

News, Talk, Opinion, Participation: The Part Played by Conversation in Deliberative Democracy

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Deliberative democracy can be defined as a political system based on citizens' free discussion of public issues. While most scholars have discussed deliberative democracy normatively, this study attempts to test the validity of a model of deliberative democracy through examining the interrelationships among its four components: news-media use, political conversation, opinion formation, and political participation. Sufficient empirical evidence was found to support the hypotheses that (a) news-media use is closely associated with the frequency of political conversation in daily life both at general and issue-specific levels; (b) willingness to argue with those who have different opinions is influenced by majority perceptions and by news-media use and political talk; (c) news-media use and political conversation have positive effects on certain measures of the quality of opinions (argument quality, consideredness, and opinionation) and perhaps on opinion consistency; and (d) news-media use and political conversation are closely associated also with participatory activities, but more so with "campaigning" than "complaining."

Keywords consistency, deliberative democracy, news media use, political conversation, political participation, public opinion quality, talk, willingness to argue

We may define deliberative democracy as a process where citizens voluntarily and freely participate in discussions on public issues. It is a discursive system where citizens share information about public affairs, talk politics, form opinions, and participate in political processes (Barber, 1984; Bobbio, 1987; Bohman & Rehg, 1997; Chambers, 1996; Cohen, 1989; Elster, 1998; Fishkin, 1991; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Habermas, 1996; Keane, 1991; Page, 1996). The whole system is "discursive" inasmuch as each category of deliberation—sharing information, talking about it, forming opinions, and participating—possesses characteristics of "discourse" and "communicative action" (Habermas, 1984). In this sense, deliberative democracy is "discursive democracy" (Dryzek, 1994). The concept of deliberative democracy covers not only institutional procedures such as the rule of majority but also the political culture of free discussion and voluntary participation.

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At the core of deliberative democracy, therefore, is political conversation. Conversation *is* the soul of democracy. By “political conversation” we mean all kinds of political talk, discussion, or argument as long as they are voluntarily carried out by free citizens without any specific purpose or predetermined agenda. We are, hence, less interested in formal discussions with specific agendas and purposes than in casual and spontaneous conversations among private individuals.

A century ago, French sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1899/1989) defined conversation as “any dialogue without direct and immediate utility, in which one talks primarily to talk, for pleasure, as a game, out of politeness” (p. 87). It is also in this vein that Habermas (1984) understands conversation as a “communicative action for mutual understanding” contrary to “purposive-strategic action for specific goals.” Oakeshott (1991) agrees that conversation has no specific purpose, and Moscovici (1985, p. 187) argues that “a country where people do not talk for the sake of talking is simply one where people do not talk at all.”

It is through such conversation that citizens can bridge their personal experiences with the political worlds out there. Political conversation often happens in the private sphere, but (a) its inputs (e.g., information, topics, and issues) come from outside the private sphere, particularly from the political system and the political world, and (b) its outputs (e.g., public opinions, issue positions, voting preferences, participatory activities) are fed back into the political system and the political world.

Since Bryce (1888/1973), Tarde (1899/1989) and Dewey (1927), many scholars have emphasized the crucial role of conversation for democracy (Barber, 1984; Carey, 1995; Cohen & Arato, 1992; Habermas, 1984, 1996; Lasker, 1949; Oakeshott, 1991). Even now, when mass media dominate the distribution of information and function as public agenda setters, interpersonal communication remains a fundamental building block of democracy, as William Greider (cited in Anderson, Dardenne, & Killenberg, 1994, p. 13) points out: “Strange as it seems in this day of mass communications, democracy still begins in human conversation.”

Not everyone, however, agrees that conversation is the essence of democracy. Schudson (1997), for example, contends that casual and spontaneous conversation has little to do with democracy and asserts that “nothing in conversation itself suggests democracy” (p. 305). Schudson argues that conversation and political talk are two different things and that we must distinguish casual conversation from “democratic talk,” since (a) democratic talk is not spontaneous but civil, (b) democratic talk is essentially public but not necessarily egalitarian, and (c) talk in democracy is oriented to the explicit, available, transferable communications found in print and broadcasting rather than in face-to-face conversation.

Schudson (1997) considers political conversation “uncomfortable,” something that “invites conflict.” He believes that political talk in democracy must have certain purposes: solving conflicts, deciding public policies, or protecting one’s own interests before the public. He thinks that political talk, therefore, must be goal oriented and guided by rules arising from outside conversation; otherwise, political conversation would not be relevant to democracy. In short, conversation for the sake of conversation, according to Schudson, is not functional for democracy, and political conversation is a contradiction in terms.

We do not agree. In the process of deliberative democracy, as Barber (1984, p. 163) points out, “many citizens are bound together intimately through their common citizenship, and they interact guided by opinions that in themselves are slender and provisional but that when woven together into a communal will and a public purpose inspire power-

ful conviction.” Habermas (1984), too, maintains that conversation, an archetype of communicative action in the public sphere, is intimate and reciprocal.

The question, then, is how nonpurposive and casual political conversation—conversation for conversation’s sake—can produce, among other things, the impartial and rational opinions that serve democracy. This should be possible if conversation is a communicative action oriented toward mutual understanding, as Habermas (1984) contends. As such, conversation can foster “enlarged minds” and cultivate “representative minds” (Arendt, 1958), which, in turn, produce impartial reciprocity (Chambers, 1996; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Habermas, 1996). At the individual level, conversation provides people with the opportunity to think through their “idea elements” and reduce cognitive inconsistency (Zaller, 1992; Zaller & Feldman, 1992), thus enhancing the quality of an individual’s opinions and arguments (Billing, 1996; Kuhn, 1991; Lasker, 1949).

These are the basic assumptions underlying this study; they lead us to ask: What are the conditions that encourage conversations about public affairs? What kinds of “effects” do conversations have on the quality of opinions? And how do such conversations relate to participatory activities?

What Stimulates Political Conversation?

A hypothetical answer to this question is that the frequency of political conversation in daily life should be positively associated with the amount of news-media use as well as with the perceived friendliness of one’s conversational environment. These hypotheses are derived largely from two theoretical sources: the concept of the public sphere and the theory of spiral of silence.

The Public Sphere and News-Media Use

While the concept of the public sphere has normative imperatives for freedom of expression and equality of opportunity, it also emphasizes the significant role of the press as the necessary condition for political conversation. Tarde (1899/1989) theorized about a process in which “the public,” with its rationalized “opinion,” emerged as a result of the rapid diffusion of newspapers that provoked simultaneously political conversations in salons and coffee houses. Katz (1992) summarizes Tarde’s argument: (a) The newspaper fuels conversation, (b) conversation shapes opinion, and (c) opinion triggers action.

Although Tarde did not use the term *public sphere*, his concept of the public (*publique*) is almost identical with Habermas’s “public sphere” (*Öffentlichkeit*), in that both point to the tight relations among news media, conversation, and opinion formation. Tarde, for example, wrote that “conversation at all times, and the press, which at present is the principal source of conversation, are the major factors in opinion” (1899/1989, p. 75). Habermas (1991) also defines the public sphere in terms of news media, conversation, and public opinion formation:

By “public sphere” we mean first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as *public opinion* can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every *conversation* in which private persons come together to form a public. When the public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence; today, *newspapers and periodicals, radio and television* are the media of the public sphere. (p. 398; italics added)

Tarde (1899/1989) views the news media as the universal trigger of conversation providing the public with conversational topics of the day.¹ Recently, Page (1996) has also pointed out that “public deliberation” can be carried out only with the help of “professional communicators” (i.e., mass media), and Anderson, Dardenne, and Killenberg (1994, p. 37) add, “News is what people talk about, and news makes people talk.” Historically speaking, it seems obvious that print—the press—created the “reading public” and, hence, the public sphere where private individuals could gather and talk about public affairs (Eisenstein, 1979; Gouldner, 1976; Habermas, 1989).

This relationship between news media and political conversation in the historical context, however, does not automatically guarantee that more avid readers of newspapers talk about politics more frequently in their daily lives. The question is whether the “tight relationships” between news media and political conversation can still be found at the level of individual behavior.

James Bryce, the British political theorist, succinctly summarized the tight relationships at the individual level while describing his “four stages” of the public opinion formation process (1888/1973). We may consider Bryce’s typical person the model citizen of deliberative democracy:

(1) Reading newspapers: “A business man reads in his newspaper at break-fast the events of the preceding day.”

(2) Political conversation: “He goes down to his office in the train, talks there to two or three acquaintances, and perceives that they agree or do not agree with his own still faint impressions. . . . Then debate and controversy begin. . . .”

(3) Opinion formation: “And the opinion of ordinary minds, which in most of such minds has been hitherto fluid and undetermined, has begun to crystallize into a solid mass. . . . The effect of controversy is to drive the partisans on either side from some of their arguments, which are shown to be weak; to confirm them in others, which they think strong; and to make them take up a definite position on one side. Moreover, opinion, which may have been manifold till the polling, is thereafter generally twofold only. There is a view which has triumphed and a view which has been vanquished.”

(4) Participatory activities: “The fourth [stage] is reached when action becomes necessary. When a citizen has to give a vote, he votes as a member of a party.” (pp. 4–6)

Bryce clearly shows the relationship between news-media use and political conversation within the context of an individual’s behavior. More than a hundred years later, although unaware of Bryce’s model citizen, Koch (1994) confirms the model by showing a positive and significant association between newspaper reading and political talk. In Koch’s experimental study, the experimental group was required to read *The New York Times* on a daily basis and showed a significant increase in political communication activities. While some differences were found by gender and ethnicity, the most consistently significant relationship was found between newspaper reading and feeling comfortable in expressing one’s opinions in political discussions.

Based on the theories of Tarde, Habermas, and Bryce on one hand and Koch’s empirical findings on the other, we hypothesized a significant relationship between amount of news-media use and frequency of political conversation.

Perceived Opinion Climate

In her theory of the spiral of silence, Noelle-Neumann (1993) suggests that the feeling of belonging to a majority encourages political talk. Although some studies criticize the theory (Glynn, Hayes, & Shanahan, 1997; Katz & Baldassare, 1992; Price & Allen, 1990), other empirical studies support the hypothesis (Glynn & McLeod, 1984; Kenamer, 1990; Salmon & Oshagan, 1990; Shamir, 1995; Taylor, 1982).

Based on the spiral of silence theory, we hypothesize that those who perceive the general opinion climate as favorable to them on a particular issue will be more likely to discuss the issue with others. But the effects of majority perception do not generalize beyond specific issues. In other words, the effects of majority perception would be detected in issue-specific talk but not in general political talk, because the majority perception is constrained by one's own position on a *specific* issue.

From a completely different background—game theory rather than social psychology—MacKuen (1990) advanced a theory about the conversational conditions that encourage people either to get involved in “political talk” or to “clam.” MacKuen suggests that there are two basic forms of political talk: One is conversation between those who hold similar opinions, and the other—what he calls a “public dialogue”—is an exchange among those who have different opinions. Only the latter, MacKuen argues, allows genuine debate and exchange of ideas where “each participant will have the opportunity to choose from a broader menu, and the composite social process may serve as a marketplace of ideas” (p. 60).

MacKuen regards conversation among those who have different views as the essence of deliberative democracy. Basically, MacKuen's theory proposes that the likelihood of getting involved in a political discussion depends on the degrees of perceived friendliness of one's conversational environment (probability of coming across those whose views are similar to one's own) and, thus, one's expected “pleasure” from the conversation. To test MacKuen's hypothesis, we also probed respondents' perception of the “local opinion climate” to measure the perceived friendliness of their conversational environments.

Based on Noelle-Neumann's and MacKuen's theories, we hypothesized that the perceived friendliness of the local as well as national opinion climates, in addition to news-media use and general talking behaviors, will bolster one's willingness to argue with people with different opinions or, to borrow Glynn and McLeod's (1984, p. 735) terms, people with “dissimilar (noncongruent) viewpoints in hypothetical situations.”

What Are the Consequences of Talking Politics?

So far, we have hypothesized a relationship between frequency of news-media use and frequency of talk about public affairs. We have also proposed that the frequency of political talk—and willingness to argue, in particular—is enhanced by the self-perception of being in the majority on an issue. We now propose that political conversation will enhance the quality of opinion, which, we argue, can be measured by the consistency (ideological coherence), clarity, and consideredness of opinions and reasonableness of arguments.

Attempting to measure the quality of opinion is hardly a new enterprise. About a half century ago, Lasker (1949, pp. 207–208) asked: “Can we in any way test opinions to ascertain the extent to which they are authentic—that is, not off-hand judgments but linked up with a more or less consistent set of attitudes?” In the chapter titled “Effects

of Discussion on Opinion,” Lasker (1949) points out, “Our opinions can remain unformed and mutually contradictory for a long time unless a discussion or some other stimulus forces us to reconsider them.” Many contemporary scholars such as Zaller (1992, 1996), Zaller and Feldman (1992), Price (1992), Page and Shapiro (1992), and Mutz, Sniderman, and Brody (1996) share this view. We would argue, therefore, that those who talk politics frequently are likely to have more consistent, clearer, and more considered opinions.

The rationale for this hypothesis is that (a) people do not have preformed opinions but, rather, multiple and often conflicting opinion elements toward an issue (Zaller, 1992; Zaller & Feldman, 1992); (b) people usually do not realize that they have conflicting opinion elements until they have had a chance to talk and reflect on their thoughts about an issue; and (c) only when people have had an opportunity to express their opinions by speaking do they try to organize their opinions in more coherent ways—consistent with what they “say” and what they now believe.

Consistency-Based Opinion Quality

Since Converse (1964), consistency across logically (or ideologically) related items has been considered an indication of “real” opinion. Converse thought inconsistency was a result of “non-attitudes” or pseudo-opinions rather than a complication of contradictory idea elements within an individual. According to him, only Americans with higher education (the 10% who completed standard college training in the 1950s) could “contextually” understand the “standard” political belief system or “what goes with what” based on the underlying principles in their mind. Following Converse’s initial finding, many studies have confirmed that political elites have higher ideological consistency. For example, Jennings (1992) replicated Converse’s survey and found that political party elites had more constrained (by consistency) and stable sets of political preferences than mass publics. Jennings’s conclusion is that “any standard survey instrument can distinguish” the differences in constraint “between mass publics and political party elites” (1992, p. 419). Many other studies concur (e.g., Hagner & Pierce, 1983; Judd & Downing, 1990; Judd & Milburn, 1980; Nie & Anderson, 1974). Other attempts to measure various aspects of consistency in opinions and attitudes include Hunter, Danes, and Cohen (1984) and Kiesler, Collins, and Miller (1969).

Do political elites have more consistent opinions because they have more political discussions? Indirect evidence to support this inference appears in the study by Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger (1995), who found that attitude constraints among political elites in post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine were unexpectedly low. The authors conclude that their “unexpected findings” might result from the absence of various political institutions and arrangements in post-Communist Eastern Europe—such as functioning political parties and lobbying groups—which otherwise would have provided political elites with forums for more frequent political discussions.

Argument Quality, Consideredness, and Opinionation

How else might conversation affect quality of opinion in addition to enhancing consistency? We propose three other measures. We call them “argument quality,” “consideredness,” and “opinionation.”

The quality of argument has long been regarded as an indication of quality of opinion. The rhetorician Isocrates in the fifth century B.C. succinctly pointed out that “the power to speak well is taken as the surest index of a sound understanding . . . the same

arguments which we use in persuading others when we speak in public, we employ also when we deliberate in our own thoughts” (cited in Benson & Prosser, 1988, p. 49). Billing (1996) suggests that when we consider certain issues, we are silently arguing with ourselves. “Our inner deliberations,” he says, “are silent arguments conducted within a single self . . . our thought processes, far from being inherently mysterious events, are modeled upon public debate” (p. 5).

“Thinking as argument” is implicated in all of the beliefs people hold, the judgments they make, and the conclusions they come to, according to Kuhn (1991). Relying on Kuhn, Rhee and Cappella (1997) employ “argumentative depth” scales to assess political sophistication. Extending their perspective, we may propose that political conversation itself is a thinking and deliberating process that should lead people to have more reasoned opinions. Our hypothesis is that those who talk politics more frequently are more likely to show reasoned argument—an indication of higher quality of opinion.

From the point of view of deliberative democracy, it also appears that political discussion should “enlarge” people’s minds and increase “reciprocity” and “impartiality” by providing opportunities to consider given issues from different, even opposite viewpoints (Arendt, 1967; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Habermas, 1996; Lasker, 1949). This is what Arendt (1967) calls “representative thinking” or an “enlarged mentality,” which allows people to consider issues with less self-interestedness and to imagine how they would feel and think if they were in someone else’s place. Arendt points out that “the very quality of an opinion as of a judgment depends upon its degree of impartiality” (1967, p. 115). Consideration or open-mindedness toward different positions is an important aspect of opinion quality. We hypothesize, therefore, that political conversation will increase such impartial “consideredness.”

Another aspect of opinion quality can be measured by “don’t knows” and no answers. The “don’t knows” are probably those who have what Converse called “nonattitudes” about the issues and lack the ability to arrange their opinion positions according to their belief systems (Beach & Metzger, 1997; Podmore, Chaney, & Golder, 1975; White, 1977; Zeisel, 1985). We may, therefore, assume that those who fail to answer certain questions have lesser quality of opinions than those who successfully answer them. We call this measure “having opinions” or, simply, “opinionation.”

One Step Further: From Deliberation to Participation

As we have already seen, Bryce’s model suggests that the variables of deliberative democracy result in some forms of participatory activity. Katz also maintains that opinions lead to actions: “Opinions [are] really formed through the day-to-day exchange of comments and observations which goes on among people. . . . By the very process of talking to one another, the vague dispositions which people have are crystallized, step by step, into specific attitudes, acts, or votes” (1992, p. 80). Many theorists of the public sphere also allude to the tight relationships between the variables of deliberative democracy and participation (Calhoun, 1992; Keane, 1984; Robbins, 1993; van Ginneken, 1992). We hypothesized, therefore, that news-media use and political conversation will have significant associations with political participation, beyond socioeconomic resources and political interest.

Data and Measures

Our primary purpose was to measure the interaction of the four components of deliberative democracy: news-media use, conversation, opinion quality, and participation. We

asked, among other things, respondents' opinions about balancing the federal budget at the cost of Medicare, reasons for their opinions, perceptions of opinions of others, willingness to persuade others who disagree with them, and frequencies of news media use and conversation.

We conducted a nationwide survey of 1,029 adults from the 50 U.S. states in May 1996, when budget balancing and Medicare were salient topics. The survey was administered by a commercial firm using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) system with random-digit dialing. Once an eligible English speaking household was contacted, respondents were systematically chosen by rotating gender and age.²

News-Media Use

We distinguish two types of news-media use³: issue specific and general. Previous studies found that there were significant differences between general media use and media use for specific issues. McLeod and McDonald (1985), for example, compared "general media exposure" and "exposure to specific issues" and concluded that simple, generic measures of exposure were not effective predictors of learning of specific content. Chaffee and Schleuder (1986) also suggested that, in addition to exposure measures, we need general and specific measures of attention to various media. Our hypothesis is that the tight relationship between news-media use and political conversation will be evident both at the general level and at the specific-issue level. To test this hypothesis, we also employed two levels of conversation measures: general political conversation and issue-specific political conversation.

For the general measure, we included both television news viewing and newspaper reading. We did not combine these two measures into one, because many studies have demonstrated that newspaper and television news are often quite different in the size of their effects (Gunter, 1991; Robinson & Davis, 1990; Shaw, 1977).⁴ Based on the previous studies of news media and political knowledge, we hypothesized that newspaper reading would be more closely associated with political talk than television news viewing.

For general news-media use, we relied on two measures: self-reported frequencies (almost daily = 4, a few times a week = 3, once a week = 2, less than once a week = 1, and never = 0) of daily newspaper reading and daily viewing of national network television news programs. For issue-specific news-media use, respondents were asked how closely they followed the news about the issues of Medicare and government spending (very closely = 3, fairly closely = 2, not too closely = 1, not at all = 0).

Political Conversation

In designing the survey, we tried to avoid such questions as "How often do you talk about politics?" which usually leave the definition of "politics" to respondents' imaginations. Some would consider drug problems and abortion issues as "political," while others might have a narrower conception of politics, focusing on the workings of government and political campaigns.

We designed our political conversation measures to capture the amount of political talk through frequencies of patterned behaviors, or, borrowing Bourdieu's (1984) term, "political talk habitus." Political conversation as communicative action should include a wide range of topics, such as education, economy, crime, and foreign issues. We selected nine topics—which we speculated were the most common topics in daily conversation—covering private as well as public subjects.

Respondents were asked whether they talked about each of nine subject-specific items “often” (4), “sometimes” (3), “seldom” (2), or “never” (1). The nine items were “what the president, the national government, and the Congress are doing”; “what your state and local government are doing”; “what is happening in foreign countries”; “how the economy is doing”; “the crime situation and violence in society”; “what is happening in your personal life and your family”; “what’s going on in the schools and education”; “your religion and religious beliefs”; and “what is happening in sports, television, music, or the movies.” Items were presented in random order to control question-order effects.

The nine items showed a relatively high interrelationship (Cronbach alpha = .74). As a means of assessing the dimensionality of the conversational subjects, the nine items were entered into a principal component analysis with an oblique rotation, and two clean factors were extracted. The first factor, centering on conversations about national government, local government, economy, and foreign affairs, was named “political talk” because it represented talk about political affairs (34% of variance was explained with the eigenvalue of 3.06). The second factor, rather loosely centered on personal matters and other subjects, was called “personal talk” because it more or less represented private and intimate affairs (14% of variance was explained with the eigenvalue of 1.21). This does not mean that only “political talk” is political conversation; as we have already argued, by “political conversation” we refer to any casual conversation that can entertain political subjects in it. The two factors were positively correlated ($r = .36, p < .001$). We used these two extracted talk factors as general political conversation measures.

For issue-specific political conversation, respondents were asked whether they “happened to discuss issues like these about Medicare or government spending with your family, or friends, or people you work with” (no = 0, seldom = 1, sometimes = 2, often = 3). By focusing on the single issue of Medicare, we expected to detect clearer relationships between following news media on Medicare, talking about Medicare, and opinion formation about Medicare.

Willingness to Argue and Perception of the Opinion Climate

The “willingness to argue” question was asked immediately after respondents expressed their opinions on the Medicare issue. If the answer was “agree” or “strongly agree” (37%) with balancing the budget by reducing Medicare, they were then asked: “Suppose that someone you know argued that continuing Medicare support at its present level is more important than balancing the budget. Would you try to persuade that person that you are right?” About 64% of respondents, or 21% of the whole sample, said yes. If their answer was “disagree” or “strongly disagree” (63%) with balancing the budget through reducing Medicare costs, they were then asked: “Suppose that someone you know argued that balancing the budget is more important than continuing Medicare at its present level. Would you try to persuade that person that you are right?” About 72% of these respondents, or 42% of the whole sample, said yes. Overall, 63% of the sample expressed willingness to argue with those who had opinions opposite to theirs.

Since we wished to associate the willingness to argue with environmental friendliness, the “majority perception” scale was constructed from (a) the respondent’s position regarding the Medicare issue and (b) the respondent’s guess about the general opinion distribution in America.⁵ In this majority perception scale, those who thought their opinions belong to the minority were given a lower score (0) than the majority perception

(2). Those who guessed that the general opinion distribution would be “half and half” were categorized as “neither” and given a middle score (1). In the same manner, a “local majority perception” scale was also constructed based on the respondent’s estimate of the “local opinion distribution”—opinions among the people whom the respondents personally knew.

Opinion Consistency

Following Wyckoff (1987) and Barton and Parsons’s (1977) suggestion, we constructed three consistency scales based on an individual level rather than collective level. The first was based on the assumption that support for Medicare should be closely related to political partisanship.⁶ Medicare support and self-identification of partisanship (Democrats) were standardized; then, each individual’s distance between the two scales was calculated. The distance scores were inverted so that they could represent the level of consistency.⁷ We called this measure “partisanship-item” (PI) consistency. The correlation coefficient between partisanship and Medicare support was .34 ($p < .001$, $n = 936$).

The second consistency scale was constructed in the same manner, using self-identified ideological disposition and Medicare support. We call this the “ideology-item” (II) consistency scale. The ideology item had five data points with 93 missing cases. The correlation between ideology and Medicare was .22 ($p < .001$, $n = 897$).

The third consistency scale was based on the assumption that “to the extent that attitudes reflect the influence of a core value held by an individual, opinions on different but related issues should be consistent with one another” (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 235). Such “related issues” can be identified, among other things, as principle-policy relationships, and reasoned opinion should display “principle-policy” (PP) consistency (Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). In other words, to be consistent, if one accepts the “principle” item “The government should provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed,” then one should also support Medicare more than those who do not accept the principle. This “principle” item had four data points with 57 missing cases. The correlation between the principle item and Medicare opinion was .26 ($p < .001$, $n = 936$). The three consistency measures, surprisingly perhaps, were only weakly correlated.

Argument Quality, Consideredness, and Opinionation

As Kuhn (1991) suggests, “deductive reasoning”—the capacity to put one’s own opinions and conclusions in contexts beyond one’s direct experiences—is an important element of argument skills. Based on this assumption, the following question was put to those who expressed their willingness to argue with a person with opposite opinions: “What would you say to the person?” The answers were coded by the interviewers with the following categories: no reason (0; $n = 72$), some answers without specific reason (1; $n = 66$), reasons related to concrete situations of the respondent’s life (2; $n = 212$), and reasons based on principles beyond the respondent’s personal experience (3; $n = 285$).

For the consideredness measure, we borrowed from Zaller and Feldman’s (1992) “stop-and-think” probe. A random half of the sample was asked to “stop” before giving an opinion about the Medicare issue and “talk” about the issue in their own words.⁸ In their answers, those who expressed considerations on both sides of the issue got the highest score (4; $n = 37$), followed by those who gave a one-sided opinion and offered

reasons to support it (3; $n = 152$). Those who simply expressed, or just reiterated, their positions without giving any reasons got a lower score (2; $n = 244$). Those who gave irrelevant answers got a still lower score (1; $n = 12$). Finally, those who failed to answer (don't know or fail to answer) got the lowest score (0; $n = 40$). This scale of "consideredness" can be applied to the random half of the sample who were given the "stop-and-talk" treatment.

Quite a few respondents failed to answer the questions about ideology (96; 9.3%), party identity (53; 5.2%), Medicare (48; 4.7%), and the principle of government provision of a decent standard of living (57; 5.5%). They are probably those who have what Converse called "non-attitudes" about the Medicare and welfare items and lack the ability to arrange their opinion positions according to their belief systems. We have, therefore, assumed that those who failed to answer had lower quality of opinions than those who successfully answered.

Based on this assumption, a new scale for "having opinions" was constructed: Partisanship, ideology, Medicare, and the decent-standard-of-living items were dichotomized depending on whether the respondents gave answers at all (agree or disagree) or failed to give an answer (don't know and refuse to answer). This scale of "opinionation" was constructed simply by summing the four dichotomized scales; it has values ranging from 0 (for those who failed to answer any of the four items) to 4 (for those who successfully answered all).

Political Participation

Political participation was measured by a set of six yes-no items and by intention to vote in the next election, which was dichotomized.⁹ These seven items were subjected to a factor analysis to examine different types of participation (Hollander, 1997; Pan & Kosicki, 1997; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978; Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). The factor analysis identified two clean and correlated factors ($r = .26, p < .001$) extracted from a principal component analysis with an oblique rotation. The first factor summarized the participatory activities "within" the political system (voting, working for a political campaign, attending public meetings, and contacting elected officials), which we call "campaigning," and the second centered on activities "outside" the political system (demonstration, writing letters to media, and calling in talk shows), which we call "complaining," much like Hollander's fourth factor.¹⁰

Results

A first overview of findings is presented in Table 1, which reports partial correlations between each of the three talk variables and news-media use, opinion quality, and political participation—controlling for age, sex, race, and education. The table shows, first, that the three talk variables are significantly correlated with one another; the weakest of the three, as might be expected, is between the "personal talk" factor and specific talk about the Medicare issue ($r = .24, p < .001$).

The talk variables—particularly the two that deal directly with political matters—are associated with three of the opinion quality measures: holding opinions (opinionation), showing awareness of others' opinions (consideredness), and the quality of argumentation. The measures of opinion consistency, however, are not related significantly to the talk variables. The two types of political participation—"campaigning" and "complaining"—also relate significantly to the talk variables. Detailed presentation of our

Table 1
Relationships between political conversation and media use,
opinion quality, and political participation

	Talk variables			N
	Political	Personal	Issue specific	
Talk				
Personal	.41***			968
Issue specific	.48***	.24***		968
News-media use				
Newspaper	.18***	.12***	.07*	968
Television news	.12***	.07*	.05	968
Issue specific	.34***	.10**	.38***	968
Opinion quality				
Item-party consistency	-.04	.03	.05	908
Item-ideology consistency	.02	.05	.04	872
Principle-policy consistency	-.01	.04	.04	908
Opinionation	.12***	.11***	.08*	968
Consideredness	.18***	.11*	.23***	460
Argument quality	.19***	.09*	.21***	613
Participation				
“Campaigning” type	.32***	.17***	.19***	941
“Complaining” type	.18***	.13***	.19***	941

Note. Cell entries are partial correlation coefficients controlling the four demographic variables—age, sex, race, and education; missing cases are deleted pairwise.

*Minimum number of cases in each row.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

findings follows, within the frame of the systemic connections we are seeking among news-media use, political talk, opinion quality, and participation.

Does News-Media Use Encourage Political Conversation?

As a means of assessing how much news-media use explains the variations in political conversation, three regression models for political talk, personal talk, and issue-specific talk were assessed.¹¹ It is, of course, possible that any association between news-media use and political conversation is influenced by an exogenous variable such as general political interest. To allay this suspicion, we included political interest, along with the four demographics (age, sex, race, and education), in the first block of predictors. Then the three news media variables were entered in a subsequent step to see how much additional variance they could explain. As Table 2 shows, political interest was a significant and effective predictor for the three types of conversations. But it did not negate all of the effects of the news media on conversations.

Interestingly, among the news-media variables, issue-specific news-media use was the best predictor not only for issue-specific discussion but also for general political conversation. Our interpretation is that those who pay attention to currently salient

Table 2
Multivariate regression models for political conversation

	Linear				Logistic	
	Political talk (<i>N</i> = 958)		Personal talk (<i>N</i> = 958)		Issue specific discussion (<i>N</i> = 984)	
	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 1	Equation 2
Demographics						
Age	.04	.00	-.26***	-.28***	-.16*	-.25**
Sex	.03	.02	-.16***	-.17***	-.05	-.08
Race	.02	.01	.03	.02	-.02	-.03
Education	.12***	.10**	.06	.06	.28***	.22**
Political interest	.42***	.32***	.18***	.15***	.77***	.57***
News-media use						
Newspaper reading		.09**		.09**		-.04
Television news		.05		.04		-.04
Issue specific		.19***		.01		.67***
<i>F</i> Change	58.2***	17.6***	21.7***	3.8*	—	—
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.23	.27	.09	.10		
Tolerance	.82	.68	.82	.68		
Model χ^2 (improvement) ^a					150.9***	63.5***
Correctly classified (%)					68.6	71.3

Note. Cell entries are standardized regression coefficients. Political talk and personal talk variables, which are extracted factors, have multiple data points. The issue-specific discussion factor, which has only four data points, was dichotomized and subjected to a logistic regression analysis. Missing cases were deleted pairwise.

^aThe difference between 2log (likelihood) for the regression model and 2log (likelihood) for the null model (or the previous equations) with intercept only was distributed as a chi-square value with degrees of freedom equal to the number of predictors.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

issues are more likely to join in political talk about general issues as well as about the salient issue. Another possible interpretation is that people may have difficulty in recalling their news-media use behaviors but may recall more easily and successfully that they follow certain issues through the news media. These findings argue for including both issue-specific and general media use measures as previous studies have suggested (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; McLeod & McDonald, 1985).

For political talk, only education was a significant demographic predictor. For personal talk, however, younger age and being female significantly increased the amount of personal talk. This finding urges us to reassess the commonly held belief that younger age and male sex are strong predictors of political conversation (Noelle-Neumann, 1993;

Salmon & Kline, 1985). As our data show, being male did not contribute anything significant to political conversation.

Consistent with other studies, television news viewing did not contribute anything to any type of political conversation. For example, Robinson and Davis (1990) found that newspaper reading was a consistent predictor for public knowledge of candidates and political issues, but watching television news had very small to negligible effects. Gunter (1991) also reported that the newspaper was a more reliable source of political information than television news.

Willingness to Argue, Political Conversation, and Majority Perception

Our assumption is that political conversation and news-media use increase the willingness to argue. We first assessed bivariate relationships between willingness to argue and perceptions of opinion climate. As a means of filtering out possible spurious effects, the four demographic variables (age, sex, race, and education) and political interest—which presumably influence people’s willingness to express opinions—were controlled for.

As the theory of spiral of silence suggests, willingness to argue was positively associated with perceiving oneself as holding the majority opinion both within the local environment of family and immediate friends ($r = .10, p < .01, n = 868$) and within the national opinion climate ($r = .06, p = .07, n = 843$). The local and national majority perception were also positively associated with each other ($r = .32, p < .001, n = 836$).

Next, a series of logistic multiregression analyses were executed by entering each block of predictors sequentially. The results are presented in Table 3. All predictors were standardized so that the logistic regression coefficients could be used to compare relative importance. Our hypothesis was supported: News-media use and political conversation significantly improved the model’s predictability. In fact, we found that news-media use and political conversation are stronger predictors than the perception of being either in the local or the national majority.

However, only issue-specific news-media use and issue-specific conversation were significant predictors. This may mean that willingness to argue a specific issue reflects people’s involvement with that issue rather than their general use of the news media and general conversational behaviors. It is also interesting that the national majority perception had only minimal effects, while the local majority perception had greater effects on willingness to argue. This suggests that one’s membership group is also one’s reference group and, thus, that the effect of majority/minority perceptions may not generalize to larger communities.

It should be noted that political interest drops out with the introduction of the media use variables (especially issue-specific media use) and the political talk variables (especially issue-specific discussion) in Equations 4 and 5. This implies that degrees of willingness to argue might be “overdetermined” by two levels of political interest—general level and issue specific level—while issue-specific interest maintains a priority.

It is also notable that the education variable was a negative contributor to willingness to argue, although education was positively associated with issue-specific discussion (Table 2), which appeared as the strongest predictor for willingness to argue. We believe that this is due to the nature of the Medicare issue, which was significantly less supported by people of higher education and higher income. And education is not always positively associated with willingness to argue. Shamir (1997), for example, also found that education was negatively associated with people’s willingness to express opinion on a controversial issue to a stranger who disagrees with them in a long bus ride.

Table 3
Multivariate logistic regression models for willingness to argue ($N = 772$)

	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 3	Equation 4	Equation 5
Constant	.94***	.94***	.95***	.97***	.97***
Demographics					
Age	.26**	.21*	.19*	.13	.17
Sex	.14	.11	.12	.11	.14
Race	.04	.07	.08	.09	.08
Education	-.22**	-.27**	-.27**	-.32***	-.37***
Political interest		.23*	.23*	.07	-.06
Majority perception					
National climate			.04	.04	.05
Local climate			.25**	.26**	.28**
News-media use					
Newspaper				-.03	-.05
Television news				-.10	-.10
Issue specific				.50***	.40***
Talking					
Political talk					.07
Personal talk					.13
Issue specific					.34***
Model χ^2 (improvement) ^a	17.7**	6.5*	10.5**	24.9***	17.5***
Correctly classified (%)	71.0	71.2	71.8	72.9	73.8

Note. Cell entries are coefficients from logistic regressions, estimated via maximum-likelihood methods. Dependent variables take the values 0 (not willing to argue) and 1 (willing). All independent variables are standardized.

^aThe difference between $2\log$ (likelihood) for the regression model and $-2\log$ (likelihood) for a null model (or the previous equations) with intercept only is distributed as a chi-square value with degrees of freedom equal to the number of predictors.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Effects on Opinion Quality

If consistency is analyzed at the “collective level,” as Converse (1964) and his followers have done, our results would look quite similar. For example, the strength of the correlation between party identity and Medicare support is actually different at each level of talk: It increased as the frequencies of issue-specific discussion went up from “no” ($r = .22$, $p < .001$) to “seldom” ($r = .23$, $p < .05$), “sometimes” ($r = .38$, $p < .001$), and “often” ($r = .45$, $p < .001$). The same is true with the principle-policy item (Medicare vs. decent standard living): It increased with the frequencies of issue-specific discussion from “no” ($r = .12$, $p < .05$) to “seldom” ($r = .27$, $p < .05$), “sometimes” ($r = .30$, $p < .001$), and “often” ($r = .36$, $p < .001$). Between self-identified ideology and Medicare support, however, we found one deviation from the stepwise increase in the size of the correlation as frequency of issue-specific discussion increases: from “no” ($r = .05$, $p =$

.39), to “seldom” ($r = .22, p = .06$), “sometimes” ($r = .37, p < .001$), and “often” ($r = .26, p < .001$). However, we believed it necessary to conceptualize opinion consistency at the individual level because comparing strength of correlations across different groups may produce misleading results (Barton & Parsons, 1977; Judd & Downing, 1990).

To assess the degree to which news-media use and political conversation can explain variations in the six opinion quality measures at the level of individuals, we constructed four linear and two logistic regression models. The results of the analysis supported our hypothesis only partially, as Table 4 shows. The model could explain only about 4% of the variance in partisanship-Medicare support consistency; however, older age and non-White race contributed to consistency more than news-media use and the conversation variables. This means that non-Whites and older people saw the Medicare issue as a partisan concern more than other groups. The predictors explained neither Ideology-Medicare consistency nor principle-policy consistency successfully.

One might argue that we should drop the three consistency measures (PI, II, and PP) from the model altogether because they lack any significant partial correlations with other variables (Table 1), and they cannot be adequately predicted by the regression models (Table 4). But we decided to keep them because we believed this “failure” was worthy of reporting for the following reasons.

When we constructed consistency scales, as did Converse (1964) and some of his followers (Hagner & Pierce, 1983; Judd & Downing, 1990; Judd & Milburn, 1980; Miller, Hesli, & Reisinger, 1995), we found the scales to be positively associated with amount of news-media use and political conversation. In other words, higher correlation coefficients among the items—Medicare support, party identity, ideology, and support for “decent standard of living”—were detected among those who use news media more, talk politics more, and have higher education.

But when the consistency scales were constructed at the individual level, following Wyckoff (1987) and Barton and Parsons’s (1977) suggestions—by calculating how much respondents shift from one item to another—the scales showed little association with news-media use, political conversation, or education variables. This led us to reconsider whether we have a right to expect consistency to result from deliberation.

The methodological and theoretical implications of this finding include the following: (a) The traditional consistency measures at collective levels (Converse, 1964) may be misleading, as Barton and Parsons (1977) have suggested; (b) consistency measures at individual levels, however, cannot be equated with the quality of opinions, since ambivalence and inconsistency may also be an outcome of reflection and interaction; and, (c) to assess opinion quality, a range of measures should be developed.

Table 4 also shows that the nonconsistency measures are better explained by news-media use and political conversation variables. For consideredness, general newspaper reading was a better predictor than issue-specific news-media use, while issue-specific discussion was a better predictor than general political conversation. Political interest also appeared as a significant predictor only for the consideredness measure. For opinionation, general newspaper reading was an even stronger predictor than other news-media use. While political conversation did not contribute much to opinionation, demographics—younger age and higher education—contributed to the model significantly.

For argument quality, news-media use did not contribute much; issue-specific and general political conversation were the most effective predictors for the model. Interestingly, issue-specific news-media use hardly contributed to any of the models, while issue-specific talk was an effective predictor for both consideredness and argument quality. Television news watching and personal talk barely contributed to the models, either.

Table 4
Multivariate regression models for opinion quality measures

	Linear ^a				Logistic ^b	
	Consistency ^c			Consideredness	Opinionation	Argument quality
	P-I	I-I	P-P			
Demographics						
Age	.12**	-.11**	.01	.01	-.23*	.27*
Sex	-.05	-.01	.03	-.09*	.17	-.04
Race	.14***	-.04	-.04	.04	-.03	.03
Education	-.05	-.05	-.03	.03	.26**	.09
Political interest	-.02	.07	-.01	.12*	.09	.02
News-media use						
Newspaper	-.02	-.04	.03	.11*	.20*	.01
Television news	-.07*	.01	.03	.09	.07	-.06
Issue specific	.02	.01	-.02	.06	.09	-.05
Talking						
Political talk	-.09*	-.04	-.05	-.01	.15	.30*
Personal talk	.06	.05	.05	.04	.08	.03
Issue specific	.08*	.02	.07	.16**	-.07	.42***
Adjusted R ²	.04	.01	.01	.11	—	—
F	4.00***	1.67	.07	6.00***	—	—
N	913	877	913	465	954	597
Model χ^2 (improvement)	—	—	—	—	46.8***	45.2***
Correctly classified(%)	—	—	—	—	83.0	78.2
Correlations^d						
I-I Consistency	.11**					
P-P Consistency	.09**	.05				
Consideredness	.06	.11*	.01			
Opinionation	-.07*	.03	-.03	.21***		
Argument quality	.03	.03	.01	.17**	.08	
Participation						
“Campaigning”	-.05	.04	.00	.16***	.14***	.12**
“Complaining”	-.01	.00	-.00	.00	.02	.09*

^aCell entries are standardized regression coefficients; the minimum tolerance value of all independent variables was .55.

^bThe cell entries are coefficients from logistic regressions, estimated using maximum likelihood methods. Dependent variables take the values of 0 and 1. All independent variables are standardized.

^cP-I: partisanship-item consistency; I-I: ideology-item consistency; P-P: principle-policy consistency.

^dPartial correlation coefficients controlling for age, sex, race, and education. Missing cases were deleted pairwise.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

On Participation

As a means of examining how much of the variance in participation can be explained by news-media use and political conversation—beyond the demographics, socioeconomic resource levels (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995) and political interest—linear regression models were constructed for the “campaigning” and the “complaining” types of participation. As the results presented in Table 5 show, education, family income, and political interest were very effective predictors of the campaigning type of participation, a finding congruent with numerous political participation studies. However, for the complaining type, younger age and non-White racial identity were more important predictors than education and family income.

For both types of participation, issue-specific media use and issue-specific conversation significantly increase the models’ predictability beyond the demographics of education, family income, and political interest, supporting our hypothesis. General news-media use barely contributed to the models, but issue-specific media use was an effective predictor for both types of participation. For the campaigning type, general political talk was an effective predictor, while for the complaining type, personal talk and issue-specific conversation were better predictors.

The results suggest that the effects of political conversation on participation cannot

Table 5
Regression models for political participation ($n = 839$)

	“Campaigning” type		“Complaining” type	
	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 1	Equation 2
Demographics				
Age	.09**	.08*	-.14***	-.13***
Sex	-.00	-.03	.05	.06
Race	.04	.03	.09**	.09**
Education	.22***	.19***	.08*	.04
Family income	.15***	.13***	.05	.04
Political interest	.33***	.19***	.13***	.01
News-media use				
Newspaper reading		.06		-.02
Television news		-.03		-.04
Issue specific		.11**		.16***
Talk				
Political talk		.12**		.05
Personal talk		.04		.08*
Issue specific		.07		.09*
Adjusted R^2	.28	.33	.06	.10
F Change	56.0***	9.9***	9.3***	7.4***
Tolerance ^a	.80	.55	.80	.55

Note. Cell entries are standardized regression coefficients. “Campaigning type” and “complaining type” are extracted factors from the 7 participation items. Missing cases were deleted pairwise.

^aMinimum tolerance value of the independent variables.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

be simply attributed to political interest, education, and socioeconomic resources; all of these variables were entered into the model before the political conversation variables. These findings thus have a vital theoretical implication: For the theory of deliberative democracy, political conversation should be conceived not just as an agent contributing to better opinions but to more active participation. Indeed, these findings suggest, deliberative democracy *is* participatory democracy.

Discussion

This study attempted to test the validity of deliberative democracy not just from a normative perspective but through empirical examination of the conditions that motivate political conversation and the consequences of such conversation. We broke down the notion of deliberative democracy into four empirically measurable components: news-media use, political conversation, opinion formation, and political participation. Sufficient empirical evidence was found to support our hypotheses on the interrelationships among the four components.

First, the amount of news-media use was closely associated with the frequency of political conversation in daily life both at the general and the issue-specific levels. Since we rely on a single wave of cross-sectional survey data, it is difficult to establish causal direction. However, the case has been made that news media use comes “before” political talk—historically (Bryce, 1888/1973; Habermas, 1989; Tarde, 1899/1989), theoretically (Anderson, Dardenne, & Killenberg, 1994) and empirically (Koch, 1994), not to mention the tradition of media effects studies, including agenda setting and the two-step flow of communication models, where news-media use is the independent variable and interpersonal communication is the dependent (or the intervening) variable. Our major focus, however, is less on causal direction and more on the tight relationships between “habitual” news-media use and “habitual” political conversation, which is more significant to the deliberative democracy model.

Second, willingness to argue with those who have different opinions is influenced not only by majority perceptions, as the theory of spiral of silence suggests, but also and more by news-media use and political conversation. Borrowing Bourdieu’s (1984) phrase, those who argue are those “who feel entitled to claim a personal opinion” (p. 414). We may, again borrowing from Bourdieu, say that those who have the “habitus” of political conversation and news-media use have a higher “sense of being entitled to be concerned with politics, authorised to talk politics” (p. 409). We found that this “habitus” is a more important predictor of the willingness to get involved in “public dialogue” (MacKuen, 1990) than opinion climate perception.

Third, news-media use and political conversation have positive effects on the quality of opinion, separately and together. There are relatively few problems in determining the causal direction from news-media use and political conversation to opinion quality because quality of opinion was measured at the moment when the survey questions were asked, while the other items involved respondents’ self-reports about behavior before the survey. Effects on opinion quality were more evident in measures of argument quality, consideration of alternative opinions (consideredness), and the extent of holding opinions (opinionation) than in measures of consistency.

Finally, it was found that news-media use and political conversation were also closely associated with participatory activities, but more so with the “campaigning” type of participation than the “complaining” type. News-media use and political conversation could explain variations in the “campaigning” type of participatory activities beyond

socioeconomic resource levels and general political interest, but the “complaining” type of participation is better explained by demographics—younger age and non-White racial identities.

There have been numerous studies on the four components of the deliberative democracy model from a broad range of fields, including political science, communication studies, public opinion research, political psychology, and social cognitive studies. Nevertheless, our study has some distinctive features. First, our study is empirical and attempts to examine the interaction among four major elements of a comprehensive model of deliberative democracy. In this, we have tried to give operational definition to the writings of political theorists and philosophers who have postulated interrelations among news media, political conversation, opinion formation, and political action but who stopped short of empirical study. While there are many relevant empirical studies, they tend to focus on pairs of the four elements rather than taking them all together as a system.

Second, we attribute particular significance to the role of political conversation in the process of deliberative democracy. Many communication scholars have studied the relationship between mass media and interpersonal communication, based on theories of social networks, agenda setting, and diffusion. But most of these studies have dealt with conversation as an intervening variable, with only secondary significance. Political scientists, too, have considered “talking politics” only as a stand-in for such variables as political participation, political interest, psychological involvement, information-gathering activities, and the like, as is evident particularly in the ongoing National Election Studies (1948–1996). Begging to differ, our view is that conversation is central to a participatory democracy.

Finally, we have given major attention to the proposition that conversation refines opinion and have wrestled with the conceptualization and operationalization of “opinion quality.” We have found ideological consistency to be an inadequate measure of the quality of opinion and can make a case that opinion quality may find expression not only in increased consistency but also in inconsistency. We have proposed three additional measures of quality that we call opinionation (having opinions), consideredness (being aware of the alternative opinions), and argument quality (reasonableness of argument). Political conversation, we believe, may affect any or all of these aspects of opinion quality, but this subject deserves more work. It should be clear, however, that we have placed primary emphasis not on the distribution of opinion, or opinion change, but on opinion quality and its relationship to everyday political talk. Political conversation is indeed the heart of deliberative democracy.

Notes

1. “Not that everyone need read the newspapers but even those who fail to are forced to follow the groove of their borrowed thoughts. One pen suffices to set off a million tongues (*Il suffit d'une plume pour mettre en mouvement des millions de langues*)” (Tarde, 1899/1989, p. 82).

2. The telephone survey was conducted by a survey research company located in Baltimore and supervised by the authors. Fifty-six percent of the sample was female. In age, 31% were 18–34, 35% were 35–49, 20% were 50–64, and 15% were 65 and older. Whites made up 84% of the sample, Blacks 9%, and those of other or mixed race 7%. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that, in 1996, for the U.S. population above age 18, 52% were female. In age, 33% were estimated to be 18–34, 32% were 35–49, 18% were 50–64, and 17% were 65 and older. For the entire population, race estimates were 83% White, 13% Black, and 5% of other or mixed race. Our sample, when compared with U.S. census estimates, somewhat overrepresented females and, to a lesser degree, those 35–49 years of age; Blacks were somewhat underrepresented. Given the acceptable

distribution of the demographics, however, data were not weighted to avoid difficulties with multi-dimensional scaling and other statistics.

3. In this article, we employ *news-media use* to avoid the term *media exposure* which may imply that media messages are hypodermic injections. Following Delli Carpini and Williams's (1994) suggestion, we view news-media consumers as "participants in an ongoing conversation." This is why we want to avoid the term *media exposure*.

4. Shaw (1977) also found that frequency of political discussion was more closely associated with newspaper than with television news. Interestingly, however, as the 1972 presidential campaign neared its end, the effects of television on political discussion increased significantly, so that "the large newspaper lead over television in June disappeared by October" (p. 75).

5. The question was, "Please give us your best guess about how many Americans would agree with the statement, 'government should balance the budget even if that means reducing Medicare coverage.' Would almost all agree, or would more than half agree, or would half agree and half not agree, or would few agree or would almost none agree?"

6. In May 1996, many Republican politicians stressed the importance and urgency of balancing the federal budget, while Democrats in the Clinton administration were arguing that balancing the budget should not mean sacrificing social welfare programs for the less fortunate. The Medicare versus federal budget deficit issue ("balancing the budget at the cost of reducing Medicare") was chosen not only because the issue was thought to have ideological implications but also because it had been one of the top salient issues for more than a year as the survey was conducted (Kohut, 1995). The Medicare support item had four data points with 48 missing cases.

7. The SPSS syntax for this process was as follows: compute PIConsis = 1/abs(zparty - zmedi), where PIConsis was the partisanship-item consistency measure and zparty and zmedi were standardized scores for partisanship (Democrats) and Medicare support, respectively. The partisanship item itself had three data points—Republican, Independent, and Democrats—with 53 missing cases.

8. About half of the sample, or 485 respondents (47.1%), were asked the following question immediately before the question about whether they supported Medicare: "Consider this statement: 'Government should balance the budget, even if that means reducing Medicare coverage.' Before saying whether you agree or disagree, could you tell me in your own words what kinds of things come to mind when you think about this issue? Again, the statement is: 'Government should balance the budget, even if that means reducing Medicare coverage.'"

9. The questions and the distribution are as follows: (a) "Written a letter to a newspaper, magazine or television news program?" (yes = 24.3%); (b) "Called in to a radio or television talk show?" (yes = 16.3%); (c) "Written a letter to, phoned, or otherwise contacted a candidate for public office or an elected official?" (yes = 37.6%); (d) "Attended a public meeting of an organization interested in public affairs?" (yes = 41.0%); (e) "Taken part in a public demonstration or march?" (yes = 11.8%); (f) "Worked in a political campaign?" (yes = 14.3%); and (g) "How likely are you to vote in the election for president that will be held this fall. Are you very likely to vote, somewhat likely, or not at all likely to vote?" (very likely = 78.1%, $n = 1,012$).

10. Previous studies have identified similar but different types of participatory activities. Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978) suggest four types: voting, campaign activity, communal activity, and particularized activity. Based on factor analysis of a set of 12 dichotomized participation items, Hollander (1997) identified four types: attending city meetings, attending discussion groups, and attending public hearings (Factor 1); writing to elected officials, calling/sending letters to Congressmen, and calling/sending letters to the White House (Factor 2); giving money to political groups/institutions, giving money to candidates, and joining organizations (Factor 3); and calling in to give one's opinion, calling the media on issues, and calling television with complaints (Factor 4). Pan and Kosicki (1997) also identified four types of participation through factor analysis of a set of 13 dichotomized participation items: (a) contacting elected officials, (b) attending public meetings, (c) contributing to a cause, and (d) responding to media. Finkel (1987) identified four types of political participation as well: voting, campaigning, peaceful protest, and aggressive behavior.

11. Linear regression models were used for the political and personal talk items, and a logistic model was used for the dichotomized issue-specific talk. The minimum tolerance value of all of the independent variables in the two linear regression models was .68, which means that there was no serious problem of multicollinearity. The standardized regression coefficients, therefore, could be interpreted as the relative importance in predicting the outcome measures.

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