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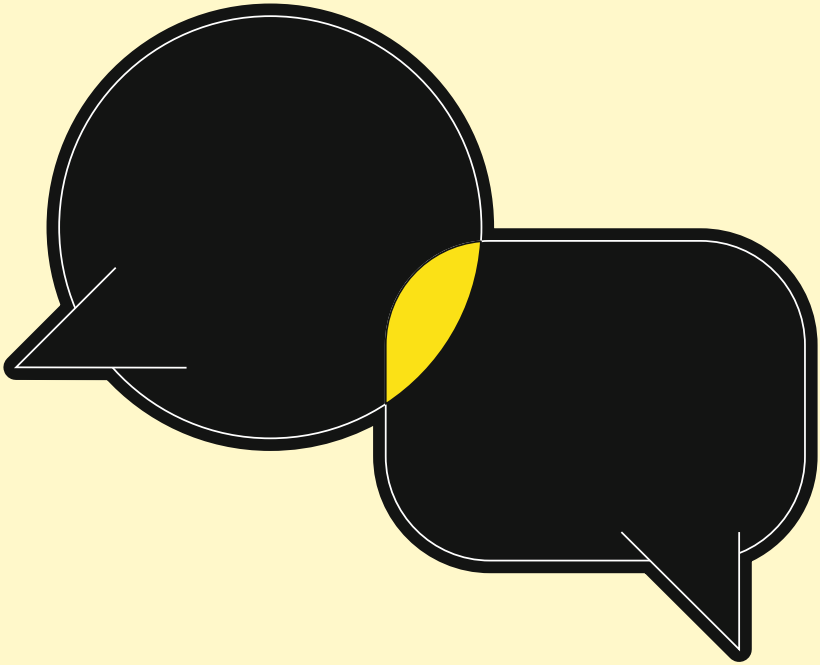

The Origin of Dialogue in the News Media

Regula Hänggli

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Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century

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Baden Regula Hänggli
June 2019

Praise for *The Origin of Dialogue in the News Media*

"Hänggli investigates a fundamental topic: how elite rhetoric, through the presence or absence of dialogue, shapes citizens' understanding of the policy options before them. This book is novel both for its comprehensive theoretical treatment of the framing process as well its rich content analyses of Swiss direct-democratic campaigns."

—Jennifer Jerit, *Stony Brook University, USA*

"This is a refreshingly innovative conceptual and empirical contribution to the vast literature on political communications. Analyzing Swiss referendums, Hänggli shows how campaign dialogue is framed by the competing norms and interests of politicians, parties, and the media. Readers will gain valuable insights about the conditions promoting discussion, learning, and debate that are essential to the democratic process."

—Dennis Chong, *University of Southern California and Northwestern University, USA*

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PART I

Introduction and Methodology

CHAPTER 1

Dialogue in the News Media

The people are powerless if they cannot choose between *alternatives*. Imagine that you—as an ordinary citizen and member of the public—are asked to participate in the decision-making process of, let us say, the asylum policy. What policy will you design? Unless you have expertise in the field, or have the time or motivation to become informed about this issue, you might feel that you are the wrong person to design such a policy. Schattschneider's statement makes this point: "Above everything, *the people are powerless if the political enterprise is not competitive*. It is the competition of political organizations that provides the people with the opportunity to make a choice. Without this opportunity, popular sovereignty amounts to nothing […] *Democracy is a competitive political system in which competing leaders and organizations define the alternatives of public policy in such a way that the public can participate in the decision making process*" (Schattschneider 1988 [1960]: 137–138, emphasis in original).

He states that competing leaders define the alternatives, which allow the ordinary citizen to participate. I agree and understand the alternatives to mean both the options *and* their interpretations. Thus, imagine that the parliament (which consists of two chambers, the National Council similar to the US House of Representatives and the State Council similar to the US Senate) has prepared a new asylum law and you can decide whether or not you will accept it. As an ordinary citizen, it is easier to participate in this situation. In actual fact, in Switzerland,

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this happened and the people were able to vote on a new asylum law. This example from the real world serves to illustrate what I mean by options and interpretations. The options are either to accept or reject the new law, while interpretations we will look at below.

The new law contained these most important aspects: It stipulated that asylum requests from refugees who have already been given refugee status or some other form of protection by another state will not be dealt with. The new law also prohibited social assistance for refugees whose requests have been legally rejected. Moreover, it introduced more restrictive rules for considering the question of refugees without proper identification; it adopted a so-called airport procedure allowing for rapid decisions at the refugees' point of entry, and it enabled the possibility of exchanging information with the refugees' home countries. The new law also brought an improvement for asylum seekers with a provisional admission. They are allowed to work and to receive a residence permit for their families after three years. The interpretations of the leaders are part of the alternatives. Political leaders offered these interpretations (I shall call them frames, see below): Proponents of the new law argued that Switzerland needs instruments to fight the abuse of its asylum legislation (abuse), and that the new law provides a more efficient implementation of the asylum legislation (efficacy). Opponents claimed that the new asylum law is contrary to the humanitarian tradition of Switzerland (human. trad.), and that the provision of the new law undermines the rule of law (rule-of-law). Their interpretations make clear that the *new* law is more restrictive than the previous one. In the vote on the new asylum law, similarly to related previous votes in 1987 and 1999, the proposal for a new asylum law was accepted by two-thirds (67.7%) of the Swiss people (compared to 67.3% in 1987 and 70.6% in 1999). The first asylum law dates back to 1981 and was considered liberal. Previously, asylum matters were part of the law on foreigners. Over the years, the asylum law was gradually tightened. In this book, alternatives and their interpretations are of key importance and I will keep a constant eye on competing interpretations. I will raise the question: *Under what conditions do we see competing interpretations (= dialogue)?* As Schattschneider points out, the process of defining the alternatives is *competitive*. Political elites deploy arguments and attempt to steer thinking toward their point of view in order to gain an edge in partisan contests.

The alternatives need to be presented in the *news media*. Since, in our diverse society, the media play a vital role in conveying information from

the political scene to the public, citizens get an important share of their information from the news media. In other words, democracy today is largely mediated democracy. People not only learn about the options and their interpretation directly from politicians (be it in person or impersonal contact like a speech on TV). They also learn about the alternatives *indirectly* through the media. They read about them in a newspaper report, or listen to a discussion about or summary of a political issue being presented in the news on the radio and TV. As a consequence, the alternatives (i.e., the yes or no choice and its interpretation) should also be found *in the news media*.

Thus, I investigate: *Under what conditions do we see dialogue (= competing interpretations) in the news media? What are the driving mechanisms?* To complete the picture, I will end with the question: *What is the role of dialogue in the Public Opinion formation process?*

Tools for the Study: Frames and Dialogue

This book investigates the origin of dialogue in the news media by *using frames*. A frame is defined as an interpretation of an issue, or a perspective on the topic. It is a central organizing idea that emphasizes certain aspects of a perceived reality (Entman 1993: 52) and "provide[s] coherence to a designated set of idea elements" (Ferree et al. 2002: 105). It is like a "spotlight" that attracts our attention to certain aspects of an issue and directs it away from other aspects (Gamson 2004: 245). By selectively emphasizing/evaluating certain facets of a perceived reality and by making them salient in a communicating text, frames also "promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman 1993: 52).[1] The framing approach is well suited for modeling a process with different actors involved. It has the great strength of enabling the behavior of elites, decisions of journalists, and choices of citizens to be

[1] In terms of Entman's frame definition, substantive frames focus mainly on problem definition. The other elements mentioned by Entman would be called reasoning devices by Gamson and Modigliani (1989: 3) and explain what should be done about the problem. Framing devices, as opposed to frames, are condensing symbols that suggest the frame in shorthand (Gamson and Modigliani 1989: 3). They include metaphors, illustrative examples (from which lessons are drawn), catchphrases, descriptions, and visual images (icons). What Iyengar (1991) calls "episodic" frames, I would call a framing device.

linked. Contending elites compete to establish the meaning and interpretation of issues in the news media or in the public. Journalists edit the information, add to it, and offer help for opinion formation, and citizens who engage with an issue must grapple with opposing frames and decide what their individual cognitive understanding is of a given situation. In this way, frames serve as the *conceptual bridge* (Scheufele 1999) between organizing ideas in presented news (for instance, the aspects of an issue emphasized in elite discourse) and comprehended news (for instance, the aspect of an issue a citizen thinks is the most important). In this sense, frames are interpretative structures embedded in political discourse and, at the same time, also live inside the minds of individuals.

Let me illustrate the definition of a frame. With respect to the direct-democratic vote on the asylum law, the argument that the new asylum law is contrary to the humanitarian tradition belongs to the "humanitarian tradition" frame (human. trad.). All similar arguments, i.e., arguments that focus on this aspect, are also categorized under this frame. This is shown in Table 1.1. The arguments are grouped and coded based on their position, i.e., whether they are pro or con arguments. All of these arguments are categorized as "humanitarian tradition" frame irrespective of their position, i.e., independent of whether an argument is for or against the new law. The same procedure is used for all arguments. If not otherwise stated, I use argument as a synonym for frame. In this sense, I mean the group of similar arguments belonging to one frame.

The struggle between alternatives can be more or less *dialogical*. Dialogue occurs when competing leaders and organizations talk directly about each other's interpretations or discuss the same interpretations of an issue, rather than rerouting (or displacing) the discussion to focus on alternative interpretations. The opposite of dialogue is the *absence* of opposing viewpoints and a *monologue* about one's own viewpoints, as is the case in (one-sided) propaganda. *Dialogue* looks at *all main* interpretations in a campaign and investigates how far the two camps converge on them. I will use convergence as a synonym for dialogue. Dialogue includes the idea of competing interpretations and looks at the exchange and convergence around these. Let me illustrate my understanding of dialogue based on the asylum law in Table 1.2. There are four important different interpretations: humanitarian tradition, rule-of-law, abuse, and efficacy. Opponents of the new law came up with the first two, while proponents offered the second two. In situation 1, there is a maximum degree of dialogue (Dialogue = 100). Opponents (contra camp) and proponents (pro camp) of the new law discuss each other's interpretations to

Table 1.1 Illustration of frame definition: the humanitarian tradition frame in the asylum law

Humanitarian tradition frame			
Pro arguments	Frame	Con arguments	Frame
Humanitarian tradition *in general*	Human. trad.: defensive use	Humanitarian tradition *in general*	Human. trad.: offensive use
Human dignity, conformity with human rights, no human rights violation		Human dignity/human rights/principle of humanity in danger	
Law corresponds to Swiss tradition		Law is un-Swiss/contradicts Swiss tradition	
Conformity with children's rights convention		Children's rights in danger/UN children's rights convention (also separation of children and parents in detention)	
Improvement of social and cultural quality		Improvement of social and cultural quality	
Conformity with religious norms		Religious norms in danger	
		The basic rights of asylum seekers must be protected	
Other *specific* ethical/humanitarian pro argument		Other *specific* ethical/humanitarian argument	

the same extent. In order to measure dialogue, I use a measure developed by Sigelman and Buell (2004) and Kaplan et al. (2006). This dialogue measure works with the absolute differences between the two camps in the share of attention each camp devoted to a certain frame, divides the sum by 2 in order to calibrate the measure to the range between 0 and 100, and subtracts that sum from 100 in order to convert the measure to one of similarity rather than dissimilarity (see Appendix for formula). Monologue appears in situation 2 (Dialogue = 0). Here, proponents concentrate exclusively on the abuse interpretation, opponents focus exclusively on a different interpretation (humanitarian tradition), and both sides ignore third interpretations (efficacy, rule-of-law). Obviously, no

Table 1.2 Three situations with different degrees of dialogue

	Situation 1: fully dialogical		*Situation 2: fully monological*		*Situation 3: asylum law (news media)*	
	Contra camp	*Pro camp*	*Contra camp*	*Pro camp*	*Contra camp*	*Pro camp*
Human. trad.	25	25	100	0	48	25
Rule-of-law	25	25	0	0	15	8
Abuse	25	25	0	100	26	46
Efficacy	25	25	0	0	12	21
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	101	100
Dialogue	100		0		70	

dialogue occurs, and each side talks about its own interpretations here. Situation 3 is what actually occurred in the news media regarding the asylum law. It is highly dialogical (Dialogue = 70, resulting from $100 - ((|48 - 25| + |15 - 8| + |26 - 46| + |12 - 21|)/2)$. In this situation, each camp mostly presents its own interpretations, but engages also with the interpretations offered by the other camp. The observed clustering of scores around 70 indicates that, on average, the attention profiles of the competing sides were seven-tenths of the way toward perfect convergence. In this instance, only about 30% of the proponents' attention would have had to be reallocated to bring about a perfect match with the opponents, or vice versa.

As mentioned, my understanding of dialogue is inspired by Sigelman and Buell (2004) and Kaplan et al. (2006). According to their understanding, dialogue means convergence on the same issue(s). Their studies are at the issue level. In my study, the issue is given and we look at the exchange of arguments about this issue between two camps. Thus, dialogue investigates the *argument* level. In this regard, my definition comes close to the understanding put forward by Simon (2002: 22, 107), who defined (sustained) dialogue as responding to the opponent's claims and also discussing the minority opinion of an issue. It also comes close to the understanding used by Jerit (2008, 2009). She defines dialogue as issue engagement (focusing on the same consideration) or direct rebuttal (a statement making the opposite prediction).

The value of 70 is very high. Simon (2002), who analyzed US Senate Campaigns, reports relatively low levels of dialogue. He finds that

dialogue occurs in less than 20% of discussions in a race. Kaplan et al. (2006) also observe a relatively low value of 25 (standard deviation 35) in US Senate Campaigns. By contrast, Sigelman and Buell (2004) report a relatively high mean value of 75 in US presidential campaigns. Franz (2014: 17) concludes that convergence rates often are higher in presidential campaigns than in Senate campaigns. Nevertheless, our value is higher because Sigelman and Buell and Kaplan et al. look at the extent to which two sides talk about the same issue without looking at the *content* about that issue. Simon's analysis (and mine as well) includes the *content* about one issue, i.e., the extent to which one reads about both perspectives (pro and con). In our cases, we would have a value of 100 in the way Sigelman and Buell and Kaplan et al. measured dialogue because every statement is about the same issue. Thus, we go beyond the issue level and look at the extent of political discussion and debate about a topic.

Of course, dialogue has many more connotations and denotations, which extend beyond competing camps talking about each other's arguments or discussing the same aspects of an issue. A concept related to dialogue is deliberation. Deliberation—it is argued—requires mutual civility and respect for the opinions of others, as conditions that enable and support the exchange and justification of arguments (Bächtiger et al. 2010; De Vries et al. 2010; Habermas 1996; Wessler 2008; Zhang et al. 2013). My standards here are somewhat lower. The actors are not expected to ultimately agree on arguments, to act respectfully, or to justify their argumentation. My approach is also less demanding than the approach of Bennett et al. (2004), who use the concept of "responsiveness", i.e., mutual reactions from the opposing political actors. Their concept entails not only that a political actor uses the opponents' arguments but also that he *identifies* the source of the opponents' message. For our purposes, it is crucial that the audience learns about the position of a political actor on each message and that a set of messages from both camps are discussed in the news media. It is less important that the actors refer to each other.

The Importance of Dialogue in the News Media

Dialogue in the news media matters for a number of reasons. First, dialogue is relevant for the opinion formation process. The presence of competing arguments increases the likelihood that citizens will choose the alternative that is consistent with their values and predispositions

(Zaller 1992; Sniderman and Theriault 2004; Chong and Druckman 2007a). In addition, individuals are more motivated to engage in conscious evaluation when they are exposed to opposing considerations addressing the same aspect of an issue (Chong and Druckman 2007b). Furthermore, competition fosters political judgment (Chong and Druckman 2007c: 639, 651): It can moderate ideological extremes; it prompts people to consider which argument is the most applicable and to make their judgments based on the persuasiveness of a message (not merely on its frequency of repetition). More specifically, Benz and Stutzer (2004) show that direct democracy in Switzerland and the EU makes voters better informed. Colombo (2016: 147; 2018) supports the argument that direct-democratic campaigns (with their dialogical character) have a positive effect on public opinion with findings from the real world of Swiss direct-democratic campaigns: "[T]he provision of information during the campaign, by media and elite actors, is crucial". There was no measure of dialogue at her disposal but she shows that an intense campaign (with arguments from both sides) increases the quality of decision-making process. In addition, she can show that 70% of the interviewees were able to justify their decision with at least one argument. Post-vote opinion polls also show that arguments play a decisive role, with the main arguments of the analyzed campaigns also being the important ones used to justify the voters' decisions (Hirter and Linder 2008; Milic and Scheuss 2006; Engeli et al. 2008). Indeed, Wirth et al. (2011: 202) showed that in the direct-democratic campaigns analyzed here, arguments "play a decisive role in determining the voting outcome".

Second, dialogue can help to ensure that democracy works well. This point is relevant for scholars who recommend a realistic model of democracy. In such a perspective, in order for democracy to function well citizens must be able to become informed (e.g., Schudson 1998, 2000). Citizens "monitor" or "scan" the political and social environment and are ready to take action if it is needed. In line with the statement above by Schattschneider (1988 [1960]), the idea is that clear position-taking by politicians and clashes between their views are prerequisites for an informed democratic choice.

Third, dialogue is relevant for democratic theory, which conceives citizens' preferences to be formed *endogenously* to the political process (=within the political process) (Chong and Druckman 2011; Disch 2011). In particular, we need to know more about the ability of elites to shape the news (Druckman et al. 2013). In this view, citizens' preferences

are not formed exogenously (as many have thus far assumed), but are rather formed based on the content of news. Thus, elites' strategies of communications, conditions that moderate elite influence, and generally the factors that influence the presence of alternatives in the news media are relevant for gaining a better understanding of the public–elite interactions.

Fourth, dialogue in the news provides a counterbalance to possible "filter bubbles" (Pariser 2011), "echo chambers" (Sunstein 2001), or "cyber apartheid" (Putnam 2000). These concepts refer to the risk of fragmentation, allowing people to sort themselves into homogeneous groups, which often results in them receiving news tailored to their own interests and prejudices, amplifying their preexisting view. Dialogue in the news media is a counterbalance in the sense that people are confronted with unsought, unanticipated, and even unwanted ideas, and dissenting people.

Fifth, dialogue in the news media not only counterbalances "echo chambers" in social media; it can also work as a corrective to interpersonal communication where citizens mainly talk to like-minded people. It increases tolerance among people and awareness of the rationale behind one's own and oppositional views (Mutz 2006). Mutz (2006) showed for personal discussion networks that the most interested and politically knowledgeable citizens are the least likely to be exposed to oppositional viewpoints in personal discussion networks. Thus, it is essential that these citizens are exposed to oppositional viewpoints in the news media.

Sixth, we know surprisingly little about the strategic use of dialogue in debates, even though dialogue can be a clever strategy, as Jerit (2008) illustrated. She found considerable evidence of dialogue for the 1993–1994 healthcare reform debate and showed that dialogue can be effective, particularly for the pro camp. Thus, political actors have reasons to engage in dialogue, and convergence on a message can be a successful strategy.

Seventh, majorities formed on the basis of public dialogue tend to be more legitimate than simple majorities (Simon 2002; Fishkin 1991, 1992; Chambers 2009; Disch 2011) because a decision based on the preceding debate in the public is more likely to represent the authentic will of the public. Furthermore, if minorities can contribute to the discussion and influence the decision in their favor, dialogue can reduce inequality and empower minorities or the have-nots.

Eighth, examining dialogue in the news media is also relevant in terms of the health of democracy. Understanding the level of dialogue in the news speaks directly to concerns that the increased profit orientation, the entertainment-oriented presentation of information, or the conglomeration of news media owners is unhealthy for democracy and jeopardizes the offer of alternatives.

Ninth, dialogue increases the likelihood that diverse ideas are present. The presence of diverse ideas is the basis for high innovation rates, collective intelligence, and societal resilience (Helbing 2016; Page 2008). In other words, dialogue increases the likelihood that good solutions to societal problems are found.

The Main Thesis of the Book

The main thesis of the book is that dialogue in the news media occurs as a result of choices taken by the involved actors, i.e., the elites and journalists. In this sense, dialogue is a desirable but not necessarily intended outcome. Besides the actors' choices, certain campaign characteristics are the key driving mechanisms. To work out the mechanisms that drive dialogue in the media, I use a procedural model. In Chapter 2, I will introduce this theoretical framework of the study (frame building model) and suggest that the level of dialogue is dependent on the political actors' constructing choices, on their promoting choices, and on journalists' choices. The model of frame building yields six core hypotheses:

1. Dialogue in the news media occurs because political actors strategically choose to discuss each other's interpretation and because they concentrate on substance to a good extent. Campaign characteristics additionally influence the level of dialogue. Issue complexity and imbalance in financial resources handicaps dialogue, whereas issue familiarity and expected closeness of vote outcome increases dialogue (Chapter 4).
2. A good level of dialogue can be explained by the anticipatory effect of media on the part of political actors. In order to test this hypothesis, I will distinguish between mediated (media input, i.e., press releases and documents written for media conferences, and letters to the editor), unmediated (political advertisements and direct mail) and internal (info for members) channels. In the mediated channels, campaigners must cater to the needs and values of

journalists. If the political actors anticipate the media logic, they behave differently in the mediated channels. Thus, I expect to find a higher level of dialogue here (Chapter 4).

3. Dialogue stays high because of a constant effort by the political actors to attract news coverage and a constant behavior of political actors over time (Chapter 5). In order to attract news coverage during the whole campaign period, the campaigners produce routine staged events actively and reactively. If they become reactive, they react to events in their own camp, to the opponent, to the media, and to facts. In all their activities, the political actors want the audience to learn about their position and thus repeat their messages over time. Therefore, they stay on message, and as a result, I find no concentration on a smaller number of interpretations in the mediated channels over time.
4. By deciding on their choices, journalists also contribute to the dialogue in the news (Chapter 6). In particular, journalists balance out the messages of each camp in all the three campaigns we will look at. In this way, they ensure that both camps can bring in their interpretations and enforce a journalistic norm of presenting their audience with competing positions. The journalists mainly stay within the range of views presented by the political actors and discreetly bring in their own interpretations. This promotes dialogue because the concentration on main frames allows dialogue to take place. Journalists can challenge views, can interview key players, and confront them with counter-frames. With regard to differences between media types, we find less dialogue in free news media.
5. In direct-democratic campaigns, there is a relatively clear order in the flow of information (Chapter 7). The political actors prepare the main interpretations in the media releases and have the lead in the debate. The journalists can focus on confronting perspectives and on challenging views. This division of work might also contribute to dialogue. Furthermore, it is also relatively clear that direct-democratic campaigns are important. This means that political actors and journalists make an effort and engage in the discussion. In addition, the involved actors know when campaigns take place and when they are covered. It is routine action and they can concentrate on the discussion. Both aspects might also be supportive for dialogue.

6. Direct-democratic campaigns are relevant for the opinion formation process (Chapter 8). The arguments from both sides in the news media help the voter to vote in line with his or her preferences.

Empirical Evidence

In Chapter 2, I will introduce my theoretical framework of the study, the *frame-building model*. It suggests that the level of dialogue is dependent on the political actors' choices in the construction and promotion phase and on journalists' choices in the edition phase. The remaining part of the book is empirical in nature.

Chapter 3 introduces the design of the study (incl. Swiss direct democracy, relevant policy domain, relevant cases, main frames, and campaign selection) and data. In order to analyze the three relevant processes in frame building in direct-democratic campaigns—frame construction and frame promotion by the political actors, and the frame edition by the journalists—I rely on a rich data set and use different types of data.[2] The content analysis is most important. In all three campaigns, I conducted a content analysis of media input (=press releases and documents written for media conferences), political advertisements, letters to the editor, and of the media's news reporting. Additionally, direct mails and information for members were coded in one campaign (asylum law). All material was coded in the same manner, with three levels of analysis—the level of the article, the political actor or journalist, and the argument (for details, see Appendix). To explore the framing strategies of the *political actors*, I occasionally also rely on data collected in interviews with these actors. The relevant organizations were identified on the basis of various sources: the parliamentary debates, the campaign for the collection of signatures, voting recommendations, the press, and Web sites more generally. I used cross-checks with the persons we interviewed in order to complete the set of relevant actors.

In Chapter 4, I will look at how political actors craft their messages for press releases and media conferences (=media input). By

[2] A group of researchers from mass communication and political science collected these data together. This research belongs to a national center of competence in research (<http://www.nccr-democracy.uzh.ch/>, March 2019), which has been financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (for the design of the study, see Hänggli et al. 2012a).

constructing their message, I will argue that political actors decide strategically on at least three framing choices ("Substantive Emphasis Choice", "Oppositional Emphasis Choice", and "Contest Emphasis Choice"). Chapter 5 will investigate the frame *promotion* process. In this process, I suggest that the political actors are concerned about how they can spread their message the furthest and maximize the impact of their campaign. The promotion effort can include both the variations of the strategic framing choices in the different communication channels and over time. The media input is the baseline channel because, as I will argue in Chapter 5, it is the most important channel in frame building. The variation in different communication channels also tells us the extent to which the political actors adapt their strategies to the media logic. Moreover, by promoting their message, the political actors think about how they can continuously garner media attention and bring their message into the media *during* the whole campaign. Instruments of direct democracy are well developed in Switzerland (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008: 49) and all actors involved know exactly how it works. Thus, it is routine action, and commonly resources restrict the political actors from substantially changing their strategy during a campaign. By discussing the variation of the framing choices over time, I will argue that promotion practices used in direct-democratic campaigns are used such that a frame finds media attention during the whole campaign.

The contribution of journalists is analyzed separately in the final process of frame building, called the frame *edition* process (Chapter 6). I consider the journalists and the media as an active element in society. In such a way, journalists have to select, process, and interpret stimuli from the environment (Schulz 1989: 142). I will look at the choices made by journalists and suggest four choices which journalists decide upon ("Balancing Choice", "Range of Views Choice", "Story Choice" and "Interpretation Choice"). I find dialogue to be the result of all of these choices.

In Chapter 7, I will look at the *flow of frames*. In a first step, I will argue that the frame-building process is highly asymmetrical. Frames promoted by political actors in their media input influence media frames more strongly than vice versa. In a second step, I will investigate the importance of the media input for frame building in comparison with the influence of other channels. Then, I will look at *how much* media attention direct-democratic campaigns receive and *when* they are covered (effort and timing routines). Finally, I will investigate framing effects

(Chapter 8) and the s*trengths of frames in communication*. I will compare the new measure of a strong frame in communication to the commonly used measure of a strong frame in thought. I will also explore the relative importance of the framing-based (=systematic) path of opinion formation process in comparison with the partisan heuristic path.

Implications

The insights of this book are relevant to all situations in which we would like to have competing messages and dialogue in the media, such as when citizens need to form their own opinion or need to participate in ordinary political processes (e.g., following or influencing parliamentary debates), or in elections. The first argument is that dialogue in the news media is more likely if the debate becomes similar to a debate of direct democracy, i.e., if the discussion is restricted to one issue (or a few issues), if the topic is salient, if political actors from two sides are involved, and if the duration is limited. These insights are not new, but can be deduced from the existing literature (Kaplan et al. 2006; Simon 2002). The focus chosen in this book allows controlling for these factors and going beyond existing insights. I can identify more mechanisms that further stimulate dialogue. The second argument is that dialogue is more likely if the issue is simple and familiar, if the financial resources are balanced, and if the race is expected to be close. Third, dialogue is more likely if communication is mediated. Fourth, dialogue is sustained if political actors stay on message. Finally, dialogue is more likely if journalists balance out the efforts of the political actors.

Since the book builds on studies for which the role of the elite is central (e.g., work on the indexing hypothesis, failure of the press), the findings are applicable to public debates or campaigns that involve a leading role of the elite, or in which the control by the elite is crucial. We can learn from this study that dialogue can occur with the participation of such a powerful actor as the government. However, in line with the indexing hypothesis, we also see that the range of views is more or less set by the range of views of the powerful actors.

Furthermore, the insights of this book show the importance of free and independent media, their norms, and their implications (anticipation effect of these norms on political actors) for dialogue. We have to take care of these norms and implications. They are helpful for the whole opinion formation process. It also speaks to concerns regarding the