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# A.1 Sampling

The survey was conducted using the ASCOR-survey tool and published on a university domain. Respondents were recruited by posting an online request to participate in the survey. As is often claimed, generalizing from Internet samples is problematic (for issues of sampling in online studies see, for instance, Hewson et al., 2003); Internet users are not representative for members of Dutch society at large, and the sample of Internet users participating in the questionnaire are not necessarily representative of all participants of large Dutch web forums. There is no information on who participates on these forums and thus it is impossible to compare the sample of respondents that filled out the questionnaire with the larger population. Even though this limits the extent to which the conclusions can be generalized, the motives of users to discuss online and their evaluation of such discussions do give insight into general trends.

I used non-probabilistic sampling methodology in this study by obtaining volunteer participants (for an overview of types of online sampling see: Hewson et al., 2003), and I relied on web forum participants to come across the announcement of the survey as I (and in one case, the forum administrator) posted it in on different forums. The message advertising the survey read:

Research into political discussion on the Internet

The University of Amsterdam is conducting research on the way people use the Internet to discuss politics. We are very interested in your view, and hope you will take the time to fill out the questionnaire. Filling out the questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes. We are also very interested in your view even if you do not post, but only read messages in this discussion. Thank you very much in advance!

You can find the questionnaire here: http://www2.fmg.uva.nl/comlab/surveys/politieke\_ discussies.html I first sent a request to forum moderators to ask for permission to post the above announcement on their website. I sent this request to the web masters of the following web forums (the e-mail addresses of the web masters were obtained through the website)<sup>1</sup>:

- http://www.maghrebonline.nl/
- http://www.weerwoord.nl/
- http://www.terdiscussie.nl/
- http://www.maroc.nl/
- http://www.politiekdebat.nl/
- http://forum.fok.nl/
- http://islamforum.vrijspraak.org/
- http://www.nieuwrechts.nl/forum

After the first request I received two positive reactions (from *Weerwoord* and *Fok*). I sent another message nine days after the initial request. The forum *Politiekdebat* reacted on this second request, with the message that they did not participate in these types of requests, but that they would like to have more information to make an informed decision. Upon sending more information, the Webmaster did not respond.

Since requesting email responses from the moderators did not always prove to be effective, I also contacted web forums through their interaction feature on the website (if they had this). With *Maghrebonline* this resulted in a positive response. Similarly, with *Nieuwrechts* I asked for permission to post the request through their web site, as there was no contact information available on the forum. Also, I tried to find alternative e-mail addresses of web masters or moderators. For instance, with the forum *Maroc*, I did not get a response using the Webmaster-address, but I did get a positive response using an 'info'-address. After receiving a very low response from the web forum participants of *Maroc* and *Maghrebonline*, I also asked permission to post it on http://www.forums.marokko.nl/ (with no response) and http://www.amazigh.nl/ (with a positive response, and the agreement that the link would be posted, but I have never been able to find the link on the website, or to obtain further information on the status of the posted link).

The request was posted in different sections of the web forums. On *Weerwoord* the announcement was moved towards 'the notice board'. On *Fok* the announcement was placed in the 'politics' section of the web forum. On *Maghrebonline* the message was posted in 'general discussion', and on *Maroc* I posted the message in the section 'wie schrijft die blijft'. On *Nieuwrechts*, the Webmaster posted the announcement.

What is important to mention here is that the announcement initially posted by me (or as requested to be posted) was also posted on other sites than the selected few. It was posted on discussion sites other than web forums (such as web logs). This is not necessarily a 'contamination' of the data, as the respondents were asked about their experiences on web

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>This is the same selection of forums as examined in Chapter 4 (for motivation behind this sampling, see Chapter 3), except for *Islamforum*. *Islamforum* was added to try to ensure response from those of immigrant descent.

forums (and were asked which web forum they attend most frequently, and to answer the question with that particular forum in mind). A question was included to gain insight into which site people came from when linking to the survey. However, 99 participants in the survey (almost 40%) did not provide this information. Of the respondents that did provide the information, the majority indicated that they came from Fok. Together with Nieuwrechts, Dutch Disease Report (note that the request to participate in the survey on this site was not posted by me), Maghrebonline, and Weerwoord this constitutes 90% of the sites from which people linked (see Table A.1).

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Table A.1: <i>Forum</i>	trom which	respondents	linked to the	URL 0	r the c	questionnaire

Web forum	Frequency	Percent
Fok	91	58
Nieuwrechts	16	10
Dutch Disease Report	13	8
Marghrebonline	12	8
Weerwoord	11	7
Maroc	3	2
UvA	2	1
Via a friend	2	1
Opinari	2	1
Other <sup>†</sup>	6	4
$Total^{\ddagger}$	158	100

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>†</sup> There were six other sites provided, each by one participant.

In relation to the link to the questionnaire, I tried to make participating as easy as possible, so participants only had to click on the link. Thus, participants did not have to obtain a login and password before filling out the questionnaire. This made it easier for participants and should thus potentially increase the response. Using this approach, however, makes it difficult to determine whether unique participants filled out the questionnaire. To check whether people filled out the questionnaire more than once, the IP-addresses were checked and double entries were deleted.

The fact that I have used only volunteers that actively followed the link to participate in the survey may be problematic. As Hewson et al. (2003: 38) point out, volunteers have been found to differ on, for instance, personality variables. Also, the sample is very dependent on who visits the web forum at what time after the announcement is posted; Threads normally move 'downwards' in the topic, depending not only on the date and time of the initial message but also on the number of replies to this initial message. Thus, on those forums where there was a lot of interest in the thread (resulting in replies), the message

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>‡</sup> There were 99 missing values regarding the question from which forum participants came from.

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remained in a prominent place longer than on those forums where no one reacted. This resulted in an even higher response by participants of web forums where the survey attracted a lot of initial attention. This causes problems with regard to whether the findings can be generalized: Which people participated in the survey is dependent on the moment at which they visit the web forum (and thus also depends on how often they visit the web forum, increasing the probability that heavy users participate), check the specific section the request was posted in, and how many reactions the request received. One last element that may be important here is the fact that people volunteer to participate (and make the active choice to follow the link). These respondents are likely to be more interested in the topic of political discussion online than those that do not participate in the survey.

There are a number of important elements to discuss in terms of which people participated. First, the announcement was placed in different sections of the various web forums, as to allow for different types of participants to take part. Secondly, the announcement was placed on the web forums at different times. Third, the number (and type) of reactions varied considerably per web forum, thus influencing the visibility of the request. Last, people that visit online forums, and particularly the sections where the announcement was posted, are often interested in online political discussion, and may thus be interested and willing to fill out a questionnaire on the topic, allowing for a broad representation.

## A.2 Online questionnaire

The survey deals with different topics: demographics; political interest and efficacy; attitudes towards immigration; participation in debate on immigration and integration; Internet statistics; the discussion forum used for discussing immigration and integration; evaluation of the online discussion; reasons for discussing online; and other attitudes towards discussing online. I will discuss these topics in this section. The full questionnaire (both in Dutch and English) is included below.

*Demographics:* With regard to demographics, the following variables were included in the questionnaire: age, gender, education, country of origin (own, mother, father), and religious affiliation.

Political interest and efficacy: Examining participants of political discussions, and asking about their political interest is, of course, important. It is essential to look at how interested and active they are, what their political preference is, and how political efficacious they consider themselves to be. Also, a number of politically related activities are considered in the questionnaire: How often do people watch news programs on television, read newspapers, listen to radio, talk to friends about politics, read contributions to political web discussions, and read Internet news pages?

Attitude towards immigration: Along with the participants' political preference, the questionnaire asks for their attitudes towards immigration: How strong are their feelings, and

are they positive or negative? How does this relate to the frequency with which they discuss the issue?

Participation in debate on immigration and integration: To examine the extent to which online discussion of the issue of immigration is supplemented by offline discussion, respondents are asked how frequently they discuss immigration and integration in the following ways: discussion with friends/family, discussing with colleagues, attending public meetings, writing letters to the editors of newspapers, and writing contributions to Internet discussions.

Internet statistics: First, the question of access is raised: Where do people access the Internet? Second, do people participate in online debate through web forums, e-mail groups, chat, newsgroups or other types of online discussion? Third, how often does the respondent discuss politics online? Last, which specific forum(s) is used to discuss politics (open question)?

Evaluating the discussion forum that is used to discuss immigration and integration: Apart from asking questions that raise more general issues of discussing politics online, the survey aimed to ask specifically about the online discussion of immigration and integration. Respondents are first asked whether they discuss these issues online, and if so on which forum and for what reasons (open question). They are then asked to answer the questions that follow with that specific forum in mind. To evaluate the forum with regard to the discussion of immigration and integration, the respondents are asked about whether people feel free to give their opinion; if there is diversity of opinions; whether some participants dominate the discussion; if everyone has equal opportunity to contribute; if they change their opinion as a result of the discussion; if they encounter other opinions than those of family and friends; and whether they encounter other opinions than those expressed in traditional media.

Reasons for discussing online: Apart from the open question, the questionnaire also consisted of closed items regarding reasons to discuss online. Respondents are asked to what extent the following items form a reason to participate in online debate: anonymity, encountering a variety of opinions, expressing oneself, finding like-minded, being able to stay at home while discussing with others, writing instead of speaking about opinions and arguments.

Other attitudes towards discussing online: To further gain insight into the motivations for and evaluations of participation in online debates, the following items were raised with the respondents, to see to what extent they feel that: they do not feel represented in traditional media; the Internet allows for a representation of voices not heard elsewhere; the Internet should be better regulated to prevent religious fundamentalism; the Internet should be better regulated to prevent racism; on the Internet we can find the same voices as in other media.

#### Questionnaire

- 1. In welke mate bent u geïnteresseerd in politiek? *To what degree are you interested in politics?* 
  - Sterk [Highly]
  - Gewoon [Normal]
  - Matig [Moderately]
  - Weinig [Slightly]
  - Niet geïnteresseerd [Not interested]
- 2. Bent u lid van een politieke partij? *Are you a member of a political party?* 
  - Nee, en ik ben nooit lid geweest. [No, and I have never been a member.]
  - Nee, maar ik ben in het verleden lid geweest. [No, but I have been a member in the past.]
  - Ja. [*Yes.*]
- 3. In welke mate bent u het eens of oneens met de volgende stellingen? *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?* [Five answering categories ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree]
  - Politiek is soms zo ingewikkeld dat mensen zoals ik niet goed kunnen begrijpen wat er speelt.
    [Politics is sometimes so complicated that people like me cannot properly comprehend what is going on.]
  - Mensen zoals ik hebben geen invloed op wat de regering doet. [People like me do not have influence over what the government does.]
  - Ik denk dat ik beter geïnformeerd ben over politiek dan anderen.
    [I think that I am better informed about politics than others.]
- 4. Als er vandaag verkiezingen zouden zijn voor de Tweede Kamer, zou u dan gaan stemmen?

If today there were elections for Parliament, would you vote?

- Ja. [*Yes.*]
- Nee. [*No.*]
- Ik heb geen stemrecht, maar anders zou ik wel stemmen. [*I am not entitled to vote, but if I could I would vote.*]
- Ik heb geen stemrecht, maar anders zou ik ook niet stemmen. [I am not entitled to vote, but if I could I would not vote either.]
- 5. Op welke partij zou u stemmen? Which party would you vote for?
  - CDA [Christian Democrats]

- PVDA [Labour Party]
- VVD [Liberal Conservative Party]
- SP [Socialist Party]
- LPF [List Pim Fortuyn]
- o GroenLinks [GreenLeft]
- o D'66 [Democrats]
- o Christen Unie [Christian Union]
- SGP [State Reformed Party]
- o Geert Wilders
- Nieuw Rechts [New Right]
- Blanco [*Blank*]
- Weet nog niet [Don't know yet]
- Anders, namelijk: [Differently, namely:]
- 6. Hoe vaak onderneemt u de volgende activiteiten per week?

How often every week do you undertake the following activities?

[Answering categories ranging from: (Almost) daily; 3 to 4 times/week; 1 to 2 times/week; Less than once/week; Never]

• Naar het nieuws op televisie kijken.

[Watching the news on television.]

Naar actualiteitenprogramma's kijken, zoals Twee Vandaag, Nova, Netwerk, Den Haag Vandaag of Buitenhof.

[Watching current affairs programmes.]

o De krant lezen.

[Reading the newspaper.]

o Het volgen van nieuws en actualiteiten via de radio.

[Following news and current affairs on the radio.]

o Met vrienden over politiek praten.

[Discussing politics with friends.]

o Het lezen van bijdragen aan politieke internetdiscussies.

[Reading online discussions.]

o Het plaatsen van bijdragen aan politieke internetdiscussies.

[Posting in online discussions.]

o Internet nieuwspagina's lezen, zoals bijvoorbeeld nu.nl.

[Reading Internet news pages.]

7. Op welke plaats(en) gebruikt u het internet om over politiek te discussiëren? (meerdere antwoorden mogelijk)

In which of the following places do you use the Internet to discuss politics? (several answers possible)

- o Thuis [At home]
- Werk [At work]
- School [At school]
- o Internetcafé [At an Internet café]

- Anders, namelijk: [Other, namely:]
- 8. Op welke manier(en) gebruikt u het internet om over politiek te discussiëren? (meerdere antwoorden mogelijk)

In which way(s) do you use the Internet to discuss politics? (several answers possible)

- o E-mail(groepen) [Email groups]
- Webfora [Web forums]
- o Chat [Chat]
- Newsgroups [Newsgroups]
- o Anders, namelijk: [Other, namely:]
- 9. Welke discussiefora bezoekt u op het internet? Geeft u a.u.b. de precieze webpagina, indien dit mogelijk is.

Which discussion forums do you visit on the Internet? If possible, please provide the exact website.

[Open question]

De volgende vragen gaan over de onderwerpen immigratie en integratie.

The following questions concern the issues of immigration and integration.

10. Hoe vaak neemt u aan het debat over immigratie en integratie deel op de onderstaande manieren?

How often do you participate in the debate on immigration and integration in the following ways?

[Answering categories ranging from never, almost never, sometimes, often, very often]

- o Discussiëren met familie en/of vrienden.
  - [Discussing with family and/or friends.]
- o Discussiëren met collega's.
  - [Discussing with colleagues.]
- o Naar debatbijeenkomsten gaan.
  - [Attending public debates.]
- o Het schrijven van brieven en/of opiniestukken naar de krant.
  - [Writing opinion pieces/letters to newspapers.]
- o Schrijven van bijdragen aan internetdiscussies.
  - [Writing posts in Internet discussions.]
- 11. Heeft u in het laatste half jaar op één of meerdere internetdiscussiefora gelezen en/of geschreven specifiek over immigratie en integratie?

In the past half year, did you read and/or write about immigration and integration on one or more Internet discussion forums?

- Ja [*Yes*]
- ∘ Nee [*No*]

12. Op welk internetdiscussieforum discussieert u het meest over immigratie en integratie? (Als er meerdere zijn, kiest u de belangrijkste.)

On which Internet discussion forum do you most often discuss immigration and integration? (If there is more than one, please choose the most important.)

Beantwoordt u de volgende vragen voor het discussieforum dat u bij de vorige vraag hebt ingevuld.

Answer the following questions for the discussion forum that you have entered in the previous question.

- 13. Wat zijn de redenen dat u op dit forum over de issues immigratie en integratie discussieert? Onder discussiëren verstaan we zowel het lezen als plaatsen van berichten. What are the reasons that you discuss the issues of immigration and integration on this forum? By discussing, we mean both the reading and the posting of messages.
- 14. In hoeverre bent u het met de volgende stellingen eens of oneens? *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?* [Five answering categories ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree]
  - Op dit forum voel ik me vrij om mijn mening te uiten ten aanzien van immigratie en integratie.
    - [On this forum I feel free to express my opinion on immigration and integration.]
  - Op dit forum kom ik veel verschillende meningen tegen over immigratie en integratie. [On this forum I encounter a lot of different opinions on immigration and integration.]
  - Op dit forum overheersen enkele deelnemers de discussie over immigratie en integratie. [On this forum a few participants dominate the discussion on immigration and integration.]
  - Iedereen heeft op dit forum evenveel kans zijn/haar mening te geven over immigratie en integratie.
    - [On this forum everyone has equal chance to express their opinion on immigration and integration.]
  - Ik verander niet van mening door de discussie op dit forum over immigratie en integratie.
    [I have not changed my opinion as a result of the discussion on immigration and integration on this forum.]
  - Op dit forum kom ik meningen over immigratie en integratie tegen die ik niet tegenkom in mijn familie, vrienden- of kennissenkring.
    - [On this forum I encounter opinions on immigration and integration that I do not encounter in my family, or in my circle of friends and acquaintances.]
  - Op dit forum kom ik meningen over immigratie en integratie tegen die ik niet tegenkom in andere media.
    - [On this forum I encounter opinions on immigration and integration that I do not encounter in other media.]
- 15. Geeft u aan in welke mate de volgende aspecten van belang zijn bij uw keuze om deel te nemen aan het politieke debat op het internet.
  - Please indicate the extent to which the following aspects are important for your choice to participate in online political discussions.
  - [Five answering categories ranging from very to not at all important]

- Anoniem blijven. [Remaining anonymous.]
- Veel verschillende meningen tegenkomen. [Encountering a diversity of opinions.]
- o Mijn mening laten horen. [Expressing one's opinion.]
- o Gelijkgestemden vinden. [Finding like minded individuals.]
- Het gemak van thuis te kunnen blijven en toch met anderen discussiëren. [The ease of staying at home, while discussing with others.]
- Schriftelijk in plaats van mondeling meningen en argumenten verwoorden. [Expressing one's opinion and arguments in writing instead of orally.]
- 16. In hoeverre bent u het met de volgende stellingen eens of oneens? *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?* [Five answering categories ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree]
  - In de traditionele media (krant, televisie en radio) wordt mijn mening niet vertegenwoordigd.
    - [In traditional media (newspaper, television and radio) my opinion is not represented.]
  - Het internet biedt een mogelijkheid om meningen onder de aandacht te brengen die op andere plaatsen niet aan bod komen.
    - [The Internet offers a possibility to bring opinions to the fore that are not heard elsewhere.]
  - Het internet moet beter gereguleerd worden om religieus fundamentalisme te voorkomen. [The Internet should be regulated better to prevent religious fundamentalism.]
  - Het internet moet beter gereguleerd worden om racisme te voorkomen. [The Internet should be regulated better to prevent racism.]
  - Op het internet komen dezelfde meningen aan bod als in andere media.
    [On the Internet the same opinions are expressed as elsewhere.]
- 17. In hoeverre bent u het met de volgende stellingen eens of oneens? *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?* [Five answering categories ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree]
  - Nederland moet zo veel mogelijk asielzoekers terugsturen.
    [The Netherlands should send back as many asylum seekers as possible.]
  - Allochtonen leveren een positieve bijdrage aan de Nederlandse samenleving.
    [Allochtonen are an enrichment for Dutch society.]
  - Allochtonen maken misbruik van de sociale voorzieningen. [Allochtonen take advantage of social services.]
  - Allochtonen moeten zich aanpassen aan de Nederlandse cultuur.
    [ Allochtonen should adjust to Dutch culture.]
- 18. Wat is uw hoogst genoten opleiding (al dan niet afgerond)? What is the highest education you have received (whether completed or not)?
  - Lagere school [*Primary school*]
  - VMBO, MAVO, LBO [Lower level secondary]
  - HAVO, VWO [Higher level secondary]
  - MBO [Intermediate vocational education]
  - HBO [Higher vocational education]

- WO [*University*]
- o Anders, namelijk: [Other, namely:]

#### 19. Waar bent u geboren?

Where were you born?

- o Nederland [The Netherlands]
- o Nederlandse Antillen, Aruba [Dutch Antilles, Aruba]
- o België [Belgium]
- o Duitsland [Germany]
- o Indonesië [*Indonesia*]
- Marokko [Morocco]
- Suriname [Suriname]
- Turkije [Turkey]
- o Anders, namelijk: [Other, namely:]

## 20. Waar is uw vader geboren?

Where was you father born?

- Nederland [The Netherlands]
- o Nederlandse Antillen, Aruba [Dutch Antilles, Aruba]
- o België [Belgium]
- Duitsland [Germany]
- Indonesië [*Indonesia*]
- Marokko [Morocco]
- Suriname [Suriname]
- Turkije [*Turkey*]
- o Anders, namelijk: [Other, namely:]

#### 21. Waar is uw moeder geboren?

Where was your mother born?

- Nederland [The Netherlands]
- o Nederlandse Antillen, Aruba [Dutch Antilles, Aruba]
- o België [Belgium]
- Duitsland [Germany]
- o Indonesië [*Indonesia*]
- o Marokko [Morocco]
- Suriname [Suriname]
- Turkije [*Turkey*]
- Anders, namelijk: [Other, namely:]

#### 22. Wat is uw leeftijd?

What is your age?

23. Tot welke kerkelijke gezindte of levensbeschouwelijke groepering rekent u zichzelf? *To what religious denomination do you consider yourself to belong?* 

- Geen [None]
- o Rooms-katholiek [Roman Catholic]
- o Nederlands Hervormd [Dutch Reformed]
- o Gereformeerde kerken [Reformed]
- Hindoeïsme [Hinduism]
- o Islam [Islam]
- o Boeddhisme [Buddhism]
- Jodendom [*Judaism*]
- o Anders, namelijk: [Other, namely:]

### 24. En tot slot. U bent een:

And to conclude. You are a:

- ∘ Man [Man]
- o Vrouw [Woman]

Heel hartelijk bedankt voor het invullen van de vragen! Heeft u nog opmerkingen naar aanleiding van deze vragenlijst?

Thank you very much for filling out the questionnaire! Do you have any additional remarks in relation to this questionnaire?