Offline and Online Activity:

Effects on Political Tolerance Attitudes

Bachelor thesis Political Psychology

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Netherlands has had a longstanding reputation for being one of the most tolerant countries in the world. Within the span of a single decade, however, that reputation was lost. The first of a series of events that underlies this change occurred in 2002 when Pim Fortuyn stepped onto the political scene. Crime, immigration and failing integration policies had become sources of discontent and worry for many Dutch citizens, especially those living in the poorer urbanized areas. A few members of the political establishment, notably politician Frits Bolkestein and publicist Paul Scheffer, tried to address the problems of multiculturalism. Their critique, however, was dismissed as being racist. “To see massive immigration as a problem […]”, Ian Buruma comments on the episode, “was worse than bad taste; it was like questioning the European ideal or racial equality” (2006: 53). Fortuyn, mediagenic, flamboyant, openly homosexual and a political outsider, was the man who broke open the discussion and became a possible candidate for the office of prime minister almost over night. Just nine days before the parliamentary elections Fortuyn’s party Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF) was taking part in for the first time, Fortuyn was shot and killed by an animal rights activist. The scenes at his funeral procession were as uncharacteristic of Dutch culture as the political murder that inspired them. Fortuyn posthumously received 1.1 million votes. LPF became the second biggest parliamentary party with 26 out of 150 seats and was one of the three parties to enter into coalition government.

Without its leader, LPF quickly lost its electoral support, but the issues Fortuyn had addressed remained salient. Some of Fortuyn’s positions were partly adopted by established parties, such as People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), but electoral potential remained. A second murder, one and a half years after Fortuyn’s violent death, revived the anxieties of the Dutch. Director Theo van Gogh, who was critical of Islam and admired Fortuyn and atheist activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali, was shot by Muslim extremist Mohammed Bouyeri on a street in Amsterdam. Using a small knife, Bouyeri pinned a letter addressed to

Hirsi Ali to Van Gogh's chest. The hours and days after the murder were tense. Dutch media added to the tension by blowing the smallest disturbance up out of proportion (Buruma 2006: 8).

It was Geert Wilders who seized upon the electoral potential of immigration critique, the topic that other parties still took care to avoid. In 2004, the year Van Gogh was murdered, Wilders broke with the VVD, the party he had been an MP for for six years, over his controversial views on Islam. In the years since, his party has had considerable electoral success, but has also been criticized for its intolerant attitudes towards Muslims and, more recently, East-European immigrants. An opinion piece written by Wilders and published in *de Volkskrant* in 2007, in which Wilders called the Koran a "fascist book", led a number of people and associations to file charges against him. Wilders was tried in for inciting hatred and discrimination against Muslims. His acquittal in 2011 was, according to the foreign press, the final blow to Dutch tolerance (De Jong 2011).

Both Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders seemed able to tap into some difficult to grasp quality of the Dutch electorate. Buruma offers two explanations for Dutch voters' behavior. The first has its context in a wider trend in continental Europe, where processes of globalization, Europeanization and the hegemony of multi-national corporations have made it unclear to people where decision making takes place. This left people feeling underrepresented. The second explanation lies in the style of Dutch politics. The Dutch *poldermodel* has successfully accommodated multiple parties by means of consensus and compromise, but, because of its intrinsic qualities, got "stuck in the rut of a self-perpetuating elite, shuffling jobs back and forth between the members of the club" (2006: 50-51). The Dutch voter was confused and frustrated with politics. In the debate, it is often claimed that there is a 'gap' between the electorate and politians.

The events in the Netherlands and the explanations that Buruma offers tie in with a more general trend. What seems to be going is that political socialization processes are failing. When political socialization is successful, citizens are become aware of civic society and feel

a duty to engage in it. When they fail, people feel disconnected from society and the state. Buruma's analysis points to two opposing perspectives in the political socialization debate. From one point of view, it is the citizen whose interest in politics and in being politically and civically engaged is decreasing. Political apathy grows and citizens become disaffected (Loader 2007: 1). Opposite the disaffected citizen perspective is the cultural displacement point of view. According to this approach, citizens' levels of political interest and their willingness to be engaged is no less than previous generations, rather it seems that traditional political activity is no longer able to address contemporary concerns (Loader 2007: 1-2).

There have been few attempts to examine political tolerance in the Netherlands in any systematic way. From a normative standpoint, this is rather remarkable. Political tolerance is a civic virtue widely recognized to be essential for well-functioning democracy, particularly in a pluralistic country like the Netherlands. Decreasing levels of political tolerance have potentially destabilizing effects. Decreasing tolerance in the broader perspective of political socialization is, however, merely a symptom of failure. This study aspires to contribute to the political socialization debate. It looks at political tolerance amongst the Dutch and compares traditional associational activity with online activity that potentially enhances engagement and, therewith, tolerance.

2. Literature Review

The aim of this paper is to shed light on the extent of citizen disaffection by comparing traditional forms of civic engagement, i.e. associational activity, with newer forms of participation. In doing so, the study draws on the political socialization and political tolerance literature. The theoretical framework is closely associated with social capital theory. Besides its most common use as a label for social networks and norms, social capital also refers to a perspective on democracy. In this sense, social capital is a causal theory with a focus on the "socialization of individuals into cooperative behavior" (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999: 3).

2.1 Associations

Associations have a central role in social capital conceptions of democracy. Mark E. Warren distinguishes three ways in which associations produce potentially democratizing effects: public sphere effects, institutional effects and developmental effects. Firstly, public sphere effects occur when associations "contribute to the formation of public opinion and public judgment", thus providing political autonomy (Warren 2001: 61). Secondly, institutional effects are "the effects associations have on the institutions through which collective decisions are made and collective actions are organized" (Warren 2001: 82). Thirdly, and most relevant for the present study, are developmental effects on individuals: "[a]ssociations may contribute to forming, enhancing, and supporting the capacities of democratic citizens" (Warren 2011: 61). Associations promote citizens' efficacy, enhance their political and critical skills and cultivate civic virtues, amongst which are trust and tolerance (Warren 2001: 70-75).

The developmental effects Warren identifies are the result of the political socialization processes that takes place within associations. It is here that citizens acquire their political orientations and behaviors, including political tolerance orientations (Cigler and Joslyn 2002: 9). By participating in voluntary groups and associations, the argument runs, citizens gain experience with views and interests of other citizens that may differ from their own (Cigler

and Joslyn 2002: 7). Associations with horizontal internal structures and relatively egalitarian structures are in a way 'little democracies' in themselves (Cigler and Joslyn 2002: 8). So not only do people learn about other people's perspectives and how to deal with them on a personal level, they are also exposed to more formal rules of collective decision making, and thus get acquainted with the democratic proceedings of the larger polity.

This is not to say that associational activity only produces democratic effects. Indeed, there is also a 'dark side' to associational activity which may manifest itself in particular in hierarchical, homogenous groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan (Cigler and Joslyn 2002: 9). Robert Putnam, in his influential book *Bowling Alone*, distinguishes between bonding social capital and bridging social capital (2000: 22-23). Forms of bonding social capital, he explains, are "inward looking and tend to reinforce inclusive identities and homogeneous groups" (Putnam 2000: 22). They forge strong in-group bonds, but may, consequently, also create "strong out-group antagonism" and thus increase intolerance (2000: 23). Forms of bridging social capital, however, "are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages" (2000: 22). Thus, different kinds of groups produce different effects; some enhance democratic effects, others do just the opposite.

2.2 Political tolerance

Political tolerance is generally seen as a major prerequisite for a well functioning democracy (Gibson 2006: 21-23; Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus 1979: 781). The concept implies "a willingness to permit the expression of those ideas or interests that one opposes" (Gibson and Bingham 1982: 604). In the political sphere, where different groups compete for influence and power, this means that one refrains from oppressing their political enemies (Gibson 2006: 22). Different studies have found that levels of intolerance are quite high, even in established democracies (see for example Peffley and Rohrschneider 2003). As long as the targets of intolerance are quite diverse, there is no real danger to civil liberties or

democracy. If, however, attitudes are focused and mobilized, then intolerance might pose a threat to the functioning of democracy (Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus 1979: 793). The Dutch case reminds us that circumstances can change quite rapidly and that it is, therefore, both important and urgent to gain an ever deeper understanding of political tolerance.

Cigler and Joslyn test the general hypothesis that participation in groups leads to higher levels of political tolerance. They expect there to be a positive relationship between the number of associations that individuals are involved in on the one hand and political tolerance on the other. Similarly, Cigler and Joslyn anticipate a positive relation between "memberships of an overlapping, yet diverse set of groups" and political tolerance (2002:9). Cigler and Joslyn find that group membership, regardless of the nature or number of groups, is a predictor of political tolerance. Moreover, they report that additional memberships correlate with greater levels of tolerance (2002: 15). The expectation that group type would have an effect on political tolerance was not borne out, or at least not entirely. The results showed that "memberships in veterans and farm groups, churches, unions and Greek organizations were all associated with lower levels of tolerance" (Cigler and Joslyn 2002: 20). These types of organizations may fit into the category of bonding social capital. Memberships of literary, professional, political and cultural groups, in contrast, have a positive effect on tolerance. Both effects are nowhere near as large as group membership alone, however (Cigler and Joslyn 2002: 20). This leads Cigler and Joslyn to conclude that the isolated citizen is the one that is least likely to be politically tolerant.

2.3 Online activity and civic engagement

One possible critique on Cigler and Joslyn's study on political tolerance is their focus on traditional associations. One reason why such an approach is inadequate is that traditional associations – churches, unions and political parties in particular – are less and less relevant. As discussed above, traditional associations have, for various reasons, seen their membership numbers decrease in the past half century (Putnam 2000). Instead, there are

clues that membership has shifted to other types of associations and to the digital sphere. Indeed, Quan-Haase et al. suggest that a focus on traditional associational activity may lead to new forms of communication and participation being overlooked (2008: 3). This critique echoes the cultural displacement point of view on civic engagement, in which "deinstitutionalized forms of political engagement (…) are enacted within networks and spaces characterized by loose social ties and informal social structures" (Loader 2007: 3).

The early debate about the effects worldwide connectedness through the internet would have on citizens and civil society ran between two opposing camps: the utopians (or e-topians) and the dystopians. The utopians emphasized the opportunities of the new technology. According to them, the internet would allow individuals to increase and deepen their social contacts (De Haan 2008: 365). The internet has no closing hours and no geographical limits. People can be online 24/7 if they choose to, and interact with whomever they choose to through an ever diversifying and ever increasing number of media channels. The internet would also eliminate gender, ethnic and socioeconomic inequalities (De Haan 2008: 365). As such, the utopians posited, the internet had a huge potential for social inclusion, participation and integration. It could develop into a complete alternative to offline citizenship (Warschauer in Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal 2008: 1).

The list of arguments brought to the table by the dystopians is equally extensive. Dystopian feared that the internet would not contribute to social cohesion, but, instead, would cause social isolation (De Haan 2008: 365; Quan-Haase et al 2008: 3). Rather than go out into the real world and meet others, dystopians argued, people would spend more time staying at home, surfing the web. Online contacts, they believed, would not have the same socially integrating quality as working and recreating in the real world. In addition, the internet would not eliminate inequalities, but help shape new ones through differences in access to and (ability to) use the new technology, creating a 'digital divide' (Loader 2007: 4). With regard to online participation, the cyber-pessimists expected the Internet to reflect "politics as usual" (Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal 2008: 49). This entails that those who were already

participating in the real world would continue their participation online, whereas those not participating in the real world would not start doing so online (Vromen 2007: 98).

Perhaps unsurprising, neither of the two polar opposites has become a reality today. As scholarship has caught up with developments in the real world, results of research on online political participation have been mixed. Some studies support elements of the dystopian account of events, other research corroborates parts of the utopian account. For example, the dystopian expectation that access to and usage of the internet would be unequal, has, thus far, been borne out. Generally speaking, internet access and usage remains limited to well-educated people with high incomes. A recent study found that 73 percent of households in the 27 countries of the European Union have access to the internet (Seybert 2011). There are considerable differences between countries, with the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark and Sweden scoring over 90 percent and Bulgaria, Romania and Greece lagging behind with 50 percent or less (Seybert 2011). More interesting are the statistics on who actually uses the internet regularly. Seybert reports that age, country and education are the most significant sources of inequality (2011). Although differences remain, there is, however, also a silver lining. DiMaggio and Celeste report that socioeconomic features of adopters of internet technology “have become less distinctive over time” (2004: 6). This pertains especially to the gender divide, which “has disappeared with respect to access to the Web, and appears to be rapidly diminishing with respect to patterns of productive use as well” (DiMaggio and Celeste 2004: 40).

Today, as the internet has become a stable presence in the daily lives of millions of people in the United States and Europe, increasing support is found for a third possible effect of the internet on civic engagement. Rather than substitute or enhance, the internet supplements social capital. For example, Quan-Haase et al. have looked the relation between online and offline interactions, people’s sense of community and levels of civic engagement. They conclude that the internet “facilitates social contact that supplements face-to-face and telephone contact” (2008: 29). Also, they found that those who are active offline find

additional ways of doing so online. Thus, rather than decrease or increase social capital, the internet is “quietly fostering the changing composition of social capital” (Quan-Haase et al. 2008: 30).

DiMaggio and Celeste claim that individuals deal with new technologies like the internet in different ways. They distinguish between ‘drop outs’ and ‘adopters’. Some people will try the technology, but decide it is not for them. Others may be more enthusiastic or skilled and will continue using the technology after they first started using it. Not every ‘adopter’ uses the technology in the same way, however. Some internet users may go online every day and engage in a wide range of different activities, while others use it just to read their e-mails once a week. Thus, internet users have varying ‘technological careers’ in which it does not only matter if individuals use a certain technology, but what patterns their usage follow subsequently (2004: 3).

On the basis of the theory that the internet supplements, rather than increases or decreases, offline activity in terms of democratic effects, it is hypothesized that associational activity and online activity reinforce one another. In other words, it is expected that the two have an interaction effect. The next sections describes how the study was set up in order to test this hypothesis.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Case selection

A large proportion of the Dutch population is well-versed with internet usage. In a cross-European study the Dutch ranked second (after Sweden) for frequency of internet use. Ninety per cent of the Dutch population went online at least once a week, while nearly eighty percent did so almost every day. Only seven per cent of the population had never used the internet (Seybert 2011). As far as user skills are concerned, the Dutch score above the European average (Van Deursen and Van Dijk 2001: 27). The decline of associations that Putnam and others have claimed is so evident and consequential in the United States of America has also been studied in the Netherlands. Although memberships of traditional associations such as churches, political parties and unions have decreased sharply in since the 1950s, social capital levels have not. Bekkers and De Graaf explain that it is not so much the scope of social capital, but the base of social capital that has changed in the Netherlands (2002: 338). New, secular organizations, chiefly in the areas of environmental protection, ethical issues, cultural expression and sports, were founded and have in part taken the place of traditional associations (Bekkers and De Graaf 2002: 339). It is this combination of widely dispersed internet usage and the prevalence of associations that makes The Netherlands in particular such a relevant case for testing the hypothesis that online activity supplements offline participation.

3.2 Survey design

An online survey was distributed via the author's personal network. Respondents were recruited via e-mail and social networking websites such as Facebook. Participants were asked to share the link to the survey with the people in their own networks, thus recruiting more respondents. Although snowball sampling is subject to bias, this sampling technique was deemed the most effective strategy for acquiring a decent sized sample. In a time span of three weeks, 804 respondents filled out the questionnaire.

The survey consisted of a total of 24 questions, 14 of which are used in the present paper. It included questions for other research projects as well, with all projects having political tolerance as their dependent variable. Care was taken to exclude any questions that might influence responses to the questions about political tolerance. A total of 38 respondents was excluded from the sample due to non-response. This includes three respondents who indicated that there was no group they could think of that they did not like. The total sample, then, consisted of 766 respondents.

3.3 Variables

3.3.1 Political tolerance

For the dependent variable, political tolerance, a content controlled measure was included. The question read: 'Some people believe that certain groups pose a threat to social order. Which of the following groups would you designate as your least liked group?' Respondents were then presented with four preselected groups: neo-Nazis, East European immigrants, Muslim fundamentalists, and homosexuals. In addition, the respondents were given the option to enter their own least liked group.

The content controlled measure for political tolerance, introduced by Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus, ensures that respondents answer the tolerance questions with their least liked group in mind. It does not matter for the purposes of tolerance research whether a respondent's least liked group is Muslim fundamentalists, people from the province of Noord-Brabant or supporters of the Freedom Party. Early empirical research on political tolerance, notably Samuel A. Stouffer's seminal work *Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties*, offered the respondents with a list of preselected groups, most of a leftist orientation (1955). Evidently, the mention of Communists and Socialists during the heydays of the Cold War and McCarthyism would trigger intolerant responses. Studies conducted in subsequent decades using the same preselected groups as Stouffer logically found that levels of political intolerance declined as Cold War hostilities subsided (Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus 1979:

781). However, Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus noted that these results confused intolerance for specific groups for intolerance in general. They proposed giving respondents the opportunity to select a group other than the ones on the preselected list, if their least liked group was not on there. In addition, Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus took care to ensure that the list would include groups representing various positions on the left-right and progressive-conservative dimensions, and not just those on the political left (1979: 785). Their findings opposed Stouffer's: it was not so much that intolerance levels had decreased, but that the focus of intolerance had changed (1979: 789).

The list of preselected groups in the present study was relatively short. The four groups that were included were chosen on the basis of two criteria: the expectation that it might be the least liked group for a large percentage of respondents and the potential to make respondents think about their own least liked group, should they feel none of the preselected options accorded with their own attitudes. Muslim fundamentalists, for example, were included because they are the source of much anxiety in the Western world. But the word 'fundamentalists' might also trigger respondents into offering 'religious extremists' because they feel that label is the more appropriate for the group they find most objectionable.

Next, respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought people belonging to their least liked group should be allowed to participate in each of the following six activities: teach their children, seek office, found a political party, have airtime on public broadcasting, hold a rally or demonstration and be put under surveillance. Respondents had to answer either 'yes' or 'no' to each of the items, resulting in a six-point index with the most intolerant respondents scoring 0 and the most tolerant scoring 6. The way the questions are phrased is commonly accepted in the political tolerance literature, with the footnote that they were adjusted to fit the Dutch context. For example, in American political tolerance research respondents are commonly asked if they think their least liked group should be subjected to phone taps. The placement of phone taps, however, is a far less salient issue in the Netherlands than it is in

the United States. Identifying and listing societal groups on the basis of their religion or origin for the purpose of surveilling them, however, is far more controversial, as it harks back to Holocaust fears and guilt. Including a question on phone taps is, therefore, less likely to elicit intolerant responses from Dutch respondents than a question on surveillance measures.

3.3.2 Civic engagement

Respondents were then asked to indicate which type of associations and organizations they were members of. The question read: 'Of which of the following types of associations and organizations are you a member?' A list of twenty types of traditional associations and organizations was offered, ranging from general categories such as political parties and sports associations to typically Dutch clubs like carnival associations and broadcasting associations. There was no limit to the number of association types respondent could select. Respondents were also given the possibility to add types of organizations of which they were a member, but which they felt were not provided for in the list.

DiMaggio and Celeste have argued that individuals may have different technological careers (2004). What matters is not just that individuals adopt a certain technology, but also the patterns of their use once they have successfully adopted the technology. Not every type of online activity is likely to enhance social capital, just like not every offline activity is likely to do so. The same holds for the frequency with which individuals engage in particular online activities. Online activity, then, was measured with the question 'How often do you engage in each of the following online activities?' The questionnaire included eight different online activities which were selected on the basis of their logical potential to enhance civic engagement. For example, 'looking for information' and 'social networking' were included, but one-dimensional communication types such as surfing the web or online shopping were not. Respondents had to choose a frequency from five categories: practically every day, once or twice a week, once or twice a month, rarely or never, and don't know. For analytical purposes, it is assumed that respondents who cannot tell how often they, for example, video

chat or engage in crowd sourcing either do not know what the term entails, or do not engage in the particular activity too often. In either case, these responses best fit the ‘rarely or never’-category.

3.3.3 Control variables

For control variables, the survey included the variables gender, age, level of education and income. The original Dutch survey, and English translation and coding information are included in the appendices.

3.4 Analysis

In order to test if there is an interaction effect between online and offline activity, an interaction term was introduced. The interaction term multiplies the associational activity and online activity variables. The ordinary least squares method is then used to fit the model to the dependent variable, the seven-point political tolerance index. For each of the individual questions that make up the political tolerance index, logistic regression analysis is used to estimate the fit of the model to the data.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Sample

The sample consists of 766 respondents. Women are slightly overrepresented at 58.7 per cent of the sample. The average age of respondents is 34 years. 56.4 per cent of the respondents is between 20 and 30 years old. Over half of the respondents (51.7 per cent) report an income below minimum wage. Thus, the average respondent is female, 34 years of age, and earns less than 1450 euros a month. The sample can therefore not be considered representative of the Dutch population at large.

4.2 Least Liked Group

Most respondents selected neo-Nazi's as their least liked group. Muslim Fundamentalists came in second. Homosexuals and East-European immigrants were selected by 0.3 and 1.7 percent of the sample respectively. 8.6 per cent of the respondents stated another group to be their least liked group. Three respondents claimed there was no group that they disliked. Their responses were excluded from the sample.

4.3 Political tolerance

The mean score on the political tolerance index was 3.41, just above the mathematical mean of the seven point index that was coded zero to six. The results of the regression analysis are reported in table 1. Age ($b = -0.021$, $p < 0.005$) and education ($b = 0.322$, $p < 0.005$) are the only variables in the model that are significant predictors of political tolerance. The directions of the correlations correspond to the general consensus in the literature; the younger and the more highly educated, the more tolerant. The other control variables, income and gender, do not come out as significant in the analysis. The interaction term, although being positively correlated to political tolerance, is not significant. Table 1 also reports the regression coefficients and standard errors for each of the items that together make up the political

tolerance index. Here too, the key variables online activity and associational activity are not significant. The same holds, across all items, for the interaction term.

Table 1. Determinants of Political Tolerance Attitudes

Independent variables	Tolerance	Teach	Elect	Found party	Airtime	Rally	Surveillance
Associational activity * online activity	.012 (.011)	.005 (.017)	.008 (.015)	.017 (.015)	.003 (.013)	.010 (.017)	.023 (.013)
Online activity	-.007 (.035)	-.048 (.052)	.025 (.043)	.029 (.043)	.008 (.040)	.025 (.051)	-.085 (.041)
Associational activity	-.023 (.125)	.062 (.193)	.067 (.153)	-.080 (.154)	.023 (.144)	-.037 (.167)	-.163 (.146)
Gender	.142 (.139)	.063 (.198)	.271 (.172)	.367 (.170)	.098 (.157)	.294 (.209)	-.259 (.159)
Age	-.021 (.006)*	-.030 (.010)*	-.029 (.008)*	-.016 (.008)	-.010 (.162)	-.016 (.009)	-.006 (.007)
Income	-.041 (.071)	-.107 (106)	.002 (.979)	-.014 (.087)	-.002 (.081)	-.140 (.104)	-.045 (.082)
Education	.322 (.054)*	.079 (.010)	.349 (.066)*	.324 (.065)*	.303 (.064)*	.439 (.073)*	.084 (.061)
Constant	2.016 (.564)*	-.544 (.436)	-1.145 (.679)	-1.442 (.673)	-1.732 (654)**	-.837 (.773)	1.106 (.648)
R^2	.091	.042	.135	.114	0.056	.126	.023

N = 766; * p < .005 or better; ** p < .01 or better;
Nagelkerke pseudo R^2 is reported for variables Teach, Elect, Found party, Airtime, Rally and Surveillance.

5. DISCUSSION

The hypothesis that online and offline activity reinforce one another is not supported by the data. The interaction term that was included into the regression model, although positive and thus having the correct direction, was not significant. This means that it cannot be concluded that people who are active both online and offline are more likely to be politically tolerant. Online activity, then, does not seem to supplement associational activity in terms of its potential to enhance political tolerance in the sample used here.

This, however, is no reason to dismiss the hypothesis. There are several explanations for the results of this study being inconclusive. The first explanation pertains to the sample and data collection method. Using snowball sampling has resulted in a non-representative sample. As briefly mentioned in the results section, women, 18 to 25 year-olds, the higher educated and lower incomes are overrepresented. In addition, by distributing the survey via e-mail and social networks, the study in all likelihood attracted respondents who had at least some measure of experience with the internet and precisely those online activities that the study is interested in, thus distorting the results.

A second explanation may be found in the measurement of the dependent variable, political tolerance. An index of six items that are commonly used in political tolerance studies was constructed. Some items were adapted to fit the Dutch context. The likelihood ratios (Nagelkerke R^2) of the Airtime and Surveillance variables are particularly low. These two of the items in the index should, therefore, be revised or excluded entirely.

A third explanation for the inconclusive results of this study may be what is referred to as the ‘dark side’ of associations. Cigler and Joslyn have found such an effect in their study on the extensiveness of group membership. They identified a number of different organization

types, notably unions, farm associations, Greek organizations and church groups, as being particularly negatively correlated to tolerance attitudes. Similarly, a number of the types of memberships in the present study may contribute negatively to the overall index of political tolerance. Yet Cigler and Joslyn also found that the negative effects of a subset of their list of organizations was “offset by the positive contributions to tolerance orientations of a single membership” (2002: 15). So, even if a number of organization types listed in the present study produces negatives effects, associational activity as an additive index should still be positively correlated with the dependent variable. It seems, then, that the dark side of associational activity is a possible, but unlikely explanation for the results of this study.

A final explanation is related to the operationalization of the online activity variable. DiMaggio and Celeste have suggested that individuals have different technological careers, that is, different patterns of internet usage. The survey, therefore, inquired not only what types of online activities respondents engaged in, but also the frequency with which they did so. If online activities produce democratic effects in ways similar to and reinforcing offline associational activity, then online activity should be positively related to political tolerance attitudes. Although the present study did not corroborate this expectation, the argument remains viable.

A factor analysis of the observed data suggests that the eight online activity items represent three general dimensions. Intuitively, the items that the factor analysis groups together make sense. The factor analysis sorts online networking, contributing to forum discussions, searching for information, watching and sharing photos and videos and keeping up with news and current affairs into one dimension. Another dimension consists of crowd sourcing and crowd funding. The factor analysis sets e-mailing apart as a final dimension. One way to interpret the activities grouped together into distinctive dimensions is in terms of levels of use. A ‘minimal’ user may only go online to read and send e-mails from and to colleagues and distant relatives. This type of use is unlikely to increase social capital and political

tolerance. The ‘intermediate’ user goes online for purposes that flow from their offline lives; their online social network resembles their offline social network and they may read the paper and watch television news alongside looking for information and news online. A third category consists of ‘maximum’ users. Maximum users are those individuals who make use of the internet’s new possibilities and applications; those purposes that do not have an offline equivalent, or only an inferior alternative. Examples are crowd sourcing and crowd funding. It is this class of individuals who may be the foremost to see the internet as a ‘universe’ in its own right. It is also for this group of users that increased social capital and political tolerance through online activity alone become likely.

An exploratory regression analysis was run to follow up on this presumption and validate the factor loadings. Recoding the social activity variable along the lines of these three categories and including it into the regression model does not, however, yield a significantly better fit. Nevertheless, expanding on and deepening the conceptualization and operationalization DiMaggio and Celeste’s model of technological careers seems like a promising venture for future research. Creating a more sophisticated model will help increase the validity of measurements and enhance our understanding of online activity and its possible consequences for social capital and political tolerance.

The Netherlands as a nation were for a long time known for their tolerance. The Dutch wore this reputational ‘gold star’ with a certain smugness. In the past fifteen to twenty years, however, there has been little to be smug about. Tolerance is no longer one of The Netherlands’ defining traits and the political debate is increasingly polarized. When intolerant sentiments are mobilized, the underpinnings of democracy are threatened. Thus, it remains important to study political tolerance, not just to establish how much intolerance there is and at which societal groups intolerant attitudes are directed, but especially to identify its underlying mechanisms. Thus far, intolerance has not had major destabilizing effects, and understanding the underlying mechanisms may keep it that way. The role of the internet in

creating or supplementing social capital is one of the most pressing matters for political science research. Digitalization is a global process that is changing societies across the globe in unprecedented rates. Studying the consequences of internet usage at the level of the individual is going to allow us to chart and anticipate societal change and comprehend the changing ways in which people are tied to each other and the state, which is what helps democracies thrive.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY ITEMS (DUTCH ORIGINAL)

I. Control variables

A. Wat is uw geslacht? [0 = female, 1 = male]

B. Wat is uw geboortejaar? [1912-2000]

C. Wat is uw hoogst genoten opleiding? [1 to 8 = high level education]

1. Basisschool
2. VMBO/MAVO
3. HAVO
4. VWO
5. MBO
6. HBO
7. WO
8. Postdoctoraal

D. Hoe hoog is uw bruto inkomen? [0 to 4 = high income]

1. Ik heb geen inkomen
2. Minder dan €1450 per maand
3. Tussen €1450 en €2500 per maand
4. Tussen €2500 en €5000 per maand
5. Meer dan €5000 per maand
6. Ik weet het niet/geen opgaaf

II. Political tolerance [0 to 6 = high tolerance]

A. Sommige mensen vinden van bepaalde groepen een dreiging uitgaan voor de samenleving. Welke groep in de samenleving vindt u het minst sympathiek?

1. Neonazi's
2. Oost-Europese immigranten
3. Moslimfundamentalisten
4. Homoseksuelen
5. Anders:

B. Vindt u dat mensen die behoren tot uw gekozen groep…

1. les mogen geven aan uw kinderen? [ja = 1, nee = 0]
2. zich verkiesbaar mogen stellen?

3. een politieke partij mogen oprichten?
4. zendtijd mogen krijgen bij een publieke omroep?
5. een demonstratie of betoging mogen houden?
6. onder toezicht geplaatst moeten worden?

III. Association membership [0 to 20 = high number]

Van welke van de volgende organisaties en verenigingen bent u lid?

1. Jeugdvereniging
2. Religieuze vereniging
3. Politieke partij of –organisatie
4. Natuur- of milieuvereniging
5. Consumentenvereniging
6. Culturele vereniging
7. Hobbyvereniging
8. Vakbond
9. Patiëntenvereniging
10. Omroeporganisatie
11. Sportvereniging
12. Vrouwenvereniging
13. Wijkvereniging
14. Fanclub of supportersvereniging
15. Bejaarden- of seniorenvereniging
16. Carnavals- of Oranjevereniging
17. Studenten- of studievereniging
18. Beroepsvereniging
19. Muziekvereniging
20. Anders:

IV. Online activity

Hoe vaak houdt u zich bezig met elk van de volgende online activiteiten? [1 = nagenoeg elke dag, 2 = 1 of 2 keer per week, 3 = 1 of 2 keer per maand, 4 = zelden of nooit, 5 = weet niet].

1. E-mailen

2. Contacten onderhouden via sociale netwerksites (Facebook, Hyves, LinkedIn)
3. Meepraten op discussiefora
4. Informatie zoeken
5. Foto’s en video’s bekijken en delen (Flickr, YouTube)
6. Nieuws en actualiteiten volgen
7. Bijdragen aan kennisvraagstukken (crowdsourcing)
8. Financieel bijdragen aan een project of organisatie (crowdfunding)

APPENDIX B: SURVEY ITEMS (ENGLISH)

I. Control variables

A. Geslacht [0 = male, 1 = female]

B. What is your year of birth? [1912-2000]

C. What is the highest level of education you have completed? [1 – 8 = high level of education]

1. Primary school
2. VMBO/MAVO
3. HAVO
4. VWO
5. MBO
6. HBO
7. WO
8. PhD

D. What is your gross income? [0 = none, 4 = high]

1. I have no income
2. Less than €1450 a month
3. Between €1450 and €2500 a month
4. Between €2500 and €5000 a month
5. More than €5000 a month
6. I don't know / I do not want to share this information

II. Political tolerance [0 to 6 = high tolerance]

A. Some people believe that certain groups pose a threat to social order. Which of the following groups would you designate as your least liked group?

1. Neo-nazis
2. East European immigrants
3. Muslim fundamentalists
4. Homosexuals
5. Other

B. Do you think people belonging to your least liked group should be allowed to …

1. teach your children? [yes = 1, no = 0]
2. seek office? [yes = 1, no = 0]

3. found a political party? [yes = 1, no = 0]
4. have airtime on public broadcasting? [yes = 1, no = 0]
5. hold a rally or demonstration? [yes = 1, no = 0]
6. be put under surveillance? [yes = 0, no = 1]

III. Association membership [0 = none; 20 = high number]

Of which of the following types of associations and organizations are you a member?

1. Youth association
2. Religious association
3. Political party or organization
4. Environmental organization or nature association
5. Consumer organization
6. Cultural association
7. Hobby association
8. Trade union
9. Patient organization
10. Broadcasting association
11. Sports association
12. Womens organization
13. Community organization
14. Fan or supporters club
15. Seniors association
16. Carnival or 'Oranje' association
17. Student association
18. Business or professional association
19. Music association
20. Other

IV. Online activity

How often do you engage in each of the following online activities?

[1 = practically every day, 2 = once or twice a week, 3 = once or twice a month, 4 = rarely or never, 5 = don't know].

1. Reading and sending e-mail
2. Social networking (Facebook, Hyves, LinkedIn)
3. Contribute to a forum discussion
4. Search for information
5. Watch and share photos and videos (Flickr, YouTube)
6. Keeping up with news and current affairs
7. Help solve another person’s or organization’s problem (crowdsourcing)
8. Make a financial donation to a project or organization (crowdfunding)