



Deliberative Democracy in Divided Societies: Experiments on democratic deliberation in Belgium

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I THEORETICAL INSPIRATION

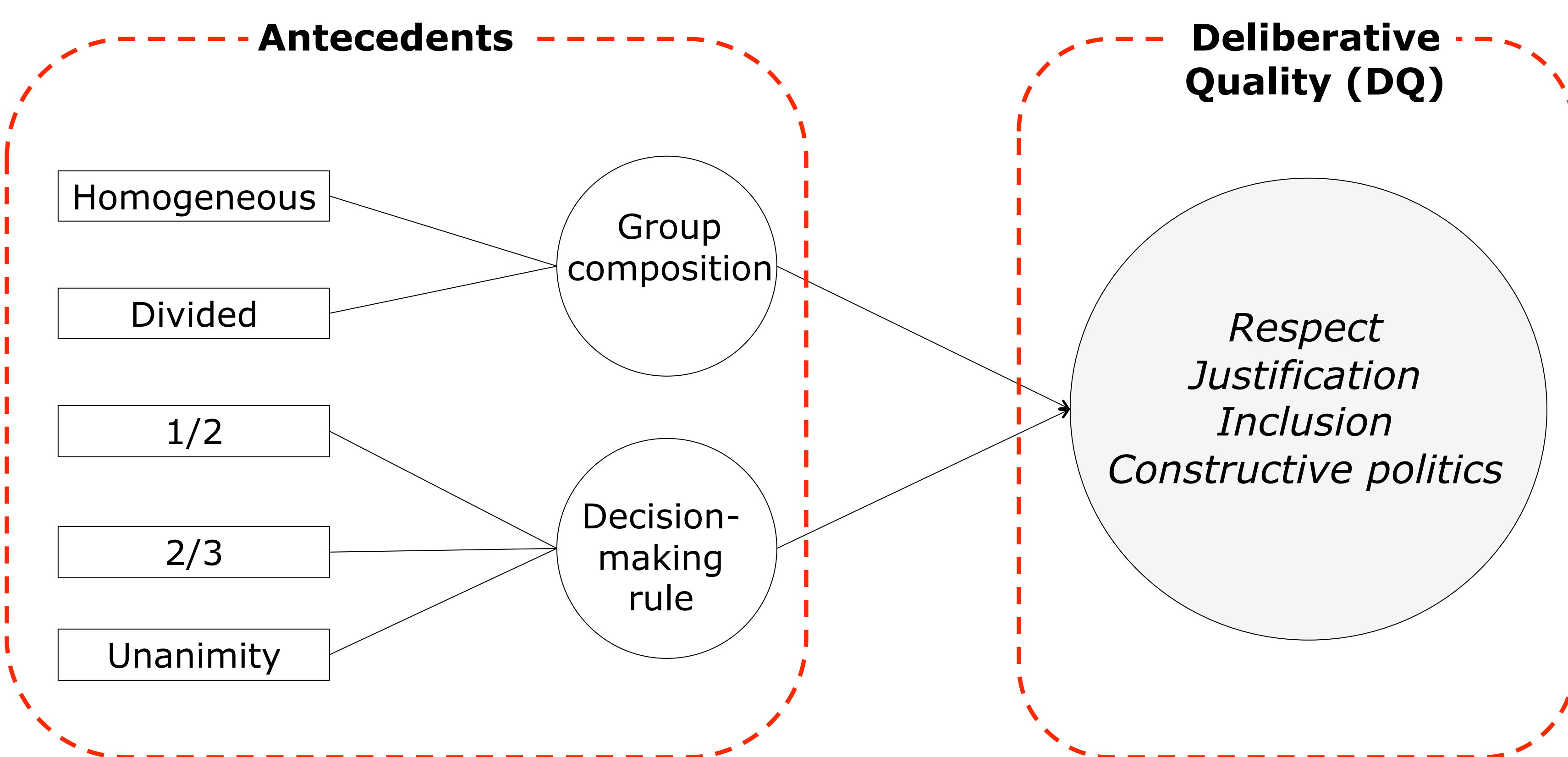
Consociational theory posits that democratic stability in divided societies results from conscious elite efforts to accommodate diverging group interests on a deliberative basis (Lijphart 1974, Steiner et al 2004). This "Spirit of Accommodation" on which the overarching cooperation is founded, is induced by the institutional pressures to which the elites are exposed. After all, power-sharing institutions constitute incentives and constraints on intersegmental elite cooperation.

Exposure to these power-sharing devices is not sufficient, however, to bring about elite accommodation. Lijphart (1968) and Huyse (1970) state that grass-root activism will undermine any attempt at intersegmental conflict resolution. The idea is therefore that democracy can only flourish in divided societies when the public remains deferent.

II RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The finding that democracy is viable only when the demos remains passive, is intriguing. We therefore ask ourselves the following questions:

- 1. Dividedness:** Does contact between competing segments at citizen level exacerbate inter-segmental political conflict?
- 2. Decision-making rules:** Can power-sharing through super majorities create a spirit of accommodation or deliberation among ordinary citizens in divided societies?



III HYPOTHESES

H1: Group dividedness — - —→ **DQ**

In divided groups, the focus is on intergroup differences and intragroup similarities, which makes the presence of the outgroup a threat (Mackie & Smith 2002). Group dividedness will therefore induce lower levels of respect and argumentation, and participants will be less willing to compromise.

H2: More stringent decision-making rules — + —→ **DQ**

Unanimity grants veto rights to all participants, which enhances argumentative, rather than power-based interactions. Less than unanimous rules lead to *solution-driven encounters* in which power and compromise set the tone (Diamond et al. 2005; Stasson et al. 1991). More stringent decision-making rules foster respect and inclusion, and demand that people are willing to yield to the force of the better argument.

IV EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH DESIGN

The absence of intersegmental contacts, which forms the essence of a divided society, makes it difficult to study the deliberative quality of interactions between citizens. An experimental research design offers a way out of this. We therefore intend to gather **nine groups of citizens from both linguistic groups** to discuss, and decide on the future of Belgium under certain experimental conditions.

		Decision-making rule		
		Ordinary majority	Two-thirds majority	Unanimity
Group composition	Homog. FR	1	2	3
	Homog. NL	4	5	6
	Divided	7	8	9

V ANALYSIS

Coding: The transcripts of these discussions, will be coded using the *Discourse Quality Index (DQI)*, which has been used before to determine the deliberative quality of parliamentary discourse (Steiner et al. 2004). Each speech act will be scored on the different dimensions of the DQI. These scores will subsequently be aggregated to the group level. Thus, for each of our nine groups we will get a score on the different deliberative dimensions, and on deliberation in general.

Analysis: The analysis of these results will use *Configurational Comparative Methods* (Rihoux & Ragin 2009). More specifically Multivalue or Fuzzy Set/Qualitative Comparative Analysis (mvQCA or fsQCA) look promising to determine the effect of dividedness, decision-making rules and issue polarization on deliberative quality. Additionally quantitative techniques will be used.

VI PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Group composition	Decision-making rule	Expected Deliberative Quality	Effective Deliberative Quality
NL	Majority	-	--
	Two-thirds	++	+
	Unanimity	+++	+
FR	Majority	-	--
	Two-thirds	++	+
	Unanimity	+++	+
Divided	Majority	----	+++
	Two-thirds	--	+++
	Unanimity	--	+++

H1 corroborated: Simple majorities lead to low quality deliberation, super majorities induce higher quality deliberation.

H2 falsified: Group dividedness leads to high quality deliberation.

Interaction H1 & H2: group dividedness overrules the effect of decision-making rules.

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