

Magruder's American Government

CHAPTER 8

Mass Media and Public Opinion

What is Public Opinion?

Public opinion can be described as those attitudes held by a significant number of people on matters of government and politics.

Different Publics

- The United States is made up of many groups, or publics, who share common news.

Public Affairs

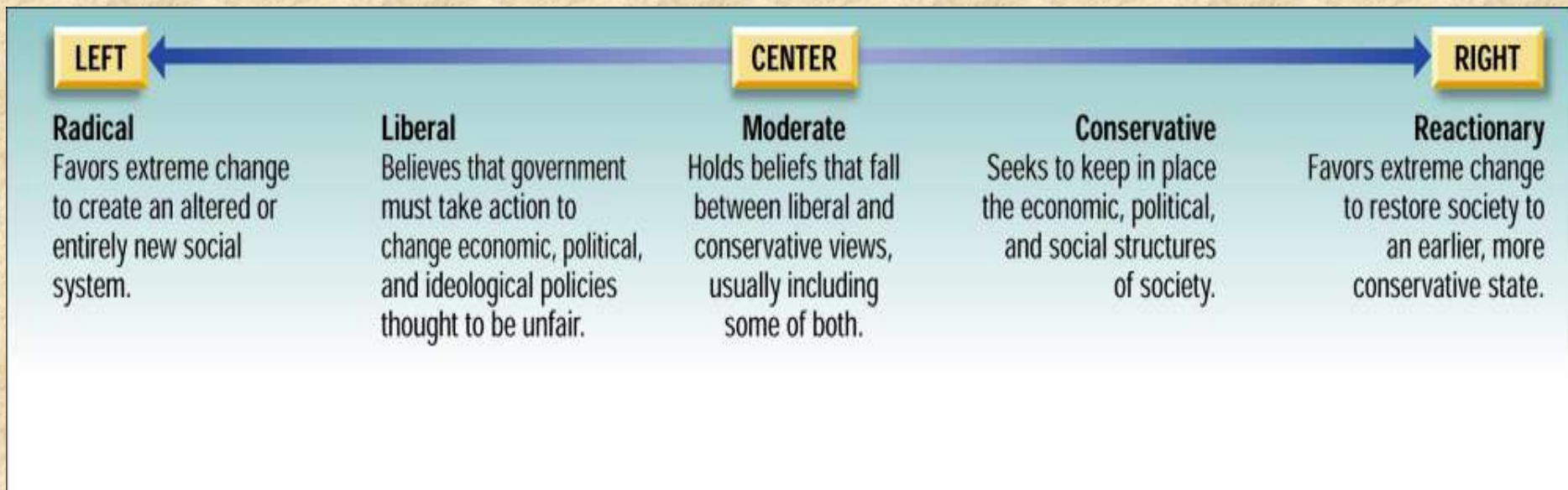
- **Public affairs** are those events and issues that concern the public at large. In its proper sense, public opinion includes only those views that relate to public affairs.

Public Opinions

- More than one public opinion can exist at the same time, because there are many publics. A view or position must be expressed in the open in order to be a public opinion.

The Political Spectrum

People who have similar opinions on political issues are generally grouped according to whether they are “left,” “right,” or “center” on the political spectrum.



Family and Education

Many factors influence our political opinions and political socialization over the course of a lifetime.

The Family

- Children first see the political world from within the family and through the family's eyes.
- The strong influence the family has on the development of political opinions is due to the large amount of time children spend with the family.

The Schools

- Children acquire political knowledge throughout their time in the classroom.
- Students are taught about political systems, patriotism, and great Americans. Some are even required to take a course on government in high school.

Other Factors Influencing Public Opinion

Mass Media

The **mass media** include those means of communication that reach large, widely dispersed audiences (masses of people) simultaneously. The mass media has a huge effect on the formation of public opinion.

Peer Groups

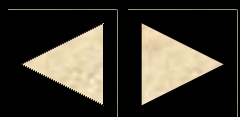
Peer groups are made up of the people with whom one regularly associates, including friends, classmates, neighbors, and co-workers.

Opinion Leaders

An **opinion leader** is any person who, for any reason, has an unusually strong influence on the views of others.

Historic Events

Historic events can have a major impact on public opinion. The Great Depression is one event that shaped the political views and opinions of a generation.



Measuring Public Opinion

Elections

- Candidates who win an election are said to have a **mandate**, or a command from the electorate, to carry out campaign promises. In reality, however, election results are seldom an accurate measure of public opinion.

Interest Groups

- **Interest groups** are private organizations whose members share certain views and work to shape public policy. Interest groups are a chief means by which public opinion is made known.

The Media

- The media are frequently described as “mirrors” as well as “molders” of opinion.

Personal Contacts

- Public officials rely on frequent and wide-ranging contacts with their constituents, such as reading their mail, answering calls, and meeting people in public.

Polls—The Best Measure

Public opinion is best measured by **public opinion polls**, devices that attempt to collect information by asking people questions.

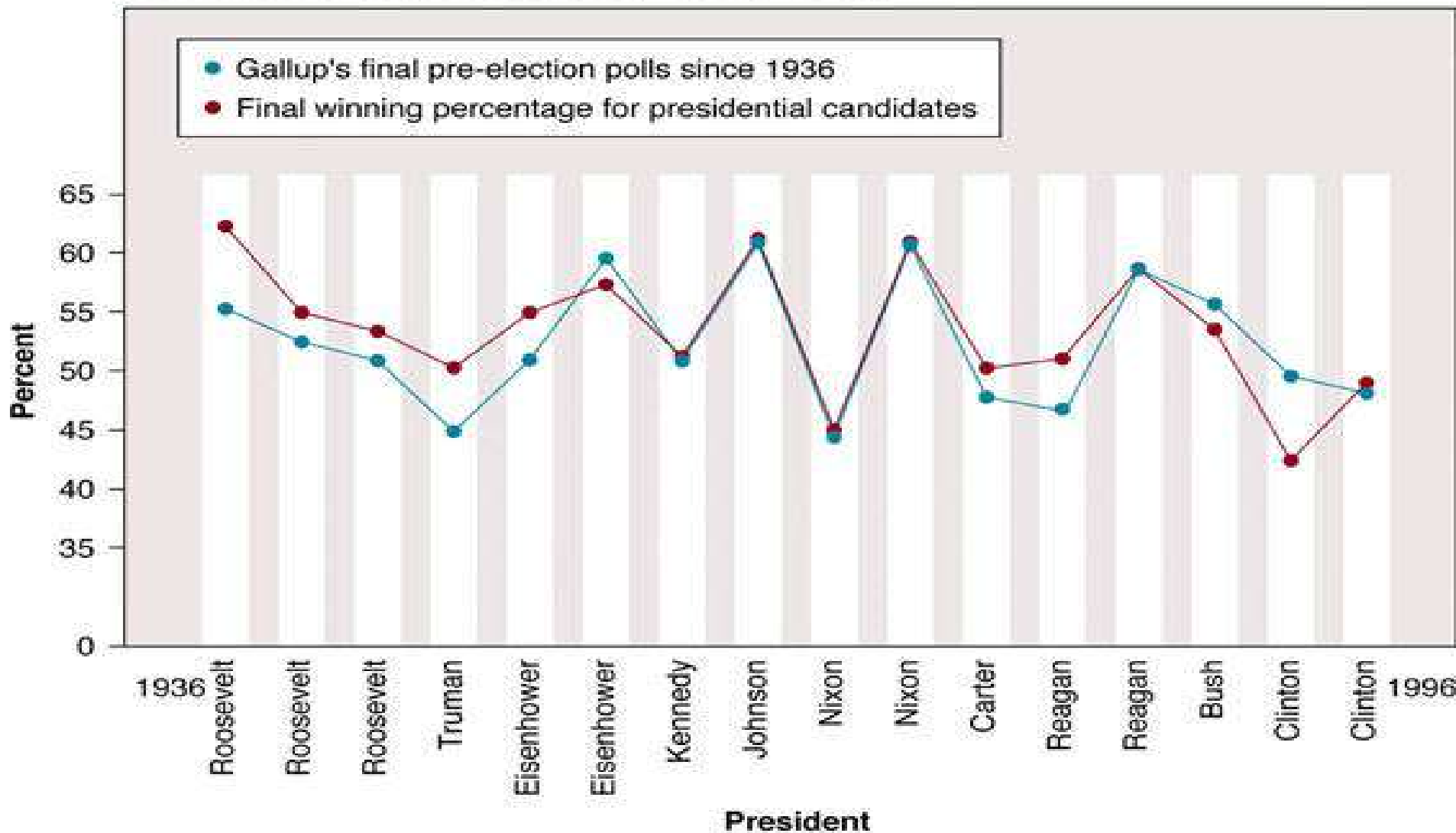
Straw Votes

- A **straw vote** is a method of polling that seeks to read the public's mind simply by asking the same question of a large number of people.
- The straw-vote technique is highly unreliable, however.

Scientific Polling

- Serious efforts to take the public's pulse on a scientific basis date from the 1930s.
- There are now more than 1,000 national and regional polling organizations in this country, with at least 200 of these polling political preferences

Figure 11.1 The Success of the Gallup Poll □
in Presidential Elections, 1936-1996



Gallup's average error: 1936-48, 4.3% 1952-63, 2.0% 1972-88, 1.6% 1992, 6.0% 1996, 1.0%

SOURCE: Marty Baumann, "How One Polling Firm Stacks Up," *USA Today* (October 27, 1992): 13A. 1996 data from Mike Mokrzycki, "Pre-election Polls' Accuracy Varied," *The Atlanta Journal/The Atlanta Constitution* (November 8, 1996): A12.

FIGURE 9.1

Americans' Support for Fundamental Values

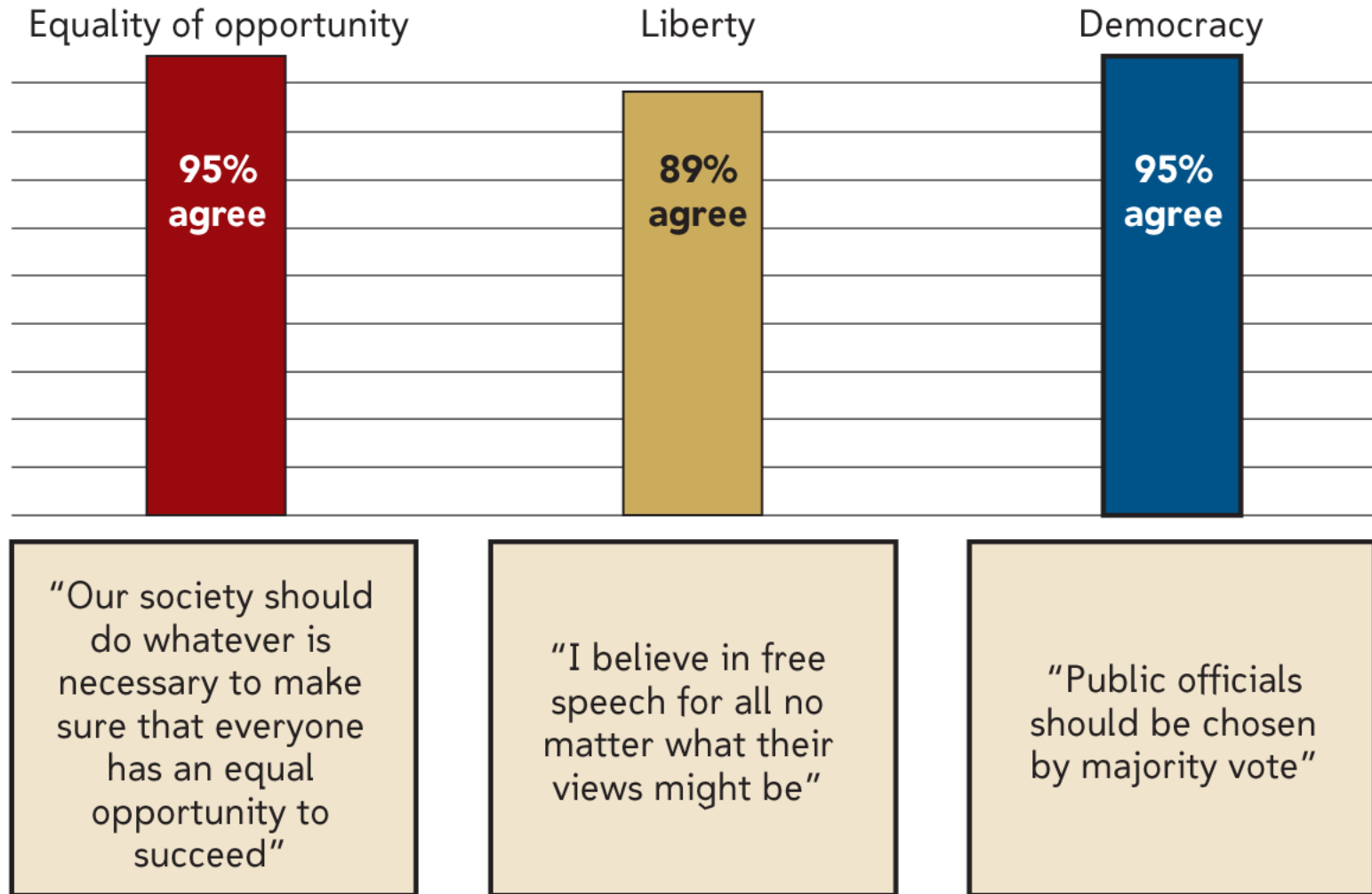


Table 7.3 The Gender Gap: Differences in Political Views of Men and Women

Issue	Men	Women
Federal spending for welfare programs should be increased.	8%	14%
Abortion should be permitted by law.	57	60
Sexual harassment is a very serious problem in the workplace.	24	38
This country would be better off if we just stayed home and did not concern ourselves with problems in other parts of the world.	24	29
Generally speaking, I think of myself as a Democrat.	32	44
The United States should increase defense spending.	37	26
The United States should increase spending on solving the problems of the homeless.	51	63
Ban all handguns except for the police.	33	58

Source: ICPSR American National Election Survey, 1996. Pre- and Post-Election Surveys.

The Polling Process

Defining the Universe

- The *universe* is a term that means the whole population that the poll aims to measure.

Constructing a Sample

- A **sample** is a representative slice of the total universe. Most professional pollsters draw a **random sample**, also called a probability sample. A **quota sample** is one that is deliberately constructed to reflect several of the major characteristics of a given universe.

Preparing Valid Questions

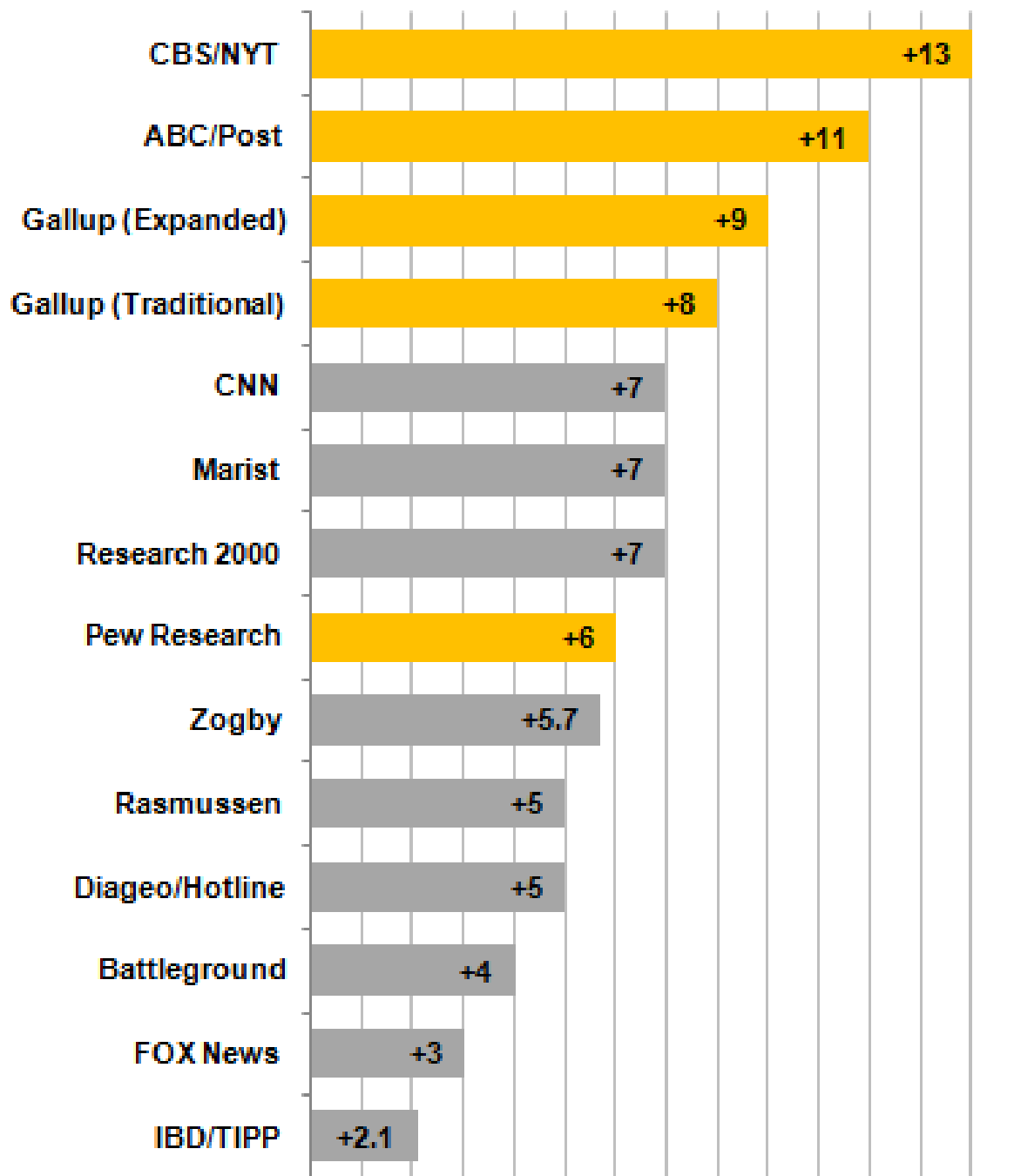
- The way in which questions are worded is very important. Wording can affect the reliability of any poll.

Interviewing

- Pollsters communicate with the sample respondents using various methods including person-to-person interviews, telephone calls, and mail surveys.

Reporting

- Pollsters use computers to store and manipulate data, which helps them analyze and report the results of the poll.



•Bias in Polling

- % advantage, Obama ahead of McCain (fivethirtyeight.com, 11/3/2008)

- What are the Yellow bars?

- Polls that included cell phones in their surveys

- The "cell phone gap" may expand over the weekend and contract during the week. Why?

- Most cell phone plans include free weekend minutes.

Gallup: Younger Voters Interviewed by Cell & Landline Phones

Interviews Conducted 9/1-10/15/2008

	Unweighted - Age: 18-29		Weighted - Age: 18-29	
	Landline	Cell Only	Landline	Cell Only
	%	%	%	%
Party ID				
Dem/lean Dem	54	51	54	51
Rep/lean Rep	34	34	33	34
All others	12	15	13	15
<i>n= (All Adults)</i>	2,595	1,238		
Pres. Vote				
Obama	57	60	58	60
McCain	38	32	37	32
Und/other	5	8	5	8
Obama-McCain	+19	+28	+21	+28
<i>n= (Reg. Voters)</i>	1,940	901		

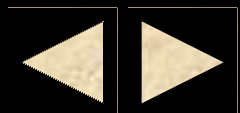
Evaluating Polls and Their Limit on Public Opinion

Evaluating Polls

- On balance, most national and regional polls are fairly reliable. Still, they are far from perfect.
- Potential problems with polls include their inability to measure the intensity, stability, and relevance of the opinions they report.
- Another potential problem is that polls and pollsters are sometimes said to shape the opinions they are supposed to measure.

Limits on the Impact of Public Opinion

- Public opinion is the major, but by no means the only, influence on public policy in this country.
- Much of the American political system is designed to protect minority interests against the excesses of majority views and actions.
- Finally, polls are not elections, nor are they substitutes for elections.



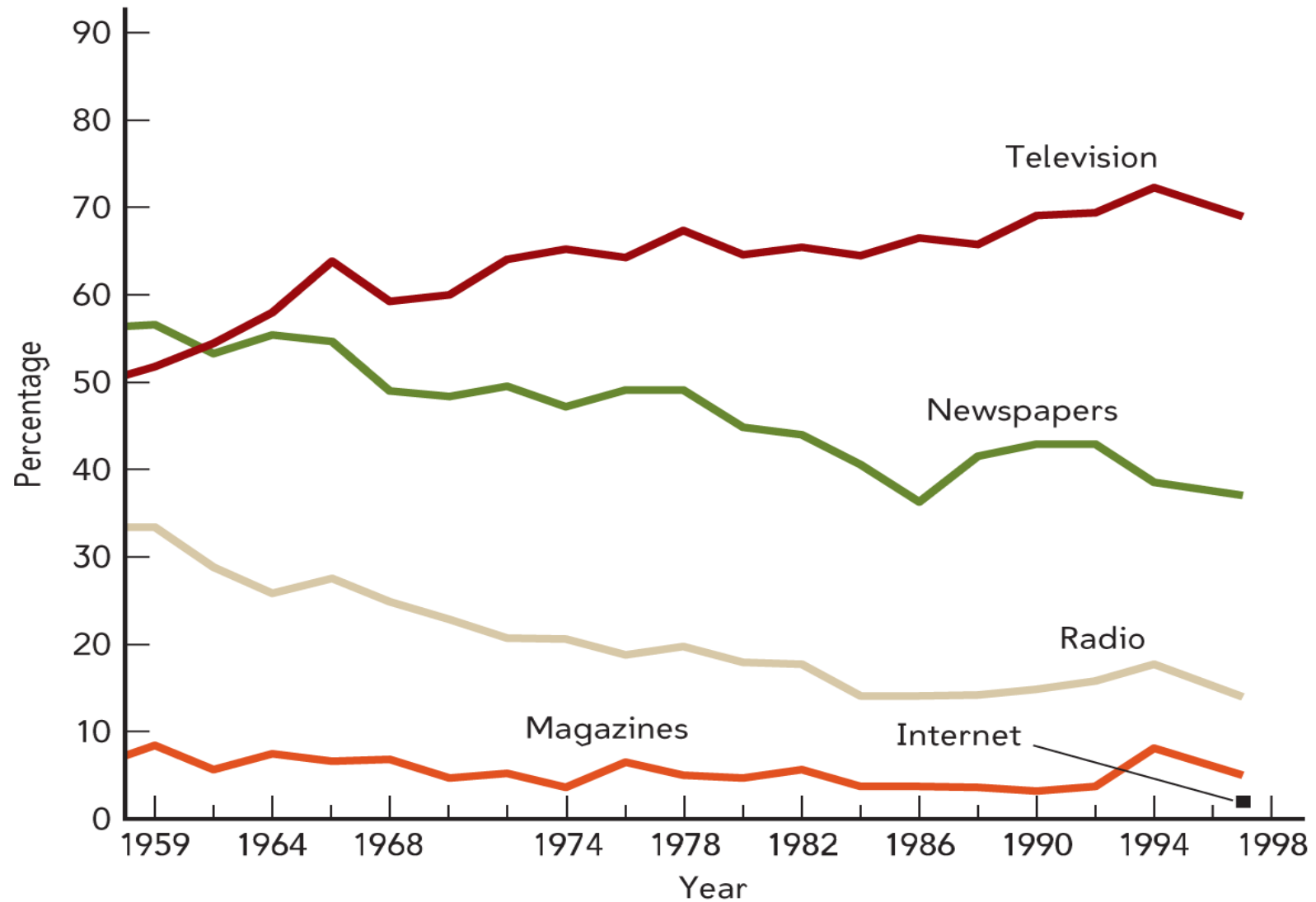
The Role of Mass Media

A **medium** is a means of communication; it transmits some kind of information. Four major mass media are particularly important in American politics:

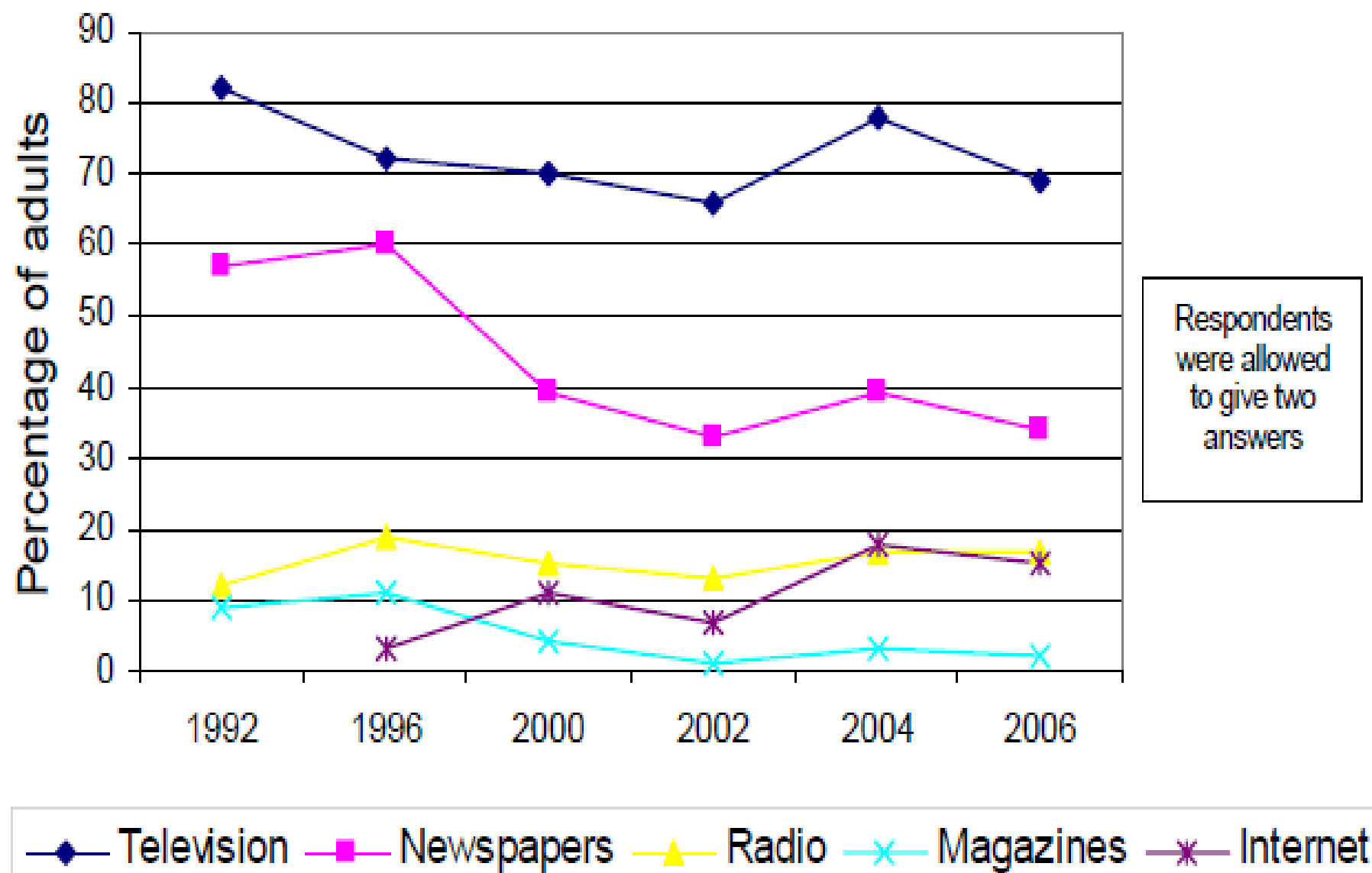
<p>Television</p> <p>Politics and television have gone hand in hand since the technology first appeared. Today television is the principle source of political information for a majority of Americans.</p>	<p>Newspapers</p> <p>The first newspapers carried mostly political news. Even with the total number of newspapers declining, they are still the second leading source of political information for most Americans.</p>
<p>Radio</p> <p>On average, Americans hear 20 hours of radio each week. Radio has been a source of news and entertainment since 1920.</p>	<p>Magazines</p> <p>Some 12,000 magazines are published in the United States today. Several magazines are devoted to American news and politics.</p>

FIGURE 13.1

Americans' Primary Media Sources of News



Americans' main sources for campaign information



Media choices of Republican and Democratic Voters

Asked of adults: How have you been getting most of your news about the November elections?

	Main source of news	
	<i>Voted Republican</i>	<i>Voted Democratic</i>
All forms of TV	69%	74%
Fox Cable	24%**	10%
Local news	22%	25%
ABC Network	11%	13%
NBC Network	10%	14%*
CNN Cable	8%	17%*
CBS Network	7%	11%*
MSNBC Cable	3%	6%*
Newspapers	38%	44%*
Radio	21%**	14%
Internet	17%	17%
Magazines	2%	2%









** Statistically significant difference for Democrats compared with Republicans.*

*** Statistically significant difference for Republicans compared with Democrats.*

Source: Joint post-election survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project and the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press. November 2006. N=2,562. Margin of error is ±2%.

Media Statistics

Access to media varies from country to country.

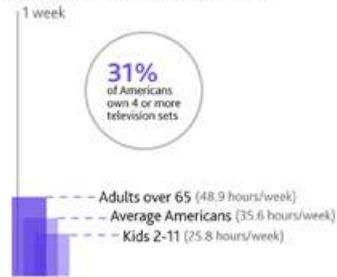
Access to Media in Selected Countries				
Country	Population in millions	Television sets per 1,000 persons	Radios per 1,000 persons	Daily newspaper circulation per 1,000 persons
 United States	270.3	776	2,122	238
 Japan	125.9	619	799	578
 Bangladesh	127.6	5	65	0.4
 Nigeria	110.5	38	170	18
 Mexico	98.5	192	227	115
 Italy	56.8	436	790	126
 India	984	21	117	21
 Chile	14.8	280	305	101
 Canada	30.7	647	919	215
 Nicaragua	4.6	48	206	31
SOURCE: <i>The World Almanac</i>				

Media Universe

Average number of TV sets per household¹

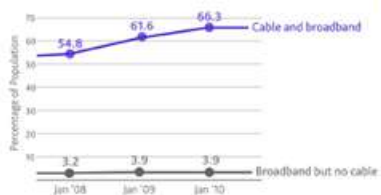


How (and how much) we watch¹



Broadband vs. Cable²

While the percentage of consumers with broadband but no cable has remained relatively stable, presence of both cable and broadband has increased, indicating there is limited evidence of cord cutting.



DVR PLAYBACK

21% of all viewing in DVR homes is DVR playback

45% of all recorded ads are viewed

2hr9m of timeshifted TV is watched every week by DVR users

115.9M

U.S. homes with at least one TV

TELEVISION UNIVERSE¹

104.7M

U.S. homes that are cable and/or satellite ready

100.2M

U.S. homes with a DVD player

70.6M

U.S. homes with a VCR

65M

TVs in the U.S. that are HD compatible

55.6M

U.S. homes with digital cable

43.1M

U.S. homes with a DVR

34.7M

U.S. homes with satellite

MOBILE PHONE UNIVERSE¹

228M

Mobile phone users, 13+

83.2M

Mobile phone web users

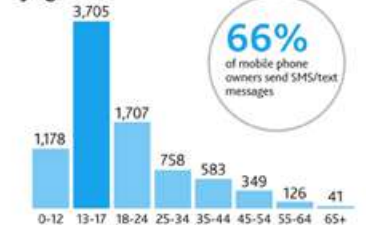
Top 10 Mobile Phones⁵

1. Apple iPhone 3GS
2. Samsung SCH-U450 Intensity, Doubletake
3. Motorola Droid
4. RIM BlackBerry 8500 series Curve 8530, 8520, 8530, 8550
5. Apple iPhone 4
6. Apple iPhone 3G
7. RIM BlackBerry 8300 series Curve 8330, 8320, 8350
8. LG VX9200 mv3
9. Samsung SCH-U350 series Smooth, Clint
10. RIM BlackBerry 9700 Bold

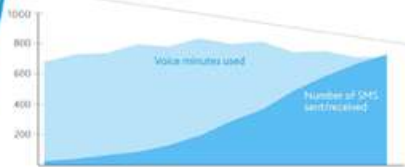
Top 10 Mobile Video Channels⁴

1. YouTube
2. FOX
3. Comedy Central
4. ESPN
5. MTV
6. ABC
7. CBS
8. AdultSwim
9. NBC
10. Discovery Channel

Number of SMS sent/received per month by age⁶



Mobile phone usage: Voice vs. SMS/texts⁷



While voice minutes used has remained relatively stable, text messaging activity has exploded.

Women talk and text more than men do⁸

In the U.S., women talk 28% more than men (818 minutes a month compared to men's 640), they text more, too, sending or receiving an average of 716 SMS messages a month compared to the 555 monthly text messages sent or received by the average American male.



WOMEN	MEN
818 minutes per month	640 minutes per month
716 texts per month	555 texts per month

nielsen

•A massive increase in access and in the amount of media created and consumed has occurred in

The Media and Politics

The Public Agenda

- The media play a very large role in shaping the **public agenda**, the societal problems that political leaders and citizens agree need government attention.
- It is not correct that the media tell the people *what* to think; but it is clear that they tell the people what to think *about*.

Electoral Politics

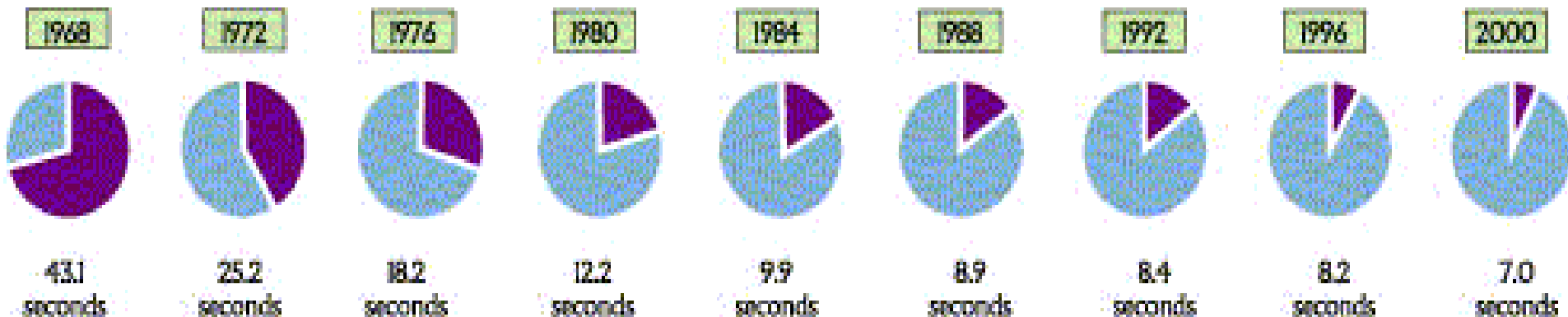
- Today, television allows candidates to appeal directly to the people, without the help of a party organization.
- Candidates regularly try to use media coverage to their advantage.
- Newscasts featuring candidates are usually short, sharply focused **sound bites**—snappy reports that can be aired in 30 to 45 seconds.

Reporting the News

- Presenting the News

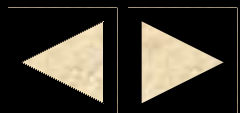
Superficial describes most news coverage today

Sound Bites: Short video clips of approximately 15 seconds.



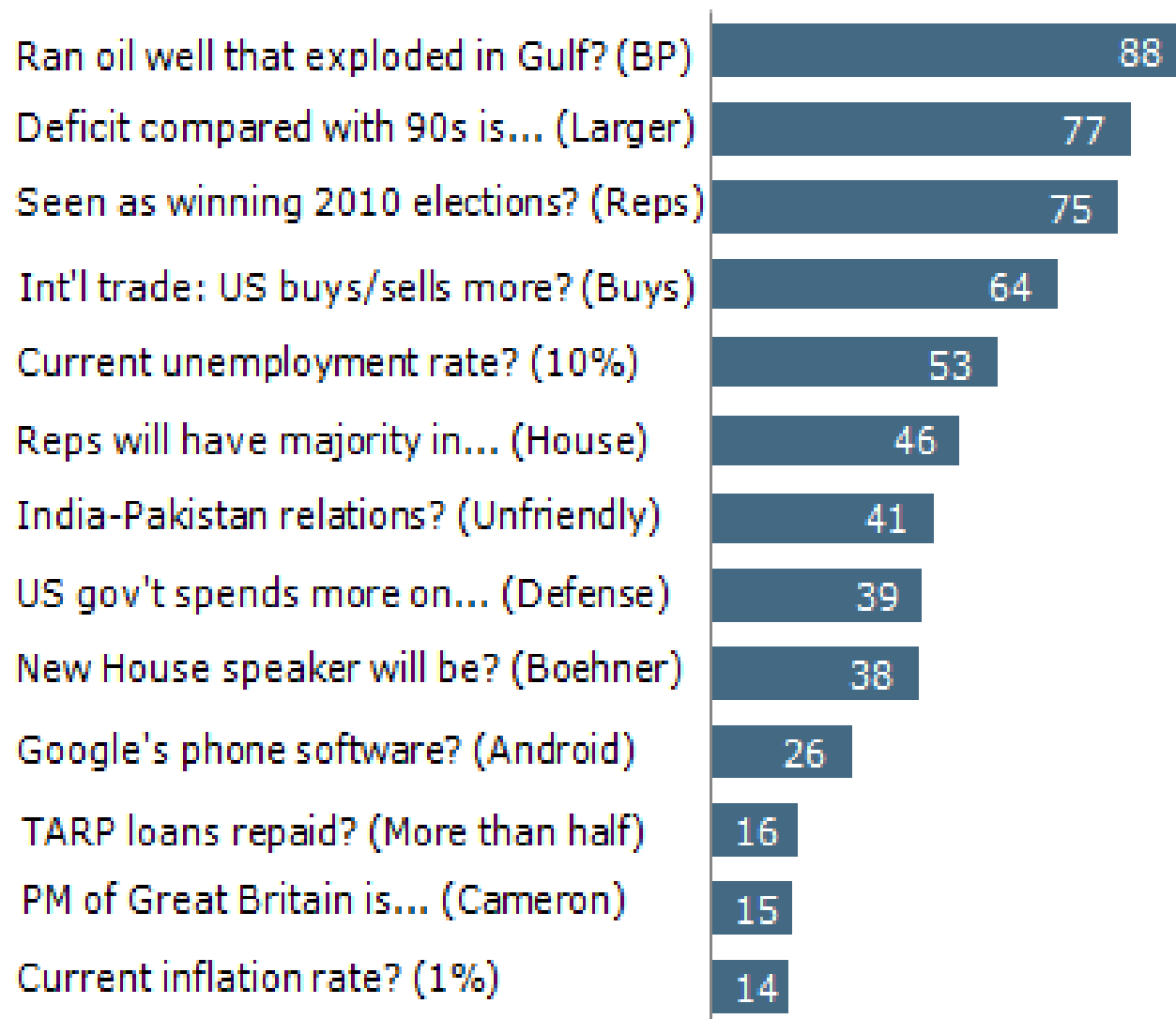
Limits on Media Influence

- Only a small part of the public actually takes in and understands much of what the media have to say about public affairs.
- Many media sources mostly skim the news, reporting only what their news editors judge to be the most important and/or most interesting stories of the day.
- In-depth coverage of public affairs is available to those who want it and will seek it out.



What the Public Knows

Percent who know...



•Does the news media keep the public informed or are we just not paying attention?

Mass Media and Public Opinion

SECTION 1 The Formation of Public Opinion

SECTION 2 Measuring Public Opinion

SECTION 3 The Mass Media

Section 1 Review

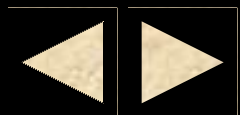
1. Public opinion is difficult to define because

- (a) everyone shares the same views.
- (b) there are many groups and issues to account for.
- (c) no one is allowed to have opinions.
- (d) none of the above.

2. The mass media consist of

- (a) friends and family.
- (b) neighbors.
- (c) newspapers, magazines, television, and the Internet.
- (d) peer groups.

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Chapter 8, Section 1

Section 2 Review

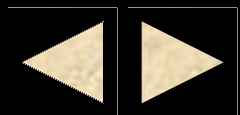
1. A straw vote

- (a) correctly predicted the outcome of the 1936 election.
- (b) is a method of polling that asks a large amount of people the same question.
- (c) is a very reliable type of polling.
- (d) measures the opinion of only the rural community.

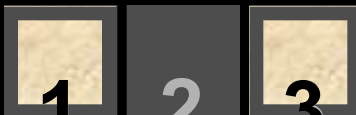
2. To pollsters, the *universe* is

- (a) a private organization whose members share certain views and work to shape public policy.
- (b) all of outer space.
- (c) a probability sample.
- (d) the whole population that a poll aims to measure.

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Chapter 8, Section 2

Section 3 Review

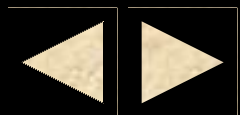
1. Which of the following are major media?

- (a) television
- (b) newspapers
- (c) magazines
- (d) all of the above

2. According to the chart on international media usage found earlier in this section, which media source is accessible to the most Americans?

- (a) newspapers
- (b) radio
- (c) television
- (d) none of the above

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Chapter 8, Section 3