

**SOCI 360**

**SOCIAL  
MOVEMENTS  
AND  
COMMUNITY  
CHANGE**

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(DR. K)**



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**SOCIAL-CONFLICT**

**Mass Society  
and  
Alienation**



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**Early Theories of Collective Behavior**

**Mass Society Theory (social conflict)**

**William Kornhauser, "Politics of Mass Society", 1959 (p15)**

- i. Developed by members of the "Frankfurt School" of sociology (Germany) to explain the turn to totalitarianism in early 20<sup>th</sup> c. Europe.
- ii. "Massification" requires *social marginalization* (alienation from social norms of work, family, politics, etc.).
- iii. Leads to populism and identity politics rather than democratic politics.
- iv. Promoted by Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, others (known as *Critical Theorists* in sociology).



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## William Kornhauser's Mass Society Theory

According to William Kornhauser's Mass Society theory, the **antecedent to all social movements** in mass society is **widespread social isolation and disconnection: excessive (egoistic) individualism**. The starting point for this theory is the concept of **"mass society" – a state or condition that produces disengagement and isolation** among individuals in late-modernity. These individuals then use **social movements as a proxy for their "need" for social connection or integration**. Longing for a deeper sense of connection to abate the increasing alienation of late-modernity and modern cities, **isolated people are drawn to social movements where they find a sense of belonging** and an alternative community to their disconnected ones.

## On "The Politics of Mass Society" (1959 by William Kornhauser)

"Mass society is a situation in which an aggregate of individuals are related to one another only by way of their relation to a common authority, especially the state...A population in this condition is not insulated in any way from the ruling group, nor yet from elements within itself. **Social atomization** engenders strong feelings of alienation and anxiety, and therefore the disposition to engage in extreme behavior to escape from these tensions. In **mass society** there is a heightened readiness to form hyper-attachments to symbols and leaders...People become available for mobilization by elites when they lack or lose an independent group life...The lack of autonomous relations generates widespread **social alienation**. Alienation heightens responsiveness to the appeal of **mass movements** because they provide occasions for expressing resentment against what is, as well as promises of a totally different world. In short, *people who are atomized readily become mobilized*. Since **totalitarianism** is a state of total mobilization, mass society is highly vulnerable to totalitarian movements and regimes." -William Kornhauser, (1959: *The Politics of Mass Society*, The Free Press)

## On Totalitarianism

"Totalitarian politics — far from being simply antisemitic or racist or imperialist or communist — use and abuse their own ideological and political elements until the basis of factual reality, from which the ideologies originally derived their strength and their propaganda value — the reality of class struggle, for instance, or the interest conflict between Jews [or blacks] and their neighbors — have all but disappeared."

– Hannah Arendt (Frankfurt School of Sociology),  
*The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951)

## Kornhauser's "The Politics of Mass Society"

(social conflict theory)

"Elites" refer to the "ruling class" – those with political power, economic wealth, and cultural respect.

"Availability" (of non-elites) refers to the degree to which people are connected (through, say, social media) and can organize.

"Accessibility" of elites refers to the perceived ability of non-elites to effect the decision-making of the ruling class.

		Availability of Non-Elites	
		Low	High
Accessibility of Elites	Low	Communal Society	Totalitarian Society
	High	Pluralist Society	Mass Society

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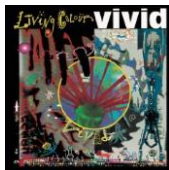
Artist: Living Colour

Song: Cult of Personality

Look in my eyes, what do you see?  
Cult of personality  
I know your anger, I know your dreams  
I've been everything you want to be  
I'm the cult of personality  
Like Mussolini and Kennedy  
I'm the cult of personality

Neon lights, a Nobel prize  
The mirror speaks,  
the reflection lies  
You don't have to follow me  
Only you can set me free  
I sell the things you need to be  
I'm the smiling face on your TV.  
I'm the cult of personality  
I exploit you still you love me  
I tell you one and one makes three  
I'm the cult of personality  
Like Joseph Stalin and Ghandi  
I'm the cult of personality

Theme: Populist  
Authoritarianism



Neon lights, a Nobel prize  
A leader speaks, that leader dies  
You don't have to follow me  
**Only you can set you free**

You gave me fortune  
You gave me fame  
You me power in the old God's name  
I'm every person you need to be  
I'm the cult of personality  
Look into my eyes, what do you see?  
Cult of personality  
I know your anger, I know your dreams  
I've been everything you want to be  
I'm the cult of personality

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