

Chapter 4

Voice

Americans cherish the idea that everyone should be able to express their opinions, whether in the town hall, at the office water cooler, in newspaper opinion pages, in the voting booth, or face-to-face with elected representatives. Indeed, democracy depends on the ability of all citizens to participate in the public dialogue. Without the ability to express viewpoints and have them represented in government, individuals cannot exercise political power to help shape their community and country, nor can they participate fully in the nation's cultural and social life. And without diverse viewpoints, the nation suffers from insularity and fails to reap the benefits of pluralism. Voice is therefore an important element of opportunity. This notion is also embedded in international human rights principles, which the United States was instrumental in shaping. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for example, states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media, and regardless of frontiers."¹

The nation has made progress in expanding voice over the last four decades. A note of great promise was sounded with passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act and enactment of many of the 1968 Kerner Commission's recommendations about the importance of protecting minority voices in the media. However, significant obstacles to full democratic participation and expression remain for many. More ominously, federal deregulation and relaxation of media ownership requirements--and general embrace of the goals of private interests at the expense of the public interest--threaten to reverse some of the gains and protections put in place in the 1970s and 1980s to protect and expand voice. These findings are summarized in Box 4.

Box 4: Has Voice Expanded in America?

Major Gains in Voice

- Although still underrepresented among elected officials relative to their proportions in the general population, women and minorities have made substantial gains over the last three decades in election to local, statewide, and national offices.
- The presence of women and minorities in news organizations has increased over the last three decades, although these groups also remain underrepresented relative to their proportions in the general population.

Areas of Limited or No Progress

- Women continue to be grossly underrepresented as sources in news reporting.
- Communities of color are rarely the subject of news stories; when they are the focus of reporting, the content of these stories remains largely negative.
- The digital divide persists, as rural, low-income, and minority communities continue to lag behind wealthier and better-educated communities in access to and use of digital communications technologies.
- Electoral participation among all groups has declined slightly over the last four decades, and significant gaps in voting persist among racial and ethnic groups; Asian Americans and Hispanics remain disproportionately less likely to vote.

Areas Where Voice has Declined

- The racial and ethnic diversity of radio news organizations declined by almost half

between 1995 and 2005.

- Minority and local ownership of radio, television, and print media has declined in the face of greater corporate consolidation of media and communications outlets.
- Rates of other kinds of political participation such as working for political campaigns or giving money remain low, and are declining for most groups.

About the Data in this Chapter

This chapter reviews trends in voice, and assesses the nation's progress in protecting and expanding expression and political participation. We examine a range of indicators including measures of political participation, diversity in news media, diversity of media ownership, media consolidation, and the digital divide. Sources of data and information include federal data and reports, particularly the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, which regularly surveys a representative sample of Americans to assess voting behavior. We also summarize federal reports on access to communications technology and on diversity among elected federal officials. Other sources are reports by independent research and policy organizations such as the Project for Excellence in Journalism and the American Society of Newspaper Editors, and scholarly research published in peer-reviewed academic journals.

Where data are available, we present trends over time on measures of voice. As with the measures of opportunity presented in other chapters, common limitations of the data persist. Data on trends over time are often not available, are not available for the same time periods across all measures, and are sometimes limited by a lack of data comparability. In most cases trend data are limited by a lack of data on several underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups such as American Indians, Alaska Natives, Pacific Islanders, as well as subgroups of Asian Americans and Hispanics. And data are often lacking on the experiences of low-income communities of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. We urge researchers to compensate for these limitations in the future by focusing on understudied groups.

Political Participation

Voting in the 2004 Election

Voting is a core function in a democratic society and therefore is an important indicator of political voice. Yet the degree of U.S. electoral participation has fluctuated dramatically over the years, both overall and by race, ethnicity, gender, income, and education status.²

The November 2004 elections drew the highest turnout of voters since 1992. Nearly two-thirds of people age 18 and older reported registering to vote, and almost 60 percent reported voting in 2004. This relatively high voter turnout rate was good news, as rates of electoral participation had declined over the last several decades. But the 2004 elections also revealed gaps in electoral participation among racial, ethnic, income and education groups that have persisted over the last forty years, despite a slight narrowing

of some of these gaps over time.³ For example, fewer than three in ten Asian Americans and Hispanics voted in 2004, a rate half that of white non-Hispanics (see Figure 4-1).⁴ Women were slightly more likely to vote than men in 2004 (see Figure 4-2).⁵

Figure 4-1. Reported Voting and Registration of the Total Voting-Age Population by Race and Ethnicity, 2004

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005

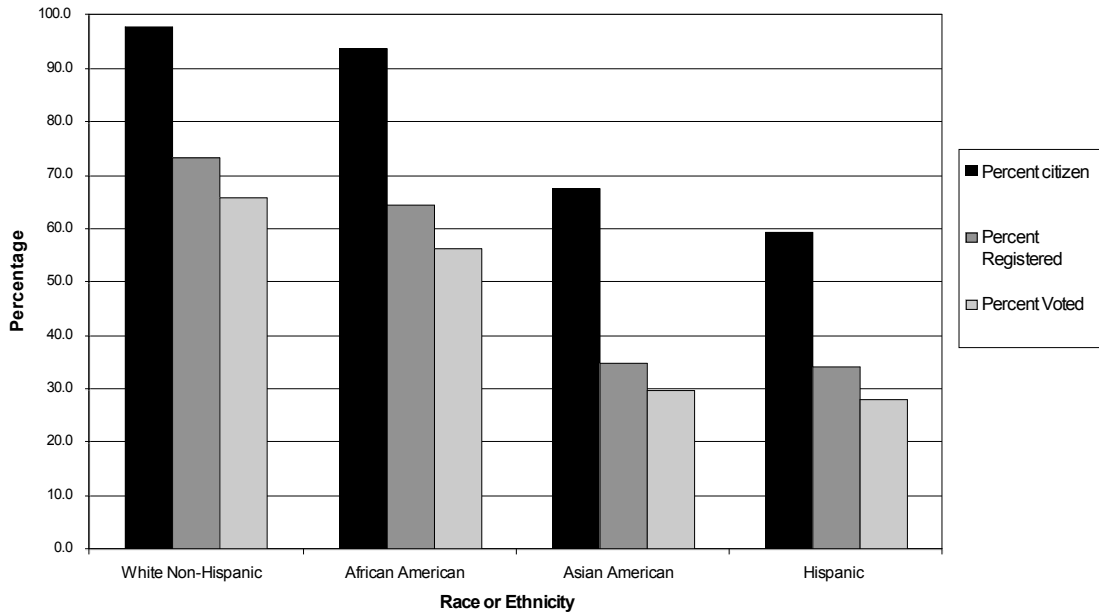
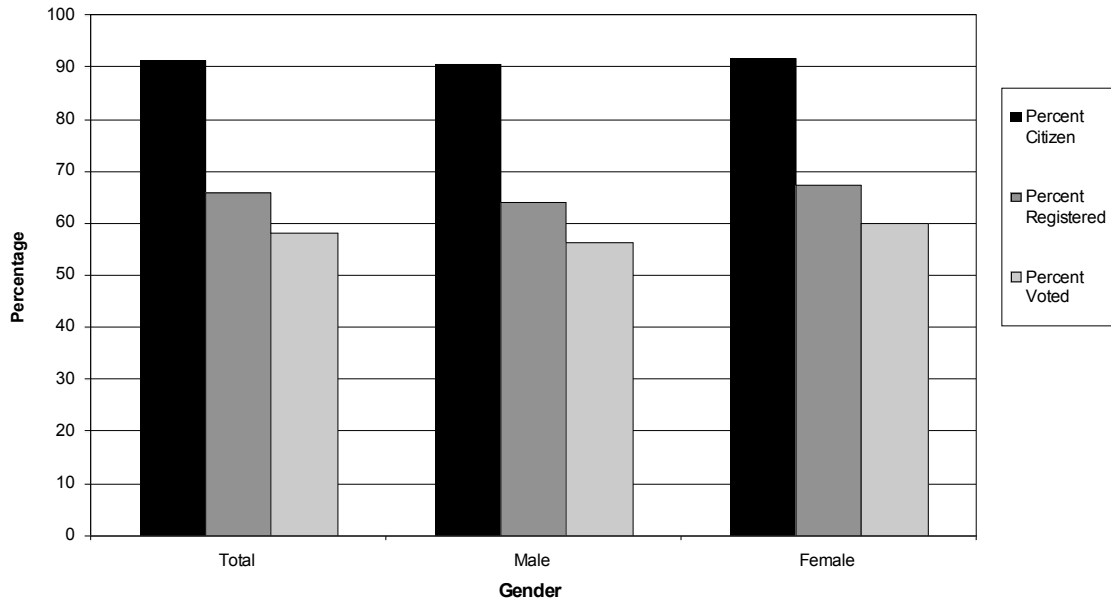


Figure 4-2. Reported Voting and Registration of the Total Voting-Age Population by Gender, 2004

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005



Important differences in rates of voting emerge when gender, race, education, citizenship and income are considered. About 56 percent of African Americans reported voting in 2004. But the gender gap--52 percent of African-American males voted, relative to 60 percent of African-American females--was larger than that for other racial and ethnic groups. By comparison, the gender difference in voting rates for white males (64.5 percent) and white females (67 percent) was much smaller. Hispanics were much less likely to report having voted: Only about 35 percent reported registering and only 28 percent reported voting. This appears largely due to the fact that 41 percent of voting-age Hispanics are not U.S. citizens and therefore were not eligible to vote. By contrast, only 2 percent of white non-Hispanics and 6.3 percent of African Americans reported not being U.S. citizens and therefore not being eligible to vote. Only 25 percent of Hispanic males reported voting, compared to 31 percent of Hispanic females. Asian and Pacific Islander Americans had the lowest level of voting: Only about 30 percent reported voting in 2004 and 32.5 percent of adults reported not being U.S. citizens. Asian-American males were slightly less likely to report voting (29 percent) than were Asian-American females (30.5 percent).⁶

Voting is tied to education for all racial groups. Overall, fewer than 24 percent of people with less than a ninth-grade education reported voting, compared to 52 percent of high school graduates, 73 percent of college graduates, and 77 percent of people with advanced degrees. Family income also contributes to differences in electoral turnout. Reported voting increases with income for all races. About 36 percent of those with family incomes less than \$10,000 reported voting in 1994, compared to 49 percent for those with family incomes between \$20,000 and \$29,000, 68 percent for those with family incomes between \$50,000 and \$74,999, and 78 percent for those with family incomes of \$150,000 and above. The increase in voting rates actually doubles between the lowest income group and the highest income group for whites, Hispanics, and Asian Americans. Among low-income voters, however, African Americans report higher levels of voting than do other racial and ethnic groups.⁷

The Census Bureau's Current Population Survey also asks about reasons for not voting in the November 2004 election. One of the best predictors of not voting was being "too busy, conflicting schedule," which was selected by 31 percent of Asian Americans and 19 percent of white non-Hispanics. Asian Americans were also more likely to report being out of town on election day (12 percent), another example of conflicting schedules. Illness or disability was the most frequent reason for not voting among people age 65 and over (46 percent) and for people with less than a high school education (26 percent), but was also high for African Americans (16 percent) and for white non-Hispanics (16 percent). Registration problems were highest for Hispanics (11 percent) but, surprisingly, were lowest for Asian Americans (6 percent), who are more likely than other racial and ethnic groups except Hispanics to face language and citizenship barriers stemming from recent immigration. Not surprisingly, only 6 percent of white non-Hispanics reported registration problems. African Americans provided the highest percentage of "don't know, or refused to answer" responses (13 percent), and white non-Hispanics reported the highest percentage of "didn't like the candidates or campaign issues" responses (11 percent).⁸

Trends in Voting Over Time

Data on trends in voting behavior over time reveal that registration and voting rates have generally declined since 1964. This trend extends to men and women and to all racial and ethnic groups (see Figures 4-3 and 4-4).⁹ Men were slightly more likely than women to vote until the early 1980s, when women’s rates of electoral participation overtook those of men. Since then, women have been more likely to vote than men. In 2004 this difference reached almost four percentage points, as 56 percent of men voted, compared to 60 percent of women. Racial and ethnic minorities, in contrast, have voted at lower rates than whites, although voting rates among African Americans have generally increased since 1992, narrowing the African-American/white voting gap significantly.¹⁰

Figure 4-3. Percent of Population Voting by Gender, 1964-2004
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005

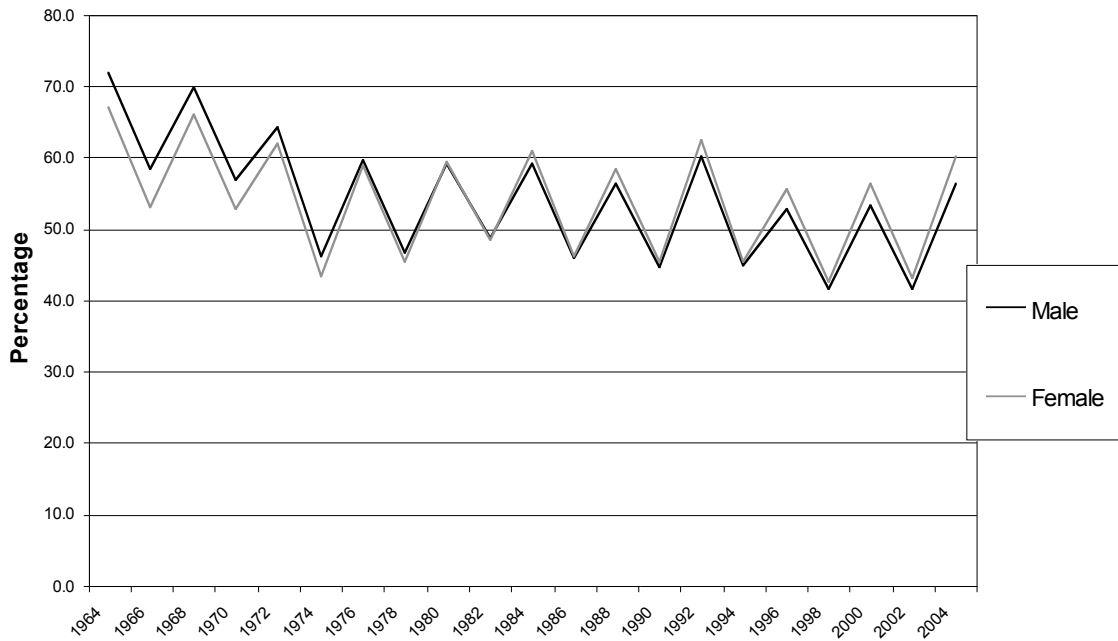
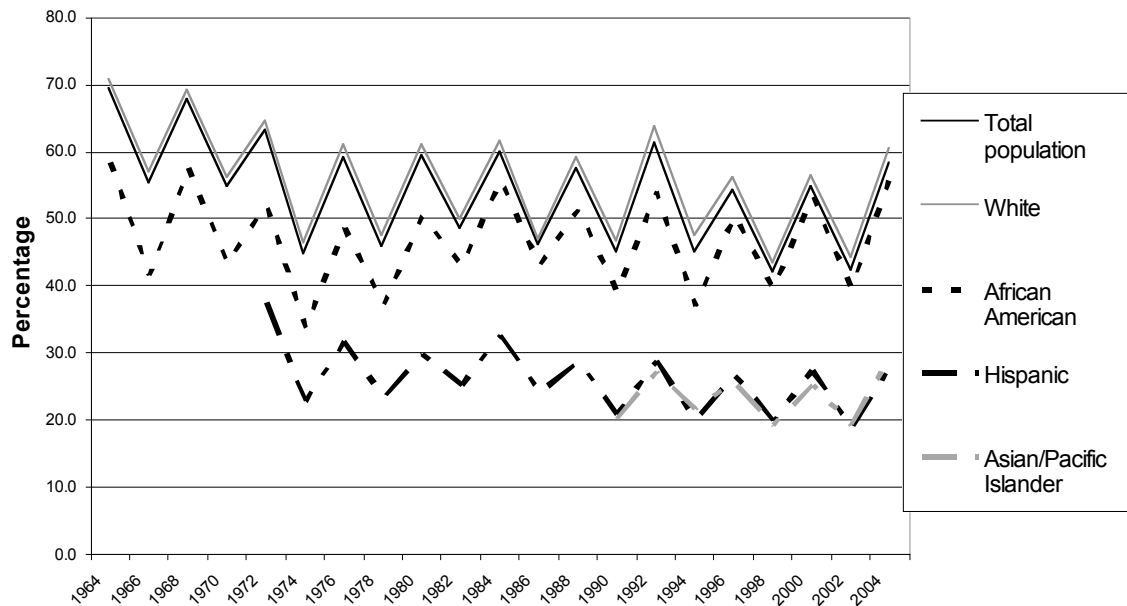


Figure 4-4. Percent of Population Voting, by Race and Ethnicity, 1964-2004

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005



Although not displayed in the figures above, the overall decline over the last forty years in electoral participation extends to almost all age groups. The youngest age group, age 18 to 24, who report the lowest level of voting today (42 percent), reported higher voting rates in 1964 (51 percent). Although people age 18 and 19 became eligible to vote in 1972, they slid to an all-time voter participation low of 16.6 percent in 1998. The youth turnout for the 2004 election (42 percent) marked a large rebound from its 17 percent voting rate in the 2002 election. This contrast is partly explained by the lower voting rates for congressional elections every two years, compared to the presidential elections every four years. Although white non-Hispanics appeared to have the highest voting rate among young people in 2004 (48 percent), this rate was less than that of young whites who reported voting in 1964 (52 percent). In 2004 young Hispanics voted at rates far lower (20 percent) than their highest level in 1972 (31 percent), although their 2004 turnout was far greater than it was in 2002 (8 percent) and 1990 (8 percent). On the other hand, two positive trends emerged among young voters of color in 2004. Nearly one-quarter of young Asian Americans reported voting, which more than doubled their voting rate relative to 1994. And in 2004 young African Americans reported voting at rates as high as those in 1964.¹¹

Rates of voting among African Americans were highest in 1964, when 58.5 percent of the U.S. African-American population cast ballots. This rate declined through the late 1970s, before increasing slightly in the early 1980s. African Americans age 25 to 44 reported higher voting rates in 1964, 1968, and 1972 than in 2004, and those aged 45 to 64 also had higher voting rates in 1964, 1968, 1986, 1988, 1992, 1996 and 2000 than in 2004. African Americans over age 65 voted at rates almost as high as in 2004 (64 percent) as in

2000 (65 percent), which was considerably higher than their 45 percent turnout in 1964, before passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

In 2004 younger Hispanics voted at rates below their rate for 1972 and 1984. In 2004 Hispanics over age 65 increased their voting rate to 46 percent. This figure was much higher than their voting rate of 27 percent in 1972, but lower than their peak of 50 percent in 2000.

Asian Americans were more likely to vote at older age groups in each of the last eight election cycles, and have gradually increased their voting rate over time. But Asian Americans over age 65 remained virtually tied with the low voting rate of Hispanics, before dropping to the lowest rate of 38 percent in 2004.

Other Forms of Political Participation

Voting is the most significant form of political expression in a democracy, but other political activities such as helping political campaigns or making contributions to political parties or candidates are also important elements of voice. Without public engagement in these activities, the political process is likely to be dominated by narrow private interests.

Unfortunately, Americans' level of involvement in political activity, as with voting, has been low and declining slightly over the last three to four decades. With some important exceptions, Americans are less likely to volunteer time or contribute money to political campaigns than they were a generation ago. And although men and women don't vary significantly in these activities, gaps in measures of political activity do exist among racial and socioeconomic groups.¹²

The National Election Studies (NES) database, assembled by the University of Michigan, has tracked public opinion and electoral behavior for a random sample of the U.S. population from 1948 to 2002. The thousands of respondents in this database are representative of a range of demographic groups, including people with different income and education levels, although data on racial and ethnic groups are limited to African Americans and whites. These data reveal large overall declines in activities such as attending a political meeting. Fewer than 6 percent of NES respondents reported attending a political meeting in 2002, compared to 9 percent in 1968. These data reveal minimal differences between men and women and between African Americans and whites on this variable. But people with higher incomes and higher levels of education are more likely to attend a political meeting, although these gaps have narrowed as rates of participation in political meetings have declined overall (see Figures 4-5 and 4-6).¹³

Figure 4-5. Percentage of Respondents Who Attended a Political Meeting by Education Level, 1968-2004

Source: National Election Studies, 2005

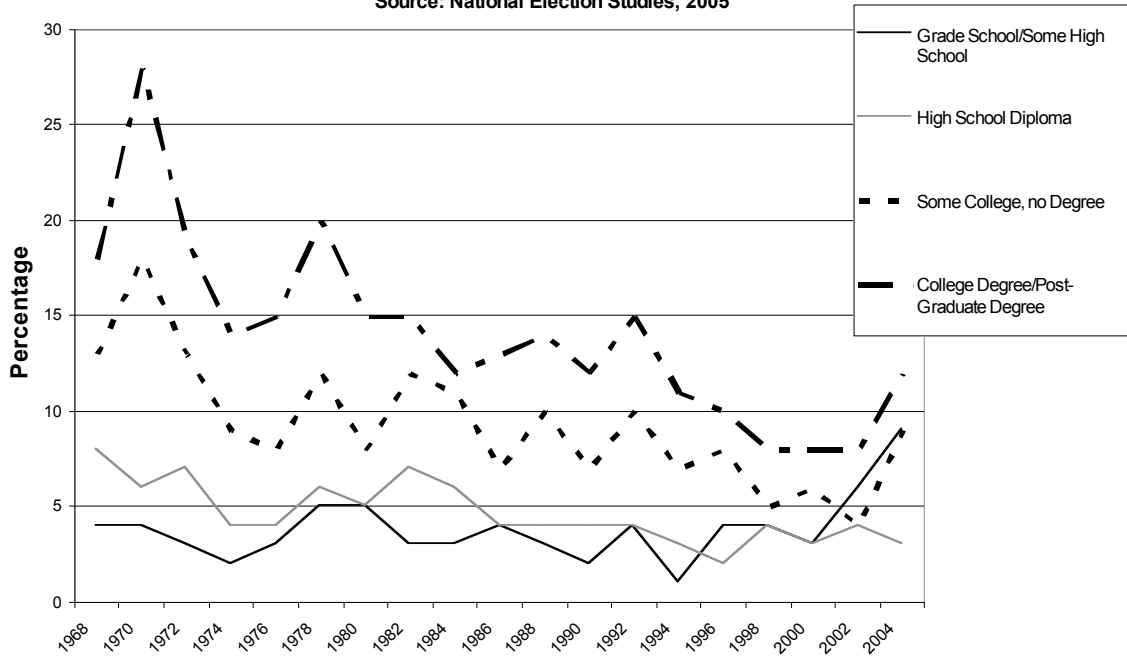
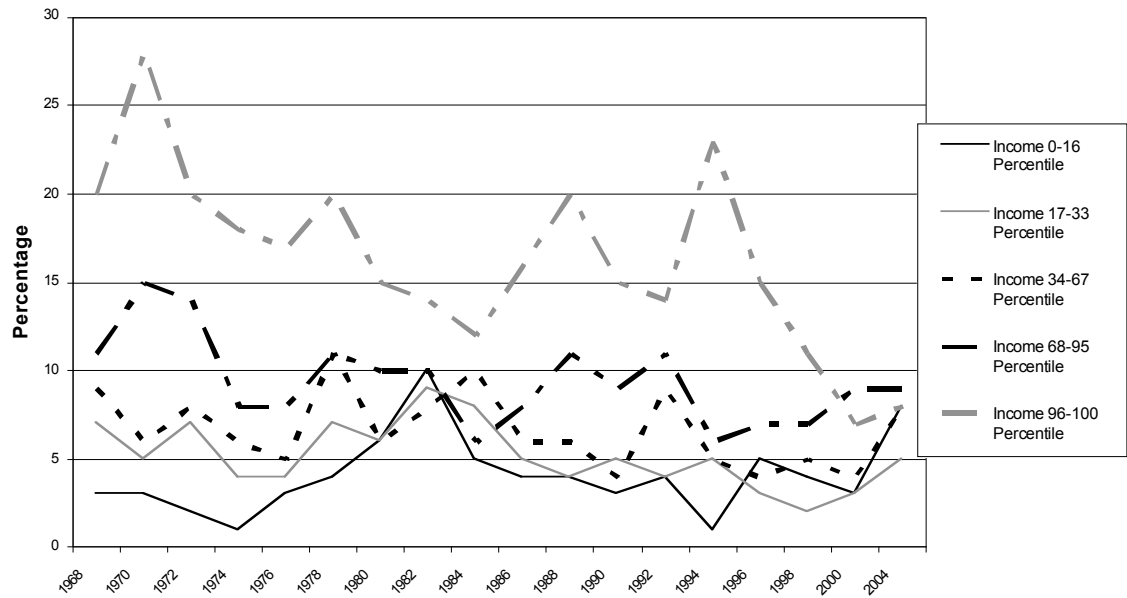


Figure 4-6. Percentage of Repodents Who Attended a Political Meeting by Income Percentile, 1968-2004

Source: National Election Studies, 2005



Note: Data not available for 2002.

Similarly, the percentage of NES respondents who worked for a political campaign is small and has declined over the last thirty years. Both men and women and African Americans and whites volunteered at roughly equivalent levels (not shown). However,

those with lower levels of education and income historically have been less likely than their better educated and better off counterparts to work for political campaigns. However, these gaps reversed dramatically in 2002, when more people with less than a high school degree reported working for political campaigns (see Figures 4-7 and 4-8).¹⁴

Figure 4-7. Percentage of Respondents Who Worked for a Political Party or Candidate by Education Level, 1968-2002
 Source: National Election Studies, 2004

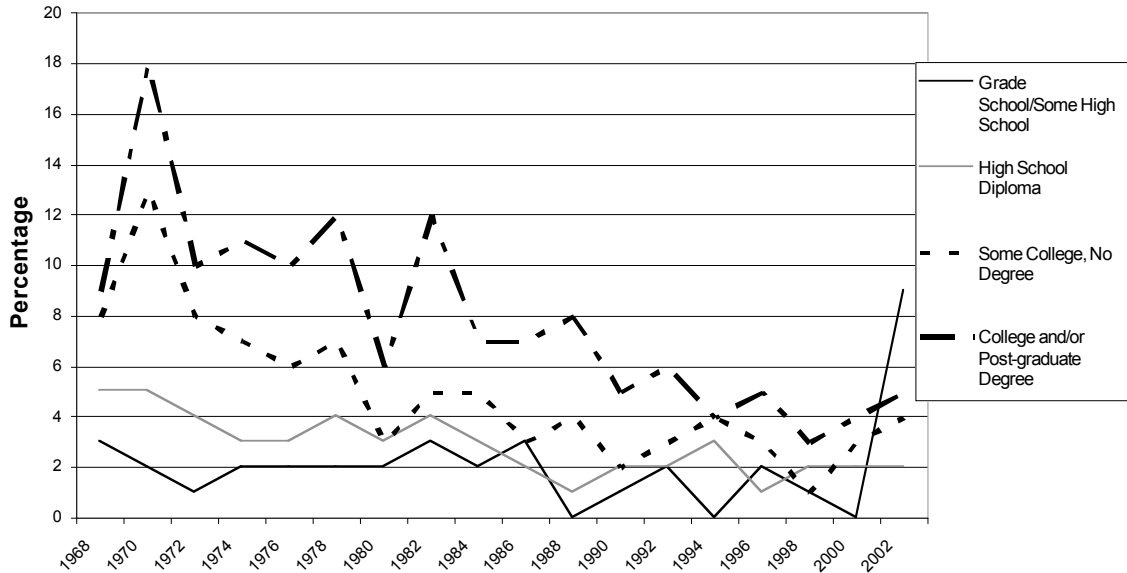
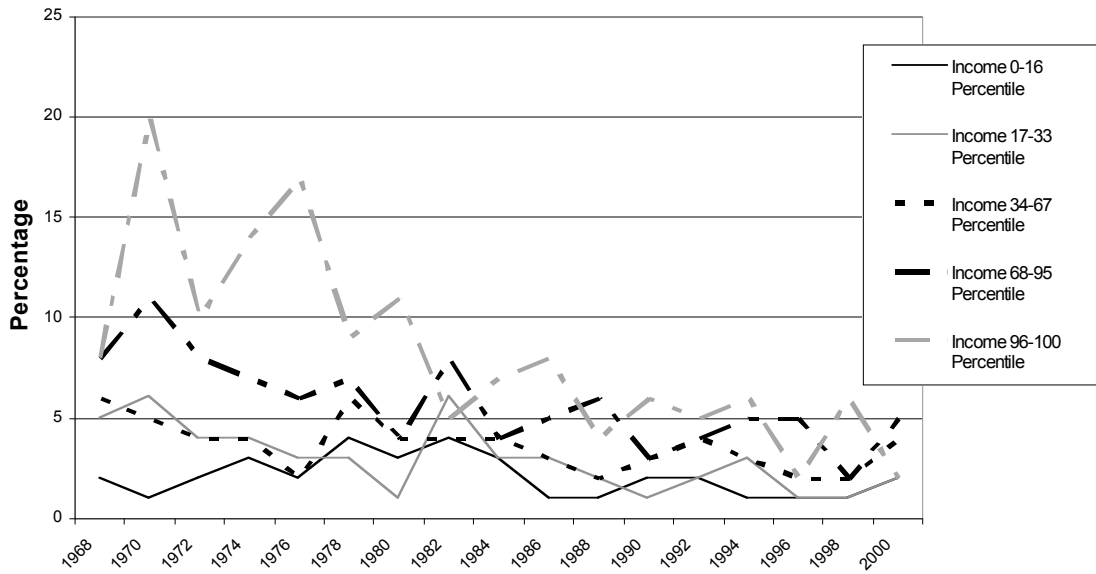


Figure 4-8. Percentage of Respondents Who Worked for a Political Party or Candidate by Income Percentile, 1968-2000

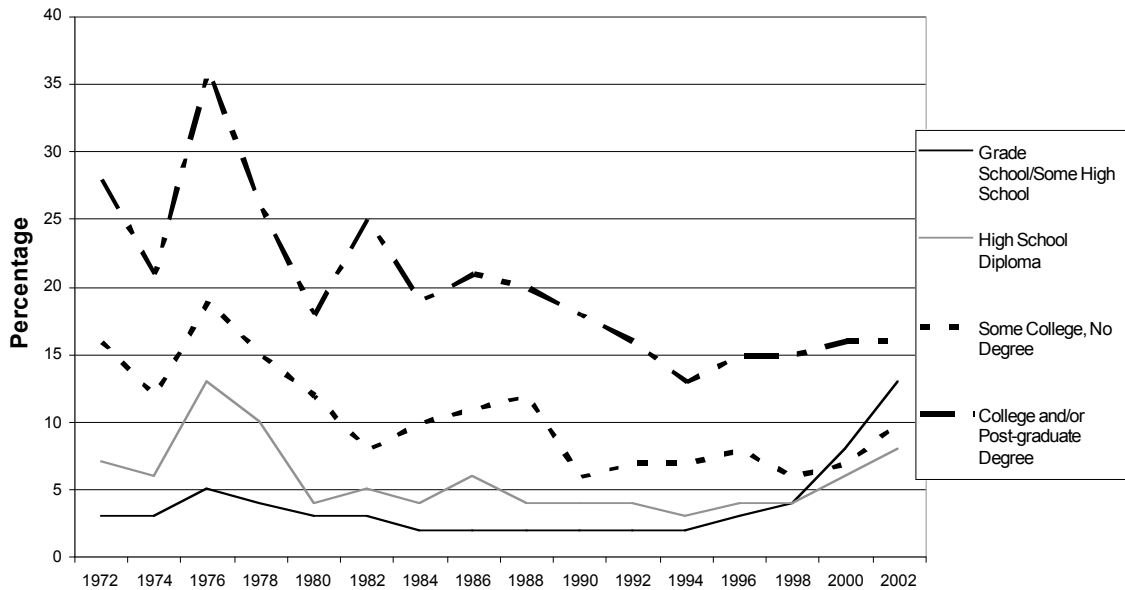
Source: National Election Studies, 2004



People with higher levels of education and income historically have been more likely to report contributing money to a political campaign, although NES data suggest that these trends are shifting dramatically, as individuals with a high school degree or less reported sharply increased levels of political giving in 1998, 2000, and 2002 (see Figure 4-9).¹⁵

Figure 4-9. Percentage of Respondents Who Gave Money to Help a Campaign, by Education Level, 1970-2002

Source: National Election Studies, 2004



It is not clear whether this increase in reported political giving reflects an actual rise in political activity, or is driven by a response bias--a tendency to respond positively or the creation of skewed responses due to elimination of respondents who refuse to answer questions about income level. Other NES data, however, do not suggest high rates of response bias. It is therefore possible that these trends reflect increasing levels of political engagement among groups whose voice is less often heard in the political arena.

Diversity Among Elected Officials

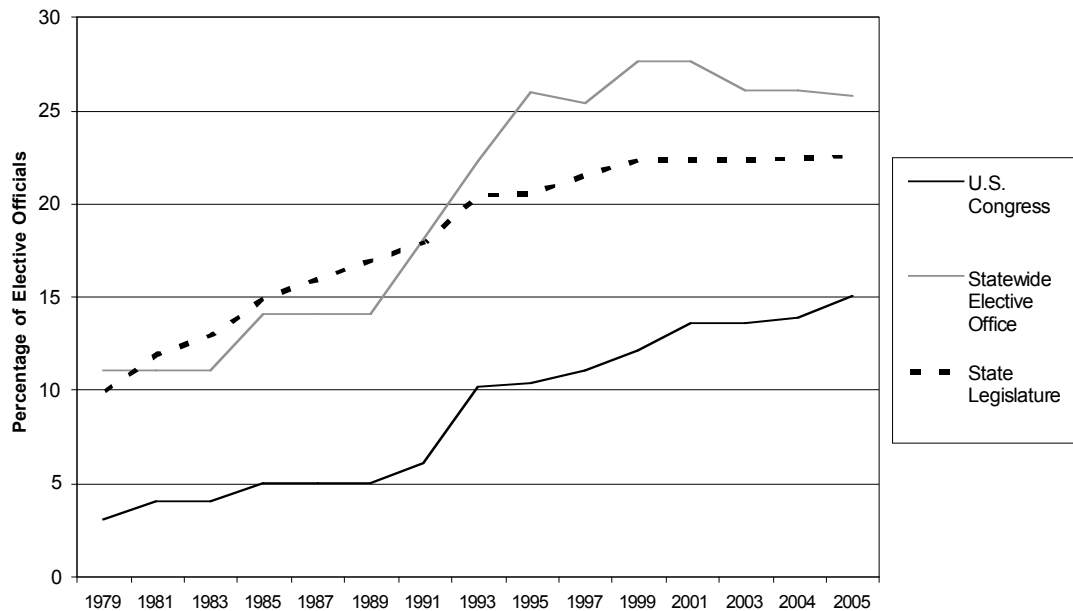
The doors to elective offices are opening for groups that historically have been underrepresented in government. Women and racial and ethnic minorities have made substantial gains in election to local, statewide, and national offices. These gains have been particularly pronounced in the last three decades, when the percentages of women and minority elected officials grew severalfold. However, these groups remain underrepresented in these positions relative to their proportions in the overall population. Moreover, the gains that women and minorities have made in attaining elective office appear to have leveled off in the last ten years, halting progress toward greater inclusiveness in government.

Over the last thirty years women have been elected to local, statewide, and national offices in substantial numbers. More recently, several gender barriers were broken in the 2004 election cycle. Today, 12 of the nation's 100 largest cities are led by women mayors, and over 16 percent of cities with populations over 30,000 are led by women. In six states--Maryland, Delaware, Arizona, Nevada, Vermont, and Washington--women

hold one-third or more of seats in the state legislature.¹⁶ Women hold 15 percent of the seats in the U.S. Congress, and nationally women hold almost 26 percent of statewide elective offices and 23 percent of seats in state legislatures. But these gains still leave women underrepresented relative to the proportion in the overall population. Moreover, as displayed in Figure 4-10, women's gains in attaining elective office in the 1970s and 1980s have leveled off, and in some cases have declined slightly.¹⁷

Figure 4-10. Percentages of Women in Elective Offices

Source: Center for American Women and Politics, 2005

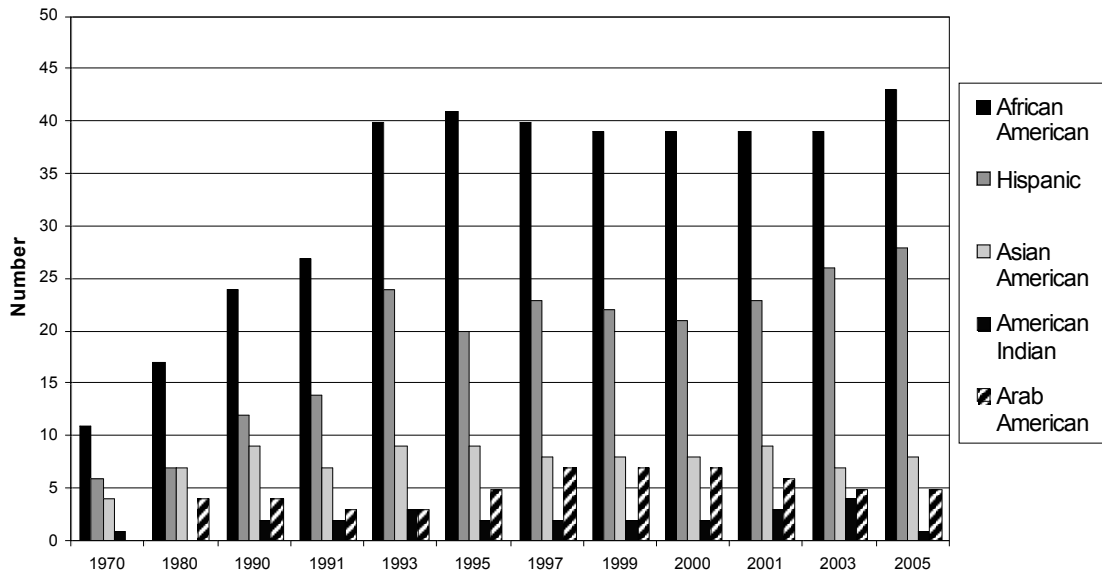


Racial and ethnic minorities have similarly made gains in attaining elective office. African Americans, for example, now hold more than 9,000 elected offices across the nation, six times the number of African-American elected officials in 1970.¹⁸ And Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders now hold over 2,000 elected and appointed positions in 37 states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, and the Mariana Islands.¹⁹

As with women elected officials, however, these gains appear to have leveled off since the mid-1990s. The number of racial and ethnic minorities elected to the U.S. Congress, for example, has remained relatively stagnant since 1993, following a period from 1970 to 1990 in which congressional members of color increased two- and three-fold for most groups (see Figure 4-11).²⁰ And the U.S. Senate has only recently regained an African-American senator, and for the first time includes two Hispanic senators in the same congressional session.

Figure 4-11. Elected Officials in Congress by Racial/Ethnic Minority Group, 1970-2005

Sources: CRS, 2005, and Arab-American Institute, 2005



Diversity in News Media

In the summer of 2005 most American consumers of national broadcast television news received almost daily stories of missing people, but these stories were hardly representative of the thousands of missing person cases that law enforcement confronts each year. In almost all of these stories, the missing individuals were young, white, attractive women. Similar stories involving women or children of color were rarely covered, prompting columnists such as Eugene Robinson and others to observe that “Cable television executives, producers and anchors have decided that viewers will stay glued to the set to hear endlessly about young, photogenic, missing women--but only if they're white.”²¹

Media critics argue that such omissions are to be expected in a ratings-driven environment, where major media outlets compete to be the first to provide a narrow range of content that meets the public’s appetite. But negative consequences can arise from insufficient diversity of news content and attention to the concerns of all communities. A 2001 poll conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, *The Washington Post*, and Harvard University found that a majority of white Americans were unaware of the wide social and economic gap that persists between African Americans and whites. “Whether out of hostility, indifference or simple lack of knowledge,” Richard Morin and Claudia Deane of *The Washington Post* wrote, “large numbers of White Americans incorrectly believe that African Americans are as well off as Whites in terms of their jobs, incomes, schooling, and health care.”²²

Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Diversity in the News Media Workforce

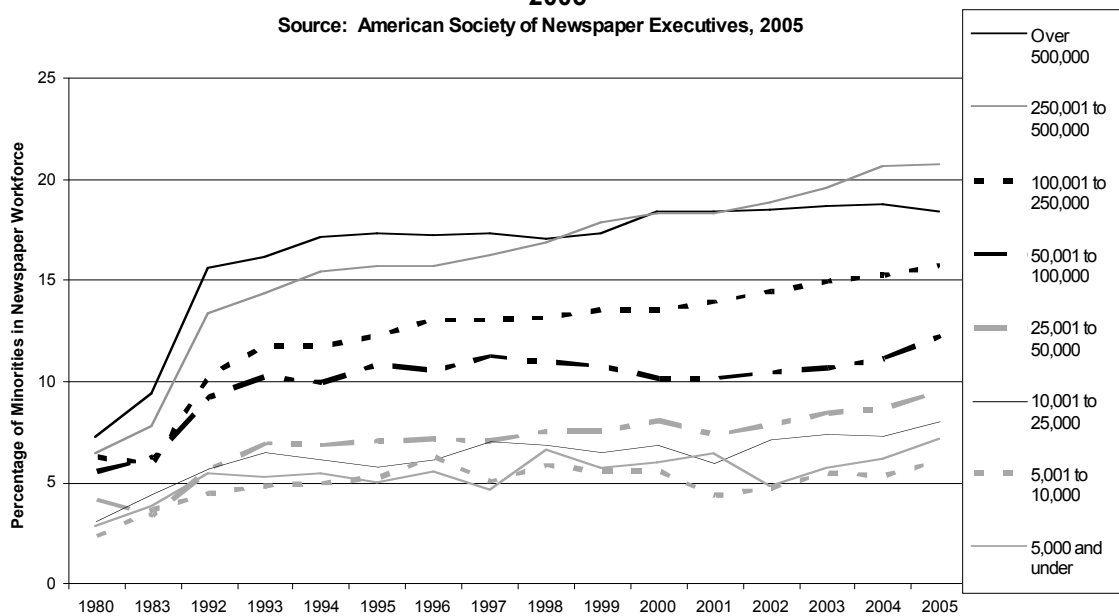
Many factors influence why and how news content is assessed, produced, and delivered. But some factors are likely to be important influences on the extent and quality of diversity in news coverage: the degree of diversity in the news media workforce, particularly at the level of editors, supervisors, and managers; attitudes of the media workforce toward the importance of covering marginalized communities and diversity issues; diversity of media ownership; and the level of commitment of news organizations to serve a public interest mission and present a representative picture of the community.²³ Below we assess part of this equation by reviewing trends in the gender and racial/ethnic diversity of the news media workforce.

Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Diversity in the Print Newspaper Workforce. Have the newsrooms of America's print media, still a major source of news coverage and analysis, despite the growth of electronic media sources, changed over the years? Have they become more or less racially and ethnically diverse? Have women been able to overcome historical barriers to leadership roles? Since 1978 the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation has supported an annual survey of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) to answer these questions. The survey allows comparisons of the racial composition of newspaper staffs to the racial composition of the communities they serve. The ASNE's annual census of newsroom employment, also conducted since 1978, tracks the number of racial and ethnic minorities and women who serve as full-time journalists in daily English-language newspapers nationwide.²⁴ Of the 1,410 daily English-language newspapers surveyed by the ASNE in 2005, 924 responded to the survey--a 66 percent response rate.

Figure 4-12 displays ASNE data on the percentage of minorities in the professional workforce of newspapers in eight circulation categories.²⁵ Minority employment has gradually increased from 4 percent to 13 percent between 1978 and 2005, and diversity has increased across all circulation categories. Diversity is greatest among the mid-size (100,000 circulation) and largest circulation newspapers, and continues to increase modestly in most circulation categories. However, since 2000 this expansion has leveled off and is declining in the largest newspapers (above 500,000 circulation). In fact, almost three-quarters of the nation's 200 largest newspapers experienced declines in the number of minority professionals working in their newsrooms between 1990 and 2004.

Figure 4-12. Minorities as a Percentage of the Professional Workforce of Newspapers in Eight Circulation Categories, Selected Years 1980 - 2005

Source: American Society of Newspaper Executives, 2005



Of all newspapers participating in the ASNE study, only about one in eight achieved ASNE's goal of reaching parity between the paper's professional staff and the community it serves. Nearly two of every five newspapers reported having no minorities among their professional staffs. In ASNE's 2005 survey this latter group included 346 newspapers. Many of these papers are very small and serve majority-white communities. But the survey revealed that several all-white newspapers serve "majority minority" communities, and forty all-white newspapers serve communities where at least 25 percent of the population is non-white. Perhaps of greater concern is the fact that more than half of the 486 dailies that did not respond to the survey had reported in a previous year's response that they had no minorities in the newsroom. This suggests that as many as 44 percent of all newspapers (621 out of 1,410) may have had all-white newsrooms.²⁶

Women have increased as a proportion of the newspaper workforce, but gains have been slow or stagnant in recent years. Published ASNE data do not report the proportion of women in newsrooms prior to 1999. But women have made few gains in proportion to men in newsrooms over the last seven years. Women are disproportionately more likely to serve as copy or layout editors, and are underrepresented among newspaper supervisors and photographers.

Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Diversity in Radio and TV News Broadcasting. As with print news organizations, radio and television broadcast news organizations appear to have achieved peak levels of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in the 1990s. But this diversity has since leveled off and, in some cases, has declined in recent years. These

trends occur when the percentage of U.S. racial and ethnic minorities has increased sharply, far outpacing these groups' representation in the TV and radio news workforce.

The Radio and Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) sponsors an annual survey to monitor the presence of minorities and women in radio and TV news station workforces around the country. The RTNDA's 2005 survey reached all 1,624 nonsatellite television stations and a random sample of 1,509 radio stations. With more than three-quarters of television stations responding, this survey provides one of the most complete assessments of gender and racial/ethnic diversity in the radio and TV marketplace. The RTNDA's surveys began in 1990, and comparable forms of data gauging the progress of women and minorities are available beginning in the mid-1990s. This timeframe therefore only permits an assessment of trends over the last ten years.

Although the representation of women and minorities in television news hasn't changed much over the last decade, the percentage of minorities in radio news has declined since 1998, when the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) suspended rules requiring that all radio, television, and cable broadcast licensees report the participation of women and minorities in the news media workforce. This change came in response to the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in *Lutheran Church Missouri Synod v. FCC*, which held that aspects of the FCC's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) requirements were unconstitutional. In 2000 the FCC reinstated the requirement that broadcasters file annual employment reports, but the agency uses the data only to monitor employment trends and to prepare reports for Congress. It no longer uses the data to ensure that stations are making sufficient efforts to recruit minorities.²⁷

The percentage of racial and ethnic minorities in the radio workforce declined by almost half, from 15 percent to 8 percent between 1995 and 2005. In 2005 over 92 percent of the radio news workforce was white. In contrast, minority representation in television news grew from 17 percent in 1995 to 21 percent in 2005, although the latter figure is much lower than the percentage of minorities in the U.S. population (30 percent). Minority participation rates in the radio and TV news workforce are displayed in Figures 4-13 and 4-14.²⁸

Figure 4-13. Percentage of Broadcast TV News Workforce, by Race/Ethnicity, Selected Years 1995 - 2005

Sources: Papper, 2003, 2004, 2005, and RTNDA, 2000

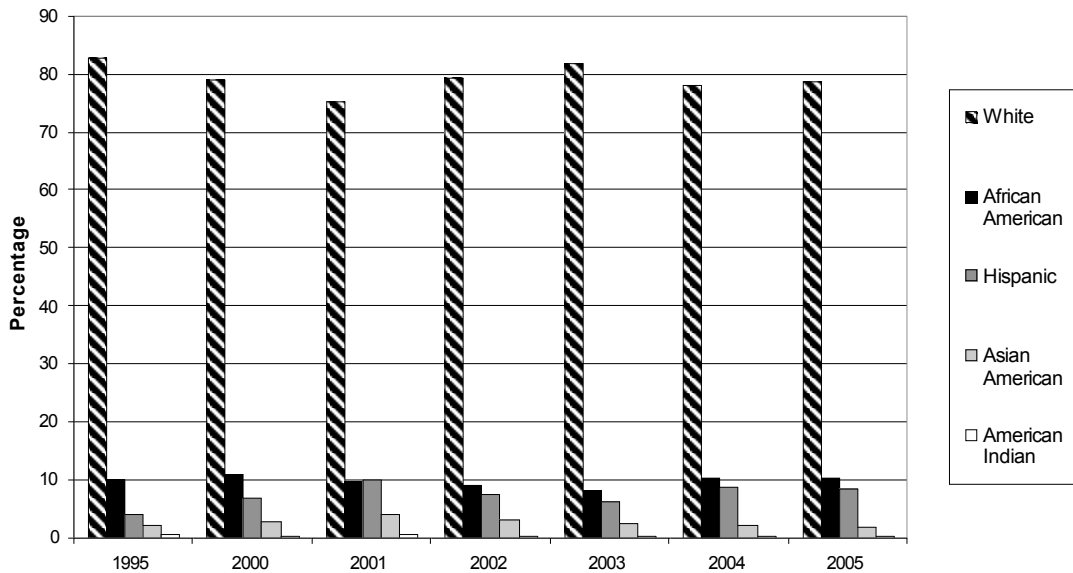
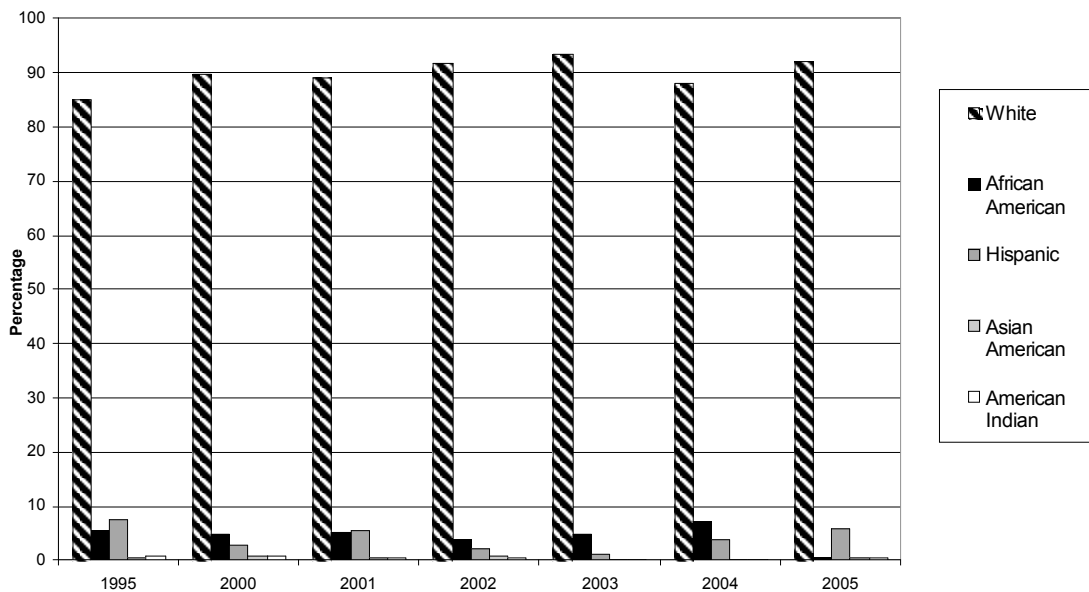


Figure 4-14. Percentage of Broadcast Radio News Workforce, by Race/Ethnicity, Selected Years 1995-2005

Sources: Papper, 2003, 2004, 2005, and RTNDA, 2000

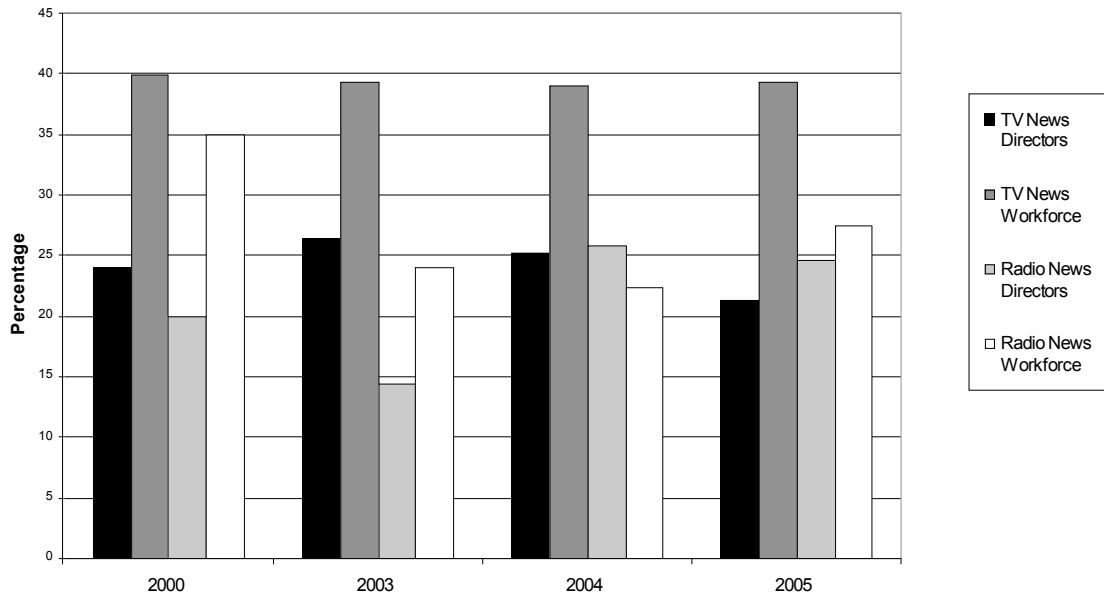


Women made inconsistent gains in the radio and TV broadcast news industry, although published RTNDA data do not track their representation before 2000. A larger percentage of women hold jobs in the television news workforce than in the radio news

industry, but the percentage of women news directors in radio news has surpassed that of television news in 2004 and 2005 (see Figure 4-15).²⁹

Figure 4-15. Percentage of Women in Broadcast TV and Radio News Workforce by Position, Selected Years 2000-2005

Sources: Papper, 2005, 2004, 2003 and RTNDA, 2000



Women and Minorities as Sources for and Subjects in the News

Women and minorities also face barriers to being sources for and subjects of the news media.

Women as News Sources. In a 2005 study of news media sources appearing in more than 16,000 news articles published by 45 news outlets, the Project for Excellence in Journalism found that women are grossly underrepresented as news sources. More than three-fourths of news stories contain male sources, but only one-third include a woman as a source. This disparity extends beyond primary sources--reporters are three times more likely to cite two or more males than two or more females in news stories. Newspapers tend to use women as sources to a higher degree than do other media, as just over two in five newspaper stories contain a female source. Cable network news, on the other hand, tends to overlook women as sources, as fewer than one in five cable news stories contain a female source. Not surprisingly, lifestyle stories are the only type of news story across all news media that tend to feature women as sources: Over half of these stories include female sources.³⁰

Research by the White House Project that was released in 2001 showed that women and people of color are almost absent as speakers on influential Sunday news shows such as *This Week* (ABC), *Face the Nation* (CBS), *Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer* (CNN), *Fox*

News Sunday (FOX), and *Meet the Press* (NBC). The research showed that “while the topics and areas of expertise of the guests may differ, one factor remains constant: the vast majority of guests are white and male.”³¹

Minorities as News Subjects

Minorities are still rarely covered in news media. When they are, coverage tends to be negative, subtly reinforcing racial and ethnic stereotypes. A study commissioned by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, for example, found that of 16,000 stories covered on four network news channels in 2002, only 120 (0.75 percent) were about Latinos. This represented an increase of more than 20 percent from previous years, when only 99 stories were about Latinos. But the proportion of news stories on these networks was far below the 13 percent representation of Latinos in the U.S. population. Two-thirds of the 2002 network news coverage of Latinos involved crime, terrorism, or illegal immigration, and 47 stories involved Latinos as victims or perpetrators of crime.³²

Negative media depictions of poverty are inextricably linked to notions of race. For example, although African Americans represent only 29 percent of poor Americans, 65 percent of poor Americans shown on television news in 2002 were African American.³³ TV news, where most Americans get their news, reinforces negative racial stereotypes more than other news media. As media scholar Robert Entman has noted, “scientific surveys designed to measure racist attitudes suggest a connection between exposure to television news and the extent of anti-black racism in the public.”³⁴

Diversity of Media Ownership

For many of the same reasons that diversity is important in the news media workforce, diversity of media ownership has been a national goal, as expressed in U.S. Supreme Court rulings, policy, and law. As former U.S. Department of Commerce secretary Norman Mineta has stated,

For almost a century, we have promoted diversity of independent editorial viewpoints and guarded against undue media concentration. We have labored to prevent the potential monopolization of the marketplace of ideas, to protect the needs of local communities, and to promote the free exchange of diverse viewpoints and information. We have supported policies that would increase opportunities for minorities, women, and small businesses to participate fully in the broadcast industry.³⁵

Since 1990 the National Telecommunication and Information Administration (NTIA) has collected data on minority ownership of commercial radio and television stations. But since 2000 it has not reported these data publicly, as had been the Commerce Department’s practice. This decade-long view does not fully capture how minority ownership has fared in the forty years since federal efforts were initiated to increase ownership opportunities for minorities. But it does provide a glimpse into the challenges and opportunities for increasing media ownership diversity.

According to NTIA data, minority broadcasters owned almost 4 percent (449) of all commercial radio and television stations in 2000, compared to almost 3 percent in 1991. Minority ownership has therefore remained dismally low. Moreover, about half of the increases captured in the NTIA data are due to improvements in the methodology used to identify minority owners.³⁶

A comparison of commercial radio and TV station ownership shows that minority ownership is more prevalent in the commercial radio industry. In 2000, 175 minority broadcasters owned 426 stations, a sharp increase from the 305 minority-owned stations in 1998. (About half of this increase, however, is due to better methods for identifying existing owners.) Only 23 television stations were owned by minorities in 2000, less than 2 percent of the nation’s 1,228 stations. Just five years earlier--prior to passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which increased incentives for consolidation of media ownership--minorities owned 38 television stations. The number of both African-American- and Hispanic-owned TV stations declined significantly between 1996 and 2000 (see Figure 4-16).³⁷ On the other hand, ownership of radio stations increased among all racial and ethnic groups, with the sharpest increase occurring among Hispanic-owned stations (see Figure 4-17).³⁸

Figure 4-16. Minority-Owned TV Stations, 1990-2000
 Source: National Telecommunications and Information Agency, 2000

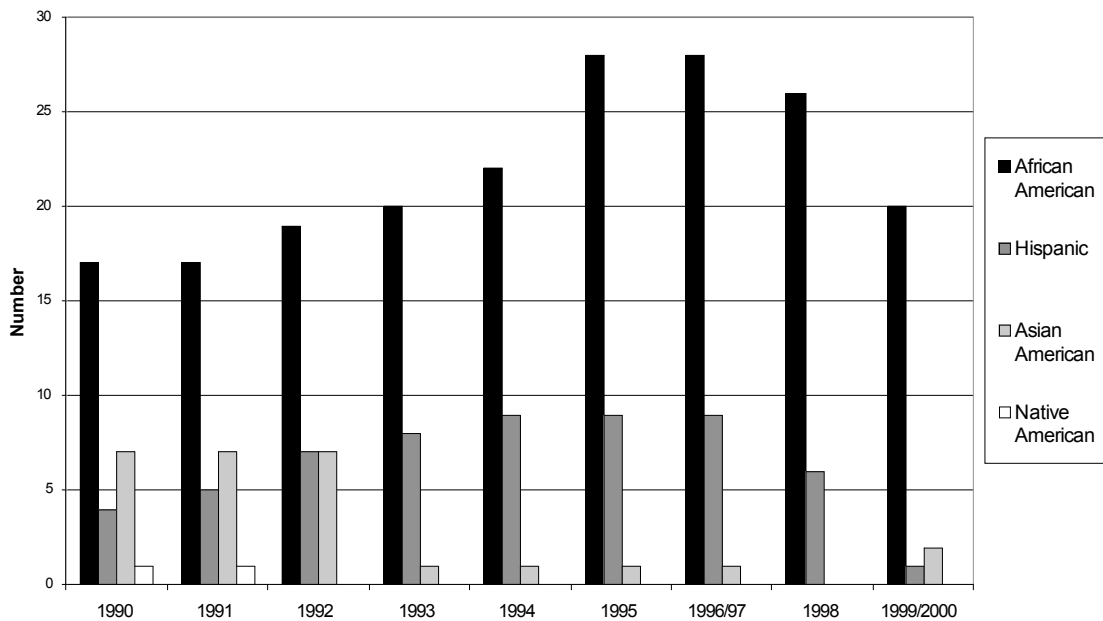
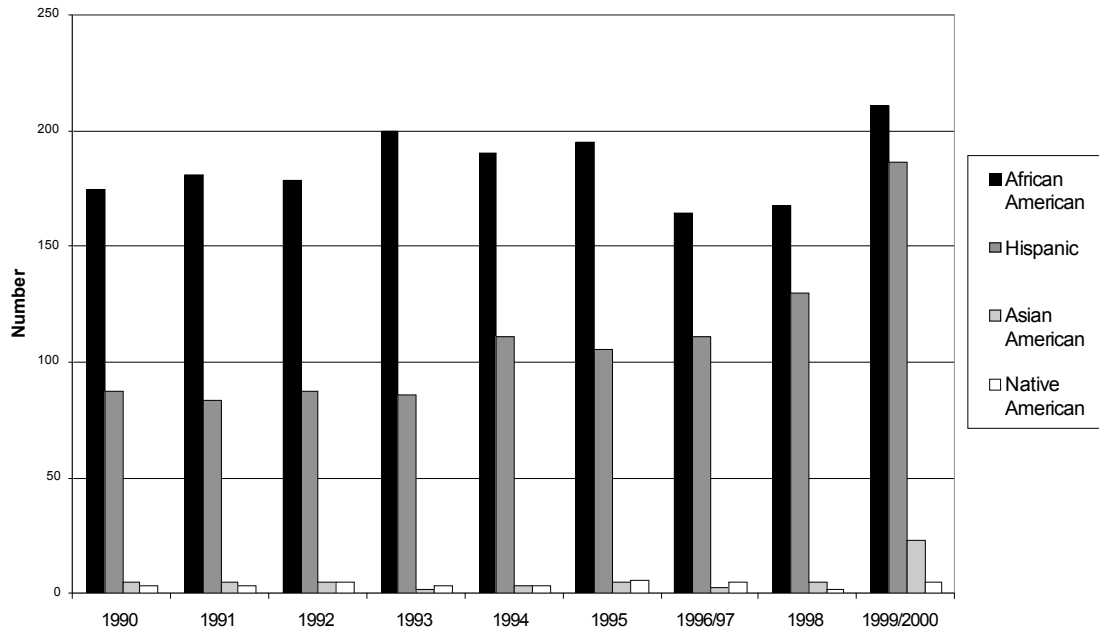


Figure 4-17. Minority-Owned Radio Station Ownership, 1990-2000
 Source: National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 2000



The link between minority ownership and diversity of content has been established in several studies, which find that minority-owned media tend to produce more content focused on the interests and concerns of minority communities. In 1988 the Congressional Research Service analyzed FCC media ownership data and concluded that minority-owned outlets tended to feature a higher degree of programming directed to a range of minority groups.³⁹ More recently, the FCC issued a series of reports that evaluated program content and ownership, concluding that minority-owned radio stations (and to a lesser extent, television stations) tend to produce content that appeals to minority interests and delivers more news and public interest programming relevant to minority communities.⁴⁰

Although minority media ownership remains low, ethnic media outlets play a prominent role in providing news content to diverse communities. A survey conducted by New California Media (now New American Media) of nearly 2000 racial and ethnic minority households found that 45 percent of African-American, Hispanic, Asian-American, Native American, and Arab-American adults prefer ethnic media to their “mainstream” counterparts. Ethnic media are a primary news source for 29 million U.S. adults of color and reach another 22 million on a regular basis. More than half of the Hispanic adults surveyed indicated that they are primary consumers of ethnic media. And about 40 percent of African Americans and Arab Americans and one-fourth of Asian Americans and Native Americans indicated a preference for ethnic media.⁴¹

Media Consolidation

With the growth of communications technology, Americans have witnessed a dramatic expansion of media sources. Today there are more media outlets than ever before. But mass media organizations have consolidated at a rapid rate since passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, a trend that has alarmed policymakers across the political spectrum.⁴² At issue is whether consolidation undermines the public interest by concentrating decisions about media content in the hands of a small number of corporations. In an increasingly competitive corporate market, this concern is not trivial: Today, six corporations (General Electric, AOL Time Warner, Disney, News Corporation, Viacom, and Bertelsmann) control more than 90 percent of media content in North America.⁴³

How might this trend affect the ability of diverse communities to express themselves and access independent content? Critics of media consolidation raise several concerns, arguing that consolidation limits the diversity of media opinions and voices; increases the likelihood that commercial and market forces will dictate media content; reduces local interest and public affairs content; and squeezes out smaller, independent voices, which are more likely to include minority community perspectives.⁴⁴

The Telecommunications Act of 1996, which eased ownership rules, preceded a decline in minority-owned television stations, as noted above. In its 2000 report on minority ownership, the NTIA found that over 61 percent of minority-owned commercial radio and television stations were stand-alone operations, which are less likely to be able to compete with larger group owners. At the same time, the number of media owners declined nationally. From March 1996 to November 1997, for example, the number of radio station owners declined by almost 12 percent, while the number of radio stations grew by 2.5 percent.⁴⁵ In many communities, far fewer radio licensees compete against one another, thus squeezing smaller competitors. The NTIA found that minority-owned stations were less likely to be part of a duopoly (two or more stations of the same type in the same market), and were less likely to participate in a local market agreement. The agency concluded that “consolidation still threatens the survival of most minority owners.”⁴⁶

The Digital Divide

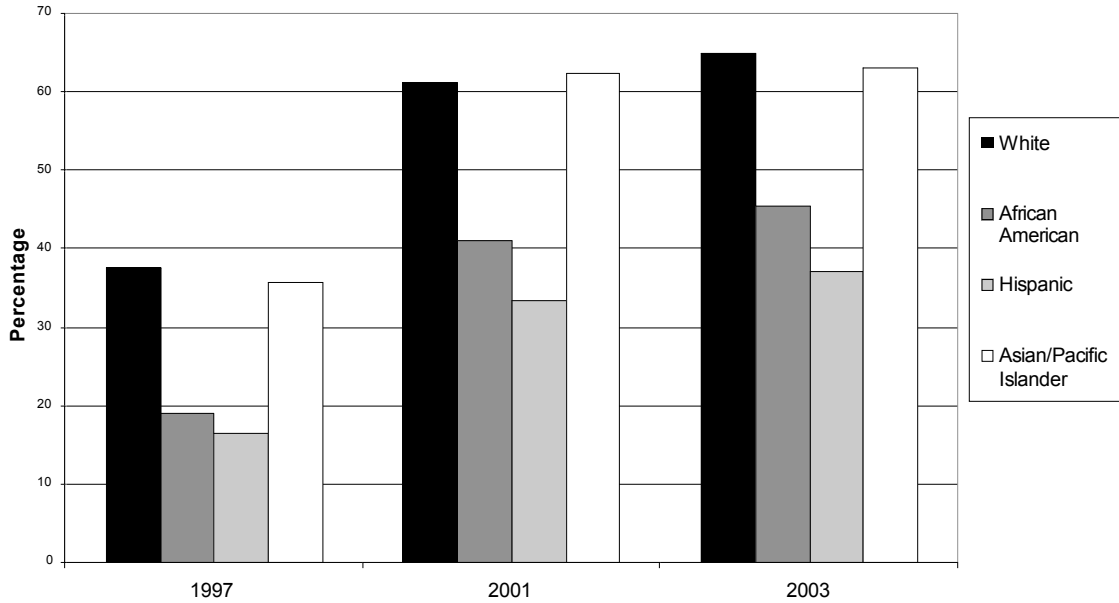
The gap in different demographic groups’ access to new communications technology such as broadband high-speed Internet, dubbed the “digital divide,” has drawn significant national attention. Concerns surround the fact that some new technologies are also public resources that are vital for democracy and free expression, full participation in the nation’s growing electronic and high-tech economy, and access to vital educational and other information resources.⁴⁷

Data on access to and use of new technology dates back only a decade, therefore limiting our ability to analyze trends. But these data show that lower income households, racial and ethnic minorities, and households in rural areas are less likely to access the Internet--

at home, work, school, or public library. For African Americans and Latinos, this gap was larger when Internet technologies began to explode in the mid-1990s, and it has narrowed slightly (see Figure 4-18).⁴⁸

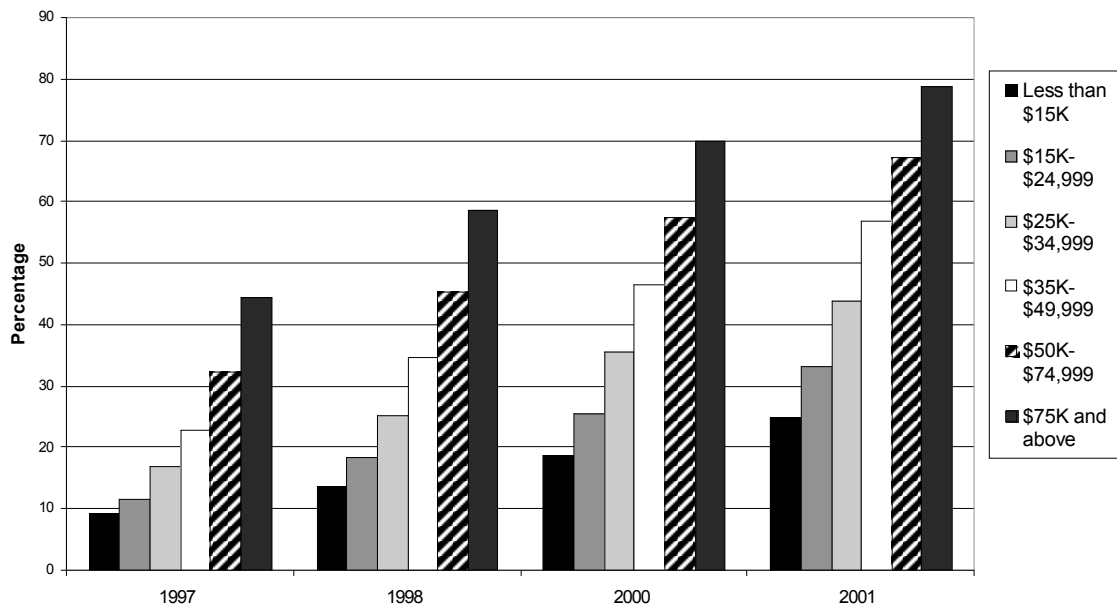
Figure 4-18. Internet Use from Any Location by Race/Ethnicity, 1997, 2001, 2003

Source: National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 2000 and 2004



Digital gaps among income groups remain large but have decreased slightly. Households earning less than \$15,000, for example, were more than four times less likely than those earning \$75,000 or more to have Internet access at home in 1997. By 2001 this gap closed to the point where households earning less than \$15,000 (in adjusted dollars) were slightly more than three times less likely to have Internet access at home (see Figure 4-19).⁴⁹

Figure 4-19. U.S. Households with Internet Access by Income
 Source: National Telecommunications and Information Agency, 2000 and 2004



How Can the Nation Expand Voice?

This analysis suggests that many factors influence the diversity of voices that participate in the national discourse. Deregulation and its sequel, media consolidation, threaten to absorb or push smaller, independent media stations out of major markets. Ownership of major media outlets is increasingly in the hands of a small number of international communications corporations. Broadband Internet will be vital to future educational and commercial applications, yet many marginalized communities lack access, and racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic divides in access persist. Moreover, political participation such as voting and contributing time and money to campaigns remains low among Americans overall. Racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic divides contribute to this low rate of political involvement.

Several opportunity strategies hold promise for enhancing Americans' voice in the public discourse and in public decisionmaking.

Electoral and Political Participation

Ensuring and expanding political participation among diverse groups remains a highly partisan and controversial issue. However controversial, all sides agree that the nation should strive toward greater engagement in the political process.

Equal access to the vote, however, continues to be impeded by problems caused by geographic and language barriers, faulty voting equipment and infrastructure,

inadequately trained poll workers, state laws disenfranchising ex-felons, and other state and federal policies that disproportionately limit voting among marginalized groups. In the wake of the disputed 2000 election, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights identified 18 barriers to electoral participation that disproportionately affect communities of color and other marginalized groups. Some of the barriers identified by the commission include:

- Considerable state and local variability in the quality of voting equipment, voter identity verification standards, sample ballots, and use of absentee ballots;
- Lax or non-existent enforcement of federal voting rights laws;
- Early registration deadlines;
- Restrictive hours of polling stations for voting; and,
- Inaccessible and/or overburdened polling stations.⁵⁰

These structural problems, coupled with a growing sentiment among the general public that government is beholden to narrow, well-heeled interests at the expense of grassroots voices, contribute to worsening problems of voice and expression in the nation overall and for disenfranchised groups.

Voting infrastructure must be improved by universally employing new technologies such as direct record electronic voting systems, which offer more accurate vote counts, ballot screens in multiple languages, and low error rates. Mechanisms for public accountability such as printed voter ballots should be incorporated into these systems.⁵¹ Voter education programs can help familiarize new voters with registration and voting processes. Similarly, training poll workers and recruiting multilingual poll workers can improve local jurisdiction compliance with federal and state voting rights laws, particularly language assistance provisions.⁵²

Barriers to voting must be addressed by establishing minimum federal standards for voting procedures and equipment; providing federal funds to help local jurisdictions improve training, equipment, and polling stations; improving voting rights laws enforcement and placing jurisdiction for review of complaints within the U.S. Department of Justice; easing voter registration requirements; establishing uniform nationwide voting hours; creating federal guidelines for verifying voter identity; restoring voting rights of people who have previously served time in prison; and assisting new Americans in obtaining the right to vote.⁵³

Finally, vigorous enforcement of the Voting Rights Act and full implementation of the Help America Vote Act are essential to ensuring equal access to electoral participation.

Diverse Media Ownership

Today's radio and television stations are less likely to be locally owned and operated than at any previous time in the modern communications age. Large multinational corporations have control over the vast majority of media content. Until recently the federal government exercised oversight of the communications and broadcast media

industries to ensure that they served the public interest. But deregulation and consolidation of several large media and telecommunications industries have resulted in diminished opportunity for independent and minority-owned media to gain a foothold.

In 1995 Congress eliminated the FCC Minority Tax Certificate program, which provided tax incentives to encourage minority ownership of broadcast and cable properties. During the program's fifteen years of operation, more than 360 media outlets were acquired by minority operations--including 288 radio stations, 43 TV stations, and 31 cable systems. Only 40 of 8,500 broadcast stations were owned by minorities prior to the policy's enactment.⁵⁴

Encouraging diverse ownership is an important public interest goal that is reflected in law, policy, and judicial rulings. The U.S. Supreme Court's 2003 decision in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, upholding the consideration of racial diversity in admission at the University of Michigan Law School, reaffirmed that carefully crafted consideration of race and gender is permissible in pursuing the compelling government interest in diversity. A new federal tax incentive program is needed that provides modest incentives for sellers of communications outlets, to defer capital gains taxes when franchises are sold to minority investors. As with the former tax certificate program, such a policy provides an unobtrusive, revenue-neutral means of helping minority investors compete in a market that is tilted against them because of rising station prices and a lack of access to capital.⁵⁵ Other policies such as expanding the FCC's Distress Sale Policy, which allows broadcasters to sell properties to minority investors at reduced rates, must be explored.⁵⁶ Such policies are a means of balancing private market interests with those of the communities that own a share of the public infrastructure with which broadcasters are entrusted. Moreover, the FCC should resume public reporting of data on minority and women-owned broadcast and cable properties. This practice, which was discontinued in 2001 after ten years of data collection and reporting, is important to assess whether diverse viewpoints are adequately represented, and whether the interests of diverse communities are being met.

Digital Divide

The explosion of new communications technologies has coincided with a dramatic policy shift in Washington, one that assumes that market forces will increase access to digital technology by fostering competition that will reduce costs and improve quality. New policies adopted by the FCC reflect this philosophy, yet connectivity costs remain high and many Americans continue to lack access to digital technology, particularly broadband. Penetration of Internet access into U.S. households has stagnated, and the United States has fallen behind internationally in broadband adaptation.⁵⁷ Broadband is not simply a luxury that should be available to those who can afford it. It is a tool with "special transformative power" that is increasingly important for participation in new economic and educational opportunities that will become less available via narrowband connections.⁵⁸ Broadband and other advanced technologies should be classified as telecommunications services that provide essential functions. They therefore should be subject to a universal service policy that encourages true competition and extends access

as broadly as possible. Federal programs such as the Technology Opportunities Program and the Community Technology Centers Program have provided innovative community-based technology and infrastructure support to improve nonprofits' use of telecommunications and digital network technologies. These programs have also promoted model educational technology programs, and have had a special focus on inner city and rural underserved areas. But they have also been slated for elimination in federal budgets.⁵⁹

Media Democracy

All of the trends noted above--the growing rate of media consolidation, increasing privatization of public communications resources, and dampening of federal incentives to encourage diverse media ownership--threaten to limit public voice. They therefore require greater government vigilance in order to protect the public interest and stimulate greater civic and democratic uses of media and communications technology.

Media democracy advocates have advanced ideas such as electronic or "dot-commons" policies, which would protect public interest programming in the same way that the non-profit sector is promoted through tax-exempt status and charitable contributions. These policies are built on the principle that the civic sector should flourish online, just as civic interests are protected in other electronic media.

Finally, new technologies to use the electromagnetic spectrum portend an explosion of new applications such as "third generation" wireless telephone services, and therefore growth in new commercial enterprises. These technologies will use the public airways and therefore should be managed so that the public interest is protected. Some policy organizations have called for a portion of the proceeds from spectrum auctions to be devoted to public interest use. As digital technology increases the application and use of the spectrum, some portion of use should be set aside for open, community-access communications systems or for other civic and public interest uses.⁶⁰

¹ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, December 1948, <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html> (23 August 2005).

² The U.S. Census tracks reported registration and voting for a representative sample of the U.S. population by race and ethnic origin, age, gender, education level, and family income. This is collected in the November supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS). CPS figures routinely overestimate voter registration and turnout when compared to official voting statistics. The discrepancy is due to an understatement of total votes cast as ballots are invalidated in the country (and thus thrown out) and an overreporting of voting as respondents may exaggerate about carrying out their civic responsibility. The Census Bureau estimates that the overestimate has varied between 6 percent and 12 percent of the total number of people reported as voting in the official tallies tabulated by each state's board of elections and reported to Congress by the Clerk of the House. Nevertheless, CPS data are among the most reliable indicators of political participation, and they reveal the influence of many social determinants of voting behavior.

³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Reported Voting and Registration, by Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Age, for the United States" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, November 2004).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. These data must be interpreted with caution, as a sizeable percentage of each racial group that reported voting did not disclose family income, including 54 percent of whites, 40 percent of African Americans, 27 percent of Asian Americans, and 23 percent of Hispanics.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Data on Asian Americans was first tracked in 1990, Hispanic data was first tracked in 1972. Census data on race before 1970 focused primarily on whites and African Americans. Citizenship was not tracked by the Census for any groups until 1976. The distinction between white and white non-Hispanic was not made until 1978.

¹⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Time Series Tables, Table A-1, "Reported Voting and Registration by Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Age Groups," 2005, www.census.gov (13 September 2005).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² National Election Studies, www.umich.edu/~nes/index.htm (13 September 2005).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Center for American Women and Politics, "Women in Elective Office, 2005," www.cawp.rutgers.edu (31 August 2005).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ D.A. Bositis, *Black Elected Officials: A Statistical Summary, 2001, 2003*, www.jointcenter.org/publications1/publication-PDFs/BEO-pdfs/2001-BEO.pdf (23 July 2005).

¹⁹ UCLA Asian American Studies Center and the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, *National Asian Pacific American Political Almanac 2005-06, 2005*, www.sscnet.ucla.edu/aasc/change/pamay17.html (13 September 2005).

²⁰ Congressional Research Service, *Membership of the 109th Congress: A Profile*, May 2005, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/49078.pdf> (15 August 2005); Arab-American Institute, *Roster of Arab-Americans in Public Service and Political Life 2004*, August 2005, <http://www.aaiusa.org/PDF/2005%20Roster.pdf> (2 September 2005).

²¹ E. Robinson, "Cable Can't Get Beyond the Pale," *The Washington Post*, 12 August, 2005.

²² R. Morin, "Misperceptions Cloud Whites' View of Blacks," *The Washington Post*, 11 July 2001.

²³ E.C. Pease, E. Smith, and F. Subervi, "The News and Race Models of Excellence Project--Overview Connecting Newsroom Attitudes Toward Ethnicity and News Content," October 2001, http://www.poynter.org/resource/5045/101701_modelsofexcellence.pdf (9 August 2005).

²⁴ B. Dedman and S.K. Doig, "Newsroom Diversity has Passed its Peak at Most Newspapers, 1990-2005 Study shows," June 2005, <http://powerreporting.com/knight> (10 August 2005).

²⁵ American Society of Newspaper Editors, "Newsroom Employment Census," April 2004, <http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=1138> (19 July 2005). The survey data do not disaggregate "minority" into racial and ethnic groups.

²⁶ Dedman and Doig, 2005.

²⁷ Previously, the FCC required radio and TV stations to report how many racial and ethnic minorities and women they employed in various positions. Although the FCC never established strict thresholds that stations were required to meet in order to renew their licenses, stations could be fined for not making a sufficient effort to recruit minorities. The FCC adopted a standard of 50 percent of parity to be an appropriate threshold below which a station would be investigated for possible discrimination. Unless intentional discrimination was found, stations would not be likely to lose their licenses to broadcast, but could be fined for lack of effort in recruiting minorities in fulfillment of their commitment to program diversity. Fifty percent of parity with the proportion of minorities in the community became a rule of thumb that the FCC used to determine whether a station was meeting its EEO obligations. After the *Adarand v. Peña* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1995, the FCC shifted its focus from results criteria for radio and TV stations to effort tests for measuring compliance with EEO standards.

²⁸ B. Papper, "Running in Place: Minorities and Women in Television See Little Change, While Minorities Fare Worse in Radio," *Communicator*, July/August 2005: 26-32; B. Papper, "Recovering Lost Ground: Minorities Gain Ground and Women Make Management Strides in Radio and TV Newsrooms in 2004," *Communicator*, July/August 2004: 24-28; B. Papper, "Women & Minorities: One Step Forward and Two Steps Back," *Communicator*, July/August 2003: 20-25; RTNDA, *2000 Women and Minorities Survey*, 2000, www.rtna.org (1 September 2005).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Project for Excellence in Journalism, *The Gender Gap: Women are Still Missing as Sources for Journalists*, May 2005, <http://www.journalism.org/gender.pdf> (11 August 2005).

³¹ The White House Project, "Who's Talking Now? A Follow-up Analysis of Guest Appearances by Women on the Sunday Morning Talk Shows," October 2005, http://www.thewhitehouseproject.org/v2/researchandreports/whostalking/whos_talking_2005.pdf (3 November 2005); The White House Project, "Who's Talking? An Analysis of Sunday Morning Talk Shows," December 2001, http://www.thewhitehouseproject.org/v2/researchandreports/whostalking/who_talking_full-report.pdf (3 October 2005). For example, women represented only 11 percent of all guest appearances on the Sunday shows; only 10 percent of guest appearances when presidential and vice-presidential candidates were included in the calculus.

³² National Association of Hispanic Journalists, *Network Brownout 2003: The Portrayal of Latinos in Network Television News, 2002* (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Hispanic Journalists, December 2003).

³³ M. Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

³⁴ R. Entman, "African Americans According to TV News," in *The News in Black and White*, ed., E.E. Dennis and E.C. Pease (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Press, 1997). The same study determined that whites who rely primarily on television for their news are more likely to stereotype African Americans as "unskilled" and "lazy."

³⁵ N. Mineta, introduction to National Telecommunications and Information Administration, *Changes, Challenges, and Charting New Courses: Minority Commercial Broadcast Ownership in the United States*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000).

³⁶ National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 2000.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ New California Media, *Ethnic Media in America: The Giant Hidden in Plain Sight*, June 2005, www.ncmonline.com/polls/executivesummary.pdf (24 July 2005).

⁴² NTIA 2000.

⁴³ M. Lloyd, "Communications Policy is a Civil Rights Issue," 1998, www.ctcnet.org (3 September 2005).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ NTIA, 2000.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Lloyd 1998. Mark Lloyd notes that the Internet was made possible through federal funding for academic institutions and the military's work to create the "information superhighway."

⁴⁸ NTIA, 2000; National Telecommunications and Information Administration, *A Nation Online: Entering the Broadband Age* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2004).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "Election Reform: An Analysis of Proposals and the Commission's Recommendations for Improving America's Election System," 2001, www.usccr.gov/pubs/vote2000/eleceref/summ.htm (4 August 2005).

⁵¹ L.F. Gonzalez, testimony submitted to the Election Assistance Commission on behalf of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, May 5, 2004.

⁵² National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, *Sound Barriers: Asian Americans and Language Access in Election 2004*, 2005, www.napalc.org (9 September 2005).

⁵³ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2001.

⁵⁴ E.G. Krasnow and L.M. Fowlkes, "The FCC's Minority Tax Certificate Program: A Proposal for Life After Death," *Federal Communications Law Journal*, 51, no. 3 (1999): 665-679.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Federal Advisory Committee on Diversity in the Digital Age, "Recommendations to the Federal Communications Commission," June 2004, <http://www.fcc.gov/DiversityFAC/061404/recommend/DistressSalePolicyRecommend.doc> (18 August 2005).

⁵⁷ Cooper, 2004.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, "Bringing a Nation Online: The Importance of Federal Leadership," 2002, www.civilrights.org/publications/bringinganationonline (8 August 2005).

⁶⁰ J. Chester and G.O. Larson, "A 12-Step Program for Media Democracy," *The Nation*, 23 July 2002.

⁶¹