

**Leiden University
Department of Political Science**

**Bachelorproject in Political Psychology
Spring, 2008
Time and Day: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1-3 pm
Ch13 / 5B04**

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Talking Politics

We learn about politics through the means of others: the mass media, politicians, family, or friends. In this year's bachelor project we examine how citizens make sense of political problems, decisions, and outcomes when they discuss politics in groups.

Most of the literature in political psychology studies citizens as individuals separated from their social networks. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in bringing the group back into our understanding of political behavior. Much of this literature examines the democratic potential of political discussion (also called citizen deliberation) as understood by advocates of deliberative democracy such as, for example, Ackerman and Fishkin (2003). Many empirical findings in social science research suggest, however, that citizen discussion of politics does not always conform to this ideal (see, for example, Sanders 1997, Mendelberg 2002, Rosenberg 2005).

In this year's Bachelor project we are going to test some of the assumptions made by deliberative theories focusing on three questions: First, how does the composition of political views in social networks influence the fashion in which discourse takes place and/or its outcome? Second, how does the environmental context in which group discussion is embedded influence the fashion in which discourse takes place and/or its outcome? And finally, how does framing influence the fashion in which discourse takes place and/or its outcome? In your Bachelor thesis you are going to investigate one of these three questions based on a systematic empirical study of an online political discussion of your own choice.

Assignment for Blok 3

In blok 4 we want to get started right away with the empirical analysis of your group discussion. This way you will have more time for writing and as a result a better Bachelor thesis. To prepare for the empirical analysis, please do the following assignment:

First, do the core readings in the order in which they appear below. Try to get a broad overview of the four arguments and how they are linked to one another. Don't focus too much on the detail as a starter.

Subsequently, explore the internet for transcripts of political discussion. You may choose any blog, discussion board, or other forms of political discussion, but it must involve discussion of politics (broadly defined) among multiple participants. You may choose a website in any language that you can read and on any issue as long as you can make a reasonable argument that it relates to politics. When you have found a discussion, save the discussion in a word- or text-document on your computer. If your discussion involves too much data, you may decide to focus on a sub-section of it. *Do not manipulate your data by interfering personally into the discussion.*

When you found your discussion, think about what your data can tell us about the link between each of the three factors – the composition of the group, the environmental context, and the framing of the issues – and the fashion in which discourse takes place and/or its outcome for individuals or the group as a whole. Choose *one* of these three factors.

Finally, review the existing literature with respect to *one* of the following research questions: 1) how does the composition of political views in social networks influence the fashion in which discourse takes place and/or its outcome? 2) how does the environmental context in which group discussion is embedded influence the fashion in which discourse takes place and/or its outcome? 3) how does framing influence the fashion in which discourse takes place and/or its outcome? You can locate relevant literature based on the bibliography of Mutz (2002), Huckfeldt and Sprague (1987), or Druckman and Nelson (2003). Another useful tool is the Social Science Citation Index as part of the Web of Science, an electronic data base available through the library.

A literature review presents and critically discusses the state of the field with respect to a research question. A good literature review does not only summarize a body of literature with respect to a specific research question. It also evaluates the literature based on, for example, the substantive arguments that are made, the methodology or empirical evidence that is used, and/or pointing out limitations of the theory with respect to explaining the real world. A literature review contains three components: First, an explanation of how previous studies have answered a specific research question. Second, an evaluation of the existing literature with respect to the research question. Finally, suggestions about how the existing literature will be advanced by your empirical study of the nature of political discussion.

Core Reading:

Ackerman, Bruce, and James Fishkin. 2003. "Deliberation Day." In *Debating Deliberative Democracy*, eds. James Fishkin and Peter Laslett. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 7-30.

Mutz, Diana. 2002. Cross-Cutting Social Networks: Testing Democratic Theory in Practice. *American Political Science Review* 96(1): 111-126.

Huckfeldt, Robert and John Sprague. 1987. Networks in Context: The Social Flow of Political Information. *American Political Science Review* 81(4): 1197-1216.

Druckman, James and Kjersten Nelson. 2003. Framing and Deliberation: How Citizens' Conversations Limit Elite Influence. *American Journal of Political Science* 47(4): 729-745.

Optional Background Reading:

Various survey reports on deliberative polls: <http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/docs/summary/>

Sanders, Lynn. 1997. "Against Deliberation." *Political Theory* 25: 347-377.

Mendelberg, Tali. 2002. "The Deliberative Citizen: Theory and Evidence." In *Research in Micropolitics*, eds. Michael Delli Carpini, Leonie huddy, and Robert Y. Shapiro. New York: Elsevier Press, pp. 151-193.

Rosenberg, Shawn. 2005. "The Empirical Study of Deliberative Democracy: Setting a Research Agenda." *Acta Politica* 40: 212-224.

Useful links on literature reviews:

<http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/litrev.html>

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature_review.html

All readings are available on Blackboard under course documents!