

with a catchall audience. In the case of Ireland, a tabloid market does exist, but it is mostly dominated by British imports, which account for about 20 percent of daily and 26 percent of Sunday circulation. The British newspaper market is essentially unique in the sharp separation that exists between quality and mass papers and the market dominance of the latter – in 1994, mass-market tabloids accounted for 54 percent of the circulation of national dailies and midmarket tabloids accounted for an additional 27 percent. Germany is perhaps the closest comparison, but the strength of the local press in Germany diminishes the significance of the *Bild*, which overwhelmingly dominates the market for “street papers.”

### POLITICAL PARALLELISM

The commercial press that developed so strongly in North America and in Britain played a pioneering role in developing what Chalaby (1996) calls a “fact-centered discourse.” Commercial papers emphasized news at the expense of the political rhetoric and commentary that had dominated earlier papers. They were innovators in the development of organizational infrastructure to gather news rapidly and accurately, as well as in the development of the cultural forms of factual reporting. In his comparison between French and Anglo-American papers early in the twentieth century, Chalaby notes that the British and American papers had more information, more accurately and more recently reported; more wide-ranging in its focus, as British and American papers had networks of correspondents around the world; and, finally, more “factually presented,” without the strong mixture of facts and personal opinion that characterized French journalism. Journalists in the Liberal countries remain more oriented toward informational and narrative styles of writing compared with continental journalists, who give greater emphasis to commentary, though the differences have diminished.

Often it is assumed that this kind of “fact-centered discourse” goes naturally with a stance of political neutrality and that a strong commercial press inevitably means a low level of political parallelism.

... [F]rom the 1850s onwards, Anglo-American journalists began to make the typically journalistic claim to be neutral and objective. . . . [E]ven though what they wrote was politically arbitrary, they generally did not admit any political allegiance or even preference. In any case, the emphasis on news and information did not give much space to Anglo-American journalists to express their opinions (Chalaby 1996: 311).

In fact, there are significant differences among Liberal countries in the extent to which political neutrality or partisanship prevails. In the United States, Canada, and Ireland, political neutrality has come to be the typical stance of newspapers. Broadcasting in all four countries is also characterized by neutrality, though with some important signs of change as channels proliferate and the broadcasting industries are deregulated. The British press, on the other hand, is still characterized by external pluralism. It is no coincidence that the concept of “party-press parallelism” was developed in Britain, where despite their commercial character and despite the importance of the fact-centered discourse stressed by Chalaby, the press has always mirrored the divisions of party politics fairly closely.

It would make little sense to characterize American newspapers as Europeans commonly do theirs, by assigning them distinct locations on the political spectrum or distinct partisan sympathies. As noted in Chapter 6, Patterson and Donsbach (1993) found that, while journalists they surveyed in Britain, Sweden, Germany, and Italy placed the major national newspapers across a wide political spectrum, their American counterparts located all the major news organizations in a small range between the Democratic and Republican parties. On their editorial pages, to be sure, many American newspapers have relatively consistent political orientations. But these carry over only to a limited extent to news reporting.<sup>5</sup> *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, for example, is a strongly Republican paper on its editorial page. It is a relatively recent convert to political neutrality – in the 1970s it was one of the last surviving papers with a clear party orientation – and still has a stronger identity on the editorial page than many American papers. Nevertheless, in the sharpest partisan conflict in recent history – the controversy over the outcome of the 2000 presidential election – a good deal of its coverage was taken from *The New York Times* news service. *The New York Times* had the opposite editorial stance on the controversy – but there is a strong assumption in American journalism that this is irrelevant to news reporting. There are exceptions – occasions when reporters feel (or assume) pressures from management to follow the editorial line of the paper (there are also occasions – much more frequently – when reporters feel pressure not to depart from the centrist views shared by the many papers; more on this in the following text). There are also particular papers that have less

<sup>5</sup> Some empirical research on the U.S. media has shown correlations between editorial stance and news coverage, for example, Nacos (1990), who found that newspapers tended to use more sources consistent with their editorial policy. These differences are all in all relatively subtle, however.

separation between editorial position and news coverage; and there is the special case of *The Washington Times*, which was set up in the 1980s with funding from the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church to be a conservative alternative to the mainstream press. Regional variations in political culture are also reflected in differences among newspapers, almost all of which are locally based. The *San Francisco Chronicle* covers a gay pride march differently than a paper in the Bible Belt. For the most part, however, American newspapers are not significantly differentiated in their political orientations. The principle of neutrality is particularly strong in American journalism today exactly where newspapers in the nineteenth century, or those in some other countries, would display their political colors most strongly – in election campaigns, where American newspapers typically take great care to balance the coverage of the two major parties, putting the story about one party on top one day, for example, and reversing them the next.

The story is essentially similar for Canadian papers; only the *National Post* is generally seen as having a clear ideological orientation, toward the right. Most accounts of the Canadian media also make the point that the culture of the Francophone journalism in Quebec is somewhat different (Gagnon 1981; Saint-Jean 1998; Hazel 2001), with a greater emphasis placed on commentary (similar to the French press) and more of a tradition of political involvement on the part of journalists, many of whom entered politics during the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., René Lévesque). This does not, however, mean that strong external pluralism has developed in the Quebec press and according to many accounts there has been a shift toward professional norms of neutrality more recently (Pritchard and Savageau 1998; Saint-Jean 1998).

In Ireland the shift toward a neutral press took place later. The development of the commercial press was slowed by Ireland's relative poverty and by competition from British imports. The political situation was also distinct: Ireland was under colonial rule into the early twentieth century and went through a revolution followed by a civil war. The party system was only consolidated in the 1920s and 1930s. Under those circumstances, "A newspaper is almost forced to take sides in the controversies, burning topics and struggles of its day" (Brown 1991 [1937]: 53). Or, to put it more positively, politicized newspapers had an extremely important role to play in the political mobilizations that formed the Irish democratic system, as they had earlier in the United States, Britain, and Canada (Carty 1981; Curran 1996) – and indeed in all the countries covered in this study. The three major newspapers thus reflected

distinct political traditions and affinities relatively late, the *Irish Times*, the original penny paper, being originally Unionist in orientation and then shifting toward neutrality, the *Irish Independent* supporting the Fine Gael party until 1979, and *The Irish Press* close to the Fianna Fail party, whose leader, Eamon DeValera, founded the paper in 1931 and ran it for much of its history. Today, however, the party affinities and ideological orientations of the two surviving papers – the *Irish Press* went out of business in the 1990s – are not greatly different (Kelly and Treutzschler 1992).

Of course, the fact that the major papers of the United States, Canada, and Ireland are not differentiated in their political orientations does not necessarily mean that they have none. They all have essentially the *same* orientation – a centrist one (as suggested by Patterson and Donsbach’s survey, in which all the major media were located between the Republicans and Democrats), as well as one oriented toward the views of the white middle-class readers who are the preferred target of advertisers. An orientation toward the center and toward the political “mainstream,” is still a political orientation. As noted in Chapter 2, the use of the term *neutral* to refer to the “Anglo-American” style of journalism is not meant to imply that it is literally “value free” or without a point of view; scholarship in the Liberal countries debunked this notion long ago. The point is that these media position themselves as “catchall” media cutting across the principal lines of division between the established political forces in society.

The British press is a very different story. As in other countries, the party affiliations of British newspapers have become weaker over the postwar period, a trend we will explore further in Chapter 8. “Between 1945 and 1995,” as Seymour-Ure (1996: 214) puts it, “the press became less predictable and manageable for the parties.” Newspapers became less consistent in their support for one party or another, less inclined to follow the agenda set by party leaders, and less focused on the rhetoric of party politics. There have been ups and downs in this trend. Seymour-Ure argues that partisanship increased somewhat in the 1980s, when Margaret Thatcher challenged much of the prevailing consensus in British politics, only to fade again as the popularity of the Conservative party waned, and papers on the right began to distance themselves from it.

Despite this general trend toward diminishing political parallelism, however, the political orientations of British newspapers today are as distinct as anywhere in Europe, with the possible exceptions of Italy

and Greece. The spectrum of political views is surely not as wide – Britain is characterized by moderate pluralism, and its politics have a strong orientation toward the center. Nevertheless, within the limits of the British political spectrum, strong, distinct political orientations are clearly manifested in news content.

Strong political orientations are especially characteristic of the tabloid press. It is part of the style of tabloid or popular journalism in most of the world to reject the constraints of objective reporting, and to present the newspaper as speaking for the common citizen and “common sense,” often mobilizing a tone of outrage. In Britain as in Germany, this most commonly takes the form of a right-wing populist stance, emphasizing nationalism, anticommunism, traditional views on gender and on many social issues, and hostility to politicians. British tabloids often market themselves by launching campaigns around causes they expect to be popular (Harcup and O’Neill 2001). Beyond this populist stance, however, the British tabloids are also intensely partisan. In election periods, particularly, partisanship is more often than not both prominent and explicit, more so than the German *Bild*, which has a right-wing ideological orientation but does not openly campaign for a political party. In the period immediately preceding the 1997 election campaign, for example, *The Mirror* – in most years (though not 1997) the only pro-Labour tabloid – carried the slogan “Loyal to Labour, Loyal to You” on its banner, and on most days devoted the first six or so pages mainly to election propaganda: “MUTINY: 59 top doctors break silence to tell Mirror the NHS [National Health Service] will die if the Tories win this week”; “Tony Blair Answers Your Questions.”<sup>6</sup> Even the page three girl was mobilized in the campaign effort: each day a different “Blair Babe” appeared to say why she was voting Labour. Five years earlier Rupert Murdoch’s *Sun* had claimed credit for the Conservative victory in its famous headline, “IT’S THE SUN WOT WON IT!” (April 11, 1992). Whether the boast was true or not, it represents a strikingly different attitude from North American papers, which deny any influence on the outcome of elections (British papers of course go back and forth, and are often more coy about their political role).

The quality papers are more subtle in their style. But the British broadsheets do employ a more interpretive style of writing than is typical in North American papers.<sup>7</sup> Recent surveys showed 83 percent of British

<sup>6</sup> *The Mirror*, April 28, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> This, at least, is our strong impression from reading British papers. We don’t have the kind of content analysis data we do for U.S. and French papers and do not know of

journalists saying that it was “very or extremely important” for a journalist to “provide analysis and interpretation of complex problems,” while 48 percent of American journalists felt the same (Henningham and Delano 1998: 153). A headline like “Whitehall forgot our debt of honor” (*The Independent*, February 27, 1997, on a story about illnesses of Gulf War veterans), would be much too opinionated to appear on the lead story of a U.S. newspaper of comparable stature, in a story on domestic politics. So would “Brown’s claim to be tough backfires” (the same day, on a report on the reaction of financial markets to statements by the Labour shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer).

The British quality papers also have distinct political identities. This can be seen in the political affinities of their readers. As Table 7.1 shows, the readerships of British national papers—both tabloid and broadsheet—are differentiated politically very much like those of newspapers in the Polarized Pluralist or Democratic Corporatist countries. In 1997, for instance, 57 percent of *Daily Telegraph* and 42 percent of *Times* readers supported the conservatives, as compared with 16 percent of *Independent* and 8 percent of *Guardian* readers. A good example of differing political orientation—outside election campaigns—is provided by the release in 2000 of the Parekh Commission’s report on race in Britain—which provoked tremendous controversy in the press—that focused on an argument in the report that the historic concept of Britain was associated with racial exclusion.<sup>8</sup> None of the major papers supported the report wholeheartedly: as we have seen, the British press shares with other Liberal countries a strong centrist bias, and this report, largely the work of academics, strayed too far from the center for even Labour papers to support. But contrasting interpretations clearly showed the different political orientations in the British press. Table 7.2 contrasts the first few paragraphs of the stories in the *Telegraph* and *Guardian*, October 12, 2000. The *Daily Telegraph* tries to tie the Labour

comparable empirical studies. Semetko et al. (1991: 159–60) found in a comparative study of election coverage that British papers were about twice as likely as American to include journalists’ contextualizing remarks, though the remarks by American journalists were more likely to be directional—usually disparaging toward whatever politician was involved. This is not quite a comparable measure to the one we use in Chapter 5 in comparing French and U.S. media, however.

<sup>8</sup> The conservative midmarket tabloid *Daily Mail* (October 11, 2000) printed on the top of the paper, using the background of the British flag, this attack on the Labor government, a summary of a comment that appeared inside the paper: “The flashy vacuity of the Dome, the trashy icons of Cool Britannia . . . and now the idea that to be British is racist. This is a government that knows nothing of our history and cares about it even less.”

Table 7.1 *Party-Press Parallelism in British Newspaper Readership*

		Party Supported by Readers		
		Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat
Tabloid				
<i>Sun</i>	1997	30%	52%	12%
	1992	45	36	14
<i>Mirror</i>	1997	14	72	11
	1992	20	64	14
<i>Daily Mail</i>	1997	49	29	14
	1992	65	15	18
<i>Express</i>	1997	49	29	16
	1992	67	15	14
Broadsheet				
<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	1997	57	20	17
	1992	72	11	16
<i>The Times</i>	1997	42	28	25
	1992	64	16	19
<i>The Guardian</i>	1997	8	67	22
	1992	15	55	24
<i>The Independent</i>	1997	16	47	30
	1992	25	37	34

Source: Scammell and Harrop (1997: 161). Papers are listed in order of circulation.

government as closely as possible to the report, presenting Home Secretary Jack Straw as backing down because the newspaper forced him to (it shows a picture of its own headline from the previous day – “Straw wants to rewrite our history”). Inside the paper, near the continuation of the story on Straw’s comments, is another story with the headline, “More whites become victims of racially motivated crime.” The *Guardian* by contrast takes at face value Straw’s effort to distance himself from the report and does not suggest that that effort constitutes a “retreat.” It puts the onus for the controversy on the far left rather than the Labour party.

The Liberal Model thus encompasses cases unusually high (Britain) and unusually low (the United States, Canada, and Ireland) in political parallelism in the press sector. Certainly, this suggests that the development of commercial media markets does not automatically eliminate

Table 7.2 *Contrasting Stories on Immigration in the British Press*

<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>
<p><b>Straw beats a very British retreat over race report</b></p> <p>JACK STRAW yesterday distanced the Government from a report on “multiculturalism” that provoked a furious row over what it means to be British.</p> <p>The Home Secretary was forced to repudiate key findings of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, which he launched almost three years ago.</p> <p>Although the commission is not a Government body, the Home Office had welcomed its 400-page report as “a timely contribution” to the debate on race relations.</p> <p>But as controversy deepened over its portrayal of Britishness as “racist” and its call for a “reworking” of British history – as disclosed in <i>The Daily Telegraph</i> on Tuesday – both Mr. Straw and Downing Street dissociated themselves from its conclusions.</p>	<p><b>Be proud to be British, Straw tells left Do not leave patriotism to the far right, urges home secretary</b></p> <p>Jack Straw, the home secretary, yesterday blamed lack of patriotism of the political left for allowing modern British identity to be seen as “narrow, exclusionary and conservative.”</p> <p>Mr. Straw declared himself to be proud to be British and insisted he did not accept the arguments of some on the liberal left or the nationalist right that the idea of Britain as a cohesive nation was dead. The existence of people happy to be known as “black British or Chinese British” demonstrated that “Britishness” had a future.</p> <p>The modern challenge now, said Mr. Straw, was to meld the enormous range of races, accents and attitudes in the country into a single shared identity. “This is made even more difficult by the way those on the left turned their backs on the concept of patriotism and left the field to those on the far right,” the home secretary said.</p>

political parallelism. Why such great differences between the British and North American press? We will look at possible explanations that lie in the realm of political culture later in the chapter. But the differences in market structure already mentioned provide one possible explanation. Just as the competitive national media market in Britain permits segmentation of the market by class, it may also permit segmentation of the market by political affinity, in a way that the local monopoly markets of North America (or the much smaller national media market of Ireland) do not.

Two final points should be made about political parallelism in the British press. The fact that the newspaper market has reflected political

divisions does not mean that it has *accurately* reflected them: since the rise of the Labor Party there has been a strong partisan imbalance, with most of the press – with only the exceptions of the *Mirror*, *Guardian*, and *Independent* – clearly on the political right (Negrine 1994; Curran and Seaton 1997). It may be that this is changing, with the shift of Labour to the right and the shift of some right-wing papers to more “pragmatic” orientations: it may be, in other words, that the partisan dealignment that began in the 1970s and was temporarily reversed, has resumed and will result in the disappearance of political parallelism, though it is too early at this point to draw such a conclusion. The dominance of right-wing papers in Britain is one of the reasons a strong revisionist current arose to contest the view that commercial press means a free fourth estate expressing public sentiment.

The closeness of the press to the political system in Britain is also manifested in more substantial and more party-centered reporting of politics. Semetko et al. (1991) in a comparative study of election coverage in the two countries in the late 1980s, describe British election coverage as “more ample, more varied, more substantive, more party-oriented, less free with unidirectional comment and more respectful” than American coverage (142).<sup>9</sup> These differences they attribute in large part to differences in political culture, which lead British journalists to take a “sacerdotal” attitude toward election coverage, a view that an election is inherently important and journalists have a responsibility to convey what the parties are saying: “the more structured character of the British party system, the clearer ideological character of these parties and the consequent higher degree of politicization of British society as a whole,” they argue, “might place political activity in a relatively higher position in the public’s esteem (5).”<sup>10</sup> The strength of the British party system,

<sup>9</sup> The finding that “unidirectional” comments are more common in the United States than the British press might seem strange given the partisan character of the British press, confirmed by their study. Semetko et al. don’t fully explain this; presumably partisan bias is expressed in many ways that don’t show up in the count of “unidirectional comments,” in headlines, for instance, and in the selection of news and quotations. In the U.S. case, unidirectional comments are not generally partisan in character but reflect the journalists’ attitude of cynicism about politics in general. The general differences they observe between election coverage in the two countries are probably due not only to the strong, more ideological party system but to the strength of public broadcasting in Britain and also, as they note, the fact that professionalized political marketing has developed more slowly there.

<sup>10</sup> Though it might be noted that some surveys show relatively low levels of confidence in political institutions in Britain today, compared with other European countries. See Eurobarometer 55: 7.

and the closeness of the media to that system, is manifested, in other words, not only in external pluralism but also in the fact that news coverage centers more on the parties and their views – Semetko et al. found that the agenda of election coverage followed more closely the parties' own agendas in Britain – and in a generally greater attention to politics. There is some evidence that this “sacerdotal” and party-oriented attitude toward the political world has declined in recent years, in favor of a more American-style coverage driven by journalists' market-oriented judgments of what makes a good story (Franklin and Richardson 2002).

In broadcasting, in contrast to the press, all four countries have strong traditions of political neutrality. To a large extent, this has been a matter of public policy. In Britain, both the BBC and the Independent Television (ITV) companies are bound by requirements for impartiality and balance in news and public affairs. The actual practice of balanced reporting of government and opposition dates from World War II, when Labour was integrated into the government, eventually coming to power on its own in 1945. In the early days of radio Britain was a one-party dominant system and coverage of the Labour opposition was limited (Seaton and Pimlott 1987, ch. 7). During election campaigns, both the BBC and ITV have regarded the formula according to which the free broadcast time was allocated to the parties (e.g., 5:5:4 for Conservatives, Labour and Alliance in 1983) as a guide for election coverage (Semetko et al. 1991: 42–3). British broadcasting also has strongly manifested the “sacerdotal” attitude toward elections, with BBC news expanding the broadcast during election periods, as is the case with public broadcasting in most of Europe.

In the United States, when the initial debates took place over the regulation of radio broadcasting, commercial broadcasters were successful in arguing that they should control the airwaves because they served the public as a whole, while nonprofit stations that institutions such as trade unions, churches, and universities were trying to establish, were characterized as “propaganda” stations, serving particular, sectarian interests (McChesney 1994). Until the mid-1990s the Fairness Doctrine required U.S. broadcasters to provide “balanced” coverage of controversial issues, though the kinds of set political formulas that often govern the allocation of coverage in European systems – especially during elections – did not exist, and journalists exercised more discretion in judging the “newsworthiness” of political events. Market forces have also pushed toward neutrality in U.S. broadcasting just as they did in the press, as we shall

see in the following section of this chapter. The broadcasting market was national and at the same time highly oligopolistic, with three networks competing for the same mass audience. Just as the networks sought the “least objectionable programming” in the realm of entertainment, so in news they had a strong interest in bridging political and ideological differences. They even had to bridge the regional differences that account for much of the modest variation in the political orientations of American newspapers. This stance of political neutrality was generally successful in all four countries in giving the broadcasters a level of prestige and credibility not enjoyed during some periods by newspapers. Frank Capra’s classic *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, produced in the 1930s when newspapers in the United States were still often highly partisan, portrays newspaper owners as political villains, manipulating information to thwart the will of the people. Radio, on the other hand, is portrayed as a source of objective information.

There are signs of change in broadcasting today, connected with the shift toward neoliberalism in broadcast policy and the shift toward a multichannel environment. The Fairness Doctrine, which required “balanced” coverage of controversial public issues and which free-market advocates saw as unwarranted government interference with broadcast content, was abolished in 1987 and highly ideological radio programs, mostly on the right, have proliferated. In television, Rupert Murdoch’s Fox network has established a news division that also seems to be adopting a distinctive, rightward tilt. During the 2003 war against Iraq, both Fox and the radio giant Clear Channel sought to differentiate themselves from market rivals by taking a particularly explicit “patriotic” stance. Republicans and conservatives are overrepresented among Fox News viewers, in contrast to the three traditional networks and CNN, whose viewers are not significantly differentiated politically from the general population (Pew Research Center 2003: 13).

### PROFESSIONALIZATION

Journalistic professionalism is relatively strongly developed in the Liberal countries. Certainly journalism has developed into a distinct occupational community and social activity, with a value system and standards of practice of its own, rooted in an ideology of public service, and with significant autonomy. At the same time, many contradictions in the nature and significance of professionalization emerge when we look at journalism in Liberal systems.