



Dissecting discursive contention: A relational analysis of the Dutch debate on minority integration, 1990–2006



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Keywords:

Network analysis
Political conflicts
Public debates
Discursive power
Minority integration
The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This paper elaborates a relational approach to examine discursive contention. We develop a network method to identify groups forming through contentious interactions as well as relational measures of polarization, leadership, solidarity and various aspects of discursive power. The paper analyzes how an assimilationist movement confronted its adversaries in the Dutch debate on minority integration. Over different periods in the debate, we find a recurrent pattern: a small yet cohesive group of challengers with strong discursive leaders forces their framing of integration issues upon other participants. We suggest that the pattern found in our study may exemplify a more universal network pattern behind discursive contention.

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1. Introduction

In this article we elaborate an approach to uncover power relations in debates in which actors compete and cooperate to identify public problems and propose solutions. To better understand power relations within and between contending groups, we develop a relational understanding of discursive power, leadership, solidarity and polarization. We apply our approach in a case study of discursive contention in the Dutch debate on minority integration between 1990 and 2007. Whereas ethnic and religious differences in the Netherlands had hitherto been pacified through accommodation, a powerful movement came to problematize the presence of Muslims and ethnic minorities in the 1990s and early 2000s. We refer to participants in this movement as assimilationists,¹ because they believe that immigrants and the native Dutch have inimical cultures and that it is incumbent upon immigrants to respect the norms and values that define the Dutch nation. We analyze how this movement emerged and confronted its adversaries. Drawing

on the literature on social movements and scientific change, we hypothesize that the assimilationist movement was sustained by specific relational mechanisms that enabled it to set the agenda of the integration debate and to withstand opposition.

Section 2 distills elements from the literature to develop our framework for a relational analysis of public debates. Section 3 presents the case study on the Dutch debate on minority integration; Section 4 reconsiders familiar sociological concepts including group formation, power, polarization and leadership from a relational perspective. Section 5 presents our findings: our analysis shows that, in our case, a small group with relatively strong solidarity and leadership dominated a larger group with less solidarity and weaker leadership. In Section 6, we summarize how our network approach has helped to study power relations in the Dutch integration debate and how these insights might be generalized and applied elsewhere.

2. Toward a relational analysis of public debates

While many scholars agree that relational approaches are promising, it has proven difficult to translate the general principles of relational thinking into concrete propositions, concepts and methods to analyze contention (Diani and McAdam, 2003; Diani, 2015). Recent research has begun to address this lacuna by analyzing discursive contention on social media, especially Twitter. Researchers have found that social media users cluster according to their political preferences and observed remarkable differences in the network structure of left-leaning and right-leaning

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¹ Labeling positions within the debate on minority integration is politically sensitive as labels conjure connotations and imply value judgments. To prevent a proliferation of concepts that refer to essentially the same phenomenon, we opt for “assimilationists.” While this label carries negative connotations in the Dutch debate, its use is in line with international academic literature on the topic (cf. Brubaker, 2001).

communities (e.g. [Adamic and Glance, 2005](#); [Conover et al., 2011, 2012](#)). While this research effectively uses newly available data to reveal certain aspects of discursive contention, it does not address the question whether challenges against the status quo are sustained by specific kinds of network structures. This section outlines the general tenets of a relational approach to answer this question and distils expectations about the network structure of discursive contention from the literature on scientific revolutions.

We propose a relational analysis based on the premise that discourses and groups are mutually constituted through public criticism and support. A relational perspective is especially useful in the study of discursive conflict since participants in the debate do not have recourse to force or formal authority to impose their views on others (cf. [Weber, 1964\[1921\]](#)). To the extent that participants in debates have power, it is an outgrowth “of the positions that social actors occupy in one or more networks . . . it emerges out of the very way in which figurations . . . of relationships are patterned and operate” ([Emirbayer, 1997](#), p. 292). The task is therefore to develop an understanding of discursive conflict as a process in which groups and power relations emanate from, and structure, interactions ([Elias, 1978\[1970\]](#)). The structure of power relations in intellectual, scientific and political debates results from, and in turn shapes, how participants in these debates distribute their attention and selectively associate or disassociate with other debate participants. The discursive power of participants in debates originates in part from their network structures. For instance, by closing their ranks and maintaining strong ties among themselves, established groups can sustain their dominance over outsiders (cf. [Elias and Scotson, 1994\[1965\]](#)). Network structures are important not only for sustaining the status quo, but also for challenging it.

The network structure of discursive challenges has been most extensively researched for scientific movements, which can be regarded as a specific subset of social movements ([Frickel and Gross, 2005](#)). In the postscript to his seminal work on the structure of scientific revolutions, [Kuhn \(1962, p. 176\)](#) alluded to the importance of “the community structure of science” for understanding the conception of new ideas in periods of scientific revolution as well as the persistence of the status quo under conditions of “normal science.” Revolutionary ideas are advanced by small groups of scholars who collaborate with trusted colleagues in an organizational and intellectual effort to effectuate a break with received wisdom as well as to rival competitors ([de Solla Price, 1986\[1963\]](#); [Collins, 1998](#)). Within these networks, activity generally concentrates around one or several key figures who receive the bulk of references from allies as well as antagonists and thus become icons of their respective schools ([Collins, 1998](#)). [Griffith and Mullins \(1972, p. 960–961\)](#) in their survey of the role of “coherent groups” in fostering change in science found that such groups arise through several mechanisms, three of which are immediately relevant to the study of struggle within public debates. First, coherent groups break with the status quo through acrimonious contention, thereby drawing boundaries between their own group and others. The challengers place themselves at the center of debate by attracting negative attention from established actors in the debate. Second, strong supportive ties among challengers contribute to the group’s solidarity and enable it to persist in their efforts to try to revolutionize their field in the face of adversity. Third, these coherent groups have strong leaders who perform the critical intellectual and organizational work of representing the group to its members as well as to the outside world. The leaders become icons as they muster support from within their group in challenging the status quo. The synergy of these three mechanisms determines the strength of coherent groups, whose power increases as the cohesion of its opponents (i.e. elites or counter-movements) decreases ([Tarrow, 1998](#); [Lind and Stepan-Norris, 2011](#)).

Applying these insights from the study of social and scientific movements to the study of public debates can further our understanding of discursive contention. Although scholars of intellectual and scientific movements have focused on live interactions characterized by physical co-presence, many of their ideas can also be applied to mediated and relayed discursive interactions. Like live interactions, public debates serve as generators and conduits for emotional energy; here, too, participants invest positive emotional energy in their allies while denigrating their detractors. Moreover, these directed flows are asymmetrical and contribute to power imbalances. As in science, celebrity politicians and intellectuals serve as magnets for peripheral actors and come to serve as focal points around which antagonistic groups form.

We distil several expectations about the community structure of discursive challenges from the literature. We expect that—through their positive and negative references—actors in the debate will cluster into groups, with a group of challengers confronting an established group. The relational properties of these opposing groups are constructed through different mechanisms, analogous to the mechanisms of scientific contention. A first mechanism is that challengers become central to the debate when their critiques elicit negative responses from defenders of the status quo or from counter-movements. While criticisms discredit challengers and their views, criticisms also catapult them into the center of debate as challengers come to set the agenda and determine what their opponents speak about. But eliciting criticism, though crucial for generating attention, is not enough for mounting a sustained challenge. Many and intense criticisms will result in stigmatization and exclusion unless challengers can also muster support; for challengers to be recognized as agents of change, they need a cohesive base of support. A second mechanism is therefore that challengers are supported by a cohesive base of followers whose supportive relations countervail criticisms. A third mechanism is that while the challengers’ leaders are supported by solidary followers, the targets of their criticism are divided amongst themselves, lacking cohesion and strong leaders that would otherwise enable them to rebut the challenge. It is important to emphasize that these three mechanisms work together. Generating negative attention is an essential element of any sustained challenge, but will turn challengers into pariahs unless they also receive support. Similarly, challengers’ critiques can be neutralized when established groups succeed in advancing their own discourse and in supporting their own iconic figures. In short, our hypothesis is that the debate will feature a cohesive group of challengers with clearly identifiable leaders in opposition to a diffuse established group.

3. Integration politics in Netherlands: case and data

The Netherlands is known in the international political science literature as a country that pacified tensions between different ideological blocks—socialists, liberals, Protestants and Catholics—through a distinct form of accommodation, dubbed “pillarization” ([Lijphart, 1988\[1966\]](#)). Like other minorities, guest workers and post-colonial immigrants arriving in the 1960s and 1970s were entitled to state support to establish their own media and schools. In addition, the so-called minorities policy of 1983 provided minority associations with subsidies and incorporated them in governance through representative councils and advisory boards ([Soysal, 1994](#)). Although the minorities policy was abandoned around 1990 in favor of the so-called integration policy (cf. [WRR, 1989](#)), the institutions of the minorities policy (including ministerial departments, consultative bodies and research centers) were not immediately dissolved. The central premise lived on; the government had to recognize and work with ethnic minority communities to promote their integration into Dutch society ([Koopmans et al., 2005](#)).

Assimilationists suggested that instead of accommodating minority cultures (and their discontents), policies should protect Dutch (and more generally Western) culture from the putative challenges of minorities living in the Netherlands (see, e.g. [Vliegthart, 2007](#); [Schinkel, 2008](#); [Uitermark, 2012](#)). Although this change took place in many different settings, we focus on the public debate among opinion-makers in the three largest broadsheet newspapers in the Netherlands: *NRC Handelsblad*, *de Volkskrant* and *Trouw*. We do not claim the debate in these newspapers to be representative of the Dutch debate on minority integration as a whole. In fact it is an elite setting: contributors to the debate work in politics, journalism, academia or other prestigious professions while readers also belong to higher strata in society, both in terms of economic and cultural capital. We study the opinion pieces in these newspapers because they are a crucial battleground for elites involved in or close to policy-making. Unlike tabloid newspapers, these broadsheets were—and to some extent remained—the domain of established governmental and intellectual elites committed to accommodation and moderation. The inroads made by assimilationists since the early 1990s made these newspapers a key site where challengers confronted established policies and elites.

The corpus includes interviews and opinion articles published in *NRC Handelsblad*, *de Volkskrant* and *Trouw* between January 1990 and November 2006. Articles were retrieved from the Lexis-Nexis database using three keyword combinations: “minorities AND integration,” “foreigners AND integration” and “Muslims AND integration.” The Lexis-Nexis database does not contain articles in *de Volkskrant* prior to 1995 and *Trouw* prior to 1992, so these articles were retrieved from the Royal Library in The Hague and copied. Since we are interested in rivalry among opinion-makers, we only selected articles longer than 1000 words² to filter out letters to the editor and other shorter statements. We excluded news reports, book or film reviews, and other non-opinion articles. We further excluded articles that do not primarily deal with minority integration, including articles dealing with European integration. The remaining interviews and opinion articles all contain the expressions of opinion-makers³ on minority integration.⁴ The selection rendered a corpus of 735 articles.⁵

To extract relations from this corpus, the principal researcher coded all references to other actors made in these articles. Codes were assigned for paragraphs so that multiple references to the same actor within a paragraph were counted as one reference. References were distinguished according to their positive, negative or neutral content, which in some cases was difficult to decide. For instance, the phrase “Bolkestein opened the discussion” can be read as a factual statement, as an accusation (when the author feels that the topic is inappropriate for public debate) or as approval (when the author welcomes public debate on the issue). This example would receive a “neutral” score while subsequent passages revealing the position of the author would be coded separately. In cases of co-authorship, a positive reference was assigned between the

co-authors. References by co-authors to others were ascribed to all co-authors; the weight of these references (1, the weight for single-authored pieces) was divided by the number of co-authors. In the network representation of the debate, these codes become negative, neutral and positive arcs (directed ties). In our case, the vast majority of actors in the debate (between 82.6% and 92.8% for the respective periods we study) are part of the largest connected component, meaning they are connected to each other (possibly through intermediaries) through links that have a non-zero (signed) weight.

In total, 2389 actors featured in the analysis. Most are natural persons but the list also includes institutional players such as political parties and research institutes. Note that not all actors in the debate are active; some actors—including institutional actors, historical figures, and deceased persons—feature only because they are referenced by others. It is important to include references to inactive actors because they tell us something about the positions of players within larger figurations. For instance, if one person attacks an historical figure like Prophet Mohammed (or a murdered participant in the debate like Pim Fortuyn or Theo van Gogh) while another person praises him, these two persons express an antagonism through their contradictory references to the same actor. Rather than presuming that some references are more important than others, we coded all references through which actors position themselves vis-à-vis others. The total number of coded fragments is 9522: 5021 neutral (52.7%), 1768 positive (18.6%) and 2763 negative (29.0%). We use the findings from these relational data to detect patterns which emerge from and impact interactions that may not be observable from positions within the debate.

4. Concepts and methods

A premise of our relational approach is that groups emerge from discursive interactions among debate participants. We thus first elaborate how we identify these contending groups. We subsequently examine the power relations both within and among these groups. For this purpose we provide relational reinterpretations of, and measures for, discursive power, polarization, solidarity and leadership.

4.1. Identifying contending groups

To identify contending groups, we use an algorithm that detects communities on the basis of interactions among debate participants. Since we are studying conflict, it is essential to include negative ties in our analysis. While social network analysts have generally focused on positive ties, negative as well as positive ties have received systematic treatment through specialized methods in social balance theory ([Wasserman and Faust, 1994](#); [Marvel et al., 2011](#); [Facchetti et al., 2011](#)). The basic idea of social balance theory is that if ego and alter agree on a number of salient issues and have a positive tie, their attitudes toward other persons should be the same—i.e. if ego has a negative tie with a third person, alter should also have a negative tie with this person. Their triad is then said to be socially balanced. Similar statements hold for larger cycles than three (that are balanced for an even number, or absence, of negative ties); if all cycles in a network are balanced, the network is said to be balanced ([Harary, 1953](#); [Harary and Cartwright, 1968](#)).

Consistent with other empirical findings ([Szell et al., 2010](#)), we expect that the forces described by social balance theory are at work in the debate on minority integration, at least to some extent. Participants in the debate routinely refer to oppositions between two major groups like the left and the right, the progressives and the conservatives, the multiculturalists and the assimilationists, and so on. Though the labels of these different groups are contested,

² For the articles not available in Lexis-Nexis, the numbers of words had to be estimated.

³ When someone is provided ample space in a newspaper (>1000 words) to make claims, we regard that person as an opinion maker.

⁴ When codes were assigned to articles, interviewees were coded as authors.

⁵ While these selection criteria are similar to those [Uitermark \(2012\)](#) used, we improve upon his analysis in a number of ways. First, Uitermark coded only the references of pre-selected opinion makers, which means that many references that are important for establishing the figuration are left out. Second, he only coded articles that were available digitally, which means he did not include articles published in *Trouw* and *de Volkskrant* in the early 1990s (including the landmark article Bolkestein 1999). Third, he did not code co-authors separately. Fourth, he analyzed a shorter time period (excluding the year 2006). The present article not only improves upon the coding procedures but also presents additional theoretical interpretations and provides new conceptualizations and operationalizations of key notions.

they signal that participants in the debate perceive only a few—and typically two—major groups.

We therefore try to find a clustering in two groups that minimizes the number of positive ties between the two groups and negative ties within these groups (Doreian and Mrvar, 2009). Except for very small networks, it is not feasible for a computer to compare all community assignments to pick the best one. Hence all clustering methods rely on algorithms that yield approximate solutions (Fortunato, 2010). Several algorithms are stochastic in nature and may therefore provide slightly different results on different runs. Since we further analyze the resulting two main communities, we prefer these results to be stable and reproducible. We therefore use a spectral partitioning method similar to Newman's (2006) eigenvector method that relies on the extraction of the dominant eigenvector of the signed adjacency matrix. Although like any other algorithm, the algorithm based on the spectral partitioning method is a heuristic, one can prove that if the network is balanced, it will return the correct partitioning. Using this algorithm, we assign individuals to clusters based on actual patterns of conflict and cooperation, not on pre-assigned categories such as party membership, ethnicity or occupation. The approach has several distinct advantages. The first is that it does not predefine groups: we do not prioritize given categories but instead examine how groups form out of (discursive) interactions. It is perhaps important to point out that although social balance theory suggests two antagonistic groups, it does not specify the intensity of the polarization between the groups or the degree of cohesion within the groups; social balance theory merely assumes that both clusters are mainly connected positively internally (but not to what extent) and mainly negatively between each other (but again not to what extent). The second advantage of our approach is that it allows us to examine not only the internal relations of groups but also their relations to others and their position within the wider *figuration*, which is Norbert Elias' (1978) notion for network topology. This is important because the properties of groups must be identified relative to those of others; only by comparing the network attributes of groups in the context of their larger figuration is it possible to discover whether they indeed have features distinguishing them from, and giving them strategic advantage over, their opponents.

4.2. Discursive power

Power crucially depends on the position of actors within networks. In public debates, where actors position themselves in relation to others through references of varying nature and intensity, we can distinguish three qualitatively different aspects of power (Koopmans, 2004; Uitermark, 2012).

1. *Articulation power* refers to the capacity to express oneself. In our case, it means that media gatekeepers provide actors space to air their opinions as their contributions are believed to be interesting or authoritative enough to warrant publication. Those with more articulation power thus win the competition for limited space (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988), rendering their messages at least potentially visible to the general audience and other debate participants (Koopmans, 2004; Koopmans and Olzak, 2004). We operationalize a group's articulation power as the number of articles produced by its members divided by the total number of articles in the debate.
2. *Consonance power* is the capacity to articulate a discourse with which others actively agree (cf. Koopmans, 2004, p. 374). This power is most clearly manifested when actors "strike a chord" with their audience and transform them into collaborators, followers or friends. For the debate on the opinion pages, consonance can be measured for individual actors by calculating the ratio of weighted positive minus weighted negative

indegree (number of references) divided by the sum total of their positive and negative weighted indegree (leaving aside neutral references). For a given cluster r we simply aggregate the concerned individuals:

$$\text{Consonance } (r) = \frac{\sum_s (m_{sr}^+ - m_{sr}^-)}{\sum_s (m_{sr}^+ + m_{sr}^-)} \quad (1)$$

where r is a focal cluster, s an index for all clusters including r , and m_{sr}^+ and m_{sr}^- , respectively, are the numbers of positive and negative references from s to r . Consonance ranges between -1 (maximal dissonance) and 1 (maximal consonance).

3. *Resonance power* refers to the capacity to attract attention. Whereas consonance is generated by supporters and diminished by opponents, the latter is generated by supporters, neutral observers and opponents. The power to provoke reactions is crucial because public arenas, and certainly the opinion pages, thrive on criticism and opposition. As Koopmans (2004, p. 374) argues, "the maxim that 'any publicity is good publicity' also holds for political messages: even the rejection of a demand has to reproduce that demand and thereby diffuses it further in the public sphere" (see also Bail, 2012). Resonance can be grasped through *total* weighted indegree (the number of positive, neutral and negative references to a focal actor).⁶ Actors with resonance power are thus central actors who have the ability to focus attention on themselves. We operationalize a cluster's resonance power as the number of references the cluster's members receive divided by the total number of references in the debate. Since it might be expected that clusters with high articulation power (i.e. many articles) generate a lot of attention, we also report a cluster's resonance relative to its articulation power.

These three types of power are qualitatively different. Without articulation power, actors cannot make their own claims and will be either framed by others or ignored altogether. Actors without consonance power lack allies to lend them support and legitimacy, meaning they and their messages will be exclusively framed by opponents (if they receive attention at all). Actors with resonance power are central to the debate but will be tainted by stigma if they do not have consonance power and lack voice if they have no articulation power. This means that we need to consider all three aspects of discursive power simultaneously. While these can be calculated for individuals and clusters, the power of a cluster to influence a debate is not simply the sum of its parts—which is why we need to examine the community structure of the different groups in the debate.

4.3. Community structures: solidarity, leadership and polarization

The literature discussed above highlights the importance of community structure and suggests that groups with strong solidarity and leadership dominate groups without strong solidarity or leadership. Next to power, we thus conceptualize and measure solidarity and leadership. In addition, we conceptualize and measure polarization to assess the intensity of conflict.

4.3.1. Symbolic solidarity

Group solidarity is fostered by positive identifications and interactions, and impaired by negative ones. Positive references within a

⁶ We also tested more complex measures of centrality, including page rank (Brin and Page, 1998). The results of these measures had low face validity because politically unimportant figures sometimes received a high value when they were cited by an important figure only once. We therefore opted for the simplest centrality measure of all, indegree.

cluster signal and reinforce shared goals and commitments among actors in the cluster and thereby contribute to the group's symbolic solidarity (Collins, 2004). Negative references indicate conflict. The solidarity of group s with size n_s will be higher if there are more positive references between group members, m_{ss}^+ . Solidarity will diminish if there is more contention within the group, m_{ss}^- . The larger the group, the less impact a single reference will have:

$$\text{Solidarity } (s) = \frac{m_{ss}^+ - m_{ss}^-}{n_s} \quad (2)$$

Since (the lack of) solidarity is most acutely felt by active participants in the debate (and not by deceased or historical figures), we restrict the groups to participants with articulation power for the calculation of solidarity.

4.3.2. Leadership

In public debates, participants cannot exercise power over others through command or coercion but must elicit their support. Leadership is thus not associated with formal positions but emerges from interactions within groups. To form a discursive alliance, actors within a cluster need to invest emotional energy into shared symbols that come to stand for the group as a whole (Collins, 2004). In our case, the symbols are persons who command positive attention from cluster members. Such persons can be active participants in the debate who thrive on the support they receive but they can also be religious or historical figures who are merely icons, not active participants. When we refer to individuals, it should be kept in mind that they are “shorthand” for “designating a social movement” within the debate and that we need to “see through the personalities, to dissolve them into the network of processes which have brought them to our attention” (Collins, 1998, p. 4). In short, the discursive leadership of individuals results from the relational mechanisms within their group. We calculate a discursive leadership score for each individual actor: the number of positive referents minus the number of negative referents within the actor's cluster. We measure the extent to which a cluster has leaders through the variance in discursive leadership, with low variance indicating egalitarian relationships and high variance indicating centralization. High variance in discursive leadership signals that there are leaders who speak with a great deal of support from members of their cluster.

4.3.3. Polarization

As we want to analyze relations within and between contending groups, we wish to know the extent to which groups are engaged in conflict. A relational understanding conceptualizes polarization as the simultaneous clustering of allies and repulsion between antagonists (see also Waugh et al., 2009). The aforementioned method of group detection yields the clusters that serve as the starting point for defining the concept of polarization relationally. The first step for measuring discursive polarization is to count the number of negative links (i.e. the sum of their weights, equal to the number of negative references) between given communities, and to add them to the number of positive links within these communities, each of which increases polarization. Because polarization decreases through positive links *between* communities and negative links *within* them, respectively, we subtract these numbers from the former. The larger the number of participants, the less impact a single reference will have, so we divide by n . Our concept of discursive polarization has a further refinement, based on the idea that the intensity of conflict between clusters is proportionate to the extent to which the attacker or the attacked are supported by their community members. For instance, if someone with strong community support is attacked, this contributes more strongly to polarization than when someone lacking such support is attacked. We therefore

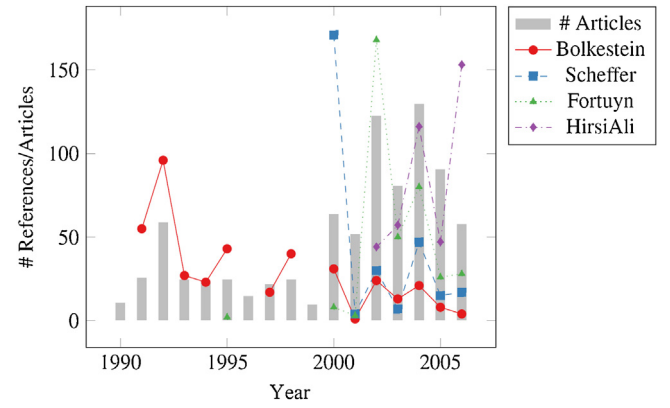


Fig. 1. References to key figures and articles in the database in the period 1990–2006.

weigh each link (through multiplication) by the discursive leadership of both citing and cited actor. Our measure for polarization is:

$$\text{Polarization} = \frac{\sum_s (w_{ss}^+ - w_{ss}^-) + \sum_{s \neq r} (w_{sr}^- - w_{sr}^+)}{n} \quad (3)$$

The terms w_{sr}^+ and w_{sr}^- are numbers of leadership-weighted positive and negative references, respectively, and indices ss and sr denote references within group s and between groups s and r , respectively.

4.4. Significance

To gauge whether the properties of the figurations in the debate might result from mere chance, we compare the values of the empirically observed networks to randomly rewired networks. The randomly rewired networks were obtained by assigning a random originating node and target node for every arc in the network. The scores for the randomly rewired network are the averages of 1000 runs. Table A1 in the online supplement provides the Z-values for the comparison between the empirically observed and randomly rewired networks.

4.5. Periodization

One further issue before we discuss our findings is the temporal partitioning of the debate: when do periods start or end? There are different ways to do this. Perhaps the most conventional way is to use the arbitrary organization of calendar time and discuss different months, years or decades but this is clearly unsatisfactory as periods of contention are not necessarily synchronous with calendar time. A more sophisticated method is to base the periodization on the endogenous identification of topics (e.g. Rule et al., 2015). Such an approach is helpful for tracking changes among topics over very long historical periods whereas our concern is with relations among debate participants in a relatively short period of time. Yet a different method is to identify periods through pegs, i.e. “topical events that provide an opportunity for broader, more long-term coverage and commentary” (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989, p. 11). Such a method is in principle suitable for our purposes and we present our results using this periodization in Table A2 of the online supplement. However, we prefer to identify periods according to the participants that are central in the debate. Just as in science (Collins, 1998; de Solla Price, 1986[1963]), a small number of individuals receive the bulk of references in any given period (see Fig. 1). These individuals are central to the debate until others take over the role as focal points around which antagonisms and alliances develop. This pattern is so strong that we can divide the whole period under investigation (1990–2006) into four periods

in which four individuals—Frits Bolkestein, Paul Scheffer, Pim Fortuyn and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, respectively—were central to the debate. We prefer this periodization (instead of e.g., a periodization based on calendar time, topics or pegs) because the tendency of actors to self-organize into figurations with highly uneven degree distributions represents a fundamental characteristic of the relational structure of the debate. We label the periods by the name of the person central to the debate at that time thus distinguish between the following four periods in our analysis:

- (1) The Bolkestein period from September 12, 1991 until January 28, 2000.

This period begins with the publication of Bolkestein's opinion article "The Minorities Policy Needs to be Handled with Guts" (Bolkestein, 1991) in which he argued that Islamic and Western civilizations were inimical and irreconcilable and that the influx of immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries represented a threat to Western countries and their liberal values.

- (2) The Scheffer period from January 29, 2000 until November 24, 2001.

This period begins with the publication of Paul Scheffer's "The Multicultural Drama" that reignited the debate on minority integration (see Fig. 1). Scheffer's article posited that an ethnic underclass had been in the making for several decades and that especially Muslim immigrants pose problems since "Islam does not acknowledge the division between Church and State" (Bolkestein, 1991).

- (3) The Fortuyn period from November 25, 2001 until October 31, 2002.

This period begins with the participation of Pim Fortuyn in the campaign for the parliamentary elections of 2002. Like Bolkestein and Scheffer, Fortuyn combined populist arguments about the plight of the people and elitist political correctness with claims to intellectual honesty and sophistication.

- (4) The Hirsi Ali period from November 1, 2002 until May 31, 2006.

This period begins when Ayaan Hirsi Ali announced her decision to join the right-wing liberals of the VVD. Hirsi Ali became a parliamentarian for the VVD and its spokesperson for minority issues, and published books, gave speeches and wrote articles arguing that Islam imprisons women, discourages curiosity and criticism, and promotes dogma and violence. Although Hirsi Ali—as a Muslim apostate, a woman and a member of a minority group—had a very different background than the central assimilationists in previous periods, her discourse was similar in that she criticized the culture of political correctness and the politics of accommodation which, in her view, made it impossible to discuss the serious problems arising from (Muslim) cultures. Hirsi Ali remained very much in the center of attention until she left the Netherlands in May 2006 following a controversy over her asylum application that brought her into conflict with Rita Verdonk, a fellow party member and Minister of Immigration. While her (pending) departure stirred up debate, references to Hirsi Ali dwindled following her departure. We therefore determine May 31, 2006 as the end date of this period.

This overview of the respective periods shows that, over successive rounds of discussion, the views of focal figures are substantively similar. All are assimilationists who oppose multiculturalism and argue that the Dutch should protect their society and culture in the face of claims from religious and cultural minorities. While there are strong affinities between their positions, assimilationist challengers adopt a more explicit and confrontational discourse over consecutive rounds of discursive struggle. However, here we are not interested in the precise content of the debate but in its relations of power.

5. Results

When we consider the four periods together, we find remarkable continuities. In all four periods, we find that assimilationist challengers were focal points in the debate. Table 1 provides an overview of these challengers and their positions in the debate.

First of all, Table 1 confirms that all periods have their respective focal figures: the debate on minority integration in the Netherlands is highly stratified, with key figures receiving a disproportionate share of references. These figures tend to be heavily criticized; they achieve centrality by provoking opposition, not by winning support from the majority of the debate's participants. Their centrality invests them with a particular form of power, i.e. resonance power. While debate participants who cite these focal figures may disagree with their views, they nevertheless engage with the issues as raised by the assimilationist challengers, thereby reaffirming their importance. But although assimilationists set the agenda, their advances were not without risks. By taking central positions in the debate, focal figures ran the risk of a pushback in the form of opposition from established figures who argued for accommodation, moderation and reconciliation and accused assimilationists of stigmatizing minorities and polarizing politics. On the basis of the theoretical discussion above, we expect that the network structure of the debate provides a key to the answer to how assimilationists could sustain their challenges in the face of such adversity.

When we consider the community structures of the contending groups, we again find remarkable continuities over the four periods. Table 2 shows that while actors change over time, the pattern remains almost invariant: following the interventions of Frits Bolkestein, Paul Scheffer, Pim Fortuyn and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a cluster of assimilationists form around relatively strong discursive leaders in opposition to a fragmented cluster of their critics. In all four periods, this cluster has higher internal solidarity and stronger leadership than its antipode—findings that help explain how assimilationists could sustain their challenges. We discuss the four periods in turn, beginning with the Bolkestein period.

Some commentators have argued that the debate was polarized between "Bolkestein and the rest" due to the number of criticisms Bolkestein received (e.g. Van Praag, 1992). Bolkestein was indeed more often criticized than praised (Table 1) and the cluster containing his opponents is relatively large, with almost twice as much articulation power (Table 2). But the figuration of discursive struggle in this period (Table 2), clearly shows that Bolkestein was not a lone critic, let alone an outcast. Bolkestein may have had more critics than supporters but he also had more supporters than any

Table 1
References to key figures in the debate on minority integration in three Dutch broadsheet newspapers.

	Period	Articles citing	Total articles	% Citing articles	Total citations to key figure	Positive citations	Negative citations	Consonance
Frits Bolkestein	September 12, 1991–January 28, 2000	84	222	37.8	301	46	137	–0.50
Paul Scheffer	January 29, 2000–November 24, 2001	40	111	36.0	175	28	73	–0.45
Pim Fortuyn	November 25, 2001–October 31, 2002	46	102	45.1	163	13	36	–0.47
Ayaan Hirsi Ali	November 1, 2002–May 31, 2006	116	364	31.9	368	74	121	–0.24

Table 2

Internal and external relations of clusters in the integration debate in three Dutch broadsheet newspapers in consecutive periods.

	Members	Articulation power (articles)	Resonance power (relative to articulation)	Consonance power	Symbolic solidarity	Concentration discursive leadership	Main discursive leader (score)	Discursive polarization
<i>The Bolkestein period</i>								
Assimilationist	132	35.5% (54)	61.8% (1.74)	−0.47	1.03	1.81	Bolkestein (13)	2.38
Anti-assimilationist	182	64.5% (98)	38.2% (0.59)	−0.03	0.30	1.12	Van Thijn (5)	
<i>The Scheffer period</i>								
Assimilationist	108	52.3% (45)	74.2% (1.42)	−0.20	0.90	1.52	Scheffer (10)	3.39
Anti-assimilationist	84	47.7% (41)	25.8% (0.54)	−0.31	0.30	0.55	None	
<i>The Fortuyn period</i>								
Assimilationist	132	52.3% (45)	57.3% (1.10)	−0.36	0.30	1.03	Fortuyn (8)	0.08
Anti-assimilationist	140	47.7% (41)	42.7% (0.90)	−0.15	0.13	0.45	None	
<i>The Hirsi Ali period</i>								
Assimilationist	305	44.2% (136)	55.7% (1.26)	−0.20	1.17	2.53	Hirsi Ali (23)	10.45
Anti-assimilationist	355	55.8% (172)	44.3% (0.79)	−0.27	0.53	1.32	Karacaer (5), Cohen (5), Prophet Mohammed (5)	
<i>1990–2006</i>								
Assimilationist	545	44.7% (309)	56.1% (1.26)	−0.23	0.83	2.36	Hirsi Ali (23)	10.30
Anti-assimilationist	664	55.3% (383)	43.9% (0.79)	−0.25	0.60	2.08	Prophet Mohammed (9)	

Notes: Cut-off for reporting discursive leaders is a discursive leadership score of 5. Only the figures with the highest scores are reported. Z-values for a comparison of the empirically observed networks and randomly rewired networks are reported in Table A1. Note that actors can appear in more than one period.

other figure in the debate. His score for discursive leadership—i.e. the net number of people within his cluster who supported him—is high, indicating that he was the cluster's discursive leader. Another crucial difference concerns the community structure of the two clusters. Compared to its antipode, the assimilationist cluster⁷ has strong solidarity and discursive leadership. While members of the anti-assimilationist cluster clearly opposed the assimilationists' ideas in general and Bolkestein in particular, they were not unified, lacking both solidarity and leadership.

The figuration in Scheffer's period is qualitatively similar. The very large number of references Scheffer received and his high share of negative references may suggest that Scheffer was neutralized by the opposition. But a closer look at the figuration reveals that Scheffer, like Bolkestein, was embedded in stronger supportive relations than his critics (Table 2). Scheffer's cluster had much higher symbolic solidarity than its antipode and Scheffer's score for discursive leadership (10) indicates strong support from within his cluster. The anti-assimilationist cluster has almost as many members but they did not have strong ties between them and had comparatively low resonance. In short, we again find an assimilationist cluster with strong solidarity and leadership in conflict with an anti-assimilationist cluster with relatively low solidarity and leadership. Although Paul Scheffer was intensely criticized, he could count on the support of a relatively cohesive and centralized group, while his many critics were fragmented.

Like Bolkestein and Scheffer before him, Fortuyn was incessantly criticized. Although Fortuyn's emergence caused consternation, the network structure of discursive conflict in this period shows that it did not create polarization in the broadsheet papers; the score for polarization (0.08) is remarkably low compared to the other periods (Table 2). A closer inspection of the clusters also shows that divisions between assimilationists and their opponents were not so

clear-cut. Although we do not see discursive polarization, Fortuyn is embedded in a community structure similar to that of Bolkestein and Scheffer, though in a less pronounced way. Like his predecessors, Fortuyn was the figurehead of a more cohesive cluster with more resonance and stronger leadership than its antipode. However, the low score for polarization suggests that while the debate may have been acrimonious, conflicts did not add up to antagonism between groups. In this sense, Fortuyn's explosive entry into the debate inaugurated a phase of transition where tension was rife yet did not produce a strongly polarized figuration.

In the period that Ayaan Hirsi Ali was in the center of debate, we do find a strongly polarized figuration. With a score of 20 for discursive leadership, she was clearly the leader of the assimilationist cluster. When we examine the debate's topology, we find that the assimilationist cluster spearheaded by Hirsi Ali is smaller than its antipode but has higher resonance, stronger leadership and more solidarity—a pattern similar to earlier periods (Table 2). The opponents are again numerous but lack leaders; while a few receive support from others within their cluster, their scores for discursive leadership or resonance do not come anywhere close to those of Hirsi Ali. In short, Hirsi Ali was strongly criticized but also received strong support from a tight-knit group of supporters, including some relatively central figures. We observe the same pattern as in previous periods: a group with strong leadership and high internal solidarity confronts a large yet diffuse opposition lacking leadership as well as internal solidarity.

Although most participants in the debate were active in only one period and differed in their political and professional backgrounds, age and other characteristics, we find a similar pattern in all four periods. Analysis of the four periods together reveals a polarized figuration between an assimilationist cluster and an anti-assimilationist cluster (bottom row Table 2; Fig. 2). The assimilationist cluster is considerably smaller than its antipode and its members make fewer contributions to the debate than their discursive adversaries but it has comparatively high solidarity, strong leadership, and a lot of resonance.

In short, the same pattern holds for each of the periods and for the entire period under study. Challengers do not defeat their opponents but push the discursive limits of the debate, thereby provoking intense criticism. While assimilationists may have been

⁷ By calling a cluster "assimilationist" (or anti-assimilationist), we do not imply that all of its members are assimilationists. Although there is a rough correspondence between substantive views and relational patterns (with like-minded people sharing supportive and negative relations), clusters are always composed of people with different ideas. We can nevertheless characterize clusters based on scores for discursive leadership. In this case, we call the cluster assimilationist because of the discourse promoted by its discursive leader, Frits Bolkestein.

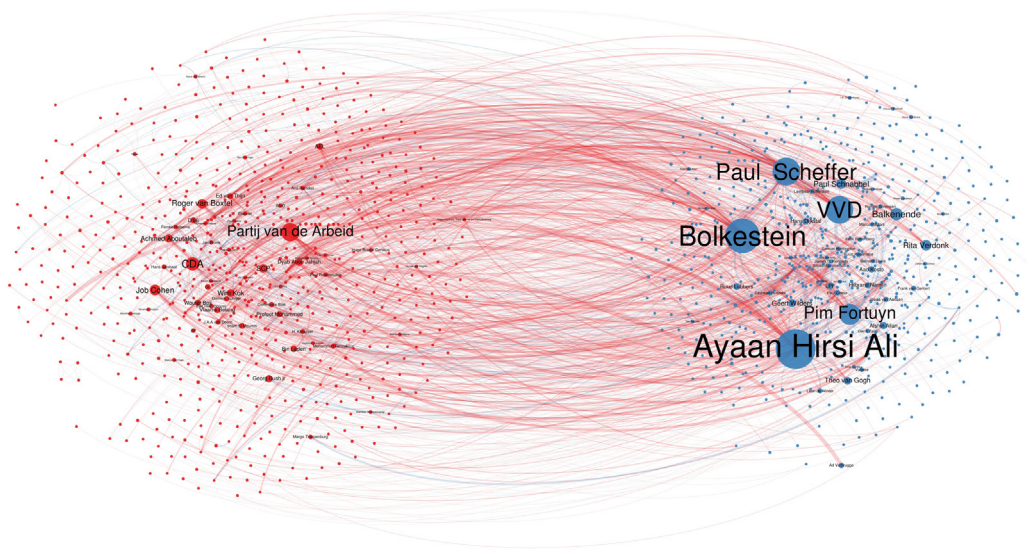


Fig. 2. Visualization of positive and negative references in the integration debate in three Dutch broadsheet newspapers 1990–2006. Node color denotes community membership; node size and labels are proportional to indegree; blue lines denote positive references; red lines denote negative references. The graph displays only the largest connected component and only nodes with more than 10 indegree are labeled. (For interpretation of the references to color in this legend, the reader is referred to the web version of the article.)

tainted by such pushback, support from their loyal and cohesive community keep them from becoming pariahs or outcasts. And despite their numerical superiority, the opponents of the assimilationist challengers remain weak; what they share is an opponent, not solidarity or leaders. In this recurrent figuration, challengers become central to the debate, reducing their opponents to critical but supporting roles in a political drama where challengers play the leading roles.

6. Conclusion

The social forces that shape the course of discursive struggle are numerous and complex. On the one hand, our goal was more modest than providing a comprehensive account of Dutch integration politics: rather than assessing all relevant factors, we aimed to foreground the relational dimension of discursive struggle over minority integration in the limited setting of the country's broadsheet newspapers. On the other hand, our goal was more ambitious as we use the Dutch case to explore dynamics that may also be found elsewhere. Toward this end, we developed a relational approach to study power relations in public debates. We built upon existing work by developing a methodology that enables the identification of contending groups emerging from discursive interaction as well as a conceptual framework that allows for the measuring of discursive power relations.

On the basis of the literature on community structures within social movements and scientific communities pushing for change, we hypothesized that the discursive interaction dynamics among debate participants result in a cohesive group of challengers with clearly identifiable leaders in opposition to a diffuse established group. This was indeed what we found. In each of the periods, we found a cluster with an assimilationist challenger as discursive leader, and the robustness of the pattern sustained the challengers' discourse. A caveat is that when Fortuyn was the debate's focal point, there was hardly any polarization between the clusters. However, while discursive shifts do not follow a predetermined trajectory, the recurrent pattern is striking: a comparatively small, cohesive group of challengers with strong discursive leaders and high resonance confronts a larger yet more diffuse group without strong discursive leaders or high resonance.

Our case study of the Dutch debate on minority integration suggests that challenges against the status quo are undergirded by a specific type of network pattern. We can hypothesize that the findings from our case exemplify more general dynamics of discursive shifts in politics, culture and science (cf. Frickel and Gross, 2005). While we lack systematic studies of incipient social movements, case studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that they consist of “core groups” of highly devoted participants whose mutual support enables them to persist in the face of hostility or indifference. A qualitatively similar figuration can be observed at the base of challenges to the status quo in scientific, artistic or literary fields: a small number of actors disrupt the status quo by asserting new ideas, their names become synonymous with a new current (the surrealists, post-structuralists) or theory (of evolution, relativity), and they develop antagonistic relations to a diffuse opposition. In this challenger-established figuration, there is one (usually small) group with strong discursive leaders and solidarity against a larger group lacking both strong discursive leaders and solidarity. Unlike the challengers, the established order lacks a face and coherence. While the challengers provoke through inflammatory statements and bold claims, established groups take their position reactively. Established groups respond ad hoc where and when they are challenged, not through a coordinated effort or under the guidance of a charismatic leader. While their dispersed negative responses discredit the challengers, they also place the challengers at the center of attention (Koopmans, 2004; Bail, 2012). As they support one another and rally around their leaders, the challengers become a vanguard that captures the benefits associated with strong community structures while their opponents come to be associated with bygone orthodoxies. Future research can examine whether this hypothesized figuration is indeed found in other examples of challenges.

In addition to researching this hypothesis, our approach to study contentious politics can also be used to identify mechanisms and regularities in the network dynamics in the course of social movement mobilizations. Network analysis in general, and the relational approach developed here in particular, can help to understand the processes through which strategic interactions at lower levels produce often unanticipated yet invariably consequential interdependencies at higher levels (Elias, 1978[1970]; cf. Axelrod, 1997; Schelling, 2006[1978]). The growing abundance of digital data and

the development of powerful algorithms provide researchers with unique opportunities to explore these issues at historically low costs. A number of issues we had to tackle manually—including the periodization and the coding of relationships—can be handled more efficiently as new data sets and automated tools for coding become available. However, probably the main challenges in analyzing discursive struggle are of theoretical nature. Much research in this field has thus far been motivated more by data availability than theoretical considerations (cf. Bail, 2014). The approach developed here provides a theoretical foundation as well as conceptual tools to leverage the abundance of network data to extract the relational mechanisms underlying discursive struggles in a range of different settings.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2016.05.006>.

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