Part 4
Critiques of the Emerging Virtual/Media World
Chapter 13
Media and Terrorists

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Abstract

The public role of the mass media in most Western industrialized societies is (in addition to making a profit) to inform and educate citizens in the ways of democracy. By contrast, the goal of organized terrorist groups is to upset these orderly processes and to achieve private usually unpopular, political and informational goals. Along the way, these violent groups use and abuse the media and the state. Thy, in turn, are reciprocally used and abused in the process.

Both terrorism’s and media’s roles, techniques, and expectations are explained and the media-terrorist interactive system described. A case study of the Italian Red Brigades’ (Brigate Rosse or BR) 1978 kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro is presented for illustrative purposes. Some conclusions and suggestions for changing the cycle-of-violence system through media, governmental, diplomatic, and rhetorical reforms are also offered for consideration in the context of future public/media policymaking and publicizing terrorism for informational, rather than exploitative, purposes.

Introduction

In addition to making a profit, the public role of the mass media in most Western industrialized societies is to inform and educate citizens in the ways of democracy. By contrast, the goal of organized terrorist groups is to upset these orderly processes and to achieve private, usually unpopular, political and informational goals. Along the way, these violent groups use and abuse the media and the state, and they are reciprocally used and abused. Media become witting and unwitting winners and losers in this process, which shares elements of both a game and a drama. In order to perform their controlling and socially reinforcing role in the communications processes, media must regularly capture the public’s attention (i.e., they must force the public to digest important news and consumer information). Therefore, media seduce consumers with sports, comics, human-interest stories, crime, scare headlines, and enticingly violent leads.

Although Accuracy in the Media, The Moral Majority, Conservative Digest, Media Monitor, and the New Right Report regularly attack the alleged liberalism of the three major networks, the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), National Public Radio (NPR), and major newspapers (e.g., the Washington Post and the New York Times), this so-called liberal slant is illusory. NPR may be unique in more severely criticizing Republican rather than Democratic presidents from 1974 to 1983, but most major newspapers and all of the networks are more noteworthy for their uniform criticism of all presidents, regardless of party stripe, their quest of middle-
of-the-road positions on partisan political questions, and their avoidance of entanglement in current public policy disputes (Larson, Spring 1989). The mass media in America are mainstream in ideology and strongly establishment-oriented, as are other large American corporations. For example, during the conservative resurgence from 1972 to 1984, between 42% and 71% of the major American newspapers (which controlled between 49% and 77% of total newspaper circulation) endorsed the more-conservative Republican presidential candidate. This is in contrast to the 5-12% that endorsed the less-conservative Democratic presidential candidate and the 23-42% that remained uncommitted during this same 12-year period (Stanley and Niemi, 1988).

Above all, media (using Ben Bagdikian’s term) employ the so-called twin sovereigns to get attention: sex and violence (Bagdikian, 1987). They stress murders, rapes, robberies, and other deviant, unusual, and “abnormal” events, each unique in its own way. Since the media have an unquenchable thirst for unsavory violence and “man bites dog” stories, militant groups find them easy targets for manipulation. But the reverse is also true. While television, newspapers, magazines, and radio could exist without as much violence in their daily diets, the products, appeal, and nature of the mass media would change and their effects would probably be minimized.

Terrorism could not exist in its present form without a mass audience. Without widespread popular exposure, the very nature of the terrorist phenomenon would radically change. Indeed, what we know as terrorism is actually a media creation; mass media define, delimit, delegitimize, and discredit events that we have not actually seen, but that we all instantly recognize as terrorist acts.

The influence of television, within its mass media setting, can be approached through a variety of theoretical constructs. These theories help to explain why people pay attention to and use new media. Harold Lasswell’s post-1945 model of the communications process maintained that the more personal the communication, the greater the effect. Therefore, personal communication is more effective than television, which (in turn) is more effective than film, radio, or print media. Klapper’s (1960, pp. 8, 55, 92-97) subsequent work recognized the fact that previous exposure to issues was a significant intervening variable. He also described selective information processing and the conversion process. Those media seeking to promote change had a direct effect, were reinforced positively, or were neutralized by other mediating factors, which produced change in different directions.

Later, in the same decade, uses and gratification theory stressed the recipient of the messages and his/her selective exposure, which created cognitive dissonance or consonance in the communications process. In the 1970s, the “gatekeeping” and “agenda-setting” functions of the press were explored as was the “need for orientation” theory. The latter states that people must relate to their environments through issues; media are used to satisfy personal needs, thus influencing
individual agenda setting (Freedman and Sears, 1965). Along the way, the role of personal interactions among opinion influencers or news elites and the two-step flow of communications also came into the literature.

The gatekeeping and agenda-setting functions of the media are most relevant to the subject of terrorist news. Knowledge and information, the media’s tools, are used to ensure system maintenance through feedback and distribution control. In complex pluralistic and interdependent societies, the print and broadcast journalists serve as arbiters of conflict management. Journalists also perform watchdog or surveillance functions. These functions allow social stress or subsystem dysfunctions to be resolved or handled without resort to civil strife and resultant social chaos. News broadcasts and stories serve to keep the flow of information moving so that tension and ultimate release (resolution) follow the very crisis that the media and political spokespersons jointly created. The media provide discrete knowledge of an issue or event rather than in-depth knowledge about a controversy or public policy. Media often avoid the latter, since those dangerous topics may require delving into causes and proposed solutions, both of which may be extremely divisive. Instead, the media selectively combine sights, sounds, images, and symbols into a meta-reality. These not only depict reality, but actually create, recreate, replace, or displace it. This media function is well documented in postmodern semiotic, humanistic, and cultural studies of the news genre (Grabber, 1980, pp. 117-154; Agee, et al, 1982, pp. 17-33, Robinson, 1984, pp. 199-221).

Of course, violent bombings, kidnappings, or robberies actually involve very few perpetrators and relatively few victims. Any small war or state military action, such as the Grenada invasion or “police action” in Libya (which some label “state terrorism”), are far more elaborate in both the number of killers and killed, as are the weekly totals of gun-related deaths or highway mayhem on American roads. So the relative scale of militant violence or the extent of public risk of physical injury is relatively small. In fact, the number of actual terrorist incidents was only 127 out of 258 reports in the Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, and New York Times in the 1980-1985 period; that is, an average of about 25 per year (Picard and Adams, March 1988, p. 1). In the United States, a person is more likely to die as a victim of an asthma attack than as a victim of a terrorist attack.

If we examine the statistics from a conflicting perspective, we see the number of international terrorist incidents reported in 1985 was 812 (a 36% increase over 1984), with 177 involving US targets. Domestically, there were only seven actual incidents that same year (with 23 thwarted attempts, according to FBI reports). Of course, certain highly visible incidents caught media and the public attention. Among these were the TWA 847, Achille Lauro, and Rome and Vienna airport assaults in which American nationals were also victimized (Picard and Adams, March 1988). Despite relatively small numbers, what we remember is the residue of psychological threats, diminution of national pride, and challenges to sacred morals, precious symbols, and hallowed myths. These have longer lasting and more
qualitative significance to the citizenry and its leaders. This is why the most proficient terrorists seek to strike at the heart of the state and the core of the establishment; they aim to destroy those elements that represent the highest symbolic and media values: American tourists, flagship carriers, embassies, or military personnel.

As with studies of crime, mugging, alcoholism, and other social ills, statistics are used to buttress the rationality of this phenomenon, which, as a UMI publication and Yonah Alexander say, “affects every person in the global community and inspires fear in many” (UMI Research Collections Information Service, 1989). Ambassador at Large for Counter-Terrorism L. Paul Bremer’s (March 1987, pp. 1-4) official US definition of terrorism allows his assertion that there were 600 such incidents in 1984; 780 in 1985; 800 in 1986; and 2000 so-called casualties in 1987. Other statistics from the RAND Corporation in 1987 claim that anti-US terrorism peaked in 1977 with 99 cases. In 1984, there were 68 cases; in 1985, 27; and in 1986, only 11. In the latter year, the US share was only 3% of the 400 deaths attributable to international terrorism as a whole (Dobkin, November 1989, p. 17).

By defining terrorism, any administration can control and own the problem itself, particularly if the media repeat the unquestioned assertions and afford them legitimacy as larger-than-life social drama with a huge public audience. Although terrorism is more dramatic than everyday crime news, both serve a moral, socially solidifying, and ideological function. In addition to accepting administration labels, the media help to brand terrorism as a foreign, strange, and evil occurrence—an abnormality that has no social context and that is irrational by Western standards. As Said (1988, pp. 149-158) says, the “wall-to-wall nonsense about terrorism can inflict grave damage . . . because it consolidates the immense, unrestrained, pseudo-patriotic narcissism we are nourishing.” This obsession with terrorism has not only led to irresponsible acts, but, as Secretary of State George Shultz said in 1985, has also bordered on considering a declaration of war against Libya. The deliberately concocted scenarios of mortal danger and threat to America’s vital national interests are responsible for popular approval of warlike acts and repressive measures such as the air raid on Libya in 1986. The buildup of tension after the administration’s erroneous attribution to Libya of responsibility for the Berlin disco bombing inevitably led to the bombing of Tripoli.

With the international state system no longer under the hegemonic control of either Western or Eastern powers, counterterrorism efforts are directed at restoring international principles of legitimacy and order. The popular panic engendered by media and administration rhetoric is used not only to justify a deadly answering force, but also to quash forever any hope of ascertaining if a legitimate basis for the terrorist grievance exists (Bruck, Winter 1989). The misuse of the terrorist threat also allows an administration based on “peace through strength” and a $3 trillion military buildup to rationalize the use of weaponry so that Americans can once
again “stand tall” regardless of its effect on the longer range issues of world order and a lasting peace. As Der Derian says of the “national security culture” in the United States:

Much of what we do know of terrorism displays a superficiality of reasoning and a corruption of language which effects truths about terrorism without any sense of how these truths are produced by and help to sustain official discourses of international relations (Der Derian, 1989, p. 234).

Obviously, there is more at stake here than normally meets the popular or journalistic eye (Palmerton, 1988; Dobkin, November 1989; Bruck, Winter 1989). Bruck’s review of critical theory, ideological closure, and hegemonic analysis of the communications media (e.g., Todd Gitlin, 1980, pp. 25-26, 284) indicates that there may be hope for a revised journalistic perspective on terrorism reporting and coverage, as has happened in recent years with the peace movement. As he said:

Against a depiction of the media as a relatively seamlessly reproducing apparatus consistently serving the entrenched powers, I want to argue that the media show discursive openings, inconsistencies, and contradictions. They can provide the basis for developing strategic politics by alternative groups and movements (Bruck, Winter 1989, p. 113).

Although his study is based on a Canadian daily newspaper’s coverage of peace, disarmament and security issues, Bruck’s discussion of media systems is equally applicable to the United States. Consequently, there is some room for optimism about breaking down the terrorist act/media response/government definition/popular panic nexus in such violent international dramatic events.

The interactions between mass media and violent terrorism are akin to host (media) and parasite (violent terrorism). This symbiotic relationship requires the media to use violence to sell magazines or newspapers and gain viewers and listeners. They seek to increase their readership and audience share to sell billions of dollars of advertising. This increases everyone’s profitability, with the possible exception of the terrorists. In Eastern or Western state-controlled mass media societies (whose numbers in the West decrease daily), publicly owned media regularly give high visibility to terrorist violence. Why? Because the news canon requires them to report all major events to ensure their continued legitimacy and credibility as a truthful or free press. With numerous and increasing external sources of news via satellite and radio, any international news event spreads like wildfire through technological societies. This occurs even without benefit of normal media contexts despite the state’s mechanisms for communications control. Even the Eastern socialist press covered terrorist events in order to maintain credibility as to benefit from invidious comparisons between the “wild West” and the “orderly East,” where peace and quiet reign supreme.
This situation highlights the need to examine a series of interrelationships between the media and terrorism. Among others, two of the most interesting questions are:

- Do the media actually help or hinder terrorism despite their societal role as cheerleader in support of basic antiviolent norms? (This is the contagion or epidemic theory regarding the spread of the terrorist virus or infection.)
- Do media/publicity-starved terrorist groups not only recognize this media dependence on violence, but also structure their campaigns to insure maximum media coverage and involvement for their own purposes?

In the process of answering these two queries, both terrorism’s and media’s roles, techniques, and expectations will be explained and the media/terrorist interactive system will be described. A case study of the Italian Red Brigade’s (Brigate Rosse or BR) 1978 kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro is presented for illustrative purposes. Some conclusions and suggestions for changing the cycle of violence system are also offered for consideration in the context of future public/media policymaking.

Common Roles, Expectations, Techniques: Mass Media and Terrorism

A description of the unique and common roles of mass media and terrorism as international phenomena may help to show that these seemingly disparate transnational entities have certain mutually reinforcing qualities. Each is, therefore, the captive or the victim, the friend or the foe, of the other. However, role reversals are not unusual during the course of terrorist incidents.

International Terrorism Defined and Described

The terrorist is considered the “ultimate criminal.” With the sudden demise of post-Gorbachev communism as the main enemy, terrorism has become “public enemy number one” in American public discourse (Said, 1988, p. 149). Both the media and the political establishment share responsibility for so framing and defining in domestic terms this mainly international problem. Therefore, it has high salience value in the public’s mind. The power to name, label, and define terrorism is especially relevant to this discussion since terrorism is so distant and beyond the average person’s experience. It is a case (as in much international discourse) where the media wield exceptional power over popular conceptions of reality. The media usually accept the official or institutionalized definitions of abstract, foreign, or new events. This is especially true when there is an established party line in the government regarding abstruse or unfamiliar events.
Although there was some difference in the Reagan administration’s earlier definitions of terrorism, a clear party line emerged by 1984. In 1983, a US Army journal defined the international targets of terrorism as a case where

The calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to attain goals political, religious, or ideological in nature . . . done through intimidation, coercion, and involving fear . . . it involves a criminal act that is often symbolic in nature and intended to influence an audience beyond the immediate victim (Dobkin, November 1989, p. 15).

The next year, a State Department definition called it “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine state agents (Dobkin, November 1989, p. 15). The US Ambassador at Large for Counter-Terrorism, L. Paul Bremer (March 1987, p. 1), added to the official definition in 1987, when he said, “Terrorism’s most significant characteristic is that it despises and seeks to destroy the fundamentals of Western democracy – respect for individual life and the rule of law.” That same year, John Whitehead, a deputy secretary of state, said that terrorism is the new enemy for it is no longer “the random, senseless act of a few crazed individuals” but is now “a new pattern of low-technology and an inexpensive warfare” and “a strategy and a tool of those who reject the norms and values of civilized people everywhere” (Dobkin, November 1989, p. 16). Yonah Alexander (an academic spokesman close to the Reagan and Bush administrations’ views) is directing a University of Michigan (UMI) international resource file on terrorism and has edited this journal for the last decade. The UMI view on modern terrorism is summed up in the following way:

Modern-day terrorism is a challenge to every society. It is an issue which somehow affects every person in the global community and inspires fear in many. Through the increased use of victimization, psychological warfare and munitions technology, terrorists have ushered in a New Age Terrorism sometimes termed “Low Intensity Conflict” – a new form of warfare in which soldiers are indistinguishable from civilians. Yet, some say “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom-fighter.” The terrorist may be viewed as a criminal by some and heroic by others. Politics, propaganda and patriotism cloud the issue, and the public remains confused or overwhelmed. Experts debate on the most effective means to eliminate the ever-present danger of terrorist incidents. It is a controversial subject – one not yet fully understood – and the questions and concerns surrounding the topic have fueled an enormous amount of documentation and scholarly research in the past twenty-five years (UMI, 1989, p. 2).

Whole nations can be held hostage. A small band of unified and dedicated, seemingly irrational, instantly important, and ultimately threatening men and women (usually young) may, supposedly, do violence to us all. Terrorists, though relatively impotent, recognize these fears. Consequently, they plan and control the calculated use of violence, mayhem, and death. Their aim is to provoke and inspire extreme fear and dread among individuals, groups, nations, and international agencies and institutions.
During the 1980s, we had the dubious advantage of more than 100 operative definitions of terrorism. One expert on the subject, Martha Crenshaw (1987, pp. 4-8), defines terrorism as “a strategy any political actor can use.” She also says that it requires few resources (i.e., it is cheap); it involves “violent coercion” in order “to intimidate an opponent”; and “it is intended to compel a change in an enemy’s behavior by affecting his will, not to destroy the enemy physically” (Crenshaw, 1987). Terrorism also relies on suspense and “psychological reactions of shock, outrage, and sometimes, enthusiasm” (Crenshaw, 1987). Moreover, terrorism usually occurs in times of peace rather than war. Noncombatants are the usual objects; the targets or victims have symbolic value, being representatives of a class, nation, or a cause. Crenshaw concludes: “Terrorism is fundamentally a strategy of demoralization, directed against the entire population of a nation rather than its armed forces, as would be the case in traditional warfare” (Crenshaw, 1987).

In her writings, Crenshaw tries, as she says, to avoid a “normative judgment” about terrorism. However, Walter Laqueur (not known for the neutrality of his views on the subject) says that “there is no such thing as pure, unalloyed, unchanging terrorism, but there are many forms of terrorism. In the circumstances, a case may be made for broader and, of necessity, vaguer definitions” (Laqueur, 1987, p. 145). More typical of such definitions was that of the US Task Force on Disorders and Terrorism (1976), which defined terrorism as “violent criminal behavior designed primarily to generate fear in the community . . . for political purposes” (U.S. Department of Justice, 1976). Other definitions of terrorism describe individual hijackings of commercial transport vehicles or state terrorism, which involves training and deploying assassins and paramilitary guerrilla bands to invade another land. In terms of objectives, terrorists may be grouped into those seeking financial reward (criminals), those seeking personal glory and fame (crazies), and those using violence for political goals (crusaders) (Hacker, 1976).

Terrorist groups may also be categorized across the political spectrum as extremists of the right (e.g., neo-Fascist, KKK, racist); leftist (e.g., anarchist, Maoists); national liberation (e.g., IRA, PLO); or religious evangelists (e.g., Hanafi Muslims and Islamic Jihad). Terrorists themselves advertise their political goals, preferring to be called freedom fighters, revolutionaries, liberators, soldiers or nationalists. These defensive terms are meant to combat the pejorative abuse uniformly heaped upon them in most mass media. Occasionally, however, extremist or marginal newspapers (like certain government-controlled media) have used similar favorable terms to describe those militant bands with whose violent motives or politics they agree. Simply put, terrorism may be red, brown, or black; uniformed or dressed in ethnic regalia; or otherwise decked out to communicate and symbolize their “just” cause against a powerful and evil enemy, the state.

In more technologically primitive days, terrorists frequently demanded media interviews, press releases, printing of demands, statements, or photographs, and the like. More recently, however, terrorist (or quasi-terrorist) groups have produced
videotaped reports on the condition of hostages, used hostages as spokespersons, spoken directly to television audiences, or even compiled a documentary record for publication of their exploits (as the Animal Liberation Front did in 1985 after a California laboratory break-in). Their increasing use of new video technology is evidence of the parallel development between terrorism and the media. As Laqueur says, “the media are the terrorists’ best friends” (Laqueur, March 1976). He also maintains that “the terrorists’ act by itself is nothing; publicity is all.” So close is this connection that one Associated Press correspondent recently claimed that terrorists are so media-wise that they now play journalists “like a violin” (Livingstone, 1987, p. 220). Of course, the most severe critics of media’s role in publicizing terrorist exploits would like to enroll media as a front-line soldier in fighting back or winning the war against terrorism, labeled a “hydra of carnage,” in “low-intensity operations.” Also of note is the use of this military jargon for a small war (Livingstone and Arnold, 1987; Ra’anana, et al., 1986).

Picard and Adams (March 1988) point out that both media and actual witnesses to acts of political violence use more neutral nominal language (such as shooting and attacker) to delineate events, whereas government officials use more highly charged, descriptive words (such as criminals, terrorists, and murderers). The latter are more judgmental, inflammatory, and sensationalistic. In these stories, the primary media characterizations were of their own making. Media seldom quoted primary sources. This occurred only 6% of the time in relevant Los Angeles Times, New York Times, and Washington Post stories from 1980 to 1985.

Complaining that US and Soviet journalists also have no real understanding of the other’s conceptions of either freedom or of terrorism, Cooper further defines the problem in this way:

The sum total of people categorized as terrorists do not fit a pat, unchanging stereotype. In-depth interviews with those depicted as terrorists in many countries do not reveal a uniform pattern of deranged, hostile, illiterate, macho, psychotic madmen. Although such people exist, much, if not all, of our monolithic image of terrorists is presented to us, not by people who call themselves terrorists, but by mass media (Cooper, July 1988, p. 5).

Since few, if any, of us have seen, spoken to, or met a terrorist (or are likely to), we are at some disadvantage. The same unfamiliarity applies when we appraise the worth of foreign news personalities such as Arafat and Qaddafi. Much the same ignorance also prevails among those strangers who label Americans as “state terrorists.” Actually, we may each share the undesirable attributes we assign to one another: a low estimation of human life; lack of mutual respect; projection of power orientations; demonstrated rigidity; and espousal of a self-serving ideology.

Although the Nixon administration had its domestic enemies list, a high priority of the Reagan administration was the production of an international enemies list. Those so listed at various times included the USSR (branded the “focus of evil” or the “evil empire”) or the so-called outlaw Qaddafi regime in
Libya whose leader is regularly called a madman. Increasingly, the public idiom leads the citizenry to automatically equate many of these enemies with terrorism so that the words enemy and terrorist have virtually become so synonymous and interchangeable that the resultant need to declare war on international terrorism becomes self-evident. In 1989, much the same sequence of events led to a renewed war on drugs when “narcoterrorists” in Colombia were declared US public enemies, fully deserving the complete attention of the president, his “drug czar,” William Bennett, the Department of State, and the US military, if need be.

In the drug war, all alternatives are considered save legalization and public control of drugs – considered an immoral choice. Alcohol regulation had a similar history in that it has been banned and legalized, taxed and allowed duty free, plus used medicinally and declared the nation’s most dangerous drug. In popular and official perception, alcohol abuse has variously been deemed immoral, showing a lack of willpower, illegal, a disease, and now (by the Veterans Administration and the federal courts) a self-inflicted, preventable illness, which does not deserve veteran’s health benefits. These various public and social definitions of disease (as with AIDS) and definitions of and responses to terrorism are critical in the identification and solution of a public problem.

Noam Chomsky’s radical critique of “the culture of terrorism” assumes American responsibility for what it gets back internationally because of what he calls “the fifth freedom” that is, America’s “freedom to rob, to exploit, and to dominate, to undertake any course of action to ensure that existing privilege is protected and advanced” (Chomsky, 1986 and 1988). Chomsky documents America’s role in Latin-American, African, and Asian repression and provides evidence of US state terrorism and clandestine terrorism activities throughout the world now and in the recent past. He also assails the Reagan administration’s conservative “right turn” politics and decries that administration’s establishment of thought-control programs and agencies, such as Operation Truth and the Office of Public Diplomacy. These activities are “wholesale terrorism” in Chomsky’s vernacular, whereas what passes for terrorism on the evening news is merely “retail terrorism” by individuals and groups. In sum, Chomsky’s view of the media-supported official terrorist line is summed up in his quotation from Henry David Thoreau, who wrote in his Journal over a century ago:

There is no need of a law to check the license of the press. It is law enough, and more than enough, to itself. Virtually, the community have come together and agreed what things shall be uttered, have agreed on a platform and to excommunicate him who departs from it, and not one in a thousand dares utter anything else (Chomsky, 1986, p. 37).

Worse yet is Chomsky’s fear that the people will not lack courage to express themselves, but rather that they will not have the capacity to think since they are products of the “engineers of democratic consent.”
America’s violent films, political assassinations, racial conflicts, violent strikes, use and threat of military force and massive retaliation, drug wars among urban guerrillas, and hundreds of thousands of annual highway injuries and deaths seem to validate the description of America as a violent society. By comparison, Arafat, the George Washington/Charles DeGaulle of the PLO, claims to be just a freedom fighter, resisting the appellation state terrorist of the Israelis and their American allies. But all of this PLO “terrorism,” American “Ramboism,” Qaddafi “irrationality,” and like creations are products of the mass media, bearing only some, if little, resemblance to reality.

Terrorist groups are frequently foreign or exotic, unknown or inexplicable, or religious based; they also produce disinformation and thrive on military secrecy, group bonds, or a blood pact. When mass media approach such groups, they are bound to fail in their comprehension, story telling, or reporting since their perceptions are seldom realistic, often adversarial, and always distorted. They are also at times self-serving, biased, or ethnocentric, and they are frequently rigid, ideological, purposeful, and negative. While terrorism is at best unpleasant, it deserves the benefit of a realistic treatment. By denying it such treatment, we not only are dishonest to ourselves, but we also infuriate and heighten the animosity of these supposed adversaries both today and tomorrow (Cooper, July 1988, p. 5).

Media Defined and Described

Large, syndicated, multinational corporations and governments have dominant control over newspapers and television throughout the world. Ownership and control are increasingly centralized. The major purpose of the media is not, as the New York Times masthead claims, to publish “all the news that’s fit to print,” but rather just that news it takes to achieve high readership (or ratings in the case of radio and television). Consequently, a newspaper today (though less so in Europe) is merely a bundle of advertisements wrapped in a tissue of news, features, and photographs. Since the corporate spirit runs high in Western capitalist economies, even Andy Warhol said, “Good business is good art.” So the twin arts of journalism and terrorism have negotiated a mutually beneficial contract: One is rewarded with dollars and the other with instant fame and publicity.

As on television (the pictorial headline news), what sells the particular communications medium is the bizarre, the investigative report, the exposé, the heinous crime, the sexy, or the spectacular. The average viewer or reader spends very little time using the educational or informational components of the mass media. For example, readers spend an average of 16 minutes with a US newspaper, concentrating mainly on sports, features, advertising, and “soft” news. By contrast, opinion leaders spend more time with a variety of media and are better informed. However, the average viewer prefers entertainment to education and the “cool” television to the “hot” printed message. ABC’s Sander Vanocur discounts the
“enlightenment or education business” functions of mass media as well as “the people’s right-to-know” argument for a free press. He says that media:

... are in a business, the business of information. Whatever anyone else may claim for us, that is what we are supposed to do – pass on information, as best we can, as quickly as we can (Ra’anan, et al., 1986, p. 259).

In maintaining this position, Vanocur must necessarily forget the longstanding US custom and tradition (codified in the Federal Communications Act of 1934), which links an informed and educated public to the existence of a free government. Without this social objective, there is no need for the First Amendment’s guarantee of a free and unfettered press. He must also necessarily ignore the Federal Communications Act, FCC regulations, and federal law, which have regulated radio, cable, and television broadcasts in the public interest for the last 50 years. For most of this time, laws and regulations required documentary evidence of public-service broadcasting for approval of a station’s license renewal application. Of course, these public-service standards were minimal, shabby, and perfunctorily enforced.

A free and responsible press in the US precludes prior restraint, but public responsibility under law also makes the media subject to prosecution under laws governing libel and slander. By 1989, television’s equal time doctrine (under congressional mandate) alone survived the onslaught of the Reagan “deregulation revolution.” This policy abolished restrictions, limits, or requirements for fairness, children’s news, and public affairs programming, programming logs, and advertising time. That was a decided swing away from previous FCC rules, dating from the 1960s. However, the FCC pendulum may still swing the other way. Congress may also involve itself more directly in legislative oversight of communications. The free market may yet abuse the public interest too severely by adhering to the communications-as-business philosophy, the result of a privatization obsession led from the Reagan and Bush White Houses.

Instead of defining the media as information or news agencies, perhaps it is useful and more accurate to accept some of Vanocur’s argument. We may agree that the media (particularly radio and television) are mainly in the profitable entertainment business – sexual and violent entertainment at that. Mass media operate on providing minimum context, supplying broad and quick coverage, and giving the reader or viewer what he or she wants. At best, the context for news is the standard journalistic litany of answering the who, what, when, where, how, and occasionally, why questions learned in Journalism 101 classes. Seldom do the media provide their readers or viewers with the background, context, or parallel information needed to follow a story over time or to understand a topic in depth. It is a small wonder that readers and views cannot internalize, assimilate, and conceptualize a story into their highly valutative, cognitive maps and perceptual frames of reference. The texts of news stories and television scripts are often more...
“writerly” than “readerly.” In the absence of regular coverage, with context, for an important continuing story or recurrent social theme (such as work hazards, defense, or violence toward others), the reader cannot realistically understand the news. When Bhopal, defense corruption, or the latest terrorist story catapult on the screen or front page week after week, they remain unique, inexplicable, strange, and forever inassimilable and meaningless.

Certain basic requirements are necessary for the news genre’s existence. That is, news must be timely (critical, crisis, recent); unique (new, fresh); entertaining (drama, pathos); adventurous (dangerous, a horse race, unfolding, risky, a life-or-death battle); and it must relate to the reality of the viewer (human identification, everyday life, innocent victims) (Alexander and Finger, 1977). To this list can be added two other news criteria: authenticity (validity) and credibility (trust), features which both news and terrorist acts share in kind. The predominant journalistic values require news to be about unexpected, sensational, and conflictual events. Violent groups are more than willing to supply an ample measure of each ingredient required to make their story newsworthy.

As a case in point of media crisis coverage of violent domestic disturbances, Graber (1989, p. 306) describes the clash over “self-preservation” issues between the media and government. The media’s “responsibility to serve public needs” is in direct conflict with the government’s desire “to control, direct, and even manipulate the flow of news for public purposes.” Graber finds that crisis coverage typically runs through three stages. First, when background information on the crisis is announced, basic details for who, what, when, where and how are revealed and a kind of ordered panic or chaos prevails while news (frequently distorted and inaccurate) is spread throughout a “wired” society. At this stage, media messages also tend to be calming and convey the message: “Don’t worry. Everything’s okay.” Stage two finds the media trying to provide context for the crisis and to supply rational and coherent explanations for the event. The final interpretive stage takes a coping posture and a longer range view. Its goals are tension relief, morale building, panic prevention, and reinforcing the viewpoint of “everything’s under control” in this unique situation.

Throughout these stages, the media depend on government sources for their information and practice self-censorship to allay fears and to prevent panic. The picture portrayed of competent government officials (“doing something”) is reassuring and calming to the media’s viewer, listeners, or readers. As a crisis matures, however, the media may develop a feeding frenzy in their lust for news. For example, crisis coverage of the Detroit riots in 1967, the Three Mile Island disaster in 1979, the Tylenol poisonings in 1982, the TWA hijacking in 1985, and the stock market crash in 1987 all produced unexpected and unanticipated results.

Reportage on the Detroit riots produced a multiplier effect by encouraging new rioters; similarly, a rash of “copycat” crimes followed the 1982 cyanide deaths. The stock market panic in 1987 was also inflamed when media pointed out its parallel...
The deployment of an antiterrorist strike force against the TWA hijackers was curtailed after widespread media reports eliminated the vital element of surprise (Graber, 1989, pp. 316-317).

Despite preexistent and widespread media plans for crisis coverage of natural disasters and civil disorders, the complacency engendered from years of rosy reports on nuclear power plant safety took its toll in 1979. Previous problems at Three Mile Island had been so well hidden, minimized, or ignored that a 3-day delay resulted before a central communications center was established there. This center essentially performed a centralized media censorship and control function for official and corporate press releases. It kept the lid on the crisis through “balanced” new releases. However, other unedited reports from the scene were contradictory, exaggerated, speculative, and frightening to area residents (Graber, 1989, pp. 312, 314, 318).

Crisis coverage planning, although widespread, is probably more successful in planning a scenario for covering the event post hoc than it is in either preventing or predicting the crisis. Media personnel regularly assume that widespread panic and contagion will result if the extent of rioting or civil disorder is fully and accurately reported. While relevant social science data do not support this view, media decisionmakers believe violence will beget violence. Therefore, they act accordingly. For example, in the 1967 Winston-Salem riots, the Winston-Salem Journal had a roughly prearranged game plan for reporting on racial violence and cooperation with the police and local officials in order to calm racial tensions and to curb violence (Paletz and Entman, 1981, pp. 114-117). The Journal’s reporting guidelines were designed to limit the news, convey tranquility, blame “thugs” and “hoodlums” for the riots, reduce exaggeration, avoid basic grievances, ignore rumors, and underplay the extent of violence. The guiding maxim was, “when in doubt, leave out.” As the story developed over four days, there were 200 arrests, 100 injuries, extensive property damage, but no deaths. On the first night of rioting, a news blackout was imposed. Thereafter, the story was reported almost exclusively from the viewpoint of the police and local officials, and concentrated on portrayals of blacks who supported the local elite’s game plan.

The Journal’s white establishment, reporters, and editors covered events as they would any important crime story where violence threatened legitimate authority. No coverage of minority grievances, underlying social problems, or statements from the black leadership or citizenry was provided to readers. In this way, not only were black demands (e.g., that police brutality against one of their number be investigated and handled) crushed but also:

The coverage probably reduced the political power of already inefficacious poor people. Simultaneously, it may have enhanced the prestige of the police department – at least among whites (Paletz and Entman, 1981 p. 117).
Graber’s viewpoint on the Winston-Salem case is that the official/police/National Guard/media concurrence could be credited with reducing the level of violence and its harmful effects:

In the short run this helped keep the situation under control, but the long-run effects of carefully limited coverage are more troubling. In terrorist incidents or prison riots, failure to air the grievances of terrorists and prison inmates deprives them of a public forum for voicing their grievances. Their bottled up anger may lead to more violent explosions. Needed reforms may be aborted (Graber, 1989, p. 322).

Graber also discusses the contrary positions of those who would prefer to allow the violent confrontation or reaction and complete media coverage to run their course versus those who would mute, censor, and black out overly violent incidents. The former claim that shocking the public conscience is a likely outcome of extensive and accurate reporting, whereas the latter maintain that more restrained coverage will reduce conflict and hatred while allowing reasoned reform after the fact. Although the media and public leadership have usually chosen the news suppression option, Graber observes:

The true test of genuine freedom does not come in times of calm. It comes in times of crisis when the costs of freedom may be dear, tempting government and media alike to impose silence. If a free press is a paramount value, the die must be cast in favor of unrestrained crisis coverage, moderated only by the sense of responsibility of individual journalists (Graber, 1989, p. 322).

Media and Terrorism: Symbiotic Relationships

Terrorism is different, dramatic, and potentially violent. It frequently develops over a period of time, occurs in exotic locations, offers a clear confrontation, involves bizarre characters, and is politically noteworthy. Finally, it is of concern to the public (Hoge, 1982, p. 91).

Since terrorism so clearly fills the bill as a major news event, media fiercely compete for coverage, scoops, and live footage or photographs that can be labeled “exclusives.” This drive to win, as Jody Powell says, is a direct product of the competition “for ratings and circulation between newspapers and networks and for personal advancement within a given news organization” (Livingstone, 1987, p. 219). Media coverage of the TWA flight 847 hijacking in June 1985 effectively destroyed certain flimsy, self-imposed media guidelines established for such coverage. Some major print and broadcast agencies developed these standards for coverage as a result of the 1985 Hanafi Muslim’s siege staged in the nation’s capital. Back then, a media orgy saturated the television screens with live stories and terrorist interviews from the scene. Reporters and radio hosts tied up telephone lines, and the lives of undetected building occupants were endangered they nearly missed an opportunity to escape.
Even while recognizing the importance of their roles as virtual abettors of such violence and terrorist’s objectives, many reporters later opposed all guidelines for covering terrorism. Their position was anticensorship, pro-free speech and press, anti-prior restraint, and advocacy of a general “right to know.” During the TWA hijacking, the media actually broadcast events live. They interacted with the terrorists, experts, victims and their relatives, and the pilot, thus becoming an integral part in expanding the problem. Perhaps it was the earlier Iran hostage debacle which set the standard. The latter was so exhaustively and regularly covered (with, for example, a daily countdown of the number of days of hostage captivity) that in a 1981 *Washington Journalism Review* article, David Altheide concluded that “more media attention was given to the hostages in Iran than any single event in history, including the Vietnam War” (Livingstone, 1987, p. 223).

The history of media coverage of terrorism has also provided the validity of Daniel Schorr’s observation that “many people have found that the royal road to identity is to do something violent” (Anzovin, 1986, p. 101). For example, the Palestinian terrorists who attacked the Israeli Olympic team in Munich in 1972 instantly found themselves in the living rooms of over 800 million people. By creating a climate of fear in an attack on (or even killing of) unknown victims, the relatively and comparatively powerless terrorists hope to compel far more powerful state or media officials to comply with their wishes. Since terrorists are so much weaker than the establishment they are challenging, they must use guerilla hit-and-run tactics to create the psychological state of mind needed to ensure public and official compliance with, or acceptance of, certain aggressive goals.

The motor of the BR: “Strike one to educate one hundred” is worth noting here as is its similarity to Lenin’s revolutionary slogan: “Kill one, frighten a hundred.” After the BR struck violently, the media ended up educating the public, while the BR served as a principal accomplice in the media war which followed. Indeed, the BR had earlier targeted the media and prominent journalists as potential victims in its war against the multinationals and the “imperialist state.” By 1977, journalists, editors, and members of the Italian press had been branded “servants of the imperialist apparatus of repression.” After several journalists were brutally “kneecapped” or shot dead in quick succession, the popular and press reaction to these violent incidents was equivalent to that following an invasion from outer space.

The BR later switched its attention to “armed propaganda” for political recognition and attacks “at the heart of the state” to prove to all that revolution was “within . . . reach.” Media were transformed from objects of attack to useful instruments of war. The BR deliberately focused in attacks on “the heart of the state” and enlisted the media as its publicists in the kidnapping of Christian Democrat Party President Aldo Moro in 1978. (Moro previously had been prime minister and foreign minister of Italy for six year.) After Moro’s assassination (in which the government actually exploited the media, as did the terrorists and everyone
involved, save Moro himself), the BR kidnapping of a prominent judge (Giovanni D’Urso) in 1980 also allowed them to use media for their purposes before releasing their prisoner. A year later, however, the BR shot a hostage after their demand for media time was rejected. But the kneecappings of journalists and media brutality of the 1970s were not reinstituted in the 1980s. Instead, the BR created its own media research and coordination group for public relations, which they called their “psychological front.”

As Daniel Schorr observes, television has a “love affair with drama and a love affair with violence” (Anzovin, 1986, p. 101). Ted Koppel, ABC’s Nightline host, is of a like mind:

> Without television, terrorism becomes rather like the philosopher’s hypothetical tree falling in the forest: no one hears it fall and therefore it has no reason for being. And television, without terrorism, while not deprived of all interesting things in the world, is nonetheless deprived of one of the most interesting (Anzovin, 1986, p. 97).

Mass media’s coverage of the news is mainly focused on politicians, corporate leaders, criminals, athletes, and other public and entertainment figures who have “star quality.” Terrorist leaders also recognize the importance of mass media just as New Left advocate Jerry Rubin did. He rebuked his revolutionary brothers for being “too puritanical” in mass media use, perhaps because “Karl Marx never watched television.” “You can’t be a revolutionary today without a television set,” he wrote, “It’s as important as a gun” (Rubin, 1970, p. 108).

And use the media they do. Terrorists use dozens of sophisticated media techniques, such as direct public communication of their grievances, demands, and requirements for compliance. They also seek to form public opinion by disinformation, “confessions” from hostages, criticisms of the government, direct broadcasts over open network channels, and appeals for help. These groups often directly attack the media by using violence against journalists or by using journalists as negotiators. They also bomb or occupy broadcast facilities. Through the media, they can also advertise their cause, incurring favorable attention through releasing hostages, thus seeking Robin Hood status. Such groups also use the media as watchdogs against police perfidy to learn about hostage identities, possible police reprisals, and current public opinion; to communicate with allies; and to identify targets or enemies to be dealt with in the future (Schmid and de Graaf, 1982, pp. 53-54).

Even a spokesman for the PLO recognized the importance of media in its quest for United Nations observer status and legitimacy saying: “the first hijackings aroused the consciousness of the world and awakened the media and world opinion much more – and more efficiently – than 20 years of pleading at the United Nations” (Hickey, 1976, p. 10). As Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton recognized in 1948, the media also provide a “status-conferral” function (i.e., by singling out terrorism for the mass audience, these behaviors and opinions are seen as
significant enough to deserve public notice (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1971, pp. 554-578). Moreover, media coverage not only provides free publicity for the terrorists, but also may establish them as role models for others.

There also may be a spiraling cycle of violence (i.e., and interactive effect between the quantity of media coverage and the scale of terrorist violence). However, which factor (media or violent incident) causes this or what else causes both is often unclear. Media coverage affects the public and combative groups alike. Regardless of their motives, as terrorists upscale their violence, they are reinforced and rewarded with more media coverage. In turn, as media coverage increases, terrorists are encouraged to top their last execution, threat, or demand (Weimann, 1983; Tan, 1987, p. 151). This view of terrorism as an epidemic that news media spread (though believed by the public, press, and some experts) is not supported in the social science literature as other than a contributing cause. Some of the associated allegations which remain unsubstantiated include beliefs that new groups are formed, new actions are incited, public support is generated, the level of violence is escalated, and media control is forfeited to the terrorists.

There is little proof that the press is so powerful as either potential censors or terrorist groups may imagine. Nevertheless, in 1985, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher called for press controls which would deny terrorists and hijackers of the “oxygen of publicity” needed to fuel the resultant flames of their violence. Edwin Diamond of New York University’s News Study Group claimed in a TV Guide article that once the television put a human face on the TWA flight 847 passengers and crew and charged the incident with “everyday emotions,” then “all military options were dead” (TV Guide, July 31, 1976). CBS’s Lesley Stahl said of the press, “We are an instrument for the hostages. We force the administration to put their lives above policy” (Davies, October 1985, p. 4). Consequently, these events become “institutionalized crises” which crowd out all other news (Picard, July 1988, p. 1). And Michael J. Davies, former editor and publisher of the Hartford Courant, typified news personnel’s attitudes when he said:

Publicity is the lifeblood of terrorism. Without it, these abominable acts against the innocent would wither quickly away. Yet few responsible critics would suggest that the media enter into a conspiracy of silence that would ignore all acts of international terrorism (Davies, October 1985, p. 5).

By and large, the media-as-contagion theory depends on transferring the findings of televised violence and aggression to the terrorism arena. However, widespread public perceptions also support this relationship. The popularity of this view among law enforcement officials has helped gain support from some experts (such as M. C. Bassiouni, who said that, except for the “ideologically motivated,” there is a certain “intuitive reasonableness” to the contagion theory. Schmid and de Graaf (1988, p. 2), two Dutch experts, also claimed that media reports helped to
“reduce inhibitions” and offered “models,” “know-how,” and motivations to potential terrorists.

In response, others (such as Brian Jenkins of the RAND Corporation) reply that “the news media are responsible for terrorism to about the same extent that commercial aviation is responsible for the airline hijackings” (i.e., the media are just “another vulnerability” in a highly vulnerable technological and free society) (Schmid and de Graaf, 1988, p. 31). Other related studies have shed some light on this phenomenon. For example, hierarchy was used in one study by Midlarsky, Crenshaw, and Yoshida (June 1980) as a theory to explain the spread of terrorism “from the least powerful” and “from the weak states to the strong” (i.e., from Latin America to Western Europe). European terrorist groups borrow ideology, rhetoric, and methods from the Third World, as well as techniques of bombing, which transfer quite easily. Through intergroup cooperation, they move across boundaries to new locations that provide a suitable site for the proposed act. The careful planning and specialized technical knowledge that some groups display could not have been learned from television or in newspapers. Diffusion of these ideas is more likely based on interpersonal channels of communications. The media’s role in furthering the awareness aspect of the process (if not in the evaluation, acceptance, and adaptation parts of the same process) may reinforce, if not cause, such diffusion. At any rate, diffusion theory probably offers a better line of research than does the imitative effect of “copycat” violent acts, scenes, and situations.

Since media engage in sensationalism, can interfere with law enforcement, may endanger lives and help spread irrational fears, they have become closely associated with terrorism, though they still have not become its primary cause. Moreover, if terrorism really seeks the media publicity it gets through violence, why should potential terrorists not receive appropriate media coverage for their grievances before they resort to violence? Not only can the media adopt a responsible, reasoned, and measured approach to terrorism, once begun, but they can also regularly provide ample outlets for expressions of relevant public and group concerns, thereby addressing or reducing grievances, while evaluating current controversial public policies. Such a modified response to terrorism would actually require more, although very different, coverage of terrorist violence. This could be done without glamorizing the perpetrators. New media formats could provide useful and valid information, consider consequences of past or hypothetical acts, improve the public’s capacity to deal with large crises, aim to reduce attendant public fears, and increase the public’s understanding. These new formats could provide continual context while they perhaps help to reduce the general level of violence in the society (US Department of Justice, 1976, p. 65; Picard, July 1988, pp. 4-6).

As the terrorist sideshow unfolds, the public is usually mesmerized. Viewers see the black-and-white spectacle of heroes and villains fighting it out, not on the set of Miami Vice, but in a real scene with real guns, bullets, bombs, hostages, and
murders. They are eyewitnesses to a human morality play, with its real winners and losers. In a way, this portrayal even becomes the “theater of the obscene” in that the television screen (reinforced in radio, newspaper, and magazine features) displays a huge international “snuff film,” rivaling execution scenes from World War II and Vietnam documentary footage. These real-life scenarios are left to the viewer to interpret. The media seldom report the social, economic, or political objectives or rationales for these unpaid terrorist “actors” who play starring roles even though they are not members of Actors’ Equity (Paletz, Ayanian, and Fozzard, 1982, p. 166).

Indeed, the media’s message, though antiviolent, may have other appeals to different audiences. Media effects reveal that the public may use their sense of a “just world” for evaluative purposes. Here, even the victims may be held responsible for their own suffering, the terrorists may be absolved of guilt, or the terrorist grievance, redress, or cause against the government may be supported. On this point, Schmid and de Graaf conclude:

Through the way the media present terroristic news, through selection of some facts out of the multitude of potentially relevant facts, through the associations they lay between the terroristic act and the social context, the media can have a profound influence that can create public hysteria, witchhunts, fatalism, and all sorts of other reactions that serve certain political interests – and not only those of the terrorists (Schmid and de Graaf, 1982, p. 98).

Dobkin (1989 and November 1989) recently described the terrorism and media connection as one in which the American government has not only manufactured the problem and dominated both its definition and public importance, and, therefore, its “public ownership” and “responsibility” for the problem, but has also turned the issue into “an instrument of US foreign policy.” In contrast to traditional research, which stresses the interdependence of terrorism and media coverage (“media determinism”), Dobkin emphasizes the power inherent in the national security state not only to engineer popular consent, but also to enlist public support for state-sponsored, official repression. Creating a so-called public crisis cuts off nonmilitary responses. The increasing level of panic and cycle of violence challenge international order. It requires the government to act in a lethal way while either muffling the media or so dominating the terms of discourse that alternatives to military action (e.g., redress of any legitimate grievances) cannot easily be considered (Dobkin, November 1989, pp. 1, 21).

Similarly, America’s 40-year dependence on deterrence theory and mutual assured destruction (MAD) also has its impact on terrorism, as does classic just war theory’s emphasis on proportionality in meeting an armed attack. Since the public and its leaders believe that deterrence has kept the peace, we are at a loss to explain why a group of terrorist Lilliputians can so effectively cripple the powerful American Gulliver. “Why does deterrence not work?” we ask, never recognizing
that this idea is actually irrelevant to the type of low-intensity, civil-war, or guerilla conflict to which terrorism is similar.

**The Brigate Rosse and the Moro Case**

Two interesting pieces of research apply to the question of what terrorists get from the media. The first from Italy is a January 10, 1982 opinion poll published in *L’Espresso*. It indicated that whereas 31% of the Italian public believed that the BR were “dangerous murderers” (negative), over 30% believed that the BR “aims at achieving a just goal by using the wrong means” (positive), and 10% believed that they led the “fight for a better society” (mixed, positive). Certainly, the media’s coverage of terrorism was not expected to produce such results. The violent nature of Italian society, a preference for spectacle politics, longstanding divisive and fractious party activity, higher frequency of regime change, and cops-and-robbers of “Keystone Kops” approaches to resolving domestic violence may be contributing factors to this totally unexpected, unintended, and often hidden aspect of the problem (Payerhin, 1988, p. 14).

Why this happens may in part be explained through an interesting, but small-scale, American research project Gabriel Weimann queried students about their reactions to reading stories about two obscure terrorist groups in the context of total group attitudes and opinions about terrorism. Those reading about these South Moluccan and Croatian groups remained generally negative toward terrorism. However, after exposure to these news articles, between 43% and 51% of the exposed group labeled the problem “important,” in need of greater public knowledge, and a subject of interest to them. The control group’s responses to similar questions was significantly lower (16%, 14%, and 33%, respectively). In other words, there may be an unintended media enhancement of terrorist activity, which is either promoted and/or obscured through media treatment of “terrorism as a spectacle” (Weimann, 1983, p. 43).

What do the newspapers and television get out of this coverage of political extremism? And what does the political regime have to gain from this process? The government clearly dominates most news sources and official reports during most terrorist crises. Moreover, since many European countries (FRG, UK, France, etc.) have terrorist/media guidelines, public officials can limit media excesses that “glorify” terrorists. Since the media take the law-and-order, social control theme to heart during such a crisis, the government gets its favorite tune played in the terrorist saga. During such episodes, the competence of the regime is displayed since the officials orchestrating the state response look powerful, competent, in control, popular, and act in the public interest. Since the government actually wins nearly all these “battles” in the long run (if not today, then tomorrow), these terrorist “Davids” have little chance against the state “Goliaths.”

Palmerton has examined CBS news coverage during the first days of the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis. Although of limited scope, her study concludes that news
coverage reinforced the terrorist strategy by focusing the cause (or blame) for the crisis on US governmental institutions and by suggesting that military action was necessary to reestablish institutional control. Furthermore, she finds that the “rhetorical impact of terrorism” is mainly a function of others’ responses (particularly the media) to terrorist activity. A principal problem of regions under terrorist attack is how to maintain both control and one’s status as a victim of terrorism. Indeed, as she says, “the primary threat to governmental institutions is not the lives lost in terrorist acts, but the questioning of governmental institutions” (Palmerton, 1988, p. 105). Lack of realistic and proportional perspective about the terrorist danger or threat in media reports on terrorism helps to construct “a variety of meanings about terrorist events” and “those meanings may well serve the terrorist cause” (Palmerton, 1988, p. 117).

As for the mass media’s gains from terrorism, besides the “hot” news akin to a continuing soap opera/criminal film, what else does the publisher or broadcaster gain? Because the crime beat and reports of violence are part of the daily diet of all media, it is no surprise that terrorism, hijacking, armed siege, political violence, assassinations, and like crimes against the state and people are given widespread publicity. In the case of terrorism, media have a virtual gold mine of news which never dries up or pans out – it has universal appeal and a built-in demand for more coverage up to and beyond the saturation point.

An interesting case in point is the Italian media’s treatment, coverage, and involvement with the state, the hostage, and the BR during the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro and five of his bodyguards in 1978. Since the Moro crisis lasted nearly two months during the spring of 1978, the roles of all prominent forces and actors in this bloody drama had a chance to be played out with the predictability of an ancient Roman coliseum scene. The saga was complete with “Christians” (Moro and his martyred bodyguards), BR “lions,” state “Caesars,” media “tribunes,” and the anxious Italian public, ever eager for more bread, circuses, and carnivals. Wagner-Pacifica (1987) has described the “Moro morality play” as a form of “social drama.”

Ignoring for the moment the complex state, corporate, and party links of the Italian press and broadcast media, Italians’ media usage differs appreciably from that of northern European and other Western European publics. For example, regular newspaper purchases are among the lowest in Europe, particularly in the southern parts of the country. The media in Italy are also strong on debate, rhetoric, conflict, journalistic competition, and sordid exhibitions, particularly reports on widespread crime and violence. There is a minimum level of confirmed sources, careful investigation, analysis of causes, background context, and socially productive reporting. One fact is clear, however: the public’s attention to the media skyrocketed once the Moro case hit the streets and airwaves. For example, all of the five principal newspapers increased sales dramatically (between 56% and 89%) after the Moro kidnapping (Lumley and Schlesinger, 1982, pl. 603).
In addition to this obvious effect, the symbiotic relationship between the print and nonprint media on the one hand and militant groups on the other warrants further analysis. With respect to the Moro case, what is the evidence that the establishment-oriented Italian press unwittingly contributed to the BR’s success? To what extent was the BR media-wise in handling the Italian communications media in order to present their cause in a favorable light, thus pressuring governmental decision makers?

In the 1970s, the BR conceived of the press as an “instrument of war,” discounting media and party claims that they and other “red terrorists” were neo-Fascist creations. They threatened: “To the psychological war we shall respond with psychological war and retaliation.” Spokesmen for the BR also said their main aims in the Moro kidnapping were “prisoner exchange” and political recognition through the use of “armed propaganda.” Their objective was to prove that the day of proletarian deliverance was near at hand. To accomplish these aims, the BR had to follow the news canons previously described (i.e., conflict, timeliness, symbolism, recognition, maximum effect, escalation, and drama). The BR strategy was clearly dramatic in its initial use of violence and death and symbolic in its choice of a famous statesman and party leader, Aldo Moro. They attacked the state itself since Moro, the former prime minister, was expected to be the new president of Italy before year’s end. They maximized the goal of social and political recognition since, under Moro’s leadership, a historic and unifying compromise between the Christian Democratic, Socialist, and Communist parties seemed at hand. Timeliness was also achieved since this “attack at the heart of the state” was in conflict with the new national solidarity cabinet which was to be announced on the very day of the kidnapping. They also drastically challenged the entire democratic system’s ability to handle its 38th postwar governmental crisis, thus achieving maximum effect (Caserta, 1978, p. 101; Rosso, 1976, p. 282; Bocca, 1985, pp. 206, 219; Payerhin, 1988, p. 61).

The BR was well known to the Italian media and readily recognized by the public. They fulfilled the black/white or good/bad values. Their past, present, and future credibility (regarding the use of violence as a political instrument) was well established and maintained as the crisis escalated with additional shootings and murders. The BR regularly supplied enough news so that the Moro case remained an international media event for nearly two months. Through their selection of a prime target (Moro) in a prominent place (Rome), with a well-planned, bloody, and efficient initial event (kidnap and murder), the BR effectively achieved maximum effect and set the news agenda in Italy for 55 days. Even in their choice of site, the BR wanted to avoid civilian casualties so that, as a spokesperson said, “we absolutely did not want the action to present any terrorist characteristics; we wanted to be clear that it was a military action directed against the state and its high representative” (Bocca, 1985, p. 208; Payerhin, 1988, p. 67). Even the choice of killing on the spot or abducting Moro had its intended media impact, since a
political martyr was worth far less press coverage than a captive hero pleading for his life.

The technique of regularly issuing communiques and letters from Moro to the press through intermediaries kept the event on the public agenda every day. Secrecy about the captive’s location also added to the mystery, as did the media being called to retrieve secret documents hidden in seven major Italian cities. Most of the releases were announced simultaneously the day before prime news days. Since the messages were long, the papers had no choice but to print only “hot” news, leaving analysis until later. This split-second timing and planned releases of Moro’s messages also served to heighten conflict and to break the society wide open. This escalation increased even more when Moro realized that the party and the press intended not to deal with the BR. This ensured both his eventual death and subsequent martyrdom. His trial and conviction in a BR kangaroo court, photographs holding a newspaper to prove his vitality, and even the symbolic placement of his dead body in the center of Rome, on a street linking the two major party headquarters, all had mediagenic and symbolic meaning to the BR and the public. All of these events were carefully planned and implemented to achieve maximum effect on the media, public, and government.

Throughout the Moro crisis, the BR continued to gain standing and legitimacy through the media from a variety of quarters, including the Vatican and the United Nations. Pope Paul VI personally begged the BR to release Moro. Kurt Waldheim, then United Nations secretary general, referred to the BR “cause,” a term which infuriated the Italian government and required Waldheim to issue an apology for a “translation error” (Sciascia, 1978, p. 144; Payerhin, 1988, p. 75). The BR held the entire Italian Republic hostage through its media campaign and psychological warfare. During this debacle, they influenced public opinion through their managed news releases, interactions with the media, and other techniques and strategies which gained them adherents, followers, and supporters, while neutralizing much of their opposition. They accomplished these feats with the mass media’s and the state’s unwilling assistance.

For its part, Italian media coverage of the Moro tragedy followed its familiar formats (i.e., publishing accounts from various sources in a hurried fashion without the benefit of context or analysis). For example, the media offered the public neither explanations for these violent acts nor any theories about terrorism, its meaning, sources, objectives, or variants (Lumley and Schlesinger, 1982, pp. 607, 624). The Moro affair was treated much like an inexplicable natural disaster or an act of God – much like a volcanic eruption, an earthquake, or a sudden, violent storm (Silj, 1978, p. 215; Payerhin, 1988, p. 75). The media treated the Moro event like a two-month soccer game in which each of the two teams (the press/state versus the BR) used different rulebooks, though they shared the same playing field. Immediacy, undigested news, daily coverage, and inflamed rhetoric were the order of the day. As one critic noted, the tendency was to report “immediately and with
the most details possible, even if fabricated... just to exhibit their own professionalism” (Bechelloni, 1978, p. 225; Payerhin, 1988, p. 78).

Though little state pressure and no prior restraint were exerted from Rome, the media practiced self-censorship. From the start, the common position of the government and the Christian Democrats was maintained. Only this perspective, one of “no negotiations,” was maintained without any consideration of alternatives. The attack was denounced and the other victims’ funerals covered, but the fate of Moro remained the true focus of attention. Paper after paper wrote of preserving his life, were it not for the overriding needs to resist “blackmail,” to respect the “law,” and to avoid making deals with terrorists.

While Moro was made a hero even before his death, the press tried to prepare the public for the inevitable. They actually began a public mourning period for him while he was still alive. Even the validity of Moro’s pathetic letters was debated, since according to Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, the views expressed were not morally ascribable to him. Appeals for Moro’s life, his family’s pleas for negotiations, and other cries for mercy went largely unheard. The media stood steadfast behind the government’s hard line of no negotiating. The news media published whatever the government distributed, without criticism or qualification, just as it did with BR demands and reports. The story line that emerged linked the future of Italian democracy with maintaining law and order through governmental intransigence. Workers’ strikes and demonstrations in the factories were taken as symbols of popular support for the government, though management was behind some of them. Newspapers also took this opportunity to attack one another with accusations of support or sympathy for the BR cause. False interviews were also published to support such allegations. Other themes of unity, stability, public support, consensus, and maintaining democracy were also used symbolically throughout the period (Silj, 1978, pp. 45, 50, 65, 80, 93, 97, 117, 211, 231; Lumley and Schlesinger, 1982, pp. 609, 613, 619; Payerhin, 1988, p. 75).

Front page coverage, banner headlines, photographs, and large amounts of space were devoted to the continuing coverage of the Moro incident. In three papers, the entire front page was regularly used for this purpose. Practically all other political, cultural, and foreign news was blacked out. On selected days, from one-quarter to one-half the news (average 37%) was devoted to this story. This emphasis was so great and so unusual that it, too, became a general subject of concern in media debates. This situation produced a curious logical impasse. That is, the media regularly assured its readers the BR could not paralyze the state, yet the media coverage seemed to convince the public that all other public business was at a standstill (Silj, 1978, p. 49; Payerhin, 1988, p. 86).

Foreign media treatment of the Moro case was a microcosm of Italian press coverage. Themes in the foreign press denounced the “terrorists” the small number of “criminals” responsible; and the “ruthless” band of “psychopaths,” “professional killers” and “murders,” “fanatics,” and “savages.” They were also branded as
“Marxist urban guerrillas” and “Marxist revolutionaries,” seeking to throw the country into a civil war (Davies and Walton, 1983, p. 40). These opinions were primarily based on official government sources, had few terrorist sources, and did not mention any public support or underlying causes for the BR actions. The use of quotation marks surrounding the name Red Brigades and phrases such as so-called of self-styled BR appeared frequently, particularly early on in the drama. The international media (excluding Pravda) also gave the story regular, prominent, and front page coverage. The treatment of the BR in US, Western and Eastern news media (e.g., New York Times, Washington Post, Manchester Guardian, Tribuna Ludu [Warsaw, Poland], CBS, NBC, BBC, ZDF, ARD, etc.) never analyzed the complexities of international, revolutionary violence. The media preferred to reduce the story to an irrational act – without meaning, cause, or explanation. Davies and Walton’s analysis noted:

... a pattern of description which is not simply biased in favor of parliamentary democracy as one would expect, but which strongly prefers certain parties, positions and ideologies over others which legitimately inhabit the legislative sphere both in and outside the parliament.

The visual and verbal content of the Moro news story tells more about the maintenance of an ideologically safe version of consensus by media demarcation than it does about the “events” which constitute the news (Davies and Walton, 1983, p. 48).

The Moro kidnapping has also been analyzed from a mythical perspective. Moro’s martyrdom achieved social consensus. This event symbolized an end to social division through the historic compromise (Davies and Walton, 1983, p. 8). This sort of dramatic analysis can also be applied to other violent incidents such as the October 1985 Achille Lauro hijacking when the sole victim, his wife, and family were eulogized for two weeks in the New York Times until he became a hero and a symbol of all that was good in America. This later justified the US diversion (hijacking) of the four terrorists on an Egyptian airliner to a NATO landing strip in Italy. The following year, the US responded to the Berlin disco bombing, in which several US military personnel were killed and injured, by bombing Libya to punish Qaddafi for his allege involvement. This “take a life, bomb a city” response completely lacked proportionality. However, the press and public voiced little opposition to this raid which the UK assisted and France rejected, in terms of permission to overfly sovereign territory (Lule, 1988, pp. 1-15).

**The Systemic Relationship Between Terrorism and the Media**

All forms of terrorism cannot be defined or described simply, nor can their relationships to different news media and governments be generalized. Nevertheless, it is possible to capture some of their essential relationships using a schematic diagram. Figure 1 lays out some of the key elements in this dynamic
interactive relationship among terrorist groups, the media, terrorism, public opinion, and public policy decisions. A democratic political system, in which a relatively free and unfettered press normally functions, is hypothesized. The key terms used in the diagram are as follows:

1. **Terrorist Groups** have various objectives and take different actions, all involving violence of the threat of violence. Most objectives are global, vague, changing, and ideologically rooted.

2. **Mass Media** include national and international radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and other print and nonprint news media which set the public’s agenda. Media coverage may be exhaustive or minimal, firsthand or secondary, dramatic, and violence-prone, with no attempt to analyze underlying group motives or social causes. Media magnify, distort, and oversimplify through use of value-laden, establishment-based stereotypes, usually obtained from governmental sources.

3. **Terrorism** is a larger-than-life product of media treatment. The result is a concept, affect, and throughput, which bears little resemblance to the much smaller, insignificant group which initiated the threatened violence.

4. **Public Opinion** is the national and international set of values, opinions, attitudes, feelings, and concepts/cognitions on which the public bases its supports and demands for given public policies or preferred state action.

5. **State Action and Public Policies** in part rely on media information, public opinions (usually vague and uninformed), establishment goals, and independent information. All terrorist activity is automatically branded unlawful, unjust, and nonnegotiable. But the response thereto varies with the importance of victims, the options available, and the accessibility of the terrorist group for the imposition of sanctions. Negotiations, as a first step, and use of violent interdiction as a last step in the process, are more routine today than in the early 1970s. The public policy on media coverage, laws nationalizing the media (as in a military alert), or regulations governing allowable media activity are made under the umbrellas of “national security” or ensuring “law and order.” There is an underlying supposition that the normally establishment-oriented media are difficult to control, predict, or manage in such situations. Therefore, media are potentially more threatening to regime maintenance, perhaps even more so than the terrorist activity itself.

6. **Political Environment** consists of the political culture and history, the normal level of order, violence, press freedom, or democracy in the society. Also of the influence are other governments and international organizations, as well as the international media network.
A useful construct for the analysis of the relationship between terrorism and mass media is deviance amplification. This process, as it applied to drug use, was described in the work of Leslie Wilkins and Jock Young in 1965 and 1973, respectively. Their work depicts a “deviancy amplification spiral,” whereby society defines a group as deviant and isolates their members. The ensuing group alienation results in increased deviancy and increased social reaction resulting in more deviancy, more isolation, and further escalation of the initial so-called abnormality. The dynamics of the interactions between the agencies of social control and the deviant group are also influenced through information provided by the mass media. This information is on drug uses, the police, the extent of public indignation, possible societal responses, and statistics on drug abuses. The whole “fantasy stereotype” of the drug taker is a media fabrication which, while untrue early in the process, assumes greater reality as the self-fulfilling prophecy about the drug culture increases. The result is increased isolation, more secrecy, ossification of values, greater group cohesion, more professional distribution of drugs, and increased public demands for solutions and social control (Cohen and Young, 1973, p. 350).

A much the same process occurs with respect to the interaction between media and terrorist groups in the nature of terrorism has been greatly changed with the help of the mass media (see Figure 1). Reports from a given terrorist group with its peculiar or unique aims and style of violence are picked up as news by the ever-
watchful media after coverage of a violent incident or release of a group’s claim of responsibility for an act. The mass media lens or filter then starts the magnification process, using terms and negative imagery, such as disorder, violence, threat, irrationality, secret society, ruthless criminals, fanatics, etc., which produces a new and larger social phenomenon labeled terrorism.

The term terrorism has certain encoded meanings, for example, civil war, guerrilla actions, widespread violence, crisis, proletarian uprising, Marxist revolutionaries, irrationality, siege, rebellion, and extremism, with highly negative valence. Terrorism then has an impact on public opinion about the terrorist group, its motives, its causes or objectives, government’s alternatives, media reports, treatment of terrorists, victims, handling of new threats and demands, negotiations process, and surrender.

But the public does not take the raw news as gospel. Instead, people filter, compress, and interpret the news through the two step flow of communications/"opinion influencers” and conceptual frames of reference (filters). This is the sum total of previous memories, information, and attitudes about such political events as terrorist attacks, governmental corruption, trust and cynicism, and good and bad politicians. Some of the resulting impressions are either neutralized and inhibited or blocked, while others are scattered or dispersed, like light through a prism. Still others become more closely focused on political decision makers in terms of supports or demands, much as light passes through a convex lens.

The process finally results in official short- and long-term actions or public policies. These include meeting demands, mounting rescue operations, antiterrorists/media controls of guidelines for coverage, negotiation, stonewalling, news releases, etc. These are the result of information, media reports, public opinion, input from other governments, and previous public policy positions on terrorism.

These events can occur over long or short periods of time, the Moro and Iran cases being examples of long duration events, and the Achille Lauro, Munich Olympics, and TWA Flight 847, short. They also occur within a political environment which has its own levels of order, violence, or limits on legally permissible behavior. For example, the level of normal or acceptable violence may vary from that seen in relatively more violent societies, such as the US, Lebanon, and Italy, or on the high seas, where international law carries the threat of certain moral sanctions. In other settings, where an international band of terrorists may victimize the nations of one country on the soil of a third, neutral, biased, or friendly country, the legal restrictions, governing laws, or permissible level of violence also condition the environmental context in which the event occurs or is played out.

The political climate or culture of a country may help to explain public policies taken to resolve a given terrorist incident. For example, in Italy in 1978, violence in the streets challenged the political system on a daily basis. Italy was also about to witness the “historic compromise” of a parliamentary alliance among Progressive
Christian Democrats, Socialists, and the Italian Communist party. Worker protests, high unemployment, and youth demonstrations also reflected or promoted anti-governmental cynicism and popular alienation. Within this political culture, Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti voiced the intransigent government position of no negotiations and no concessions to BR terrorists, under any conditions. The Italian and international press maintained and supported the government’s stand. It naturally and inevitably resulted in doom for Aldo Moro, Italy’s own state of civil disorder and parliamentary chaos on the eve of the “historic compromise” was a critical factor in shaping the way in which the government and the news media handled the Moro crisis, the terrorists, and the story over a 55-day period. Within this political environment (characterized by the terrorist/news media/government/public opinion nexus), elements of the system interacted and fed back to one another in a dynamic fashion. That is, the BR carefully orchestrated its violence and its press releases. The government remained adamant, while selectively releasing inflammatory and self-serving news to the press. The news media repeatedly played up the themes of law and order, democracy hanging in the balance, no compromise, and the willing sacrifice of Moro for the public good against the BR’s unfounded and irrational demands, which were not to be met under any circumstances.

The press, however, had an unexpected effect on public opinion. The news audience soon realized just how feeble a threat the BR posed to the supposedly unstable and fragile political system. The public also began to identify with the BR cause against the corrupt, unstable, and unpopular Roman regime. The news media, unexpectedly and purposely, helped to bring about this viewpoint. They convinced the people of the BR’s public importance, and thereby helped to legitimize their claims and antigovernment posturing, if not their violent methods. By upholding the official party line and by not examining the underlying societal links and causes of the BR phenomenon, the news analysts failed in their task to inform the public. The media were satisfied with entertaining the masses with one new spectacular event after another. Though they tried to delegitimize the BR (along with all terrorists), the media did not succeed in their mission. Preventing this were deeply rooted social divisions endemic to the Italian political system, culture, and environment. Though the establishment line was harshly antiterrorist, the stereotyped and sensationalist treatment of the BR did not endure in the public’s consciousness. Instead, the BR was transformed into an Italian Robin Hood band, an impression which no amount of negative press could dispel.

This result should give pause to those considering the effects on public opinion of news coverage of terrorism. It seems that strongly held preexistent views provide a barrier against media penetration. When the public has a negative view of the political system, the regime, and its power brokers, any news story may not easily be able to change these perspectives. This amounts to the public having a news cosmology or ideology that it also uses a filter (or concave lens) through which
citizens can reduce an exaggerated account into more simple pro- or anti-government, regime, or system evaluations. This exists at a much more simplified, basic, or gut level, based on preexistent political predispositions, perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and cognitions. Therefore, the desire of the government or media for public support of a predetermined public policy stance may not be forthcoming in the face of a solidified, unified, and clear expression of popular opinion. This situation, which sometimes may allow the government to carry out an unpopular policy without public hindrance or objection, may not always be transferrable to another, later, or similar incident. It may not result in renewed public support for the regime, system, or office holders. What a different governmental or mass media approach would yield remains to be seen. There is seldom, in any country (with the possible exception of Great Britain), a concern for an in-depth media analysis of causes, motives, social conditions, or alternative contexts (or lenses, in this illustration) for interpreting news about terrorist acts. Meanwhile, the public remains mystified about the roots, manifestations, and solutions to terrorism (e.g., is more or less democracy necessary?) and puts such incidents in the category of the “wrath of nature,” much like an act of God or a freak of nature—here today, gone tomorrow—lacking any rhyme or reason.

Statistics on both international and US domestic terrorism indicate a decided decline during the 1980s as compared with the number of incidents in the 1970s. In 1978, for example, out of 2725 international incidents reported, 60 were attributed to the BR, with 16 deaths in Italy. During this decade, the total number of such incidents has varied from 600 to 800 per year, with about 150 aimed at US nationals or American targets. Domestically, in 1985, for example, there were only ten actual incidents (as contrasted with 112 in 1977) due to a changed political climate, better airport security, counterterrorist activities, and more frequently thwarted attempts (e.g., 23 preventions in 1985). Though fewer in number, there is also a commensurate increase in the symbolic significance afforded attacks, such as the execution of Col. W. R. Higgins, the Terry Anderson kidnapping, the Achille Lauro/Klinghoffer incident, the TWA 847 hijacking, and the Berlin disco and TWA Lockerbee bombings. Each such incident has been associated with real or imagined American links to Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, or other Middle Eastern problems (Genovese, 1988, p. 143).

In Gerbner’s (March 1988, p. 1; July 1988, p. 1) discussion of symbolism, violence, and terror, he maintains that such “symbolic uses benefit those who control them: they are usually states and media establishments, not small-scale or isolated actors or insurgents.” Gerbner also observes:

... though perpetrators of small-scale acts of violence and terror may occasionally force media attention and ... seem to advance their cause, ... such a challenge seems to enhance media credibility ... and is used to mobilize support for repression often in the form of wholesale state violence and terror or military action, presented as justified by provocation (Gerbner, July 1988, p. 1).
Prime television is also a man’s world where the power wielders control the symbols and victimize vulnerable women, the young, old, and minorities. The regular and disproportionate appearance of criminals, law enforcers, the violent, and murders bears little relationship to everyday reality; yet it accustoms us to the symbolic structures of social power. Gerbner believes such media violence “cultivates a differential sense of vulnerability and stigmatization, placing heavier burdens on selected minorities and nationalities” (Gerbner, July 1988, p. 1).

John Newhouse’s recent article on intelligence gathering and terrorism is an excellent summary of the international state of the art (or the lack thereof), in meeting terrorist threats, and in solving past mysteries about responsibility for violent and unexplained aircraft disasters. A fine piece of detective reporting, the article also lays out the human technological problems associated with curbing terrorist attacks against civilian aircraft. As Newhouse sees it, the problem is much larger than either the human or technological solutions proposed. For example, JFK airport issued 47,000 passes and Heathrow in London issued 38,000 passes onto the tarmac. The new thermal neutron analysis (TNA) machine for detecting plastic explosives is not only very expensive, bulky, and as yet unavailable, but also is not very fast. For example, it would take at least two hours to screen a fully loaded 747 jumbo jet. Since Pan Am alone has over 30 scheduled departures each day and 400 trans-Atlantic crossings per week, screening all luggage is unthinkable. With false alarms sure to slow down the system and with the inevitable resort to selective screening based on secret potential terrorist profiles, the increased measure of psychological security resulting from a new system will only last until a piece of lethal luggage slips by the underpaid and often harried airline employees (Newhouse, 1989, p. 71). What is more interesting is that at the end of his account, Newhouse reverts to a larger policy point by saying:

Terrorism feeds on the bitterness and frustration of people for whom the future seems to offer nothing, and in the attention paid to acts of violence by more of us who feel threatened by them. Another dynamic – such as a credible peace process in the Middle East – might upstage and gradually neutralize terrorism (Newhouse, 1989, p. 82).

It is interesting to note that other than passenger inconvenience, Newhouse saw no problems with the technological and human solutions proposed by airline and government officials. The reality is that one intrusive technological fix will undoubtedly lead to another, each more invasive of privacy than the last. Indeed, the real threat of terrorism is that its control will lead to a variety of new, repressive measures. This becomes more likely as research findings increasingly point to the success of repressive regimes in reducing terrorism in contrast to the fewer successes of open, democratic societies.

There are also international proposals to combat terrorism. For example, in December 1985, a UN General Assembly resolution appealed to member states to join existing international conventions on terrorism. The UN also asked members
to act domestically against the problem, to work cooperatively with other member states and the International Civil Aviation Organization to establish new measures for law enforcement, and to take collective action against political terrorists killing innocent civilians, and taking them hostage. While recognizing that some terrorist groups are part of liberation or freedom fighting movements, General I. J. Rikhye of the International Peace Academy says others engage in sheer violence, seemingly for publicity or just for its own sake. Rikhye acknowledges that the complexities of the problem lead to simultaneous branding and counternaming pro- and anti-PLO and Israeli groups in the media as terrorists and linking states (such as Libya, Iraq, and Syria) to alleged sponsorship of violent groups they have harbored in the past. He also believes that both terrorism and military action against terrorism are equally ineffective, citing international publicity as the only gain of the first and the example of Egyptian commandos in Malta as illustrative of the second (Rikhye, 1989).

While maintaining these views, Rikhye once again proposes the need for more military cooperation to combat terrorism, namely, “an elite international peace-keeping unit, highly skilled in hostage rescue, to undertake this responsibility.” He also proposes extension of the US-USSR 1985 informal agreement which ensures shared information on chemical and nuclear terrorist activities. An agency along the lines of the UN Disaster Relieve Organization could also be established to pool information on potential terrorist activities and arrests for international security purposes. Once again, however, these approaches are reactive, post hoc, and treat the symptom, not the causes of terrorism as a public phenomenon and problem (Rikhye, 1989, pp. 20-22). Although information sharing and concerted diplomatic responses may help to resolve a terrorist incident, it is unlikely that any kind of international “SWAT” team would be able to accomplish much since the character of international terrorism changes daily.

The issue of using military force to free hostages or to retaliate against state sponsors of terrorism was widely debated in the mid-1980s. Two different views were then expressed by the former Israeli ambassador to the UN, Benjamin Netanyahu and Martha Crenshaw, professor of government at Wesleyan University. Both agreed on the fact that US nationals had increasingly been the focus of international terrorist attacks from 1968 to 1985, providing one-third of these victims during a time which saw a rise from 125 to 782 in the total annual numbers of international terrorist incidents. Each was also concerned with the role of the media in a terrorist crisis (Netanyahu, 1986; Crenshaw, 1986).

Netanyahu’s position is that modern terrorism is both state-sponsored and media-inspired. He maintains that unilateral military action (regardless of state sovereignty claims) can deter terrorism, as Israel’s example has proven since the dramatic Entebbe raid in 1976. The West fails in the war against terrorism because of greed, political cowardice, and both moral and intellectual confusion about terrorists and terrorism, he says. Instead, a combination of political and military
courage, and the will to take risks and to speak the truth (however painful) to valorous citizen-soldiers (who must be willing to sacrifice to ensure clarity of social purpose), are the civic virtues that will overcome the fear upon which terrorism depends.

In response, Crenshaw believes that the nature of the terrorist threat changed in the 1980s. An action-reaction-escalation spiral changed the natures of the game. Terrorists now use safe harbor states, split up hostages, and practice suicide bombings. Against these acts, elite strike force teams are ineffective. Moreover, preventive and retaliatory measures must be practical and discriminate. We cannot randomly kill innocent civilians.

But will deterrence work? Will the terrorists value calculus be influenced? Crenshaw believes not. We do not understand terrorists, their frames of reference, their motivations, or how they calculate risks. While states may be deterred, terrorist groups may not. As she says, in terrorist incidents, “the glare of publicity isolates and magnifies the consequences of miscalculation and accident.” Terrorism is time-, space-, and incident-bound; it is so differentiated that it will not respond uniformly to countervailing forces.

Media must teach “the lesson of terrorism.” That is that “even the most powerful states cannot hope to control their environments.” Since terrorism is so crisis-oriented, the media do not focus on the terrorist threat as part of the normal course of events in a disorderly world. The media hype accompanying an incident is followed inevitably by neglect and unpreparedness. This is “a pattern encouraged by the fickleness of media (especially television) attention,” which induces “complacency and a false sense of security.” Media attention not only distorts, but also glorifies violence; it fails to signify terrorism as a strategy not of warring armies, but of the weak. If this persists, it will result in the “most impressive achievement modern terrorism has claimed.” The final risk is that our response to terrorism will “transform it into the grand spectacle the terrorists sought all along and raise its practitioners to the status of mythic heroes or villains” (Crenshaw, 1986). Perhaps even more risky than such symbolic warfare are the prospects for the use of Israeli-styled repression against our own nationals and foreigners on airplanes, at the borders, and in the society at large. Violation of another nation’s sovereignty is an act of war and a serious legal lapse for a major world power. Violating citizens’ basic rights is not an acceptable alternative for the lead country in the Western alliance, priding itself on its moral, ethical, and humane values.

Two researchers have interpreted the results of their elaborate empirical and statistical cross-national study of intracountry terrorism and the contagion effect in 16 countries from 1968 to 1978 as follows:

Democratic, affluent, and well-educated states seem to have a particular difficulty in reversing terrorism, whereas autocratic, poor, and uneducated countries do not.
While Newhouse sees some hope in ameliorating the terrorist threat through technological and human solutions, Morrison (1986, p. 4) has little faith in a “technocratic consciousness” that would use information technology, replete with abundant “noise,” or an ABM/SDI defense mode, frequently plagued by “misses” and “false alarms,” to solve problems which stem from human aggression, conflict, disputes, and grievances. In the end, such human surveillance fixes may be used in an Orwellian fashion to solve the terrorist problem should even a few climactic incidents validate the need. When repression and invasion of privacy arrive, in addition to finding the few guilty criminal conspirators, human error will surely take its toll on the many innocent bystanders. Major US airlines are already collecting travelers’ passport numbers months in advance of overseas flights so they can run them through for computer checks.

Alternatively, Morrison sees that many of the world’s most pressing problems (e.g., species destruction, nuclear weapons, resource rape, and poverty) require nontechnical and human analysis and solutions if they are to be ameliorated. We ignore at our peril the human causes of war, environmental destruction, and starvation. The Third World hungers not from a lack of land, seed, or contraception but rather from historical and continued “Western exploitation, intervention, and manipulation” (Morrison, 1986, p. 15). Technological solutions to these crises or the problem of terrorism will not work, but human efforts just might. As Morrison said, “Nevertheless, while human efforts (compromise, negotiation, intermediaries, etc.) may indeed fail, they offer the real possibility of providing solutions.” And, he continued:

The possibility remains therefore that components of the terrorist problem are resolvable through continuing human efforts at resolution. But based on the evidence that has been presented, the success of such efforts is compromised by the dominant technocratic consciousness and its reflexive reaching for familiar off-the-shelf solutions (Morrison, 1986, p. 14).

Jimmy Carter’s credentials as one such mediator are longstanding and philosophically based. They were substantiated in 1979 with agreement on the Camp David accords. They last to the present day in that he arranged for an Ethiopian peace conference at his Presidential Center in Atlanta in September 1989. During his administration, the Iran crisis proved to be nonnegotiable. In part, this was because the political goal of the hostage release was timed to embarrass Carter and benefit Ronald Reagan at the start of his presidency. This might even be one of the compelling reasons why Reagan later chose to do what he pledged never to do: trade arms from the “Great Satan” nation for US hostages.
In Carter’s case, every solution for the Iran crisis was considered (as was his usual style), including an ill-fated rescue attempt and an eleventh-hour proposal for a military invasion to save his presidency. The daily pressure CBS News anchor Walter Cronkite, who repeated the countdown on the length of captivity each day, placed on the administration delivered Carter’s presidency into the hands of two elements: the Iranians and the American people. Both groups believed in Carter’s media-created impotence; each was determined to prove this self-fulfilling prophecy by retaining the hostages until Reagan’s inauguration day and by turning him out of office, respectively. The passion for diplomacy which Carter evidenced at Camp David and in the Panama Treaty accords did not always bear fruit, as his Salt II Treaty failure proved. However, the US news media, as much as the Iranian mullahs, were behaving irresponsibly when they depicted Carter as a failed leader. Their demands for action in this media-generated crisis, when no action save a bloody war was possible in the face of an intractable Iranian theocracy, cannot be termed responsible, however much it was “good television” of a “good story.” Despite Carter’s failure Martin and Walcott (1988) correctly conclude that a combination of diplomacy and law enforcement can best contain international terrorism.

The imposition of an idealistic or pluralistic model of communications on the terrorism/government/media interrelationship will not yield a panacea. More public discourse or improved news reporting formats will not solve the problem of terrorism either as an issue, an event, or a policy question. Terrorism as a media event (along with drugs, alcohol, crime, or drunken driving) is related to the larger question of establishing proportionate media perspectives on national and international problems. One related issue is the media’s role in social control and the allocation of power, which Der Derian (1989, p. 158) calls “part of the hegemonic domination of given societies.” Another issue is the need for national security-obsessed states to begin using international diplomacy and new social programs to address root causes of terrorism, rather than resorting to knee-jerk military responses as the first – rather than the last – solution.

Media self-censorship or governmental cooptation of the media are not reasonable policy alternatives in democratic societies. However, the belief in media determination as the root cause of the terrorist “theater of terror” assists central governments in their regular attempts at social control. But this is an inherently undemocratic, unnecessary, and ineffective policy. Since both media and governmental representatives control the language of rhetoric and discourse surrounding terrorism, an attempt on the part of both to differentiate between criminal and ideological terrorist acts would be a proper starting point. Each could clearly focus on the media-dominated objectives of terrorists; for example, as providing the context for explaining terrorists’ communication objectives to their fellow terrorists, the media, governments, public opinion, and others. The manipulation of the media through terrorist activities is also a topic that media and
governmental officials can elucidate during a crisis since the mass audiences become willing victims of terrorist propagandists, whose efforts usually succeed in enhancing their status and their cause (Weimann, 1983, pp. 38-45).

Since presidents and prime ministers (as national spokespersons) help to frame the terrorist event, they can help to reduce panic, define the crisis, clarify roles (as victim or perpetrator), signify competence, and present nonmilitary options. When an administration and the media treat terrorism as high drama, the mythmaking ability of the press is enhanced and military intervention, which is seldom actually used, is legitimated in a cops-and-robbers, good-guy or bad-guy scenario. Strangely enough, government and media leaders do not understand that, as Palmerton (1988, p. 107) says, “[i]t is the response which becomes the primary persuasive vehicle for the terrorist.” The terrorist, in other words, seeks the status of a victim, and therefore, encourages repressive responses. Terrorists’ challenges to state authority encourage public support for subsequent state repression, violence, terror, or military action. The media assist in legitimizing this state-sponsored counterviolence, and such justifications allow more authoritarian rule to secure a firmer hold over the domestic society as well (Gerbner, 1988, p. 3). The process of consent building, in which the media play a vital role, may produce a public which is not only amenable to suppression of terrorism at any cost, but is also willing to accept self-repression (Dobkin, November 1989, pp. 4, 10).

The media create reality and, through their interpretive frames and social conventions, teach readers and viewers not just what to think, but what to think about. Media decision makers (publishers, editors, and directors) not only share the dominant elite views toward public policy but also shape their reports in this context for public consumption.

Democracy, pluralism, nationalism, social responsibility, and order are key themes which describe these “media frames” of reference. Such conventions have so distorted terrorism reportage on the networks that Middle Eastern terrorism is exaggerated, Latin American and anticorporate terrorism is minimized, and government victimization is espoused. According to one study of the 1969-1980 period, the actual pattern of world terrorism is different from that portrayed on the networks. When news broadcasts and stories are produced within these institutionalized modes, they serve to create the so-called public character of events, a function shared with political officials and celebrities, who also share responsibility for this agenda setting role. Since politicians rely on journalists and vice versa for information, this symbiotic relationship is especially critical during a terrorist crisis when news may be managed and state power is no longer veiled. As a vital part of this process of norm encoding and image creation, politicians also label “good” and “bad” terrorists as “enemies” or “freedom fighters” to produce public support for national policies. When applied to terrorists, these labels short circuit popular thinking and reduce the community’s opportunity to think about causes of injustice (Gerbner and Gerbner, July 1988, p. 1).
David Altheide’s (1987, pp. 161, 174) US and UK cross-national analysis of television coverage of an IRA terrorist incident in 1982 indicates that the format of a news show also has an impact on the message an audience receives. That is, event-type formats focus on visuals and tactics, whereas topic-type formats (with interviews and documentaries) better deal with the purposes, goals, and basis for terrorism incidents. In other words, visuals are more restrictive than are contextual and documentary formats, which increase the chance for elite and audience reflection. Consequently, one clear signal of impending government repression is the higher likelihood of restriction of the latter format, which Britain has done with respect to IRA and the US with respect to Canadian and USSR documentaries. Government leaders prefer to use “one-liners” and event formats to inform the public, engineer consent, label, depersonalize, and delegitimize the “enemy,” and curry favor for governmental positions, however untenable. The increasingly common pictorial news headline format, which is “just good television,” helps to achieve these purposes.

Cross-national surveys at the end of the 1970s indicated that most West Germans, British, and Americans believed terrorism was a very serious problem. Respondents wanted the death penalty for terrorists, sanctioned use of “special forces,” and accepted police state or extraordinary measures against them. They also accepted news embargoes and monitored conversations with lawyers during a terrorist crisis. Also of concern was being careful not to appear pro-terrorist. This meant opposing the death penalty, supporting legal aid, feeling pity, or believing some of the terrorist’s criticisms were unjustified (Gerbner and Gerbner, July 1988, p. 3). Despite these popular fears, Gerbner maintains the greatest threat is “collective, official, organized and legitimized violence.” Television violence and small-scale terrorist attacks are not as dangerous to social stability as are “illicit commerce, wars, unemployment, and other social trends that allow the wielders of power “to depersonalize enemies, to cultivate vulnerability and dependence in subordinates, to achieve instant support for swift and tough measures at home and abroad in what is presented as an exceedingly mean and scary world” (Gerbner and Gerbner, July 1988, p. 3).

The government is one of the prime sources of emotional and pejorative descriptions of anti-state activities. Nevertheless, it is strange, indeed, that the FBI and State Department are often the prime movers behind media and public policies designed to ensure self-control or to mandate guidelines for media’s coverage after each such violent frenzy. Terrorists are such an embarrassment to the US State and Defense Departments that Secretaries George Shultz and Caspar Weinberger wanted nothing to do with the Iran-contra arms deal, which Poindexter and North managed out of the Reagan White House. In 1988, Shultz banned Arafat from attending the United Nations meeting in New York, forcing the General Assembly to meet in Geneva. His rationale was based on the PLO’s alleged terrorist links and nonrenunciation of terrorism. Arafat subsequently renounced terrorism, terrorist...
organizations, and terrorist links to the eventual satisfaction of the Reagan administration. Although the significance of these pronouncements in terms of public policy decisions involving the US, the PLO, and Israel (e.g., on resolving the future of the West Bank) remains clouded, the fact that Bush administration diplomats have met with PLO representatives and that the PLO has lately agreed to become part of the antiterrorist network holds promise for more agreements in the future.

Official party lines in approved articles from US military personnel also speak of controlling the media to control terrorism. For example, a Quantico-based Marine Corps provost marshal has joined the call for a “war” against terrorism, with the media conscripted to play a vital part in the process (Wilber, 1985, pp.20-23). He says that “something more than peacenik campouts around our European missile installations ought to be considered in our terrorist planning.” This officer was very much in favor of professional media guidelines along ethical lines in contrast to those based on “event-oriented sensationalism” or “mundane commercialism.” Unless the media clean up their act, the colonel said, “assertions of national interest may ultimately take priority over the public’s historic rights to be informed.” Guidelines need to be “mutually acceptable, realistic, and workable” and “applied by both sides during terrorist incidents,” but so done that they “do not foster the idea of ‘sides’” (Wilber, 1985, p. 21). For example, USIA proposals for a blue ribbon panel on media self-regulation and guidelines were also endorsed as topics for media and law enforcement discussions, after socializing in ice-breaker sessions. These sessions could relieve media paranoia and lead to soul-searching recognition by the media that they are part of both the problem and the solution.

The media themselves must resist manipulation, dissuade imitators, and use proportionality, balance, objectivity, context, and minimum intrusiveness in their terrorist coverage. These principles require the use of pools, less obtrusive lighting, limits on interviews primary reliance on officially designated spokesmen as sources of information, and avoidance of tactical questioning. They should also delay inflammatory reporting, suppress information on incident locations, obscure tactical information, balance information from participants with official sources, use predisclosure verification of facts, and avoid the spectacular. These are basic and commonsense, workable, and palatable media guidelines, according to the provost marshal. “The right of a hostage to survive and the right of a society to self-preservation are also important rights, too important to be left to the media” (Wilber, 1985, p. 23). To ensure reasonable accommodation, the media and its academic allies must accede to these simple rules of operation. Zemel versus Rusk (1965) was quoted approvingly to the effect that “[t]he right to speak and publish does not carry with it the unrestrained right to gather information” (Rusk, 1965, pp. 16-17).

Just why the US government should be seeking self-restraint or prior restraints on media’s – and especially television’s – coverage of terrorism or should be enlist-
ing the media as an ally in the “war” against terrorism is not easily explained. With such limitations in place, the media establishment’s quasi-adversarial role vis-à-vis the government would be further compromised through another form of governmental cooptation. When the concept of a “war on terrorism” comes into being, the media partners risk becoming tools or voices for the state, much as they did with managed news events during the Grenada invasion, the Libyan air strike, and other military operations against Libyan aircraft and the Achille Lauro hijackers.

Press treatment of incidents such as the TWA 847 case is usually rather bland, pro-government biased, and hostage oriented. Atwater’s (1988, pp. 1-8) study of network news coverage of the TWA flight 847 hijacking indicated that there was massive television coverage of this event, with 12 hours of coverage devoted to it over the June 14-30, 1985 period. Although Laqueur (1977) and Alexander (1978) maintain that publicity is the key to terrorism’s success and that establishment media wittingly or unwittingly are tools of terrorist strategy, this did not prove true in the TWA case study.

Atwater found that most reports came from Washington or New York and few from the actual site. Over half of the stories were on hostage conditions and US government reactions. Far fewer focused on terrorist demands, acts, Islam, or Lebanese internal or external difficulties. While the coverage was “dramatic, reactive, and extensive,” the Iranian crisis mode of reporting was used. It had great detail, but no interpretation or education useful to the viewers, this finding was similar to that noted in the Paletz, et al. (1982, pp. 146-165) study of the IRA, FALN, and Red Brigades coverage in network news. The networks treated these groups evenly, covering the same events with a similar portrayal. There was not legitimacy afforded the groups. Their causes were not defined as just. No explanation was given of the causes or objectives behind the acts of violence, and most stories did not even mention the organization or its supporters. In a follow-up study of network news coverage of terrorism (see Milburn, et al., reported in Gerbner and Gerbner, 1988), not only were such causes ignored, but severe mental instability was also ascribed to both terrorists and their leaders. This line, of course, implies that no negotiations are possible with “crazy people.”

Since governments have, or ought to have, control of the scene of a crisis or crime, they can limit media access as they would in any war, crisis, or emergency zone. Publishing and reporting terrorist events, however, are responsibilities of the press, not the government. As Dallas Morning News Executive Editor Ralph Langer (Genovese, 1988, p. 151) said, “the basic cause of terrorism is not news coverage. . . . Terrorism comes from real or perceived disputes and problems that aren’t resolved.” Should media ignore terrorism, terrorists may well escalate the level of violence. Further, the credibility of the press will be questioned across the board if terrorism is squelched in the news. As Chicago Tribune Editor James Squires maintains:
No policy other than a policy balancing hostages with national security and readers’ interests is all that can be hoped for in a free and responsible press environment. . . . We don’t want to be used and manipulated by anyone. So we try to be as skeptical and as cautious about being compromised in the interest of some special cause or group of people as we are on a day-to-day basis when we deal with government (Genovese, 1988, pp. 151-152).

Should such guidelines be negotiated or legislated, they would likely be unenforceable. The press would also be made to suffer for any alleged violations. When the government seeks involuntary guidelines and prior restraint, the classic case of the sovereign blaming the messenger who brought the bad news comes to mind. Should the press be forced to surrender its historic role as the fourth estate’s check on governmental power as a specious palliative to quiet minimalist terrorism? The government and the terrorists may each share an interest in controlling the press, but the public’s interest is certainly not thereby served.

In this regard, R. J. Rummel’s (1988, p. 60) studies of the relationships among political systems, violence, and war are worth noting. Rummel’s empirical research indicated that the more democratic a political system, the less likely the incidence of internal violence against its people and the less likely the event of war with other states, particularly democratic states. The reverse is true for totalitarian states. Internal violence in the 20th century has been three times as bloody as that from all the wars in this time period. Rummel concluded that, “[i]n a nutshell, democratic freedom promotes nonviolence” To “minimize collective violence” and elements of war, “. . . one must embrace and foster democratic institutions, civil liberties, and political rights here and abroad” (Rummel, 1988, p. 60). This proactive democratic stance toward preventing internal and external violence may also be applicable as a tool in the real campaign against terrorism at home and abroad.

Other advocates of proactive media roles for conflict resolution hope to reduce group grievances, frustration, and despair by using forums and encouraging free expression. These vehicles would afford a hearing, provide legitimacy when appropriate, and lend credibility to the unnecessary use of violence in a media-rich society. Present media modes reward terrorists for using violence; new modes could reward the sensible discussion of nonviolent alternatives to past aggression, fearsome reports, coerced coverage, and lengthy media-prolonged violence. Though these alternatives, like the diffusion theory (as an alternative to the contagion theory), are worthy of consideration, the, like allege media-exacerbating behavior, are al’s based on informed judgments or suppositions. That is, although they are hypotheses, they are still sound ideas worthy of testing. The provision of a UNO office to the PLO; extensive Western media coverage of Arafat, Gaza, and West Bank Palestinian uprisings; PLO acceptance of Israel and rejection of terrorism; and US diplomatic initiatives toward the PLO are all recent and relevant developments. They indicate that what Secretary of State Shultz as recently as 1988 called a “terrorist group” (thus refusing Arafat a US visa to speak at the United
Nations) may eventually enjoy UN observer status, as does Switzerland. And the US moral stature cannot be increased through an erratic policy which one day declares a group anathema and the next day offers it a seat at the bargaining table.

Of course, post hoc interviews with those responsible for prior violent acts, such as the IRA, PLF, Red Army, or Animal Liberationists, also make some sense. The group’s motives, grievances, plans, and demands can be safely revealed in these “media therapy” sessions, which provide a safety valve and a legitimate platform for dissenting views. Causes, policies, alternatives, shared selection of and control over topics, propaganda encounters, and deep and informed questioning would be necessary parts of such formats. Replies to critics who are sure to label them as “meet your friendly neighborhood terrorist” shows must also be considered. But unless the national government is supportive of, and participates in, such programs, they are likely to fail. Even the recent Columbia School of Journalism Media Studies Center series, which focused on the media and terrorism, failed to have any “guests of dishonor” at the event. No PLO, IRA, PQ, Basque, or Puerto Rican Nationalist advocates or spokespersons were present. Trying terrorism in absentia in such forms, which specialize in exchanging the conventional wisdom about media guidelines (voluntary or imposed) versus press freedom, will do little to prevent forthcoming violence in which media are sure to be major actors. Since 1982, the British government has actually used the threat of IRA terrorism to restrict English press freedom and, more recently, to circumscribe the right of witnesses against self-incrimination – a 300-year-old procedural due process rule which applies to all citizens, terrorists and nonterrorists alike. Similarly, the US State Department strenuously opposed an NBC news interview of 3.5 minutes duration in May 1986 with a PLF leader involved in the Achille Lauro hijacking. A spokesperson claimed that “terrorism thrives on this kind of publicity,” and it “encourages” that which we are seeking to “deter” (Picard, July 1988, p. 6).

Healthy debates about the broader causes of violence (e.g., publicity seeking, easy transport, cheap weapons and explosives, private and governmental funding, and media and governmental intransigence) may be more useful contexts for media-based discussions of the terrorism dilemma (Picard, July 1988, p. 5). Rather than seeking a single cause for this seemingly irrational and antistatist form of protest (which has existed for thousands of year), terrorism must be placed in the context of typical violent reactions to the existence of normally violent societies. Moreover, the realities of modern technology have promoted the state’s monopoly on the use of force. World arms sales annually total in the hundreds of billions. A puny group of terrorists is nothing compared with the thousands of preventable highway, drug, and job-related deaths every year or a 3-million person US military establishment, with annual budgets approaching $300 billion per year. This is just another necessary part of the context needed for understanding terrorism in the late 20th century.
Recent events such as the Pan Am flight 103 bombing in December 1988 and the poisoned Chilean grapes incident in March 1989 indicate that terrorism has transformed itself in a variety of ways. No group claims responsibility for the crimes, the incidents are at the miniature or micro levels (a transistor radio bomb or hypodermic syringe filled with poison), and the protagonists and antagonists operate at the highest symbolic level of abstraction (i.e., symbols of a whole country are randomly threatened and/or attacked). These recent events also portend the likely continuance of this micro-level violence. It, perhaps, may take on still newer forms, such as the use of chemical-biological weapons rather than nuclear suitcase-size devices. These will have total, surgical, quick, and limited geographical effects on a specific population group, such as a city. Biological-chemical terrorists would not run the risk of unexpected, collateral, and universally unpopular results which would follow even the smallest nuclear explosion.

When handling these recent events, the Western media mainly showed the carnage, ascribed blame to the British and American governments for inadequate forewarning, and provided emotional coverage of victims’ families. The grape incident was handled in a fashion that played up public fears, intensified the danger, and illustrated governmental (FDA) competence in protecting the public’s health and safety. Without a clear sense of a victim, victimizer, demand, goal, or continuing dramatic process in the Pan Am 103 bombing, the media were forced to improvise in their reporting formats. While they met the standard criteria for news, these bizarre occurrences failed to meet the typical standards for a terrorist drama. Once again, however, the media greatly magnified these events as threats to us all as well as incidences of sudden and unexpected violence. Yet they continually failed to provide any context (other than governmental competence of blundering) for the public to interpret these new features of the changing face of international terrorism.

The political environment or symbolic context for terrorism also relates to the centrality of the pledge of allegiance debate in the 1988 presidential elections. National pride and personal loyalty were introduced as campaign issues, just as they previously had been in the Klinghoffer case, the Achille Lauro hijacking, and the TWA 847 incident, in which a living symbol of America’s military was denigrated, brutalized, and murdered. When national emotions are allowed to exaggerate what is essentially a police matter into an international incident which provokes (as did the bombing of the Berlin disco) a military assault on Libya and the US counterhijacking of an Egyptian ally’s plane as responses to terrorism, more sensible options must surely be available. This is merely “knee-jerk” patriotism, which invites even further provocation and combative retaliation down the line.

As a case in point, on January 8, 1988, Ted Koppel, host of ABC’s Nightline, had Yassir Arafat as his guest. Arafat maintained that the US and Israel were united in “state terrorism” against Palestinian, Libyan, and other peoples. Though Koppel pressed him, Arafat held his ground. Moreover, the abundant international media
coverage which Arafat received in 1988 (during the UNO Geneva meetings and as a result of the US-PLO diplomatic rapprochement) failed to inspire a rash of terrorist incidents or proterrorist sentiment in the US or elsewhere. Though Arafat received widespread media coverage, the state-directed antiterrorist system has not collapsed. Censoring him or other advocates of unpopular, antiestablishment positions in the US makes no sense in a democratic society.

Short-term solutions to the terrorist-media interaction often focus on media self-censorship, responsibility, and restraint. For example, the Hartford Courant’s editor and publisher, Michael Davis, recently endorsed media self-censorship in the recent Lt. Dol. William Higgins murder and the Joseph J. Cicippio videotapes widely broadcast on network television. Davies applauded ABC and Peter Jennings, the ABC News superstar anchorman, for refusing to be “used as a vehicle by terrorists” and labeling the event “a characteristic tactic to put pressure on the US and Israel via the American public” (Davies, 1989, p. 83). Charles Glass, and ABC correspondent and former videotaped hostage also joined in support of the ABC position by claiming that such broadcasts “hurt the hostages’ position because it was doing exactly what the captors wanted.” Davies applauded the ABC position and said this was a far cry from the TWA flight 847 hijacking days when the networks were used “as a megaphone for terrorists” because their job was to report the news, competition demanded it, and the consequences were irrelevant. Despite their “lack of restraint,” ABC News and Jennings, said Davies, “are blazing new tails for television without leaving the American public uninformed.” He added, “Hooray for them. When will the other networks catch up?” In addition to providing a fine example of the prevailing view on prior self-restrint, it is also interesting to contrast Davies’ earlier views on the media’s need to avoid “a conspiracy of silence” in terrorist reporting (Davies, 1985).

Before the business of government becomes regulation of the news in the name of national security and symbolism, the free press needs to inform the public about policy alternatives and just what is at stake. This may mean antagonizing the old or new power brokers, who would have the media promote even more of their private financial, oligopolic, and corporate interests, which deregulation has only encouraged. Mass media news coverage is tame, bland, and establishment-oriented as it is. To promote further restrictions would not only be redundant, it would also serve to erode our shrinking press freedom even further.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The foregoing analysis of the terrorism/media/government/public opinion/policy-making connection is mainly useful for a general analysis of the topic. It helps, perhaps, to explain how the media have interacted with the US cultural milieu to affect American norms, values, attitudes, interests, and perceptions about terrorism as a recurrent crisis event and its perception as an enduring public problem. The broadcasting industry is but one part of a broader institutional framework for the
identification, definition, salience estimation, evaluation, policy formulation, and assessment of terrorism as a public issue.

The focus of this chapter has been on those aspects of the terrorist phenomenon in which the media play a critical role. This is mainly in determining the definition, ownership, context, agenda, importance, proportionality, selection of alternatives, technological ramifications, power relationships, and evaluative aspects of the issue. These are all important parts of the terrorism question. They are also ones to which media are closely linked – as are the terrorists, the US government, other governments, and public spectators. The latter also serve as cheerleaders, critics, consumers, judges, and juries in evaluating and assessing media and official policies and countermeasures.

The communication aspects of this political, economic, and social problem are vital parts of the eventual solution used to resolve or ameliorate terrorism as a problem or crisis. Be they active military or countercriminal (i.e., forcible) options, active negotiations, or passive acceptance or forbearance of that which is intractable (hostages in captivity), the media are as much partners in the event as are the other major dramatic actors. Resolution of this problem, with its international dimensions, would require looking at the phenomenon from other important vantage points of the policy process. These include careful examination of hidden and preexistent causes of the multidimensional problem, nonmilitary policy options that have proved successful in the past, media techniques for context development, and continual search for a favorable climate to encourage international, diplomatic, and law enforcement solutions to such incidents, each of which has both unique and generic features.

In both its international and domestic forms, terrorism has many guises and multiple causes. It is not a monolith any more than world communism has ever been. Simplistic solutions, such as using strike teams, demanding media self-censorship, threatening military invasion, bombing terrorist training camps, declaring war, or otherwise violating international law, will only create much larger problems (the dimensions of which are beyond speculation) for Americans. The policy implications of US options seriously considered in past international conflicts (e.g., carrying the ground war in Vietnam to the north; using force to break the Berlin blockade’ invading Cuba, Iran, or Libya; placing large numbers of American military “advisers” in Afghanistan or Nicaragua, etc.) are too horrific to contemplate. Each of these untried options would have been costly, deadly, and disastrous in the long and short run. No pax Americana or pax Sovietica against world terrorism has been or will be possible in our lifetimes, nor is this a necessary, desirable, or practical hope. Terrorism as a public phenomenon is intimately and intricately connected to America’s cold war mentality, which maintained a national security state to the tune of more than $300 billion per year. American taxpayers and consumers expected more for their money than keeping the peace through deterrence. They wanted the security of a star wars umbrella, secure transportation
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technology, and a peaceful world, dominated by American national, social, economic, and political values. They distrusted the Russians, the Arabs, the mainland Chinese, the Japanese, and most of the other peoples living on what was increasingly considered to be a very scary planet.

The United States has had a long and bloody history. We have been at war (both declared and undeclared) about one-third of the time since our baptism by fire as a new nation. This violent past continues to the present day and is symbolized by comments such as that of the 1960s black radical H. “Rap” Brown (1969), who said that “violence is as American as cherry pie.” The recent Time magazine report in July 1989 on just one week of US gun-related deaths indicated that the large majority of the victims died at their own hands, were the objects of someone known to them, or were just accidents. This was a far more common cause of death than the criminal use of weapons. The number of “underclass” Americans who were victims of these weapons was conspicuous in these statistics. While standing behind our nuclear deterrents, we seldom negotiate weapons reductions, except for the recent INF and CFE treaties. The US (with the USSR) has been a principal arms merchant for the world. We commit highway mayhem daily and practice domestic violence at home with a vengeance. It extends everywhere. Knee-jerk militarism is publicly supported at every turn. For example, in August 1989, a majority of Americans wanted to send US troops into Colombia to fight narcoterrorism, and only one-third of respondents objected (based on a Newsweek poll reported on National Public Radio on August 28, 1989). Middle East Muslim spokespersons decry the use of Christian bombs dropped by Israeli aircraft against Arab noncombatants. The cycle of violence in which international terrorism is enmeshed must be broken if the US mass media are to become more civilized and humane.

The mass media have played an essential role in the construction of a national paranoia about foreign peoples and governments, into which ethnocentric schema terrorists all too easily fit. The detachment of terrorism from America’s symbolic conflict with the rest of the world (in which our national ego is improperly enmeshed beyond mere ethnocentrism) is the responsibility not only of the broadcasting industry, but also of responsible educators, clerics, politicians, opinion leaders, and world figures who regularly influence what we hold close as “our own” facts and opinions. It is these real, peace-oriented counterterrorists who can focus attention on the pressing problems of the day; hunger, homelessness, disease, drugs, authoritarianism, racism, environmental and species destruction, militarism, and so forth – from which terrorism springs and by which terrorism pales in comparison. If national and international priorities are misplaced, the mass media can help to reorient them, but this cannot be done single-handedly. The US mass media have been particularly susceptible to elite control and influence from the corporate board rooms of networks and advertisers, from the publisher and producers, or from network superstars or editors. The news we get, how much, and what type is
prescreened and filtered through these elite few who act as gatekeepers and agenda setters. These circles of power are subject to governmental, organizational, and public pressures that can also exert influence. For example, interest groups, such as Action for Children’s Television or Ralph Nader’s Public Interest Lobby, have had some impact on televised violence or public interest reporting. There are now enough of these groups sharing a common interest in breaking the cycle of media-reinforced violence that some countervailing power against gratuitous violence can be exercised within First Amendment limits. Terrorism, crime reporting, police show, war news, and other public celebrations or unexplained violence feed on one another in a systemic and symbiotic fashion. A more careful analysis of these interrelationships, connected with efforts to break the actual cycle of domestic and international violence in which the US participates, might help produce both a less scary and less violent society against which many international terrorists now strive measure for measure.

Blaming the media for our ills (in effect, threatening to imprison the bearer of bad news) will be short-sighted and ineffective as a solution to world terrorism. The media’s responsibility in this public problem is to rethink its role along fundamental lines of analysis. Essential guidelines for the reanalysis include adopting certain overlapping maxims for a sound reassessment. These include, for example, 1) expressing unwillingness to be used exploitatively by terrorists or official spokespersons; 2) independently redefining terrorism as a public problem; 3) setting contexts for terrorist incidents in a responsible way; 4) seeking alternative nonmilitary solutions to violent domestic or international incidents; 5) developing independent sources for information on such incidents from foreign news reports and observers; 6) keeping abreast of terrorist groups through network and wire service research files and newspaper “morgues”; 7) providing regular contextual treatment in stories, broadcasts, documentaries, interviews, and discussion formats of terrorism groups, goals, countermeasures, leaders, arms, techniques, and uses of technology; 8) freely interviewing terrorist spokespersons in news segments and group discussion formats; 9) deinstitutionalizing terrorism, and recontextualizing, humanizing, and personalizing the phenomenon; 10) using the many communications levers at hand to provide terrorism with a human face; 11) providing air time to radical critics (such as Noam Chomsky) who make a case for US involvement in state terrorism and the excesses of our allies (e.g., against the oppressed Palestinians in Israeli-occupied territories); 12) developing game plans for reporting on domestic and international violence and terrorism that explore no forcible solutions until the bitter end, despite daily pressures to do otherwise; 13) developing “white papers,” television journals, television specials, and other in-depth programs on terrorism that have a life beyond the dramatic moments of their broadcasts in journalism, politics, psychology, and sociology classes and public educational forums, such as the Kettering Foundation’s National Public Issues Forums annual nationwide town meetings of citizen discussion groups and study
circles; and 14) redefining the news canon so that terrorism can be divided into its component manifestations (i.e., domestic and international; political and economic; significant or insignificant; state-sponsored, -supported, or -aided; or private, unique or patterned; well-documented or vague – in terms of causes or perpetrators; low- or high-level symbolic; grievance-based or irrational; and like categories).

The media’s responsibility in leading such an analysis of terrorism would have wide-ranging significance for our communications proficiency and media competence. The range of significant social issues (going beyond terrorists as outcast barbarians and enemies) which could be discussed in such an approach would immeasurable contribute to our social and intellectual enlightenment as intelligent media consumers. Therefore, while we can accept media’s important role in the definition and amplification of world terrorism, one cannot blame or hold solely responsible the messenger for the message. We can, however, hold the broadcast industry responsible for helping to educate all of us on what to think about and how to respond to tomorrow’s or next year’s terrorist event, for it will surely come and in a new wrapping – conceivably chemical, biological, or even nuclear.

Current conflicts in South Africa and Northern Ireland, like the former civil war in Algeria, exhibit the elements of civil strife rather than terrorist activity. This is also true of Nicaragua, Cuba, El Salvador, Burundi, Cambodia, Chile, Angola, and other conflicts in which individual terrorist acts or wholesale mass murder took place. Media’s role is to help us sort out each type of violence, relating the facts to resistance against tyranny, wholesale slaughter, or something in between. Media must also tell us when these unheard trees fall in distant political forests, since our own government has no interest in doing so unless our official interests are threatened.

In 1946, UNESCO declared that, since wars begin in the minds of men, it is there that the defenses of peace should be constructed. Much the same is true of terrorism. The media can be frontline forces in this permanent and larger battle to wage peace and to ensure justice and popular sovereignty at home and abroad.

The course of international terrorism continues to run along well-established but increasingly meandering lines. Recent developments, all heralded in the international mass media, indicate that terrorism as a media subject still excites public interest and concern. Daily news reports, new books and articles, and television programs depict motorboat assaults on Israeli beaches, the cessation of US diplomatic initiatives toward the PLO, and the latest flaws in TNA, and surveillance techniques designed to promote airline safety. The drama of terrorism as an indigenous national problem (as with the Basques and the IRA) or as a state-supported international movement (as in the case of sanctuary for Red Brigade leaders in the German Democratic Republic along with safe passage for other notables, such as the infamous “Carlos,” in Eastern Europe) continues to interest scholars, journalists, and media consumers alike. Members of the Arafat family,
such as Yasir and his brother, are now featured in Washington Post and Times (London) articles in conjunction with lengthy biographical specials of the “this Is Your Life” variety, which only tangentially relate to the essential features of the terrorism dialog and debate. With all this, the saga of terrorism seems to provoke either explanations, answers, or solutions (as in the debates over freedom fighter versus terrorist, national versus international responses, and national versus international causes and solutions). However, with the passage of time, the proponents of international approaches to solve such problems seem to have the edge in terms of the weight of their arguments and applicability to a changing world situation. New considerations of the multiple causes of terrorism, its varieties, similarities, and uniqueness, and like analyses point toward the utility of removing or ameliorating the causes of terrorism and increasing the use of East-West and North-South cooperation to promote information exchange, to provide extradition when warranted, and to monitor cross-national activities of potential perpetrators of violence against innocent civilians.

In this respect, the May 1990 presidential report from the Aviation Security and Terrorism Commission (which, naturally, made instant news headlines) is an anomaly, out of sync with the passage of events. This report might have been more properly titled “The Lockerbie Report” since it was a necessary political response to the tragic deaths of 270 people in December 1988. Some of the commission’s proposals (such as improving airport security procedures) are self-evident and reflect current policy anyway. However, it would have been nice if the details about TNA machine failures had not been so explicit since this might have provided a measure of comfort to travelers as well as a deterrent to some would-be bombers. Some of the commission’s other proposals (for example, appointing a new “terrorist czar” in the State Department and improving their emergency notification procedures, and allowing the CIA to do covert investigations) may or may not accomplish much. Only time will tell if these measures will have any specific (since they are unlikely to have any general) effects on terrorist activities.

To certain of the commission’s proposals, it is possible to make serious objection. For example, the Lockerbie disaster may have been linked to the July 1988 deaths of 290 Iranians from a US warship’s missiles. If so, the idea of sanctioning preventive strikes will only initiate and invite further retaliation and escalation.

The commission’s report (which fulfills a media dream) is also obviously linked to our emerging concept of low-intensity warfare, replacing the rationale for US military might now that the Soviet threat is in decline. In this fashion, the media have helped to reconvince taxpayers that they must support the defense budget to pacify a mean and scary world. It is a wonder that nowhere in the commission’s 60 recommendations does the report endorse or highlight ideas such as researching the causes of terrorism, using diplomacy, resolving conflicts, negotiating, determining peace settlements, or removing the causes of violent discontent while encouraging
the spread of economic freedom, social justice, and political democracy. With the course of international rapprochement running so smoothly (if surprisingly) these days, it can only be hoped that the commission report has served its purposes, revived interest in the topic, and allowed us to accept its best motives as our own. It is necessary, however, to improve media channels of communication with governments, publics, and potential terrorist groups to improve our knowledge about causes, solutions, and the mass media’s future role in terrorism as a systemic symbiotic, and symbolic set of phenomena.

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Chapter 14
Democracy and Virtual Politics

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Abstract
This chapter examines the impact of digital technologies on the construction of political subjectivity. We examine three models of political agency: the passive agent, the rational actor, and the sovereign subject. Using the 2000 German Green Party convention in Baden-Württemberg, the thesis will challenge the notion that information technologies can create a sovereign subject. Based on Jean Baudrillard's writings, we will argue that information technologies will do little more than create a simulation of democracy.

Introduction

Considerable debate has emerged recently over the role and impact of new information technologies for political life. Attitudes range from glowing predictions of the new technology’s ability to open public space for open discourse and a reinvigoration of democratic life to various pessimistic appraisals of the new technologies as the harbinger of a technological police state. In the middle, one finds claims suggesting that information technologies are not likely to change very much in the political culture since they will adapt to the existing structures of society rather than alter them in any wholesale fashion (Resnick, 1998, p. 49). In fact, evidence can be put forward to support each of these claims.

These discussions often overlook the impact of digitization on the subject as political agent. The digitized communications media is usually discussed as if it can transmit a full spectrum of information in any context of communications. Technical limitations are not usually discussed. In fact, where it is discussed at all, the technology is usually applauded as a liberating potential. As stated by Anna Sampaio and Janis Aragon, cyberspace is a place of anonymity, where traditional markers of hierarchy (e.g., age, sex, and race) no longer are tagged to human subjectivity (Sampaio and Aragon, 1998, p. 153). One is free to enter a chat room and take on any identity one wishes.

Without hierarchy and the symbolic tags of human identity, cyberspace is a place where reason can have its domain. It is a place of democratic potential, a public sphere designed for interactivity and participation. As Juliet Roper (1998, p. 69) describes it, cyberspace can provide the Habermasian space for communicative action, free from the influences of domination and subordination.

This chapter explores another aspect of information technology’s impact on political subjectivity. To the extent that the technology is use for organizational/informational purposes, it is a medium of one-way communications. In this
regard, it is little different from television or radio, apart from some additional selectivity afforded by the technology. The subject is still a passive agent. However the optimist’s argument regarding the new technologies is predicated on the idea that it is also used as a means of interactive discourse in which a subject can log onto chat rooms and websites in which there is two-way communication. This interactive process provides not only the chance for political organizing and mobilizing like-minded participants, but also developing ideas and on-going discourse and discussion. In this form, information technologies reinforce the model of the Cartesian rational actor in the world, seeking information to engage in the pursuit of rationally conceived ends. Finally, carried to its political conclusions, the new technologies available via the web have the potential to provide an arena of sovereign interaction. In this use, continuing within Cartesian logic, the subject is assumed to be an autonomous actor capable of making transcendentally arrived at conclusions in a public arena that will direct the exercise of collective power.

This chapter examines the 2000 political convention of Baden-Württemberg’s Green Party as a step toward implementing the sovereign actor model of subjectivity. While still not at the level of state sovereignty, participants in the party meeting were able to vote and make decisions that were binding on the party. After describing some details surrounding this meeting, we analyze the nature of sovereign subjectivity in cyberspace. Lurking in the background of the rational actor view of human subjectivity are concerns regarding the extent to which such a view applies in the post-Cartesian, post-industrial, and postmodern world. Using the insights of the French postmodern thinker Jean Baudrillard, we will argue that the medium is at least partly responsible for shaping the actors engaged in political activity. Baudrillard claims that our social world has lost its connection to a transcendentally grounded notion of reality. What we call reality is an increasingly simulated experience of the world. The digitized politics of the Green Party meeting in Baden-Württemberg was simply a step further toward simulated politics and, more specifically, simulated democracy.

**Organization of the Green Party Convention in Baden-Württemberg**

The Virtual Party Convention of the Greens took place between November 24 and December 3, 2000. This party convention opened up a new phase of the use of Internet technology by parties and political organizations. For the first time (at least in Germany), a party convention was completely organized using electronic networks. Members, party delegates, and the executive committee of the party made decisions in cyberspace. These decisions were then binding for the entire party within Baden-Württemberg. The party convention debated two issues: shop opening hours and, appropriately, electronic democracy. The online discussions were based on these two topics, with different motions on the two topics being
introduced in the course of the discussions. The process of discussing the issues, changing the wording of motions, and making decisions about these changes, as well as the final party statements, were done via the Internet.

Regarding the organization structure of the meeting, the organizers hoped to mirror the structures and characteristics of a real party convention as completely as possible. This was also necessary to guarantee the legitimacy of the convention and to protect against charges that somehow the results were not consistent with democratic procedures. Access to the activities of the convention was organized on three different levels. 1) Spectators to the party activities. This was essentially open to any interested person with an Internet connection. To gain access, one only had to log onto www.virtueller-pariteitag.de. Anyone could listen to the discussions and learn about the results of the voting process. 2) Green Party members acting as participants. When these members notified the Green Party’s administrative office that they intended to participate, they were sent a password via regular mail. The password enabled this group of participants to enter into the discussions, formulate amendments to the motions, and support amendments of other participants. In this regard, they were able to participate as “rational actors” but not sovereign ones. 3) Green Party delegates. Just as in a traditional party convention, voting was restricted to the party delegates. This group included officially elected party delegates and the members of the executive committee.

The virtual space found at the website was subdivided into various rooms and functional spaces. In the virtual convention office, visitors could gain information about the organization and the highlights of the convention as well as actual news. In the Convention Hall the discussion forums took place using a content-management system for the automatic administration of the participant’s statements and amendments. Finally, there was the voting space with an electronic voting booth that could be accessed by the party delegates. By encrypting the data and the authentication of digital votes via a trust center, a high degree of data security was achieved. The data security issue was dealt with by the company BROKAT, which is a technology leader in this field.

The Participants and Their Experience

The Greens in Baden-Württemberg claim 7,500 members. Only 303 members participated at the party convention. Out of this group, 113 were voting members, as either officially elected delegates or as executive committee members. The other 190 participants were interested party members, who took part in the discussions and wanted to explore the new Internet experiments. Surveys (conducted by the Institute for Technology Assessment in Stuttgart) of the participants indicated, with very few exceptions, that participants had already been very politically active. Most said they had participated in previous party conventions. They were also very computer-literate and were regular Internet users. The participants were further distinguished by their high educational levels. Up to 90% had passed the abitur and
70% had completed a university degree or were studying at a university. Only one participant had a basic school degree.

Since non-voting party members could participate in the discussions, compared to regular party conventions, a bigger group of simple party members participated. Furthermore, there was a record number of discussion statements: 792. Close to every second official participant made some contribution to the discussion, so participation levels were high. In the end, 62.7% of participants either endorsed or supported an amendment, indicating intense participation.

From this data, it is clear that the obstacles to direct participation were much lower than at a real party convention. Many more people voiced opinions and did so repeatedly. There was no need to stand up in a huge auditorium where people instantly reacted to one’s opinion. The participants also believed that a real party convention would take much more of their time and did not fit as neatly into their daily routines. This made it much easier to combine work, family, and politics.

The data gathered from the delegates indicated two problem areas. Generally, the participants were satisfied with the content of the debate, but not the structure. Many participants had problems with the often unstructured and unmoderated discussions. The party convention had 20 discussion forums running; if one moved about the various forums or disconnected for a period of time, it became difficult to follow the flow of the arguments. The various forums were unsorted and unmoderated and postings were listed only based on temporal criteria. This was a conscious decision on the part of the party to avoid the perception that the executive committee was trying to intervene and manipulate the outcome. In the end, this contributed to an impression by a large number of delegates that the virtual convention was complex and, at times, difficult to follow.

The greatest problem participants cited was lack of personal contacts. One-to-one communication was hardly possible and the informal talks that usually take place at a party convention did not occur at the virtual convention. Because participants were to post their comments to public and semi-public spaces, it was impossible to communicate synchronically or confidentially with specific groups or a single person. The participants were not able to see who was online at the same time they were. At the end, many participants missed the atmosphere of a “real” party convention; the majority claimed that real conventions are much more fun. They missed the emotions, the high-flying speeches, the back room maneuvering, and the opportunity to get to know new people not just as postings on a screen, but as real, complex, multi-dimensional, human beings.

In the end, the data gathered showed that only one person indicated that the virtual convention should replace the real party convention in the future. The virtual meetings were seen as a means to augment the party in its organizing activity or for special issues that arose, but that they should not be a wholesale substitute.
The questions surrounding the data on the party convention are not the facts themselves, but what interpretive framework should be used to analyze the data. In the following sections, different characterizations of human agency will be developed. The focus will be on the relationship between the use of information technology and the model of human agency enhanced by the use of the technology. A detailed discussion of Jean Baudrillard’s take on information technology and human beings will follow. We will then return to this data for some analysis.

Three Models of Human Agency and the New Information Technology

Optimists regarding the use of the new technology claim that it can expand democratic participation in the Western democracies. From this perspective, the Internet constitutes a new public space in which the citizenry can become informed and organized for rational political activity. Pessimists claim that the Internet is equally compatible with hierarchical rule (Schmidtke, 1998, p. 65). From this perspective, no automatic expansion of democracy should be expected from the new technology. Impossible as it may be to adopt either wholesale optimism or pessimism about the impact of information technology on political life, it is possible to make observations about some of the impacts of this technology.

However, to fully understand these changes, it is necessary to make one assumption: human nature is not static. In the contact with the various forms of information technology, the behavior, norms, and self-understanding of human subjectivity become altered. Following the claims of Marshall McLuhan (1962) (and a position adopted by Jean Baudrillard), we will assert that the human subject is altered by the conditions of communications technology. The new information technologies cannot be seen as simply being adapted to a static conception of subjectivity but are, themselves, part of a cultural milieu that, in turn, shapes the parameters of thought and the expectations of collective action. McLuhan claims that as print caused the alteration of our conception of self, so the information technologies of today are reconstructing our means of thinking about ourselves in a social and political context. Subjectivity is shaped and reoriented based on this new technology. In this context, distance is overcome by speed. Today, scarcity of information is replaced by what Baudrillard refers to as an “obscenity” of information, as information overload. Therefore, no uniform outcome can be expected from the new technology. Outcomes will be reflective of the way in which the subject interacts with the technology itself. Three such models of interaction can be identified: passive agent, rational actor, and sovereign actor.

Passive Agent

To the extent that human interaction with information technology constitutes a one-way flow of information from a person, group, or commercial interest to the viewer
of web material, the passive agent model of subjectivity is being reinforced. In this usage, the viewer may be seeking information or be solicited by the person or organization possessing the viewed material. In either case, the viewer is engaged with the material as a passive agent, not interacting or engaging in any discourse with the material, beyond possibly clicking from one subsection to another. In this role, the Internet simply has the character of any other mechanism for mass communications. It hosts the display of prepackaged material, without the possibility of active engagement on the part of the web viewer.

This model has predominated in the commercialization of the web, but it has also been adopted by organized political groups, activist organizations, political parties, and government entities. In this usage, the Internet takes on the character of a sophisticated billboard for advertising purposes. In political terms, this usage has been undertaken by political parties in most of the industrial democracies as well as by government, itself. Examples of government’s use of this model can be found in American cities (e.g., Glendale, Passadena, and Santa Monica in California). However, this model is not what Habermas had in mind as expanding the public sphere. As Oliver Schmidtke (1998, p. 67) puts it, the Internet provides the perfect public relations tool for government because it can disseminate information to rationalize all of its policies. In terms of usage, this model is the most consistent with top-down hierarchical control; it has the effect of reinforcing group identity, without regard for bottom-up political influence.

Rational Actor

If the passive agent model can be said to raise concerns about the continuation of hierarchy and control, optimists point to the rational actor model as carrying the potential for a new form of civil democracy. Here, the idea of a newsgroup (in which there is an ongoing question-and-answer format) replaces the Internet as a medium of passive consumption. Individuals can seek special information or organize chat rooms, interest groups, or e-mail lists, all at a very low cost (Resnick, 1998, p. 64). In this usage, the net resembles a pluralistic civil society, egalitarian in terms of each participant’s voice having the same potential, where only the stronger argument will prevail. For this reason, Douglas Kellner (1998, p. 173) stresses the importance of resistance groups to mobilize via the web to counteract the organized economic interests seeking to subjugate the populous.

This raises an interesting question with regard to the web and its content. On this level; the web lends itself equally well to agents of change on both the left and the right of the political spectrum. It is a medium of discourse for both anarchists and fascists. Therefore, regarding political ideology and the Internet, it is necessary to conclude that the web contains no implicit normative bias toward democracy. It contains potential as both a medium of control and a means to encourage more democratic participation. Either potential can be realized.
What can be claimed is that the Internet used in this mode has a conditioning influence on subjectivity. Here, the Internet reinforces the Cartesian idea of an individual rational subject seeking to grasp the objective environment as part of his/her life experience. As Tim Jordon (1999, p. 96) puts it, from this perspective cyberspace is a “place where individuals can finally wrest control of their being from institutions, governments, corporations, and oppressions.” However, since the Internet contains no necessary normative claims with regard to community and since it reinforces an individualistic conception of subjectivity, some scholars have concluded that the political outcome of the web’s influence on human subjectivity will be one of political fragmentation (Schmidtke, 1998, p. 61).

**Sovereign Actor**

The sovereign actor model, in its ideal form, seeks to carry the rational actor model to its political conclusion. As a sovereign actor, the individual approaches the Internet both as a medium of information and a venue for participating in binding collective decisions for some administrative unit. In this model, the web is a place to conduct direct or plebiscite democracy. Some see this as the means to overcome the apathy and cynicism increasingly found in Western democracies.

While yet to be implemented in this form, various experiments tilted in this direction. In Athens, the Pericles project was launched in 1992 (Tsagarousianou, 1998). Started by a group of intellectuals and scientists, “Network Pericles” set up a terminal in Athens so citizens could raise issues, gather information, and express opinions by voting. While the results are not binding and constitute more of an ongoing public poll, the framework could be used as a model for expressing collective decisions. Experiments are taking place in other European cities such as Amsterdam, Manchester, and Bologna. In the US 2000 presidential primaries, citizens of Arizona were able to cast their votes online. The party meeting of the Greens in Baden-Württemberg also moves in that direction. Delegates were able to raise issues, exchange ideas, and then cast binding votes for the party.

Critics of the sovereign actor model generally raise the issue of access. Will this be democratic if all people do not have an Internet connection? But on the level of the political impact of the web on human subjectivity, a more complex paradox emerges. Even if one adopts the Cartesian model of the rational subject, it would seem that two features of the Internet operate to inhibit the realization of the online revitalization of community and democracy. As discussed in the previous section, the specialized information that can be provided on the web does not require allegiance to the local institutional authority. Because the web has no territoriality and no boundaries, all notions of geographic boundaries are not generally reinforced as part of socialization on the web. All exists as a simultaneous presence. In other words, there is no necessary reason to engage in a re legitimization of the nation-state. The extra-territorial nature of the Internet does not reinforce the normative components of territorial administration. From this perspective, the
nation-state is nothing but nostalgic fiction (Angell, 1996; Ohmae, 1995). As Kenichi Ohmae (1995, p. 64) describes it, the nation-state is reduced to a protection racket designed to protect the biggest racketeers.

Debate regarding the political role of the Internet generally falls into one of these three categories. But is this all that can be said about the significance of the web for social and political life? In the next section, we will explore the work of Jean Baudrillard. He shifts the focus away from the liberating potential of the Internet and raises questions about how the technology also serves as a system of epistemological constraints on communications. As a result, serious questions are raised about information technologies’ liberating potential.

**Baudrillard's Developmental History and Rise of Simulated Politics**

French philosopher Jean Baudrillard has written extensively on the topics of technology, media, and culture, among other interests. His writings represent a synthesis of Marshall McLuhan’s work on media, Max Weber’s concerns about Enlightenment rationality, leftist politics, and postmodern epistemology. To put it mildly, Baudrillard is pessimistic about how the new information technologies are used. In the context of different models discussed previously, optimism regarding the use of these new technologies requires a belief that they will enhance the rational actor or sovereign actor models of political life. Baudrillard does not view the technology that way. For him, the use of information technology reinforces the passive agent model of human subjectivity; thus, it is not a mechanism for political liberation, but a new medium for domination and control.

For Baudrillard, information technology represents a medium that diminishes the value of human subjectivity itself. Meaning is lost within the network of communications. Thought is replaced by stimulation. Deliberation is replaced by immediacy. The real is being “murdered” by the process of rationalization and the virtual world (Baudrillard, 2000, p. 164).

In this context, political life is not just altered; it is destroyed. Political life (which was characterized by the drama of subjects struggling against the alienating components of economic and political repression) now disappears in a digitized universe. In contrast to McLuhan, the medium does not create the global village, but the isolated and alienated subject, a subject now cut off from the public space needed for real political interaction. In its place is a simulation of politics. Using the Internet as a medium of politics furthers the process of estrangement in social life and neutralizes the potentials of political interaction.

**Baudrillard and Poststructuralist Epistemology**

While at times criticizing other poststructuralists and denying his part in the postmodern movement, Baudrillard’s epistemology clearly aligns him with post-
structuralists. Generally, poststructuralism can be said to incorporate three elements: the rejection of reason’s transcendental character, the historical nature of truth, and the claim that power relations are the basis of social and political life.

To poststructuralists in general, Western philosophy since Plato has been engaged in a misguided enterprise. It sought to create a body of knowledge that can claim to have the status of an ahistorical truth that can survive the vicissitudes of material being. A column of truth is to be erected around which social and political life can be ordered (Derrida, 1981). To do this, some form of dualistic philosophy is necessary in which the faculty of “reason” is said to ascend to this universal form of “knowledge.” For Plato, this is accomplished via the dialectic and the fixed nature of the forms. In Descartes, Kant, and others, a similar process (called “reason”) uncovers the universals that transcend historical change.

Influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche’s claims, Baudrillard and other poststructuralists assert that all claims to knowledge are historical. Knowledge is created to serve human needs that are historical and material in nature. When identities are assigned to objects and hypotheses are constructed to explain the interaction of those objects, the results are always hypothetical and probabilistic in character. Ethics are constructed to meet immediate human social problems and should not be assigned any universal or transcendent character. Baudrillard (1983, p. 86) assigns the notion of natural law to the medieval period in Western history.

In epistemological terms, “knowledge” reflects the conditions of its own generation. That is, the production of knowledge is circular. What we term knowledge always reflects and reinforces the assumptions of the context out of which it was created. Out of need, we construct a model of the real. We then make the world conform to the model (Baudrillard, 1983, pp. 1-3). The knowledge contained in the model is a simulation of the world, but the simulation is reinforced as if it is real via its own enactment and dissemination. This is not unlike Niklas Luhmann’s (1990) notion of “self-referencing systems.”

If the logocentric tradition in the West is rejected by Baudrillard and the poststructuralists, so too is the Cartesian model of the human subject. There can be no “rational actor” making autonomous decisions about his/her life if the conditions for transcendent choice are not present. For Baudrillard, information technologies are not vehicles for liberation but new sets of constraints in which communications takes place. In contrast to the rational actor model, the new technologies require a further refinement and filtering of the means of communications, thus constraining the character of communications.

Rejecting the model of the rational actor also eliminates the possibility of sovereign actors and the idea that information technologies can enhance democratic practice. In the absence of universal truth around which to organize social and political practice, the idea of democracy itself takes on a historical character. Political life is a struggle for the domination of models and metaphors. Therefore, the real question regarding the new information technologies will be the effect they
have on altering the metaphors and the models to which humans must conform. Baudrillard’s conclusion can best be understood in the context of his claims regarding simulation and what he terms the three orders of appearance.

**The Three Orders of Appearance**

The central concept in Baudrillard’s middle and later work is simulation. Simulation (which represents the current means of constructing the symbolic order) is actually the third form by which value is generated since the Renaissance. In the simulated order, Baudrillard contends we have lost the ability to distinguish the real from the fabrication. In place of the real are operational models in which the real is replaced by organizations of signs and symbolic reference points that point to other signs within the operational model. All that is not explained by the model must be either ignored or destroyed. Baudrillard claims that in today’s political realm, participation increasingly takes on the character of a simulation.

The first “order of appearance” Baudrillard calls the counterfeit. The counterfeit emerges as a reaction to the rigid structure of status represented by the feudal order. The emergence of the Renaissance (with the belief in human equality, transcendent reason, and natural law) required a new distribution of social signs and a new mechanism for generating the signs of value. In order for all classes to use the signs equally, a new mechanism for the production of value was required. Still grounded in a notion of the real, the symbolic value of the real could be copied and distributed to the masses in the system of exchange that characterized the development of the bourgeois order (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 86).

The second order of appearance emerges with the industrial revolution. In what Baudrillard (1983, p. 96) refers to as the “industrial simulacrum,” symbolic value is manufactured on a massive scale. While the counterfeit retained a certain individuality in its reproduction of the real, the development of industrial production was organized to generate a series of identical products. Baudrillard’s interest is not just in the technological aspects of this transformation, but in its cultural impact. The significance of the process is rooted in the fact that organizational principles replace those of representation (Baudrillard, 1983, pp. 93-95). As a result, human beings are subordinated to the machine in the process of production. Natural law is replaced by mercantile value and the calculation of force (Baudrillard 1983, p. 9). It is through the ability to mass produce that money, value, and signs are distributed in the society (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 97).

In political terms, the production of value as a series not only subordinates human beings to the machine and the operational necessities of the production process, it also creates a cultural standard of value. The political order is characterized by conformity, as a series that is also mass-produced. Baudrillard makes it clear that the emergence of industrial production sets up a logic of operations that cause the “liquidation of the real” (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 95). However, it is with the emergence of simulation proper that this process reaches its fruition.
To Baudrillard, our contemporary age is characterized by simulation. Simulation represents the generation of the “real” without reference to an origin. In other words, the project is to make the real conform to a simulation (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 2). Simulation represents a condition in which the measure of truth, meaning, and value are validated by their correspondence to the prevailing model in which they are constructed (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 32). Today, we live in a hallucination of the real (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 148). Discourse on the metaphysics of being has given way to the metaphysics of the “code,” a projection of an “objective” form of knowledge. As Baudrillard describes this process, the Jesuit drive for unity and certainty has returned to us in the postmodern era in the form of mapping DNA, a task designed to remove any ambiguity about human nature.

To understand the significance of what Baudrillard means by simulation, remember that to the poststructuralists in general, truth, value, and meaning are historical constructions. Therefore, technology and communications play a significant part in the construction and significance of the sign. This means that the mechanisms employed in the process of transmitting signs, value, and meaning circumscribe the limits of what can and cannot be transmitted. Quoting McLuhan, Baudrillard repeats that the “medium is the message” (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 124).

The medium today is electronic communication, particularly the Internet. The Internet is a digitized medium, characterized by binary code. Baudrillard’s claim is that there is a parallel process taking place on a cultural level in which the entire realm of social interaction is entering a phase in which the computer’s binary code is being replicated within the forms of human interaction. Today, we have the “mystic elegance of the binary system, of the zero and the one from which all being proceeds” (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 106). Human contact is being replaced by a digitized realm where only that which can lend itself to digitization can be considered as the proper content of communications. This means that political interaction increasingly takes the form of a choice among binary opposites.

*Technology, Politics, and the "Code"*

Baudrillard (2000, p. 64) asserts that today, the real has been murdered by the process of rationalization and the virtual world. The significance of this notion for politics cannot be overstated. While Baudrillard views all three orders of appearance as means of control, he focuses most on the plight of freedom within the process of simulation. Baudrillard saw the political process within the Enlightenment as dominated by a particular drama, as the masses struggled against forces that sought to alienate or oppress them. The Enlightenment conception of reason was the tool of liberation, as reason was to enlighten a superstitious mass to the understanding that their acquiescence is what allowed despots to live (Baudrillard, 1988, p. 217). Today, we are no longer subject or object, alienated, or free. This is so because now, man’s alienation by man is a thing of the past (Baudrillard, 1993, pp. 58-59). Now, we are alienated by machines and the code.
The “telecomputer man” of the contemporary age is not aware of the condition of his own servitude (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 59). We have been integrated into the machines of communications (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 58). This “prosthesis” displays the spectacle of thought, but is incapable of displaying thought itself (Baudrillard, 1993, pp. 51-52). Freedom is manifested as freedom for virtual interaction rather than real social and political action (Baudrillard, 1994a, p. 30).

The result of this digitized interaction of screens rather than people is that real political interaction is dead (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 41). Today, the value of a political message is not in its meaning, but in its circulation. The idea of human agency (of subjects acting in the world) is replaced by a new metaphor. Human beings now become sending and receiving “satellites” connected in webs of networks, in which being connected and transmitting information becomes an ontological end in itself, a new means of gratification (Baudrillard, 1988b).

This new means of gratification is satisfied by an orgy of superfluous information. Baudrillard calls this the new form of obscenity (Baudrillard, 1988b, p. 24). Within this context, the idea of meaningful public space is disappearing. All is transparent, but all is on the surface. There is no depth and no meaning (Baudrillard, 1988b, p. 12). The use of binary coding for the transmission of information alters the content to fit the technology. With binary coding, the symbolic dimension of language is lost (Baudrillard, 2000, p. 69). Politics (as a struggle to overcome the condition of alienation and oppression) takes on the character of a simulation. Virtual liberation masks the continued expansion of the instruments of oppression. The transpolitical replaces the political and the political game in the world becomes that of seduction (Baudrillard, 1988b, p. 59).

The simulation of politics is coupled with a de-ideologicalization of the masses (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 41). Baudrillard does not view this as a positive development because of the process that has come to replace that of an ideological commitment. In the place of ideology, Baudrillard sees the public opinion poll. The process of opinion polling sits at the nexus of several of Baudrillard’s comments about the political. The opinion poll is part of the orgy of information that obfuscates the struggle against oppression. It covers up the real structure of oppression because the public does not really form independent or transcendent positions anyway. Baudrillard believes that the opinions of the masses are responses shaped by cues received from the political class and from a prepackaged corporate media structure that does not allow space to construct an independently formed opinion (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 41). The real effect of the concept of “public opinion” is to neutralize class antagonisms. It seeks to substitute the idea of a single outcome, a united path, among competing and antagonistic groups.

The de-ideologized mass now becomes “prey to probability theory” (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 41). Opinion polls and statistical analysis now produce “truths” for simulated politics. There can be no rational dissention because “objective data,” probability theory, rational choice ontology, and expanding
consumer consumption now establish the singular path to the future. The unity of humankind is established. All are the same. The power of seduction is such that to think otherwise is to be irrational.

From this perspective, introducing the Internet into the political realm does not open up new areas of public space. Baudrillard’s contention is that public space is disappearing because the virtual space of the web is not real public space (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 41). Within this framework, the politics on the web is part of the erosion of the political. Political parties represent the compulsion of the game, organizations designed to extend the influence of power. This process requires more than one party since debate between two subgroups of the political class can create the illusion of legitimacy. Therefore, claims Baudrillard (1983, p. 132), political parties position themselves to render a 50/50 split in the voters so election results are simply the product of chance. Election results do not lead to major changes anyway since both political factions tend to represent the conditioning of the corporate interests and the political class as reflected in the media. The Internet is just one more medium for organizing and controlling the masses.

For Baudrillard to draw this type of conclusion, he must reject the idea that media, in general, are mechanisms that further the notions of either rational or sovereign actors. The masses are simply passive agents of manipulation, mesmerized and seduced by the illusion of political choices that appear to them on voting day, whether that voting is to take place in a booth at a fixed location or via the web in cyberspace. Whether represented by the Greens in Baden-Württemberg, the Pericles project in Athens, or the Arizona primary, all extend the conformity of the dominant ontological model of consumption and expansion.

**Party in the Simulacrum**

Within the framework for analysis suggested by Baudrillard, the virtual party convention in Baden-Württemberg must be seen as reflecting a number of problematic and even contradictory elements. On the one hand, virtual politics has the ability to take the democratic ethos of the Enlightenment project and expand it with the use of the new technology. On the other hand, with virtual interaction replacing human contact, using the web to enhance political sovereignty only produces a simulation of democratic political practice.

Claims about the strength of the technology focus on the level and quality of participation by the delegates. Using the web has the potential to produce high levels of participation. In theory, this is qualitatively different participation than passively watching the event on the screen, the type promoted by TV or other one-way media. Participants can respond, raise questions, and vote via the web. All of these can be seen as having the potential to expand democratic practice.

However, such optimism masks several problems relating directly to the constraints imposed by the technology. Baudrillard, in particular, seems to raise important questions about using information technology, anticipating a number of
the reactions by the participants in the party convention. The data suggest that high levels of participation were exhibited among the participants. But the high amount of participation came at a price. It appears that there was a type of information overload (a more suitable term than “orgy”). Participants in the virtual convention claimed to have too many issues to follow, too much information to digest, too many forums in which to participate. The virtual convention represents a microcosm of what Baudrillard said about the cultural impact of information technologies themselves. The result is a paradox with regard to democracy. The party hierarchy correctly noted the problem that imposing a structure would present for the goal of promoting grass-roots democracy. However, the lack of structure makes it difficult for anything coherent to emerge from the discussion.

As a result, one casualty of the increased numbers and the level of participation is depth in the discourse that occurs. This problem is conveyed in participants’ concern for the lack of personal contact at the meeting. One reason for this is contained in the technology, itself; using binary code removes the depth and subtlety from communication. Human contact can convey the emotion of speech, whether one-to-one or to a large crowd. Web politics removes that dimension from political discourse. It gives preeminence to the march of reason in the world, but at the cost of human contact and a reduction in the value of human emotions as part of social and political life. Charisma (which people like Max Weber saw as the essence of political life) is diminished by binary transmission.

In the end, one could imagine a political arena in which everyone has access, everyone could speak, and no one would care. All is bland. No one wants to participate because no one has any interest. This is the political life of Nietzsche’s “last man.” This is the danger that Baudrillard sees the web posing for political life because the vitality and emotion of real politics is displaced by its simulation. More people can participate, but the reason to care will disappear along with the idea of ideological commitment. Cut off from the real, the virtual becomes our reality. In that regard, the web constitutes another aspect of the march of reason in the world. The Internet will not become the means to overcome the alienation of human beings but become one more, and very powerful, source of that condition. All that can be digitized will become our reality; all that cannot be digitized will be discarded.

**Conclusion**

To say that Baudrillard aligns himself with the pessimist on the role of technology would be a gross understatement. He admits that he could be considered a type of nihilist (Baudrillard, 1994a), but only in the sense that he is interested in the disappearance of the real. As he describes it, today’s nihilism is not from destruction but from transparency and simulation. Meaning disappears in a world saturated with stimuli, with an orgy of information.
Virtual politics is not the answer to a public that is increasingly disenfranchised, cynical, and alienated from real political engagement. In the end, virtual politics will heighten such feelings. It will produce a world in which a technical structure will oversee artificially contrived choices for a public whose opinion has already been shaped by the conditions of their own oppression. This is the nature of simulated politics. Information technologies are not the solution, but the cause of this condition. The Internet simply extends and furthers the conditions already present in the media age that extends back to the 1930s.

Baudrillard rejects positive claims of the rational and sovereign actor models. All are receivers, not actors. The simulation of the political constitutes a system of control. Using information technology to further advance the message of interest groups, political parties, and the state simply enhances a system of domination already in place. Today, it is no longer a question of maintaining the social contract. The contest today is between a totalitarian system of self-reference on the one hand and an infantile mass on the other (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 78). Within this framework, the state feels justified in brutalizing its own populations.

Like other poststructuralist writers, Baudrillard conveys a strong element of philosophic anarchism. One can either accept these assumptions or not, but they cannot be ignored. It has long been recognized that the Internet has a Western bias, owing to both economic factors that limit access and the fact that the ASCII code used on the web is a Western script. What has been less recognized is that technology, itself, constitutes a bias that promotes and extends a particular form of life. We live in an age in which technology has sold itself with promises that it cannot possibly fulfill. The result is a world (of which human beings are a part) that must be reshaped in order to convince us of its own success. That leaves us with a simple truth. Today, we are born to serve the technology.

References


Chapter 15
The Electronic Media Deficit

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Abstract

In 1998, the National Commission on Civic Renewal in the United States declared that television has become a “destructive force” in society because it entices people to spend many hours in front of the TV screen, away from civic activities and social relations in their communities. Two decades earlier, American professor Neil Postman (1979) warned that television was developing into a learning system that competes with the schools and predicted that TV would eventually dominate. Entreat ing educators to pay attention to the dramatic changes taking place in the communication of news and entertainment, Postman urged them to teach students about television’s effects, biases, and relationship to learning. Few educators were concerned. The public generally considered television a promising, convenient conveyor of news and family entertainment to their homes. Educators in schools and colleges saw videotape as a handy replacement for bothersome 16mm-film projectors. At home, educators (like most of the American public) viewed for short periods the evening news, short dramas, or variety shows. In the 1970s and early 1980s, there seemed to be little awareness or discussion among civic/political educators of the growing power of television to socialize and instruct (Hepburn, 1990).

In the 1970s, courses for political educators taught about “socializing agents” that supported “regime norms.” In civics courses, textbooks and teachers conveyed to students a view of the several “agents” that shaped them politically: family, school, peers, church and other social groups, and the media. These agents were not considered of equal importance in the civic development of young people. Family was considered most influential, exerting particularly strong sway on political identification and partisanship (Jennings and Niemi, 1974). The school’s influence was considered minimal, based mainly on a study of high school students (Langton and Jennings, 1968), which later was challenged by educational researchers for the lack of measurement validity and reliability (Hepburn, 1980). Meanwhile, Torney, Oppenheim, and Farnen (1975) showed that classroom experiences do affect civic understanding. Social and church groups were considered to significantly influence civic attitudes and behavior in that early literature (Easton and Dennis, 1965; Sigel, 1965). But there was little discussion of the mass media. Social conditions received some attention. Some studies examined how Blacks experienced a duality in the US political culture (Marvick, 1965; Greenberg, 1970). Societal conditions were often extraneous to the “agents” model. Moreover, the influence of each agent was likely to be examined independently, providing a somewhat disconnected picture of the process.

The sources and use of media have changed political learning. The interaction of the electronic media with family and social factors affected the process. Political educators and political socialization researchers now consider electronic media’s extensively direct effects on youth and its indirect effects on all other who interact with young people. Mass media shape perceptions of the young and mature population as well. The electronic lifestyle of the majority of Americans (a change that now affects much of the world) must be considered when theorizing about or studying how political learning takes place.
Pervasiveness of Electronic Mass Media

In the US, television is now the main source of both news and entertainment. About 99% of US households have at least one television set and 74% have several sets (Nielsen, 1998). Family viewing has declined and separate viewing by children and adults has increased as the number of TV sets in the household increased. Cable programming is found in 74% of households, greatly expanding the number of networks and independent stations that can be accessed. About 54% of children have a television set in their bedrooms; 87% of households have a VCR; and about $10 billion is spent annually on video rentals, double the amount spent at movie theaters (Mediascope, 1997).

In American households, average weekly viewing time has increased annually from 43 hours in the early 1970s to about 51 hours in the mid-1990s. Weekly viewing is highest (59.4 hours) in homes with four or more children, which is more than 8 hours per day! Children aged 2-11 spend an average of 22 hours a week watching TV (Nielsen, 1993, 1998). During prime time (7 to 11 p.m.), about 7 million teenagers and 9 to 10 million pre-teens are watching TV (Media Dynamics, 1996).

TV lifestyle appears to be related to social-economic conditions. People with low incomes watch more TV than those with higher incomes. People with more formal education watch fewer hours of TV than those with less education. The heaviest viewers are older people, especially retirees, some of whom watch 40 or more hours a week (Mediascope, 1997). Nielsen (1993) reports ethnic differences as well. African American children aged 2-11 view about 55% more TV than same-aged children in all other households. African American men (18 and older) watch 90% more daytime TV than their counterparts in other households. In Hispanic households, while adults viewed less television than Americans generally, teens and children watched more TV (Nielsen, 1998).

The Content and Effects of the Electronic Media

Communication by television is based on visual effects combined with sound. Television programming is usually vivid, fast-paced, and accompanied with voices and music, evoking emotional responses. Advertising is injected every few minutes into all types of programs on commercial TV in the US. Television news shows feature several short, dramatic, fast-paced reports of unconnected and sometimes insignificant events. The format for news seldom informs viewers about significant public issues, especially for the majority who admit that TV is their only source of news. One detailed analysis of TV news broadcasts and audience understanding concluded that news delivery failed to inform Americans about important issues and events (Davis and Robinson, 1989). The researchers determined that broadcast companies show little concern about the quality of news; they are mainly concerned about increasing the size of the audience. One analyst of American media...
observed that TV news operates on “borrowed time” in a commercial entertainment-oriented media system (Neumann, 1987).

News items are immersed in advertising, so the thoughts of viewers must shift from world events to soft drinks, automobiles, or laxatives; from Congressional decisions to running shoes, cosmetics, and headache pills (all products treated in colorful, dramatic, emotional presentations). The Internet now allows people to get more news in more detail by searching for it and printing it, but Internet news reports are also surrounded by flashing, colorful advertising to divert attention to products for sale. In 1998, only about 28% of Americans used the Internet (Nielsen, 1998).

The great majority of Americans rely on TV news and place a high level of confidence on television coverage. Close to 60% are inclined to believe television over newspaper, radio, and magazines (Stanley and Niemi, 1993). Apparently, people do not consider how easily video cameras can mislead and few evaluate the selection and presentation of news on most TV channels. Years of electronic news consumption, received in quick, brief visuals and sound bites of speech, produced a shorter attention span for news and less understanding of public affairs, especially for those who have little background knowledge (Adatto, 1993).

In a ploy to make news programs more engaging, hard news and light entertainment are subtly mingled. Vignettes of one individual’s personal tragedy or gain are used to present a public issue. (For example, if the state builds a highway across this land, it will cut off “his” grandfather’s farm; should this highway be extended? Or, the murder of “her” son took place in a district without a police station; should more police stations be built?) News presented this way offers little or no aggregate data related to a public issue, but leaves strong images of a single dramatic case. A political issue is presented as one person’s problem; research show that these narrow personal narratives have a negative effect on viewers’ cognition. In this way, TV news oversimplifies complex public issues, ignores implications for the community or the whole society, and suppresses thinking about possible public solutions (Iyengar, 1991). Such news coverage actually decreases the recall of information about public issues or a political event (Milburn and McGrail, 1992).

Another content problem in US television is the preponderance of violence in programming. Psychological, sociological, and medical researchers find that violent action attracts a lot of viewers, including children. Consequently, the producers and directors of television dramas (both fiction and non-fiction) trying to attract large audiences often include fast action and vivid violent scenes in the programs. Large national studies of the content of television programming clarify the degree, quantity, and the various contexts within which network shows, movies, and cable programs present acts of violence for viewers (UCLA Center for Communication Policy, 1995; National Television Violence Study, 1996, 1998). The majority of programs (57% in 1996, 60% in 1998) were found to contain violence and often included numerous violent acts. Much of the gratuitous violence
is produced by Hollywood in movies that end up on TV. Not only are researchers concerned about the magnitude of violence on TV programs, the public also is worried. A national survey by the Pew Research Center (1997) reported that 75% of Americans say there is too much violence in non-news programs. But are people affected by it? Does heavy viewing of violence contribute to incivility and violent behavior?

Research teams from several leading universities found that most entertainment programs and TV movies include overt, vivid depictions of physical force, harm, and killing (National Television Violence Study, 1996). The American Psychological Association (1993) and the American Medical Association (Walsh, Goldman, and Brown, 1996) gathered research evidence of effects on young children, especially those who are heavy viewers and particularly those who experience no moderating influence by concerned adults. They tend to learn from TV that aggressive or violent behavior is appropriate in given life situations. They act out the violence they see in their play and in family life (Minow and LaMay, 1995). As these same children mature, they are also more aggressive and violent as teenagers; for some, it carries on into adulthood. Prolonged viewing of violence often has a desensitizing effect, leading to callous acceptance of violent behavior. For some young people, the daily scenes of killings, rapes, and beatings create fears (fear of being in dark areas, of being in school, of violence). There are signs that aggressive and even violent expression is increasing in American society. Incivility is widely reported in government, business organizations, and social groups. Fear also has civic implications. People are less likely to be out and about in their communities if they harbor fears of becoming victims.

Newspapers are changing their content in reaction to the popularity of television. An interesting example of the influence of one news medium on another is evident in research sponsored by newspaper editors (ASNE, 1996) who examined the media habits of young people aged 16 to 30. In the US, this group is referred to as “Generation X” (the first to be fully “raised” on television). Editors who sponsored this study of media tastes wanted to find out what newspapers can do to attract young adults to read papers. The survey showed that they enjoy night-time comedies; adventure-dramas about cops, crime, and emergencies; and daytime talk shows. Their favorite cable channel is MTV, but they also like sports and recent movies on cable networks. They claim to find role models in the TV shows; these shows were also their main sources for fashion ideas and public information. TV is ingrained in their lives. “For these young people, television served as a babysitter, entertainer, educator, and a form of company for latchkey kids” (ASNE, 1996).

The newspaper editors group concluded that “we’ve got a good chance to connect with most of them if we make our papers more relevant to people in their teens and 20s” (ASNE, 1996, p. 7). Specifics are laid out in the report, challenging newspapers to cover the leisure pursuits of these young people (“fitness, cyber-space, career opportunities, budget dating, news on renting apartment”). Other
statements from the report: “Put more resources into sports.” “Do features on where to take dates, new and trendy restaurants, clubs and entertainers.” The report advised that stories about rock stars be placed on the front page. Many Americans have seen this change in local print news. TV and the Internet are changing the content, style, and aims of print news. Consequently, the quality of print news about public issues and politics is declining, making it more difficult for the ordinary citizen to know what is happening in the public political arena.

Even when away from a TV set or computer, Americans are seldom far from electronic broadcast influences. An old media, radio, is enjoying a new popularity and use. Radio broadcasts accompany Americans on the jogging trail, on buses and planes, and while seated in their cars (commuting or trapped in traffic jams). Many stations that used to broadcast music and short news summaries now send out national or regional talk shows voicing the opinions of the hosts and the call-in audience. Shows discuss every aspect of life: medical advice, social and marital advice, car repair, legal matters, and viewpoints on politics. People seem to enjoy having “a say.” But, similar to the Internet, there is seldom a check on the authenticity or accuracy of what is said. Talk radio shows tripled between 1989 and 1994; some of these shows are credited with contributing to a kind of populist negativism toward government and civic affairs.

**Implications: Need for a Socialization Model for the Electronic Age**

While television is currently most pervasive, all forms of electronic communication exert subtle influences on the social-political-economic thinking of users and ultimately affect behavior. The Internet changed the speed and form of written communication. It also is making TV and radio more interactive since broadcast stations encourage users to communicate via e-mail. Because the Internet is a more interactive mode of communication, some consider it more democratic. Nevertheless, in democratic societies, the public should view all forms of the media analytically and critically. Democracies shun censorships and rely on informing citizens so they can evaluate and make choices. How do we embed a critical perspective in political education? How can we assure that it is understood by professors who educate civics and political science teachers who, in turn, are responsible for the civic education of students in school. One step forward is to look for a more timely model of the socialization process.

Civic educators and socialization researchers must be cognizant of the significance of electronic media for political learning, especially in the lives of young people. Although the old model is still found in textbooks and teaching plans, it is clearly outdated. Agents of socialization are often discussed as contributors to the formation of public opinion with little examination of how the mass media interact with each of these other influencing factors in the context of societal conditions.
Among the textbooks used to train civics and government teachers, few examine the power of the media in shaping perceptions and political attitudes of young people. Consequently, there is a lack of critical discussion of mass media.

This omission in civic/political education in the US seems related partly to the fact that neither “media literacy” nor “critical viewing education” has been integrated into civic education. In the 1970s, there were several education projects in the US designed to raise students’ critical consciousness of television (Brown, 1991), but these instructional research projects died during the 1980s and their materials are now unavailable. In Australia, Canada, and many other countries of Europe and Latin America, media literacy education and research have developed and remained remarkably strong across the disciplines, including political science education. Today, students in every democratic nation need systematic studies of the media in school. Media studies should include research on content and delivery as well as analysis of subtle psychological influence. In every civics class, students should examine and discuss media effects on politics, public opinion, and civility in the society (Hepburn, 1995).

The outmoded perception of the socialization process probably was reinforced by the lack of professional exchange beyond the traditional history and social sciences. Civics educators were quite isolated from psychological theory and research. Few may be aware of recent questions about the relative influence of parents and peers and the proposition that parents have less long-term influence on socialization than was assumed (Harris, 1995). Meanwhile, medical research and mass communications studies provided evidence of electronic mass media effects. Clearly, cross-disciplinary sharing benefits political socialization research and instruction.

To more accurately conceptualize political influences in today’s electronically charged society requires an examination of interrelated forces that influence the socialization of young people. Let me suggest one approach. Drawing on the Lewinian field theory, it is instructive to depict students in their psychological “field” or the psychological world within which they learn. The concept of cognitive-field is useful for analyzing how young people perceive and respond to their psychological environment. It encourages thinking in terms of several interdependent factors that motivate learning and behavior. The field includes political, social, and economic conditions that affect youths’ awareness as well as the school environment in which they operate each day. The field includes their social, cultural, and religious experiences plus specific conveyers (or “agents”) of electronic media, which young people see and hear many hours daily and which not only affect them directly, but also indirectly by influencing the other factors in their social-psychological environment. Listening, reading, watching, and thinking about those media experiences shape attitudes and behavior.
Conclusions

There is adequate research to make us aware that the electronic media are now intricately involved in socialization from the early years. Political news and political imagery is immersed in vibrant, flashy ads, lively colorful animations, violent fearful crimes, shocking explosions, and hours of programming on various pop culture celebrities. Neil Postman (1990) foresaw that television would become “the command center of our culture.” There are signs that the Internet is also gradually assuming that kind of powerful role. Yet within this environment of high-speed and colorful communication, the American public shows less interest in politics and public issues. For example, college freshmen express the lowest level of interest in politics in 30 years (Sax, et al., 1998). Patterson (1987) finds that the American public, which is increasingly indifferent to politics, has fewer psychological defenses. Patterson (1987, p. 53) said, “Once we have an uncommitted and uninvolved electorate, we also have an electorate vulnerable to the media’s image of politics.” Clearly, we need more research on media and civic learning; we also need an appropriate model for conceptualizing who youths gain political awareness from and learn the attitudes that shape their thinking about political life. Both educators and researchers are likely to benefit from greater insight into the media-barraged psychological field where political learning accumulates. The new model presented here is an effort to emphasize media interconnections of socializing agents and the interaction with social background factors in a psychological field charged with electronic images and sounds. It also implies the importance of political education that teaches students to critically analyze and evaluate the media messages around them. Perhaps these perspectives on political socialization will motivate rethinking about the complexities of the field and what it can contribute to the understanding of civic life in an age of seductive electronic communication.

References


Chapter 16
Does the Media Reduce Political Participation?

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Abstract

M. Kent Jennings and Richard Niemi examine the period effect theory on continuity and change in political orientations in the US. Period effects through political socialization can change a generation or an entire society. These authors refer to wars, depression, and similar major events as affecting entire populations. We hypothesized that September 11, 2001 (9/11) would have the effect of renewing American’s interest in politics. The predicted specific effect would be a heightened consumption of news and participation in the 2002 off-presidential elections. The hypothesis was rejected because voter turnout was about 39%, pretty much in line with recent off-year presidential elections. News consumption patterns remain about the same as in pre-9/11 days, with increased attention to international affairs among past news consumer elites. Despite this low turnout, 9/11 appears to have had an effect on the Republican electorate. They increased their interest and turnout in the 2002 election, resulting in a Republican victory. In the 2004 national elections, turnout increased substantially bringing into question the reasons given for the lower 2002 turnout. A new hypothesis might be that a time lag exists between an event and its impact on turnout and/or that turnout for presidential elections is more susceptible to these types of events.

Background

September 11, 2001 was a major disaster for the US, comparable to the shock generated by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. In political socialization theory, an event of this magnitude is considered sufficient to produce a period effect. In the midst of continuity and change over time, a period effect would favor change (even dramatic) in political orientations and behavior affecting an entire population. In a longitudinal study between 1965 and 1973, Jennings and Niemi (1975, p. 329) found that the civil rights movement, Watergate scandal, and Vietnam War appeared to move the entire population, but particularly the youth generation, to exhibit a growing cynicism toward the political system. They cited strong socialization effects resulting from events such as the Great Depression, the civil rights movement, and similar highly salient occurrences.

A close examination of two significant events in American history (the 1861 to 1865 Civil War and the Great Depression) illustrates the effects of a period event. There was a major shift in the elections of 1860 (pre-Civil War), 1864, and 1868 (post-Civil War) from Democrats dominating presidential elections to the dawning of a period of Republican hegemony in American politics that lasted until the Depression election of 1932. Political participation also increased during the Civil War. In 1860, voter turnout was 4,685,561; in 1868 it was 5,122,440 (with Mississippi, Texas, and Virginia not participating and Florida’s legislature casting...
their electoral votes) (Diamond, 1976, pp. 271-273). The Depression also produced a shift in party fortunes and an increase in participation. In the 1928 election (pre-Depression), voter turnout was 36,790,364; in 1932, it rose to 39,749,382. Franklin D. Roosevelt (Democrat) was elected to four terms as President. Voter turnout rose from 48.9% in 1924 to 58.8% in 1940 (Diamond, 1976, pp. 288-289; Center for Voting and Democracy, 2003).

Prior to the 2002 election, the authors hypothesized that 9/11 would change the trend in the typically low voter turnout in previous elections and produce an increase. Often, the voter turnout was below 40% in recent off-presidential election years. The authors did not hypothesize a shift in party allegiance, although the possibility of this development was examined. The authors obtained the 2002 Final Midterm Pre-Election Poll conducted by the George Gallup organization to examine the demographics of potential turnout. The Gallup survey, conducted from October 31 to November 3, 2002, clearly predicted the Republican gains in the Senate and House. To examine the actual voter turnout and vote patterns, the 2002 American National Election Study was used.

**Immediate and Long-Term 9/11 Effects**

Immediately after 9/11, polls showed that Americans seemed to be re-evaluating the political system and their involvement in it. Prior to 9/11, approval ratings of Congress hovered below 50%, ranging from the low to high 40s. Following 9/11, Congressional approval ratings went as high as 84%. However, these figures quickly began slipping and by mid-year 2002, they fell into the 40s again.

The American public’s view of the media went through a somewhat similar transformation. In early September 2001 (prior to 9/11), 35% of respondents in a Pew Center Research for People and the Press survey stated that they felt media reported with accuracy. This rose to 46% in November 2001 but by July 2002, it fell to 35%. In early September, 54% felt the media was professional. This rose to 73% in November, but went down to 49% in July 2002. In early September, 43% surveyed thought the media stood up for America. This skyrocketed to 69% in November, but fell to 49% by July 2002 (Pew Center for People and the Press, 2003) as the media shifted focus by Spring and Summer of 2002 to cover scandals surrounding the Enron and WorldCom accounting debacles.

However, it appears that American news consumption habits changed in following international news in 2002 compared to 1998. Table 1 shows an increase by 5% among the “Very Closely” group, but a drop for “Somewhat Closely” of 2%, indicating a gain of only 3% in the combined categories. Moreover, most of the gains occurred among a small highly-educated segment of the population, including higher income, college graduates, and senior citizens.
The rating of the president remained high after 9/11. Prior to 9/11, President George W. Bush’s popularity was in the low 50th percentile. This was low, given the honeymoon effect which is supposed to accompany a new president’s first months in office (Bill Clinton’s ratings were also low). After 9/11, President Bush’s popularity went as high as 87%. Although Congressional and media approval/support ratings fell considerably, Bush’s approval remained close to or above 60% until March 2003.

There are several possible explanations for this trend. First, the President, as Chief of State, generally is central to the American people’s attitude toward the US political system. Perhaps 9/11 had deeply affected the US citizenry to the point where they gave a large good-will (rally-around-the-flag) support for the Presidency. Second, President Bush may have had something to do with the support level because he did go to war with Afghanistan, indicating to many Americans that he was acting against terrorism. If the President had done nothing, Neville Chamberlain style, his popularity may have dropped regardless of 9/11.

The 2002 Election

The turnout in the 2002 elections was 39.3%. While this figure is 2.9% higher than 1998, it is only 0.5% higher than in 1990 and is less than the 39.8% of turnout in 1982. Voter turnout in 2002 was not noticeably higher than the general trend for about two decades. The 2004 election may reveal that the trend of a slight increase in turnout that began in 2002 may continue. For presidential elections, the voting pattern in recent years has been around a 50% turnout. If the turnout is much higher than this figure in 2004, we may be witnessing a period effect. (This data was drawn from Federal Election Commission, http://www.fec.gov, Congressional Research Service, Election Data Service Inc., and State Election Offices, 2003.)

With regard to a shift in electoral preferences, the Republicans did gain seats in 2002. They gained five seats in the 435-member House and two in the 100-member Senate. This is atypical of an off-presidential election year in which the incumbent president’s party usually loses seats. In House seats, this type of loss occurred in 32 of 33 midterm elections between 1866 and 1994 (Campbell, 2003, p. 203). The Republican gain in 2002 is an interesting development; however, their net gains were small and we will have to await the 2004 elections to examine whether a shift is coming in terms of electoral allegiance. In the midterm elections from 1994 to 2002, 1994 is the only election which saw a party gain or loss of more than 10 seats in the House. Consequently, a small number of gains in the House and the Senate

Table 1: Following international news: 1998 and 2002 compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Very Closely</th>
<th>Somewhat Closely</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for the Republicans in 2002 is not out of line with most election results occurring for several decades (Campbell, 2003, p. 203).

A close examination of a right-before-the-election Gallup survey in 2002 suggests that 9/11 did affect voters both in terms of issues and voter turnout, albeit not very much, but in a distinct trend.

**The 2002 Gallup Survey Results**

During the period October 31 to November 3, 2002, the Gallup Organization conducted telephone surveys of 1,221 adults age 18 and over. The following analysis is based on our examination of a sub-sample of the survey provided by Gallup of 715 voters who were most likely to vote. Since this sub-sample focuses on the probable voters, it is the most reliable source of voter information on the 2002 election. Based on the survey results, the dynamics of the narrow Republican win (two Senate seats and five House seats) are easy to identify. The 2004 election may reveal the dynamics of a small shift, but the evidence is that the Republican support in 2002 was demographically similar to the support for George W. Bush in 2000 which constituted a victory in electoral votes, but a loss of popular vote. It is clear that Republican Party demographics held sway. Conservatives led liberals as being more enthusiastic by 65% to 60%. Males outdistanced females 57% to 52%. Higher incomes (except in the $50,000-$74,900 category) led lower income groups. Republicans led Democrats 64% to 51%. The South led other regions along with suburban and rural America. The only major variable running counter to a Republican win was education, high school or less leading all other categories as being more enthusiastic. In sum, this outcome reflects that the most likely non-Republican voters were liberal or moderate, with an income between $50,000 and $74,900, independent, from the east, from urban America, and with some college education. The most likely Republican voter was conservative, male, with an income between $30,000 and $49,900, from the south, rural America, and with a high school degree.
On issue evaluations, it is clear that voters favored Republicans (Table 3). The Republican Party was picked as better to control Congress. Particularly in Table 3, Iraq led as the most important issue with 61% reference. Terrorism as an issue also led over the economy. The latter issue was a negative for the Republicans since the economy is fairly flat in growth terms.

The 2002 National Election Study (NES) provided several interesting facts. For example, of all the voter education levels, the only one that did not provide the Republican candidates for the Senate and House of Representatives was the high school graduate (44.6% Senate and 50.0% House of Representatives). The most glaring exception to normally expected trends was the higher female vote for a Republican Congress (Table 4). This result can be tentatively interpreted as a vote for “security” on the part of the female voter; that is, the Republican Party is perceived to be better able to handle terrorism and Iraq.

---

**Table 2: Final 2002 midterm pre-election poll results – more enthusiastic demographics and issues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideology</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N 232</td>
<td>118 (65%)</td>
<td>69 (42%)</td>
<td>45 (60%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N 234</td>
<td>124 (57%)</td>
<td>110 (52%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>&gt;$75K</th>
<th>$50K-$74.9</th>
<th>$30K-$49.9</th>
<th>$20K-$29.9</th>
<th>&lt;$20K</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N 215</td>
<td>67 (58%)</td>
<td>41 (49%)</td>
<td>57 (61%)</td>
<td>23 (50%)</td>
<td>27 (51%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party ID</th>
<th>Republican</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Democrat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N 232</td>
<td>114 (64%)</td>
<td>43 (44%)</td>
<td>75 (51%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bush Job Approval</th>
<th>Approve</th>
<th>Disapprove</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N 229</td>
<td>159 (58%)</td>
<td>70 (58%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>East</th>
<th>Midwest</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N 234</td>
<td>42 (45%)</td>
<td>59 (54%)</td>
<td>86 (61%)</td>
<td>47 (56%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Community</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N 233</td>
<td>53 (46%)</td>
<td>128 (57%)</td>
<td>52 (59%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Post-Graduate</th>
<th>College Graduate Only</th>
<th>Some College</th>
<th>High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N 233</td>
<td>40 (50%)</td>
<td>41 (59%)</td>
<td>66 (47%)</td>
<td>86 (63%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The % given indicates the number of those who were enthusiastic (e.g., Conservatives at 65%, compared to liberals at 60%) (Gallup Organization, 2002).
Table 3: Final 2002 midterm pre-election poll results: party and presidential support among the more enthusiastic voters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Better Party to Control Congress</th>
<th>Satisfaction with the US</th>
<th>Economic Conditions</th>
<th>Economic Momentum (Are you more enthusiastic)</th>
<th>Most Important Issue to Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>No Difference</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>224</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>221</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>105 (64%)</td>
<td>64 (52%)</td>
<td>55 (43%)</td>
<td>123 (60%)</td>
<td>98 (49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The % given indicates the number of those who were enthusiastic (e.g., Republicans at 64% compared to Democrats at 52%) (Gallup Organization, 2002).

Table 4: Vote for US Senate and House of Representatives in the 2002 national election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Voted Republican</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Characteristics</td>
<td>Senate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>63.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsouth</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade School Education</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Education or Advanced Degree</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>00.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other and None</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American National Election Study (2002) N = 1,511
Finally, we address the general problem of low media consumption and voter turnout in the US. Much is written about the decline of social capital in the US. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press concludes that the reason people do not follow international affairs is their lack of background information in this area (Table 5).

Clearly, the main reason for not following international news is a matter of lack of knowledge for the largest number of respondents. The younger generation has more access to information through the Internet than older generations. Yet the Pew data show that they have lower levels of news consumption.

Previous generations at a similar stage in the life cycle followed the same pattern (Pew, 2002). Youth today tend to get their news online, but consumption of particularly network news as well as newspaper readership has declined. When push comes to shove, American citizens simply are not motivated to consume more international news. If it takes an incident as significant as 9/11 to motivate people to be more interested in worldwide politics, it is clear that short of war or other major incidents, very little can incite citizens to become better informed. However, they did take more interest during the Cold War when the prospect of war between the US and the Soviet Union seemed imminent. It is obvious that nothing since the Cold War has moved America to get more interested in international affairs. Moreover, they do not seem very interested in voting.

Our best answer as to why this is the case is the overall normalcy of politics and related events in America. People tend to be crisis-oriented and have mainly reacted to a war, civil war, economic depression, or other extraordinary major events that dramatically affected them. There is no reason to expect much change now, even though academicians might wish for more interest and involvement. Economically, Americans are near the top of the world’s PPP (purchasing power parity) per capita scale. This is a primary reason why we are a satisfied and perhaps complacent population, not prone to become actually involved in politics.

### The 2002 Election Re-examined

We hypothesized prior to the 2002 election that 9/11 would positively affect voter turnout. Low voter turnout in American elections has been a hallmark of the process in recent decades. We felt that 9/11 would produce what in political socialization theory is referred to as a “period effect.” Period effects have been

---

**Table 5: Reasons for not following international news for respondents with moderate/low interest**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of background</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing ever changes</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events don’t affect me</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much war/violence</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

examined by using the US Civil War and the Great Depression as causal agents. Both of these events produced an increase in electoral participation and a shift in party alignment. While we did not hypothesize a party alignment shift, the possibility was considered prior to the 2002 election.

The 39% voter turnout in the 2002 midterm election was not seen as indicating an increase in participation. This figure is roughly in line with recent off-presidential-year elections. Also, the narrow 2-seat Senate gain and 5-seat House gain were not considered to indicate a party alignment shift in the electorate. While it is unusual for a party holding the White House to gain seats in a midterm election, the Republican gains were not really sufficient to declare a period of significant shift in electorate inclinations.

Explaining why 9/11 did not have a significant effect on the 2002 election participation is not easy. It seems that 9/11 affected the economy; particularly obvious is the decline in air travel and tourism. Americans appear to have been temporarily affected by 9/11 as evidenced by the dramatic increase in support of Congress. However, the underlying cynicism which began in the 1960s and 1970s has returned to dampen the spirit of participation. The general public is back to its mixed evaluation of Congress, an occurrence undoubtedly fueled by widespread knowledge of high interest group and personal contributions to political candidates and because of the media’s continuous coverage of scandals.

The 2004 election may show a higher participation rate and a shift to Republican Party support. Such a trend will probably come from the same demographics as the 2002 Republican victory: male, conservative ideology, higher income, religious, suburban/rural America, higher education, white, and southern region.

We propose that the period effect theory needs to be accompanied by one or two attendant factors. Without one or both of these additional factors, it appears that change will not occur. 1) The period events must have a direct impact on a large number of people. The US Civil War had one of the highest casualty rates per number of participants compared to other wars in history. Many sons and husbands never returned home. During the Great Depression, 25% of the work force was unemployed and many others stood at the brink of unemployment. But 9/11 did not leave homes nationwide with dead members or result in a nationwide loss of income. 2) For the event to have an effect independent of direct impact, it must somehow be communicated in a high-impact way. When the civil rights movement affected many people, it may very well have been due to the newness of television. When citizens used this new medium to see people being beaten with billy clubs in America, they reacted with shock. Today, the American people have seen so much violence on TV that they seldom react with sufficient sustained shock for it to have any real impact. They have viewed a war live, seen students shooting up a school, etc., to the point where, it seems, they have perhaps an initial reaction to a particularly big event, but it wears off in the absence of a direct personal impact. In short,
people are so used to seeing violent events on TV that they are immune to any long-term impact. There is no new medium in the US today that has the initial emotional appeal as TV once did.

Table 6: Vote for US President (2000 and 2004)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>% Voted for Bush</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-29 years old</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-44 years old</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 and over</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Grade School Education</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Education</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Education</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Degree</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Attend church more than weekly</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Few Times a Year</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller Cities</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburbs</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Towns</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Results of exit polls N = 13,660; Source: www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/states/US/P/00/e polls.0
**2004 Election Results**

In 2004, the minor trends seen in 2002 expanded into the highest voter turnout (an estimated 59.5%) since 1968 (60.8%). The “enthusiastic” demographics of 2002 brought a very small shift to a substantial increase in certain voter categories for George W. Bush. A close look at the initial results indicates that the percentage of voters voting for George W. Bush increased in almost every demographic category except religious “other” and advanced degree (Table 6).

The regular church-going, grade-school-educated segment of the population probably increased their support for Bush in 2004 compared to 2000. These voters (combined with the higher support particularly from female, Hispanic, older, Catholic, Jewish, and urban voters who typically vote Democrat) gave Bush the popular vote he needed to become a clear victor in 2004, compared to 2000. The percentage of the backbone of the Republican Party, the college-educated Protestant, white, and southern voters who voted for George W. Bush also increased.

**Voter Turnout - 2004**

Possibly the most interesting aspect of the 2004 national elections was the increase in overall voter turnout. The 2004 turnout in the United States more closely resembled the 1968 election than the voter turnout for presidential elections since the Richard Nixon versus Hubert Humphrey race (Mellnick and Pitzer, 2004).

Political/social specialists give various reasons why voter turnout interest in politics and in political news has dropped in recent years. Bennett, et al. (2004) account for the drop in political news consumption, which is related to a lack of voter turnout, to:

1. Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989
2. Media “feeding frenzies,” “media circuses,” “drive-by-journalism,” and “attack journalism”
3. Over-attention to scandal
4. Negative campaigns (which “shrink the electorate and contribute to lessened interest in politics”) (Benett, et al., 2004, p. 94).

The spin-off of the above leads to lowered levels of attentiveness, knowledge, and participation (Bennett, et al., 2004, 94).

It could also be that voters simply were not interested in the issues. The top issues in the 2004 elections were foreign affairs (terrorism 19% and Iraq 19%), moral values (22%), and the economy (20%). It could be that 9/11, the war in Iraq, combined with moral issues (such as gay marriage, gay clergy, and gay adoption) plus the question of economic recovery re-invigorated the electorate. Certainly, the media’s general style of coverage apparently has not changed. Perhaps the reasons given by Bennett, et al. (2004) really do not necessarily apply to a public that
experiences periods of relative inattention and participation in politics due to lack of issue interest.

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Note

The data which provide the basis for this analysis were furnished to the authors by The Gallup Organization, Inc. The authors’ conclusions do not necessarily reflect the views of The Gallup Organization.
Chapter 17
Implications for E-Media, the Press, Government, and Politics in China

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Abstract
In 1994, China adopted the international Internet TCP/IP protocol and became the 71st country with Internet access. Since then, the number of Chinese who logged onto the Internet expanded dramatically, from 0 in 1994 to 538 million in 2012. China is on the “information superhighway.” The accelerating advance of information technology is changing the lives of common citizens; it is also the governing model of the state, catalyzing the transformation of Chinese society and politics.

This discusses the development of information and communication technology (ICT) and its impact as a new communication media on Chinese politics. The anticipated promise of the Internet as a revolutionary vehicle for Chinese politics prompted both ecstasy and consternation. The increased use of the Internet in heightened citizens’ interest in and capacity for political participation, broadened the channel of civil participation, improved government efficiency, enhanced communication between government and citizens, and advanced the transparency of the government’s functional departments. Meanwhile, the Internet has broken the pyramid structure of traditional Chinese society, but at the same time, it has formed a new bureaucracy and digital divide. The irrationality of electronic participation, the fragmentation of the legislative system, the disorganization of Internet use, and the government’s strict control of the Internet’s content are all barriers to Chinese cyber democracy.

China Enters the Internet Era
Since Chinese people accessed the Internet in 1994, the population of Chinese “netizens” expanded dramatically and the Internet penetration rate increased significantly. According to the 30th Chinese Internet Development Statistics Report from the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), by the end of June 2012, China had netizens 538 million netizens, with 39.9% Internet users (Figure 1).
Song Yingfa and Miao Hongna

The CNNIC is China’s first Internet research institution and issues statistical reports each June and December since 1997. The data from the December 2008 CNNIC report showed that the population of netizens, netizens with broadband connectivity, and registrations of CN domain names all surpassed other countries. Moreover, the regional distribution, age structure, and demographic structure of Chinese netizens has been optimized. The popularity of the Internet among people who live in developed areas with easy accessibility is high; but it is gaining converts among people with little education and those who live in undeveloped areas. By the end of June 2012, the number of netizens in rural China had reached 146 million, an increase of 14.64 million since the end of 2011, and 27.1% of total netizens (Figure 2).

In addition, the Internet infrastructure furnished access gradually, the Internet technology developed quickly, and the Internet performance improved continuously. By the end of June 2012, the number of IPv4 addresses approached 330
million, there were 8.73 million domain names, and there were 3.98 million CN domain names. The total number of websites increased to 2.5 million (see Table 1).

Table 1: The contrast in Chinese Internet infrastructure resources between December 2011 and June 2012 (Source: The Thirtieth CNNIC Statistics Report on Chinese Internet Development in June 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>December 2011</th>
<th>June 2012</th>
<th>Amount of growth for the six months</th>
<th>Growth rate for the six months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IPv4 (N)</td>
<td>330,439,936</td>
<td>330,468,352</td>
<td>28,416</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain Name (N)</td>
<td>7,748,459</td>
<td>8,731,083</td>
<td>982,624</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain Name under .CN (N)</td>
<td>3,528,511</td>
<td>3,984,188</td>
<td>455,677</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website (N)</td>
<td>2,295,562</td>
<td>2,503,533</td>
<td>207,991</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website under .CN (N)</td>
<td>951,609</td>
<td>975,217</td>
<td>23,608</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Export bandwidth (Mbps)</td>
<td>1,389,529</td>
<td>1,548,811</td>
<td>159,282</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chinese government also realized the Information Communication Technology had great significance for national political, economic, and social development, so the government actively promoted the Internet. People’s Daily Online (opened on January 1, 1999) became the first important news website of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which is achieving its web propaganda strategic goals via mainstream media. The 1999 launch of the “Government Online Project” was envisioned as a public relations showcase in the Internet era; it provided convenience for online service and government-public communication. Currently, Chinese e-government employs the top-to-bottom, crisscross patterned architecture, including “one station, two nets, four databases, and twelve operation systems.” (One station means one government portal website; two nets include the government intranet and the government network; four databases are the databases for population, corporate units, spatial geography and natural resources, and macro economy; twelve operation systems provide information about the government’s main business areas.) This e-government communicated with the central, provincial, municipal, county (or district), and town governments. 2008 was called “the first year of an era in Governance Online.” Chinese chairman Hu Jintao communicated with netizens online for 22 minutes through the Forum of Powerful Nation (the forum’s name comes from the BBS of People’s Daily Online), which set the new precedent of online communication between China’s highest leader and common netizens. Wen Jiabao, the premier of the State Council, first used text and video to communicate with the netizens all over the world through China Internet Information Center and Xinhuanet.com on February 28, 2009. During those two hours, there were hundreds of postings, and tens of thousands of feedback messages from mobile phone users.
Based on the rapid increase of micro-blog users, the government micro-blog appeared in 2010. The sense of Internet governance by Chinese government departments strengthened unceasingly; the mechanism of Internet governance was built up gradually.

The Internet developed quickly in China, but prosperity created problems: 1) the unbalanced development of the Internet existed among different regions in China, as well as between China and developed countries; and 2) Internet information security could not be guaranteed. These problems included lack of security measures, improper management, offline technical difficulties (partly unintentional because of technical glitches and system defects), and many serious security incidents concerning disclosure of sensitive information due to tampering, being attacked, and exploiting vulnerability. According to the Blue Paper, the Development and Research of New Digital Media in China 2012, with the development of mobile technology in new digital media, the threshold of information transmission will be greatly reduced; therefore, the problems of ideology security and information security will be prominent. This blue paper was an investigative research report about new media. The Development and Research of New Digital Media in China 2012 is the third volume of the blue paper system. The book includes the general report as well as reports on hot spots, the Internet media, plus mobile and electronic media.

Because of these problems, China began building the government-dominated nationwide strict Internet administration system in 1995. Various administrative departments that relied on a series of laws and regulations concerning Internet administration adopted multiple measures to set up the “Chinese National Firewall,” which became the Internet with Chinese characteristics (Hartford, 2000). The administrative departments of Internet in China include: the State Council Information Office, the Ministry of Information Industry, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Public Security, the Press and Publication Administration, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Health, and other departments. Similar Along with the huge number of administrative departments, China has had many laws and regulations concerning Internet administration since 1994, including Decision of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee on Guarding Internet Security, Law of the People’s Republic of China on Electronic Signatures, Regulations on Telecommunications of the People’s Republic of China, Measures on the Administration of Internet Information Services, Regulations on the Protection of Computer Information System Security of the People’s Republic of China, Regulations on the Protection of the Right to Online Dissemination of Information, Provisions on the Administration of Foreign-funded Telecommunications Enterprises, Measures on the Administration of Security Protection of the International Networking of Computer Information Networks, Provisions on the Administration of Internet News Information Services, Provisions on the Administration of Electronic Bulletin Services via the Internet, and so on. Relevant
provisions of the Criminal Law of the People’s Republic of China, General Principles of the Civil Law of the People’s Republic of China, Copyright Law of the People's Republic of China, Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of Minors, Law of the People’s Republic of China on Punishments in Public Order and Security Administration are all applied in the case of Internet administration. There are over 80 laws and regulations concerning Internet administration. Besides the laws and regulations, government still employs informal ways to administrate the Internet, such as instant text messages, mobile phones, e-mails, and informal discussions. The government directly regulates Internet content and indirectly controls it by restricting the users’ access to the Internet (Wang and Hong, 2010).

Professor Li Yonggang of Nanjing University pointed out that in the last decade, the Chinese government’s supervision of Internet content has changed. Because of the large-scale mobilization and high-investment equipment modifications, the Chinese government has taken the initiative and has remodeled the core belief of the whole ruling system. (Li, 2007) In conclusion, the Internet’s development in contemporary China exhibited two features: 1) the increase of netizens and the wide gap between the country’s rich and poor coexist; 2) the government closely watched both the active use and the strict regulation of the Internet.

The Internet as the New Political Communication Media

The rapid spread of the Internet in China is based on its characteristics as a new media, such as activity, immediacy, extensiveness, openness, and richness. These are combined with the characteristics of information transmission in unidirectional mass media and bi-directional interpersonal communication. Chinese netizens use Internet applications to acquire information and to take advantage of e-commerce, communication, and online entertainment (see Table 2).

The Internet information (using video, audio, and other multimedia techniques) combined the multiple applications with splendid content and provided users with strong sensory stimuli that heightened their desire for interactive participation. This interaction was very attractive to Internet audiences and was unmatched by any other single technology form. The BBS (bulletin board system) provided netizens with a public place to express their opinions on any topic at any time. The anonymity of online discussion was considered a key attraction of BBS and gave netizens an opportunity to speak freely.
Table 2: Internet applications of Chinese netizens from December 2011 to June 2012 (Source: The Thirtieth CNNIC Statistics Report on Chinese Internet Development in June 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applications</th>
<th>June 2012</th>
<th>December 2011</th>
<th>growth rate for the six months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>number of users (ten thousand)</td>
<td>usage of netizens (%)</td>
<td>number of users (ten thousand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information acquisition</td>
<td>search engine</td>
<td>42860.5</td>
<td>79.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>online news</td>
<td>39231.7</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-commerce</td>
<td>online shopping</td>
<td>20982.2</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>group buying</td>
<td>6181.4</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e-payment</td>
<td>18722.2</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>trip reservation</td>
<td>4257.5</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e-bank</td>
<td>19077.2</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>online stock trading</td>
<td>3780.6</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication</td>
<td>instant messaging</td>
<td>44514.9</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>blog/my space</td>
<td>35331.3</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>micro-blog</td>
<td>27364.5</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>social network</td>
<td>25051.0</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e-mail</td>
<td>25842.8</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>forum/BBS</td>
<td>15586.0</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>online entertainment</td>
<td>online gaming</td>
<td>33105.3</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>online literature</td>
<td>19457.4</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>online video</td>
<td>34999.5</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>online music</td>
<td>41060.0</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Internet’s interactive communication capability (and its apparent power to foster inclusiveness and mobilization) possessed the characteristics of democracy and freedom, which the traditional media lacked. For this reason, many major presses, newspapers and other traditional media in China began using the Internet (such as Xinhuanet.com, People’s Daily Online, CCTV.com, and STAR Group) to disseminate news. The news agencies as well as radio and television stations in China have used the Internet to develop their resources and brand advantages and to develop an open forum, bulletin board, and comment section to meet the people’s need for communication.

In the political area, the rapid expansion and wide use of the Internet in China accelerated the remodeling of the Chinese political communication system. The traditional political communication modes (newspapers, broadcasts, and television) had difficulty satisfying the Chinese government’s policymaking and implementation requirements; they also failed to cater to the public’s appeal for political
participation, discussion, and supervision. Thus, China’s government readily opted for political communication via the Internet.

The Office of Publicity of Government Affairs of Liao Ning Province publicized the Government Work Report of all counties and districts in its jurisdiction online and appealed to the general public for comments for the first time in China on March 15, 2009. This indicated that the public was encouraged to discuss the Government Work Report, instead of relying on the deputy to relay their comment to the National People’s Congress during its sessions. Consequently, the online comments gave the Chinese government a way to quickly learn about the people’s opinions and recommendations and to accept the public’s supervision.

The Internet has encouraged people to express their opinions and has facilitated political participation from the grassroots. The annual meeting of the National People’s Conference (NPC) and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) were vividly compared to a “yearly inspection” of government work and civic awareness. Since 2009, People’s Daily Online has not only continued to conduct the traditional interactive columns (such as “NPC and CPPCC investigation,” “Questions for Prime Minister,” and “Words online”), but also promoted some new ones based on the interactive idea and information and communication technology (ICT). These include “the Netizens Hall,” “E-NPC & CPPCC of Powerful Nation,” “Bills and Proposals online,” “Questions for Spokespeople.” This allows millions of netizens to indulge their passion for political participation and gives them the opportunity to offer advice. In the “Netizen Hall” column, netizens could discuss various topics, express their opinions, and make recommendations and solutions to their representatives and deputies. In “Bills and Proposals online,” NPC deputies and CPPCC members communicate with netizens and seek their advice. Both of these columns allow free discussion and thus motivate netizens’ participation. “E-NPC & CPPCC of Powerful Nation” (a large-scale interactive column) combined the netizens’ advice, voting recommendations, comments, and criticisms with interactive polls; thus, it became the netizens first choice for following NPC and CPPCC activities and for communicating their advice and opinions. Less than two days after those columns opened, almost 10,000 netizens registered for “E-NPC & CPPCC” membership, and posted hundreds of different proposals.

From “Participating in government and public affair via blog” to “E-NPC & CPPCC,” netizens have offered advice and made proposals on economy and people’s livelihood through People’s Daily Online, Xinhuanet.com, CCTV.com, which merged into “the tide of reasonable proposals” in the era of the Internet. Citizens’ concerns about and participation in NPC and CPPCC indicated their great interest in advancing Chinese democracy, the growth of citizens’ consciousness, and the strengthening of belief, rationality, and responsibility.

Accordingly, almost all local governments have actively promoted building the infrastructure for online participation and enhanced interaction with the public. On
June 29, 2009, the general office of Guangdong provincial party committee held a meeting to solve the common problems posted by netizens for the first time in China; they assigned 17 issues on 5 topics to the departments concerned. On November 1, 2009, the first “Guangdong Netizen Forum” started at Guangdong Science Center. Thus, 150 famous netizens within and outside of Guangdong province and 50 government officials and experts from non-governmental think tanks got together to debate about the “financial crisis.” The netizen forum was China’s largest at that time.

In the past, Government Online was “speaking” with netizens online and “listening” to CPC committee and government offline. Instead of using reliable mechanisms to restrain and regulate participation, the online governance mechanisms focused on temporary ones (such as online e-mails, calls, and reports). The task-based meeting to solve common problems posted by netizens was convened to explore a consistent effective mechanism for interactive communication between government and netizens and to implement “online hearing” to promote “Governance Online.” On the one hand during this process, government emphasized the importance of online public opinions, built platforms, and created opportunities for effective government-public communication. On the other hand, there was an upsurge of enthusiastic netizens’ political participation; posting and criticism thus became the norm. The task-based meeting indicated the transition of Governance Online from “online hearing” to building a mechanism for expressing public opinions online. It heralded a commitment to foster interactive communication between the government and the public.

Microblogging on government and government affairs has become the new model and is an important platform for publicizing government affairs, serving the people, getting to know public opinions, and communicating interactively between government and citizens. Since its inception in 2011, microblogs about government first opened in Beijing, followed by Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hubei and other provinces. The microblog on government and government affairs has covered central and eastern China (Du and Zhang, 2012). The public sphere and public life has been affected and involved. According to the Assessment Report of Microblog on Chinese Government and Public Affairs 2011, by December 10, 2011, there were 32,358 microblogs of CPC and government departments authenticated in Sina.com, Tencent.com, people.com.cn and xinhuanet.com; the CPC and government cadres had 18,203. The assessment report drew 1,000 samples from the microblogs of CPC and government departments and those of CPC and government cadres respectively. The statistics showed that in the microblogs of CPC and government departments, the proportion of city government and its subsidiary bodies was largest (58%), provincial government and its subsidiary bodies was next (22%). The microblogs of public security organizations accounted for 47% (the biggest one in CPC and government departments); next was the tourism department.
(8%). The proportion of cadres’ microblogs in public security organs ranked first (42%) in the CPC and government cadres, the next was in CPC departments (16%).

The dramatic expansion of microblogs on government and government affairs indicated that people-oriented, service-first ideologies have driven the Chinese government to publicize its affairs ceaselessly. This resulted in strengthening the service from the street level, elevating the utility of governance resource and the performance of service via the Internet, and improving the government website from content-oriented to service-oriented. The government’s striving for interactive communication with the public improved political communication and helped democratize the policymaking process.

The appearance of the netizen forum, online spokespeople, task-based meetings to solve common problems posted by netizens, microblogs on government and government affairs, and so on somehow initiated a new communication flow between officials and people. The interaction of government and the public via the Internet has built bidirectional communication and feedback models. This direct contact between the government and the public has elevated the administrative efficiency and governing capabilities and has rationalized the social governance structure. The cadres of government at all levels have noticed how the Internet makes it easier to seek advice from people, and have realized that getting to know the people’s wishes, to use their wisdom, and to help them were essential aspects for improving the government’s effectiveness and policymaking.

**The Process of Internet Combination with Chinese Politics**

*Government Online (1999-2003)*

The construction of Chinese governmental informationization began with the Government Online Project in 1999 and the Leading Group of National Informationization Work that same year.

Government Online means that governments can function well via the Internet, including controlling their image, relating governmental structures and procedures, disseminating information about related policies and industry, and providing proprietary governmental information. The first meeting of Government Online Project held on January 22, 1999, brought together the Chinese Telecommunication, State Economic and Trade Commission and 40 other ministries and institutions. Their goal was to bring more than 60% of state organizations and all governmental levels online in 1999 and to increase that by more than 80% in 2000. Thus the Government Online Project was formally launched and the informationization of Chinese governments entered a new era based on the international Internet infrastructure. Therefore, 1999 was called “the Year of Government Online.”

The Circular of the General Office of the State Council Concerning the Establishment of the Leading Group of National Informationization Work, issued by the
General Office of the State Council of P.R.C on December 23, 1999, announced that the Leading Group of National Informationization Work (chaired by then Chinese vice premier Wu Bangguo) would be in charge of organizing and coordinating the research and development of important information across departments and industries and solving the problems concerned with the informationization project.

Half a year after the start of the Government Online Project, the number of domain names under gov.cn registered by Chinese governments at all levels reached 1,663, which was over three times more than the 561 registered in 1998. Among others, over 720 governments set up their websites, as well as 63 central organizations, 174 provincial governments, and 467 prefectural governments. The telecommunication departments opened 198 special broadband lines to serve users. By June 2012, the number of domain names under gov.cn registered by Chinese governments at all levels reached 54,808, 33 times that of 1999. (The 1998 data is from the Second CNNIC Statistics Report on Chinese Internet Development in July 1998; the 1999 data is from the Fourth CNNIC Statistics Report on Chinese Internet Development in July 1999; the 2012 data comes from the Thirtieth CNNIC Statistics Report on Chinese Internet Development in July 2012.) In addition, a batch of excellent provincial, municipal, and county government websites sprang up. The cornucopia of typical online application projects has been established, including databases of laws and regulations, databases of cities and counties, governments’ dynamic news, leaders’ email address, real-time traffic monitoring, online declaration and anti-smuggling, electronic taxing, and government online bidding. During this period, the application of e-government grew both in form and content and began to rely on the international Internet’s great coverage and powerful interactive capabilities. The e-government project in China has been used to offer convenient service and to elevate the performance of government organizations. It has become the indispensable means for the construction of a service-oriented government.

Service Online (2003–2008)

In July 2003, Wen Jiabao (then head of the Leading Group of National Informationization Work) pointed out that promoting the informationization vigorously is the important decision of the central committee of CPC. Complying with the trend of progress and the development of the world is the inevitable choice for Chinese industrialization and modernization; is the crucial link in promoting the leaping development of productivity, strengthening comprehensive national power and international competitiveness, and safeguarding national security; and is the strategic initiative in modernization construction. Governments should combine the informationization with improving government administration and transforming government functions. This speech heralded the transition of the e-government
target from massive infrastructure construction to resource integration, application deepening, government transformation, and public service.

The Law of the People’s Republic of China on Electronic Signatures, promulgated on August 28, 2004, was the first-ever formal informationalization legislation in China. This was considered an historical breakthrough in the legal environment of China’s e-government.

The portal site of the central governmental of P. R. China (www.gov.cn) officially opened on January 1, 2006, which ranked number 2 in the popularity index of national government websites around the world, second only to the Canadian federal government’s website. The portal site put the scattered governmental websites of all levels together, became the “joint portal site” of a batch of government websites, and had an important demonstrative effect for other government websites at the same time. The setup of the portal site was regarded as the innovation of Chinese administration and a significant step in the construction of a service-oriented government.

In the October 2007 Report of 17th National Party Congress, General Secretary Hu Jintao recommended that the Chinese government improve its responsibility system and the public service system to promote e-government and to strengthen social management and public service. For the first time, he defined the function of “e-government” as “the urgent means to accelerate the reform of the administrative system and to build a service-oriented government.”

The Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on the Disclosure of Government Information were promulgated and put into force on May 1, 2008. This stipulated that government agencies should take the initiative to reveal government information “on the basis of disclosure, and the exception of not disclosure.” The regulations aimed to safeguard the rights of citizens, corporations, and other organizations to obtain governmental information in accordance with the law and to improve the transparency of government.

In May 2009, the first anniversary of the implementation of the Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on the Disclosure of Government Information, the service platform for Chinese governmental information integration (http://gov-info.nlc.gov.cn) officially opened. It was the first Chinese service portal for the publicity of governmental information built by the national library. The platform was developed to provide a public consulting service and to become a convenient service portal for governmental information.

Governments at all levels kept on opening new ways to communicate with the public in the electronic platform, such as fax, e-mail, BBS, and microblog. Some local governments gradually promoted the level of online social security service, tried to use the intelligent card as the mode of identification authentication, and advocated making the social service and management functions (such as social insurance, employment, civil affairs, medical and health care, housing accumulation fund system, household registration management information, etc.) more
accessible via the Internet. Some government websites provided public channels for online consulting and complaining; others used communication vehicles (such as the Call Center and the telephone) with high penetration rates to eliminate the difficulties for people who had no Internet connections and thus no access to government service. The Call Center offers people most online public services such as information, consultation, complaints, help, and feedback. The “Government Service Hotline” opened in some cities are the specific application of the Call Center.

During the period of “service online,” the construction of e-government entered the complete implementation stage. With “one station, two nets, four databases, and twelve operating systems,” the main content of e-government started. The fields related to e-government (such as information security, electronic signature, the development and utility of information resources) developed vigorously. In these five years, the construction of e-government in most Chinese areas (especially the economically developed regions) has benefitted from the investment in constructing the massive infrastructure and acquiring the necessary hardware. Now the focus shifts to the “application” stage, characterized by interconnection and resource-sharing.

**Governance Online (2008–)**

General Secretary of CPC Central Committee Hu Jintao communicated with netizens online and listened to public opinions through the Forum of Powerful Nation in People’s Daily Online on June 20, 2008. Hu pointed out that the Internet is an important medium to do things, to make decisions, to get to know the condition of people, and to pool the people’s wisdom. And Hu himself has paid close attention to netizens’ advice and opinions (Tang, 2008). Governors used the Internet as the distribution center for ideological and cultural information and as the amplifier of public opinion, thereby promoting the transition of governing ideas effectively, the main value of Governance Online.

The rapid development of Governance Online in China benefited from the tremendous power of online public opinion offered via the online community, blogs, News posts, BBS, and online signature. (Now, the important BBSes in China are the Forum of Powerful Nation in People’s Daily Online, the Forum of Development in Xinhuanet, and other forums in Sina, Sohu, and other portal websites.) In addition, plenty of senior leaders, deputies to NPC, and members of CPPCC were invited to be guests on the Internet so they could exchange ideas and discuss issues of public concern.

One important aspect of Governance Online is online supervision. China faced major problems in 2008 (such as the snowstorm in January, the Tibet riots in March, the earthquakes that hit Wenchuan in Sichuan Province and Yushu in Qinghai Province in May, the Weng’an event in June, the Beijing Olympic Games in August, the tainted milk scandal in September and the Longnan incident in
The Internet played a vital role in delivering information and supervising government. A great number of corrupt and degenerate officials were reported through the Internet; therefore, 2008 was named The Year of Internet Supervision. The Chinese government attached great importance to the Internet’s role in supervision and actively created conditions for the citizens to supervise the government. CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the Ministry of Supervision set up the informant websites as a new channel of reporting (www.12388.gov.cn) on October 28, 2009. The website also is used to receive reports from the public about and accusations of CPC members, CPC organs, and those who violated Party and government discipline. The website also seeks opinions and suggestions about party conduct and anti-corruption efforts. A series of episodes concerned with online anticorruption fully reflect the strengthening of “online civic consciousness.” Chinese netizens used the Internet to safeguard their rights, to supervise and participate in the public issues, and to express their demands and needs. The social survey center of China Youth Daily conducted an online survey via www.minyi.net.com and www.qq.com. There were 1,983 respondents, including 75.5% who chose to take part in anticorruption via “exposure online” (which touched a much bigger proportion than other channels) by reports, exposure by traditional mass media, information disclosure, letters and calls, and audits (Huang, 2009).

The 2009 report of Analysis on Internet Public Opinion in China conducted by Internet Public Opinion Monitoring Room of People’s Daily Online analyzed 77 influential social events; the result showed that 23 of the 77 events were exposed by netizens via Internet. That is, one-third of the public opinions were spread by the Internet, which has become one of the independent sources of news and public opinion. The 77 events involved the safeguard of civil rights, supervision of public power, maintenance of public order, and the upholding of public morality. Furthermore, along with the swift expansion of mobile media (especially mobile phone), the combination of the Internet with wireless terminals (mobile phones) has become an emerging mighty force. Mobile phones have facilitated information dissemination since the mobile media not only disseminate words, but also upload the pictures and videos on location and send a “live broadcast” for any emergency event. Governments were under great pressure to respond in a timely fashion and to maintain legitimacy.

The result of the big sample survey about “Governance Online” conducted by People’s Daily Online, China National School of Administration, and Renmin University of China has showed that, among the 48,591 survey respondents, almost 70% of netizens were looking forward to “Governance Online” and 69% of respondents considered “Governance Online” as an effective way for CPC and government officials to gage public opinions. The replies of officials to netizens’ messages and online posts were the most popular ways citizens use “Governance Online.” According to 74% of netizens, the Internet could become a new way to
prevent corruption. All these data prove that “Governance Online” had become an important feature of Chinese democratic politics in 2009 and would gradually increase. Although people have attached more importance to Governance Online and some local governments have used it as an index of official evaluations, not all officials approved of this experience; some officials saw it as a way to pretend that there was progress, others only went through the motions of using Governance Online and to quickly respond to netizens’ opinions. Some Chinese officials saw Governance Online as something they were “not willing to use, not dare to use and not capable to use.” At present, Governance Online in China limits netizens’ communications from bottom to top, but does not allow government’s affirmative actions from above to below.

Since the inception of e-government by the Government Online Project in 1999, the combination of the Internet with Chinese politics has improved China’s administrative capacity and its ability to make decisions more efficiently, respond to public service demands, and deal with emergency events of central and local governments and party committees. It has had a positive impact on improving administrative efficiency, promoting information disclosure, transforming government functions, and raising the government’s image. Despite these great achievements of e-government, it still has imperfections, such as “isolated islands of information,” lack of service, and incomplete performance evaluation mechanisms which directly affect the low overall level of e-government. An obvious example is the UN E-government Survey 2012 released by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affair (UNDESA) and Division for Public Economics and Public Administration. In this survey, Chinese e-government ranks 78th in the world, drops 6 places in the ranking from the previous year, and appears overall as a downward trend (see Table3).

Table 3: Development index and ranking of Chinese E-government in the world

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Average Development Index of E-government in the world</th>
<th>Development Index of Chinese E-government</th>
<th>Ranking of Chinese E-government in the world</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>0.4127</td>
<td>0.4356</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>0.4267</td>
<td>0.5078</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0.4514</td>
<td>0.5017</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>0.4406</td>
<td>0.4700</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>0.4882</td>
<td>0.5359</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Internet’s Impact on Chinese Politics

The Perspective of Western Scholars

Since the first Internet node opened in China in 1994, Western scholars have turned to the new technology. The relevant research topics covered the course of Chinese informationization, the government’s supervision of the Internet, and the impacts of the Internet on Chinese politics. Western scholars are especially interested in the influence of the Internet on the liberalization and democratization of Chinese politics from the perspective of the relationship between state and society.

Because of the characteristics of the Internet, the advent of the technology has excited a core of democratization transformation advocates, who connected the expansion of the “free technology” (Sussman, 1989; Tobey, 1996) with Chinese political democratization. Lots of scholars convinced people that the development of the Internet had a direct impact on and implications for political institutions and ruling techniques and the Internet and democracy were symbiotic entities. Other researchers asserted that government could not control the Internet just like they control traditional mass media. The Internet broke the government’s information monopoly and brought about a huge transformation in the press (Damm and Simona, 2006). In the Internet era, everybody became an information collector and informant, which virtually freed citizens from the bonds of hierarchy and undermined the government’s authority. Chinese government used the Internet to obtain economic and political benefits and controlled the technology to minimize its political risk at the same time, but this was of no avail. On the contrary, the government itself might be transformed during the process (Chang, 2001). Furthermore, the Chinese government would not overly curb the Internet because any containment policy would not only impede foreign investment, but also hinder the full application of the Internet (Bi, 2001; Taubman, 1998). For optimists, the development of the Internet in China thus would be an inexorable catalyst of social and political transition.

With the growing evidence that China could control the Internet successfully and continue its opening policy, the belief that the Internet would inevitably promote Chinese political transition had aroused more suspicion. The Chinese democratization brought by the Internet seemed to be just a rosy picture painted by technocrats, but it was not a realistic portrayal (Pan, 2011). With the popularity of the Internet, little individual freedom and political progress might arise, but a more likely scenario is the consolidation of CPC’s leadership and expansion of nationalism. Quite a few scholars concluded that CPC had taken advantage of the Internet functions in commercial activities and at the same time effectively controlled the negative political influence by multiple means (Banerjee, 2003; Harwit and Clark, 2001; Qiu, 2000; Shie, 2004). Even though the Chinese government is unlikely to prevent harmful information totally, it still could deter violations and irregularities by punishing those who visit illegal websites (Yin,
The expansion of the Internet contributed to CPC’s weakening control of information, but fundamentally the promise by optimists was a fiasco. CPC held back the trial of political transition promoted by the Internet by using the high-tech Internet Control System known as the “Chinese National Firewall.” With the Chinese National Firewall, the Chinese government can use more developed technology than individuals and NGOs. Those who expected to use the Internet to advance China’s political transition have to deal with both the information censorship as well as this technological obstruction. Basically, the Internet will not fundamentally transform Chinese politics, but it might support China’s gradual transition to increasing diversity and accepting the fledgling democratization (Chase and Mulvenon, 2002).

Most Western scholars who do research on Chinese Internet politics recognize that the Internet contents are under strict censorship in China’s authoritarian political system (K. Yang, 2007; Hong and Li, 2005; Lau, et al., 2011; Fairbrother, 2011). In their opinion, China’s efforts to regulate the Internet echoed their traditional ideological methods, which considered the mass media as the “CPC’s mouthpiece.” By strictly regulating the Internet’s contents, CPC made the Internet an effective vehicle for social control.

Consequently, the Chinese government is not opposed to the Internet. It constructed the Internet infrastructure to develop their e-government and used the Internet to improve its transparency and responsibility, to boost economic growth, to accelerate the construction of New Countryside, (Ting and Yi, 2012) and to consolidate CPC’s leadership (Kalathil and Boas, 2003; Kluver and Qiu, 2003; Shie, 2004; Zheng and Wu, 2005; Bertot, et al. 2010). As far as social structure is concerned, the demographic “digital divide” (between rural and urban China and among regions) reduced the possibility of e-democracy and might exacerbate existing social conflict (Hartford, 2000). All in all, the Internet facilitated citizens’ political expression, but it is not the determining factor in Chinese political democratization.

For a long time, the assertions of Western researchers about the Chinese Internet differed essentially from the opinions of Chinese scholars. The Internet’s potential for democratization depends on how we understand “democracy.” If we cannot clarify the meaning of “democracy,” it is hard to say whether the Internet is getting closer to it or not. As Barber (1998) said, the existence and development of democracy don’t rely on the quality and characteristics of technology, but the quality of the institution and the characteristics of citizens. Technology can’t determine everything. The Internet can speed up the process of democratization and can maintain the non-democratic system. How the technology is used and in what kind of environment the technology exists has an effect on readiness for e-government (Khalil, 2011).
The Perspective of Chinese Scholars

Compared to the research of Western scholars, the studies of Chinese academia on the political issues influenced by the Internet are gradually becoming more comprehensive. On the basis of the literature review about Chinese Internet politics, the studies of cyber politics in China have been divided into three stages (Chen and Luo, 2011). During the initial stage (1994-1998), displaying both curiosity and caution, Chinese scholars mainly introduced and reviewed the construction of Internet abroad. In the growth stage (1999-2005), when the government online project began, the research focused on two aspects: the introduction of e-government and Internet security. The former included the environment, the basic models, current difficulties, and the social impact of e-government construction; the latter focused on the increasing number of Internet hackers, online fraud, and cyber infringement. At the same time, because of the need to maintain order on the Internet, the emphasis of both government and researchers switched to ideological education and Internet regulation. With the development of the idea of service-oriented government construction, Chinese scholars paid more attention on the exterior functions, including service online and interactive communication. With the “Governance Online” stage, most studies dealt with online public opinion, online supervision, online civil society, and so on. The researchers primarily focused on online political participation in the development stage (after 2006).

Chinese scholars had two different attitudes toward the emerging information and communication technology (ICT) and the Internet. Some upheld the concept of “instrumentalism” and insisted that (compared to the direct impact of historical traditions, development logistics, and institutional changes to the efficiency, service, and democratization of government activities) the impact of the Internet and ICT on the three aspects of government activities is only functional and indirect. Others considered ICT a “revolutionary” power and claimed that (compared to the traditional bureaucratic system) e-government was not only an innovative administrative tool, but would also bring about a brand new governance pattern. For them, the essence of e-government is how the government transforms and reengineers itself in the face of the ICT challenge and thus builds a new pattern of government that meets the needs of the information society and achieves good governance. Professor Yang Fengchun (2007) from Peking University said: “the arrival of the inevitable Internet era, will not the disaster of existent politics system, but the fortune for the people and government.”

The Impact of the Internet on Politics: Gift or Curse?

Some scholars and politicians regard the Internet as a gift for China’s political development because they think it can improve the Chinese political system by:
- Expanding civic participation. In China, the Internet is called the “Direct Train for Public Opinion.” It alleviates the problems of traditional civic participation such as blocked participation channels, incomplete related laws and regulations, and limited willingness and ways to express political opinions.

- Promoting democratic policy-making. The Internet can change the traditional government-dominated “policy agenda-media agenda-public agenda” to “online public opinion- government policymaking.” It also changes the passive subordinate status of the public and media in traditional society and helps them to actively influence the government’s agenda.

- Boosting political transparency. This is viewed as a new effective democratic supervision pattern. On the one hand, the Internet expands the scope and depth of supervision. Via the Internet, some social issues can be raised and debated between government departments and the public. On the other hand, online supervision makes the Internet a multi-dimensional open platform for government information disclosure. The daily administrative activities (such as making and implementing policies) can be presented to the public via the Internet.

- Evolving the level of democratic service. Cyber politics affects democratic politics and services. The Internet environment increases citizens’ awareness of all possible services in the areas of policies, society, economy, culture, education and healthcare. The public can access relevant government documents or deliver relevant information, demands, and appeals to the government via the Internet. Meanwhile, government can exchange opinions with the public at any time to discuss social issues and eventually reach a unanimous decision.

- Speeding up the process of political socialization. The Internet has become the important medium of political socialization. It plays a crucial role in influencing political culture, educating citizens, shaping political beliefs and political consciousness, and consolidating political rulings. Online political participation upgrades Chinese citizens’ political knowledge and skills and develops more mature and stable political personalities (Xiong, 2008; Du and Zhang, 2012).

Some see the Internet as a political disaster because of its negative effects on the political life of China:

- Corroding political stability. The concealment, decentralization, openness, and immediacy of online political participation influences political stability negatively. For example, it is easy to spread false information from persons or organizations with ulterior motives via the Internet; this could confuse people’s judgments and may lead to social unrest (Zheng and Wu 2005). From the civil rights perspective, the irrational and non-institutionalized cyber political participation may trigger group polarization which could threaten social stability, infringe on citizens’ legitimate rights and interests, and seriously affect people’s daily life (for example, the phenomenon of Internet Mass Hunting).
• Challenging government administration. The Internet differs from the authoritative mass media which is top-down style and dominated by centralized government. It poses a tough test for the traditional bureaucratic administrative pattern.

• Widening the digital gap. China’s digital gap limits the information provided to people who do not have Internet access. This results in unbalanced political participation. The Internet’s regional (urban versus rural) and personal (education, socio-economic, and age differences) imbalances limit online participation and cannot guarantee that all classes are heard. While cyber democracy provides various political participation channels and the gaps will undoubtedly narrow, Internet usage gives more access to the well-to-do, highly educated, and the more ideologically driven people.

• Jeopardizing state security. Online terrorism heavily undermines the authority of the government. Computer hackers target the national information center of political, economic, and military departments. This jeopardizes state security and violates civil rights and democratic institutions.

Statistics supplied by the National Computer Virus Emergency Response Center show that 72.16% of respondents had Internet security incidents in 2012. These incidents included maliciously tampering with the web page (75.08%), spam (73.65%), and Internet theft and phishing (64.87%). Moreover, the monitoring data from the National Computer Network Emergency Response Technical Team Coordination Center of China (CNCERT) showed that the overall evaluation of Internet security was medium in June 2011 when 8.15 million (76% higher than the previous month) Chinese computers were infected by viruses; 3,164 websites were tampered with, including 333 government websites. China National Vulnerability Database (CNVD) collected 447 system vulnerabilities, including 250 high-risk ones and 406 which could be attacked long distance. The software/hardware manufacturers affected were Adobe, Apple, Cisco, Google, IBM, Linux, Microsoft, Mozilla, Novell, and so on. The Chinese Internet security system is still weak in its ability to predict, respond to, prevent, and recover from threats. During China’s social transition different factions used the Internet to further their values and political demands and to jockey for dominance. If the mainstream ideology cannot control the Internet, revolution could occur.

The Future of Cyber-politics in China

Enhance the Performance of E-government

E-government is called a “top leadership project” because the government plays a leading role in its planning and implementation. Chinese e-government aims to reshape the government structure, to make the government process transparent, and to develop an innovative administrative pattern. However, it is restricted by the
bureaucracy’s lack of commitment to live by the rule of law. There is also redundancy within the government’s functional division, ingrained hierarchical control habits, and entrenched civil service policies that hinders the e-government’s administration and discourages its growth. Therefore, to help e-government transform administrative patterns, the Chinese government must improve the bureaucratic structure, lower hardware restrictions, raise the level of bureaucratic software, and move it forward. To promote e-government’s performance requires reforming the administrative system to meet citizens’ basic requirements, making a commitment to complete every project, and expanding successful applications.

Expand Orderly Civil Online Participation

The Internet has become the new channel for Chinese citizens’ political participation. One netizen of People’s Daily Online insisted that every ordinary netizen can express their opinions and offer suggestions for CPC and government via posting and blogging. And a netizen from Xinhuanet.com left the message that the directness, interactive features, and immediacy of the Internet is a great convenience for Chinese citizens who want to express their views online. Much like a double-edged sword, online participation has both a positive and negative effect. The Internet also allows for disorderly, imbalanced, and emotional participation that negatively affects the evolution of Chinese cyber democracy. Since the Internet does not possess judgment skills, Chinese leaders need to standardize online behavior, to encourage rational and civil online participation, and to promote a harmonious and stable political order.

Establish E-governance for Social Harmony

Different from e-government, e-governance attaches importance to government informationization and the construction of a service platform; it pays more attention to informational interaction between the subject and object of public administration and the related virtual political and social structure and its interrelationship. To improve the performance and service orientation of e-government requires interaction among government, citizens, and NGOs. The traditional bureaucratic system stresses the top-down hierarchical management style, while e-governance (a new governance pattern in the information society) emphasizes people-centering, civic participation, information transparency and disclosure, interaction between the government and the public, and collaboration between government and NGOs. E-governance monitors the process of government administration, uplifts administrative efficiency, and increases transparency to build a clean and honest administration. Although currently e-government in China is confined to supplementary functions of traditional government administration, it aims to become an online consulting service and offer innovations to encourage civic participation and eventually to construct the e-government.
Conclusion

Since the mid 1990s, especially as the technology has advanced, e-government is progressing in China. The emergence of cyber politics gives citizens convenient and cheap paths to participate in government and to benefit from its services. Cyber politics enhances citizens’ ability to communicate and participate in the political process, improves political socialization, and shapes political beliefs and consciousness. But it also balances the power structure between state and society, strengthening the power of Chinese civil society. The positive influences of the rise of cyber politics on the development of Chinese politics are multifaceted. The Chinese government needs to take the initiative to adopt this trend and make cyber politics a new form of socialist democratic politics with Chinese characteristics. Of course, there are also negative effects. The inequality of online participation, the disorderly online participation process, the manipulation of online public opinion all constitute obstacles to Chinese political development in this period. Therefore, the Internet era is not the curse for existing politics, but rather a gift for the people and the government. The Internet expands the scope of orderly civic participation. E-governance is based on the active participation of netizens’ and their ideological education and regard for the laws of China.

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