Voters’ Political Conversations during the 2005 German Parliamentary Election Campaign: Causes and Consequences

Bruchsal, May 14, 2009

Thorsten Faas, Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck
University of Mannheim

Email: Thorsten.Faas@uni-mannheim.de
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

• “word-of-mouth communication that occurs in face-to-face interaction between two or more individuals”

• But: not all (political) talk is the same; differences exist …
  – … in the frequency of occurrence
  – … in the level of disagreement
  – … with regard to the relationship between talking individuals (“strong“ vs. „weak ties“; „primary“ vs. „secondary relations“)
AIM OF THE PRESENTATION

• Analysis of the causes and consequences of (the different dimensions of) interpersonal communication

• Special attention is paid to the dynamics of interpersonal communication in the course of a campaign, as our data is especially suitable to do so
DATA: ROLLING CROSS-SECTION SURVEY

Federal Election 2005

First Wave: Pre-Election
N = 3,583

Second Wave: Post-Election
N = 2,420

August         September         October
QUESTIONS INCLUDED

- Do you talk to your family and friends about politics? [If so] On how many days have you done so during the last week?
- What would you say, how often have you had different opinions in these talks – very often, often, sometimes, rarely or never?
- And do you talk to your colleagues and neighbors about politics? [If so] On how many days have you done so during the last week?
- What would you say, how often have you had different opinions in these talks – very often, often, sometimes, rarely or never?
- In comparison: a series of questions pertaining to mass communication
TALK DURING THE CAMPAIGN (BINARY)

Date: 13 Aug 2005 to 17 Sep 2005

- Primary
- Secondary
IN COMPARISON: MASS MEDIA

[Graph showing media coverage over time with different lines for primary and secondary media sources.]

- Zeitung
- BILD
- ÖR-TV
- Priv. TV
- WWW
TALK DURING THE CAMPAIGN (AVERAGE)
DETERMINANTS OF FREQUENCY

• Three prerequisites for having a discussion:

  – willingness to talk
  – someone to talk to
  – something to talk about
DETERMINANTS OF FREQUENCY

• So what can be expected?

  – Motivational variables (interest in politics, party identification) should increase the frequency

  – Talk in primary groups as a function of household composition, talk in secondary groups as a function of employment situation and wider setting

  – Mass media (esp. quality media) as content providers
LOGISTIC REGRESSION: WHO TALKS?

Unstandardized coefficients, primary

Thorsten Faas, Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck: Voters’ Political Conversations
LOGISTIC REGRESSION: WHO TALKS?

Unstandardized coefficients, primary and secondary
DETERMINANTS OF DISAGREEMENT

• Motivational and structural variables likely to be less important

• Mass media as provider of arguments for discussions, to be aware of differences

• More disagreement in secondary relations („crossing lines of difference“ compared to homogenous primary groups)

• Dynamics: „disambiguation“ as a consequence of campaigns vs. increasing polarization in the course of a campaign
DISAGREEMENT DURING THE CAMPAIGN

The graph illustrates the level of disagreement during the campaign period, with data points from 13 August 2005 to 17 September 2005.

- **Primary** line
- **Secondary** dashed line

The x-axis represents the dates, and the y-axis represents the level of disagreement.
OLS REGRESSION: WHO DISAGREES?

Unstandardized coefficients, primary

- Interest in Pol.
- PI
- Spouse
- Unempl.
- Not empl.
- Village
- Town
- Church Att.
- Union memb.
- Public TV
- Private TV
- Newspaper
- BILD (Tabloid)
- WWW
- Day
- Male
- Age
- Level of Talk
### OLS Regression: Who Disagrees?

Unstandardized coefficients, primary and secondary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Pol.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unempl.</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notempl.</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Att.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union memb.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public TV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private TV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BILD (Tabloid)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-Lev.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Talk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thorsten Faas, Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck: Voters’ Political Conversations
CONSEQUENCES OF TALKING

• „The basic idea is straightforward: Interactions with others enhance one’s likelihood of political participation“ (Manza et al. 2005: 209)

• Mutz (2002): political talk possibly causes „political ambivalence“ and „social accountability“ if disagreement is encountered

• Scheufele et al. (2004) expect that heterogeneous network have stimulating effects
DEPENDENT VARIABLES

- Turnout Intention
- Response latencies for vote intentions
- Perceived difficulty of making up one’s mind (in retrospect, post-election wave)
## DOES TALKING MATTER?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Turnout</th>
<th>“Vote Choice was easy”</th>
<th>Response Latencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Primary Talk</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Sec. Talk</td>
<td>-0.032</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>-0.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Primary Disagreement</td>
<td>-0.126</td>
<td>-0.134*</td>
<td>-0.121*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Secondary Disagreement</td>
<td>0.375***</td>
<td>0.147*</td>
<td>0.076</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N     | 1935 | 1359 | 1941 |
| R²    | 0.316| 0.075| 0.053|