

# Online mobilization and perspective taking in contentious politics

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## Working paper – Comments welcome

### Abstract

This article presents an approach to the intergroup contact theory focusing on the value of perspective taking as a central premise in a broad conception of democracy as it implies acknowledging conflict and having respect for political adversaries. I look into protest mobilization and the role that movements and civil society organizations play as mediators in contentious politics in the internet and argue that online protest mobilization processes provide bridging between political divides as protest conveyors need to counter-argue adversarial arguments and frames. Three protest events in Spain are studied through surveys of protesters and through network analysis of issue actors online in order to link individual attitudes with intergroup interaction. This approach provides preliminary evidence to support the theory that online mobilization serves as a contact space which affects the disposition of protest participants for considering opposing stances in political conflicts.

**Keywords:** perspective taking, intergroup contact theory, political disagreement, attitudes, mobilization, online politics, social movements

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## Introduction

Internet use for political mobilization is increasingly capturing the attention of multiple disciplines as many expectations for the effects of online media on civic engagement need to be tested. The central argument in this paper is that online mobilization needs to be considered further than its effectiveness in maximizing turnout in order to appreciate a greater democratic potential for internet use. I focus on online mobilization in the particular case of protest in position issues and propose to conceive it as a political experience in which groups holding contrary positions have an opportunity to interact in order to face their controversy. This implies that protest mobilization is expected to provide spaces which may affect intergroup attitudes. I draw on the principles of intergroup contact theory (Allport 1954) and its modern reformulations focusing on media effects and internet use (Paluck 2010, Postmes & Baym 2005) as well as on the traditional media literature on political disagreement. My main interest is in the attitude changes that online mobilization may bring about by providing contact spaces, and I question whether individual disposition for perspective taking is affected by online mobilization experiences.

In contact theory, perspective taking has been consistently identified as a mediator in prejudice reduction and has been explained as an ability to “*take the perspective of outgroup members and empathize with their concerns*” (Pettigrew & Tropp 2008). I argue that perspective taking is an important subject of study in its own as it is a central premise in a broad conception of democracy; it implies a disposition for understanding conflicting positions and having respect for political adversaries. It involves cognitive and emotional processes that entail a determination for acknowledging differences and therefore the role of information brokers is central in structuring contact spaces that provide exposure to political disagreement. This article deals with how this intermediation may affect individual dispositions for considering opposing political stances. I assess mobilization processes to analyze the extent in which these result critical for determining the nature of contact spaces online, considering the capacity of political organizations for managing issue attention. I present some evidence that mobilization actors can provide positive contact between opposing political stances in highly salient issues and affect the disposition for perspective taking in their publics, and propose that ordinary encounters in everyday political life need to be further studied as they move rapidly into online spheres.

In the first part of this paper I introduce the proposed approach to contact theory in the real-life context in which it is studied and bring together some of the theoretical foundations of social movement and media-effects studies. In a second section, questions and hypotheses are presented. The third part deals with the research design, the data and a short description of the cases for Spanish anti-abortion and the Catalan nationalist events in 2010 and the final chapters present major findings and the discussion of the results.

## **Contact theory in a political context**

### **Perspective taking: more than a mediator in intergroup prejudice?**

The most widely used definitions of perspective taking agree in recognizing it as a cognitive process which leads to the result of understanding others<sup>1</sup>. This is the sense in which I propose to consider perspective taking as a *sine qua non* for the democratic ideal of the public agora which requires individuals to be capable of “*representative thinking*” (Arendt 1968, p. 241). In this political approach, perspective taking has been studied as the product of deliberative experiences in which exposure to disagreement happens in face to face conversations (Gurin et al. 2002, 2004; Nagda 2006; Nagda & Zuniga 2003) and in contexts where political talk is motivated by exposure to political contents. It thus seems to be good indicator for democratic strength, as it implies that group interactions will meet the conditions to be a conscious effort among political adversaries to consider the varying arguments on all sides of a public issue in a fair, egalitarian, and open manner (Gastil 2000; Habermas 1989; Rawls 1996). In the extent that intergroup contact shares the principles of deliberative practices, perspective taking is expected to be a resulting attitude.

### **Contact and exposure to political disagreement**

Political disagreement has been studied within multiple spaces and forms of receiving individual stimuli: formal deliberation, political talk to cross-cutting networks (Huckfeldt, Johnson & Sprague 2004), (Scheufele et al. 2006), attending meetings or public forums (Wojcieszak, Min Baeky & Delli Carpini 2010), online forums and message boards (Wojcieszak 2006; Wojcieszak & Mutz 2009; Gonzalez-Bailon et al. 2010). Any of these discursive engagements are expected to expose individuals to dissimilar views by facing political adversaries directly. However, exposure to political disagreement can also happen when acknowledging political adversaries and dealing impersonally with the arguments of opposing stances. I propose to consider online mobilization as an alternative form of exposure to political disagreement which constitutes a contact space characterized by media inspired discussion (Paluck 2010). This approach complements the studies on direct interaction in political discussion networks and private information consumption, as it is composed by mediated online information in the mobilization for contentious issues.

The rise of internet communication has contributed to the increasing protagonism of civil society organizations as political intermediaries as they have achieved a major presence through online interaction with their publics and through their social networking potential. Most of the attention on this phenomenon has focused on social movement organizations, but as a good deal

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<sup>1</sup> “*the cognitive process of putting oneself in the place of another and understanding how the other thinks about a problem*” (Falk & Johnson 1977, p.64) - “*the cognitive process of understanding how another person thinks and feels about the situation and why they are behaving as they are*” (Sessa 1996, p.105)

of research has centered on social movements' structural opportunities, resources, mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1977), network formation practices, repertoires of action, framing processes and so on, the role of a wider range of organizations in political intermediation needs to be further characterized in the internet-powered information environment. I aim at taking a cut into this question by leaving aside the nature of the particular organizations and focusing more generally on their micromobilization processes<sup>2</sup> (Snow et al. 1986). I will focus on organizations that perform general mobilization functions which are shared by different types of issue-actors. McAdam et al. (1988, p. 709) suggest two functions in the mobilization process: Providing a context for realizing the process of collective action through the framing of particular issues and offering a staging ground where individuals meet through communication networks. These functions have in common that they rely on public dialogue as a form of connecting individual interests with collective issues, and in this sense, they serve as vehicles into contact spaces where interaction occurs. As mobilization agents share the common purpose of motivating political action through communication, they depend on establishing trustful ties so as to transmit reliable information and influence beliefs and incentives for action. They constitute a linkage between the structural political context in the public sphere and the individual discussion networks and in this way they are expected to be highly influential on individual attitudes.

The proposed approach to the literature on intergroup interaction considers the effects of being involved in these mobilization networks as a valuable subject of study given the nature of the highly sophisticated publics composed by activists who use the internet for issue-specific information and the role that organizations take on as trusted sources in providing that information. In the last decade political use of the internet has raised a big hype around the expectations for broadening access to political information. However the migration of politics from offline channels and its reinvention within online spaces reflects highly particular trajectories as it represents a tiny proportion of internet contents (Hindman 2009) and it concentrates around particular issues, their main actors and their specific timing (Marres 2007). Furthermore, as attention becomes the most valued resource in the abundance of internet information supply, issue importance becomes a filtering criterion, and issue publics find incentives to seek information in a highly selective manner (Brin & Page 1998) and to depend on reliable sources that provide informational cues related to group identities. In this sense, issue publics become central actors in understanding the dynamics of online political information, especially when trying to follow the dynamics of information supply and to understand how intergroup contact happens in heterogeneous networks.

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<sup>2</sup> *"the range of interactive processes devised and employed by SMOs and their representative actors to mobilize or influence various target groups with respect to the pursuit of collective or common interests"* (P. 464-465)

## **Contact space and online mobilization in position issues**

Internet communication has been studied as an opportunity for intergroup contact (Postmes & Baym 2005, Walther 2009, Glaser & Kahn 2005, Wang et al. 2009), and as an opportunity for improving political information dynamics (Gonzalez-Bailon 2008). However, in spite of its potential for civic engagement, a general concern for the possible effects of internet use on selective exposure has been raised in the last decade (Garrett 2009, Knobloch-Westerwick & Jingbo Meng 2009, Stroud 2008). Online issue publics are especially prone to the risks that accompany Internet's ability to open new spaces for discursive exchange and exposure to political diversity, as homophily may result in fragmentation and isolation of issue publics. A high choice media environment facilitates the avoidance of political disagreement as individuals can isolate themselves in echo chambers where like-minded people are exposed to one-sided arguments (Sunstein 2009). These dynamics may lead to the fragmentation of public spheres and consequently into individuals reinforcing their predilections and ignoring political adversaries (Sunstein 2002; Davis 1999; Hill & Hughes 1998; Wilhelm 2000; Wojcieszak 2009). This scenario is distressing as it runs against the democratic ideal of the public agora and limits the possibilities for contact between politically opposing groups. However, the way in which selective exposure happens in the particular context of issue politics, as well as the actual effects of exposure to single sided discourse on individual attitudes and behaviors is understudied.

This article responds to these concerns for selective exposure and to the appeals of moving intergroup contact theory research from the mainstream experimental approach toward ordinary encounters of group interaction in everyday life (Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux 2005). It looks into particular political information environments online in order to study the role of mobilization agents in providing contact spaces and how they configure the conditions for contact with their mobilization practices. Issue publics in contentious matters provide a good opportunity to focus on groups composed by informed individuals, highly identified with particular causes and who are exposed to different forms of communicational stimuli online.

I propose a model of online contact space which results from group interaction in mobilization to protest in position issues. This model brings together two lines of research by considering exposure to political disagreement as intergroup contact between political adversaries who hold opposing issue stances. It provides a theoretical ground that draws from protest politics scholarship, political psychology research in attitudes and the political disagreement approach of media studies into a particular version of the contact space which responds to the actual context of politically motivated groups in online environments.

As unconventional forms of participation, such as protest, work on less instrumental rationalities than electoral politics, it is expected that mobilization processes take on argumentative elements by acknowledging political adversaries and establishing cross-cleavage bridges. This potentially enhanced awareness for political difference is a relevant question in order to explain political attitudes and has a normative value if discursive exchange is taken to be a central matter for group interest representation processes.

The contact space in online mobilization can be studied through two types of interaction as individuals can meet outgroup actors through mediated contact in which mobilization agents assume a brokerage role when they provide bridges between groups on opposite issue stances or they can find them directly through their websites.

In the first case, interaction between opposing groups is possible through mediated contact. Mobilization agents may act as brokers between groups if they provide bridges across lines of difference. They have the power to acknowledge outgroups through discourse and to establish references by providing structural linkages. Within the particular issue networks in this study, the way in which mobilization agents deal with issue discourse and network structures will determine the richness of interaction between opposing groups. Brokers can provide access to heterogeneous networks where individuals are exposed to outgroup positions and face political disagreement, or alternatively, they can endow with self-reference and within-group isolating information practices that lead to echo chambers. These practices are assessed by looking into the way that mobilization discourse is built through structural choices in online references which may provide linkages to political adversaries and build cross-stance bridges between opposing arguments. Furthermore, the contents of interaction with political adversaries can lead to positive or negative experiences. Brokers can also be responsible for contact valence as they can face political disagreement in a civil manner or they can delegitimize outgroup actors and produce a negative contact experience.

In this context, assessing the role of advocacy groups, social movement organizations and other civil society actors in mobilizing political action becomes an appealing research subject as these mobilization agents have become critical actors in capturing issue attention for politically interested individuals who trust the intermediation function of their online platforms in an increasingly intricate electronic public sphere (Bennett, Breunig & Givens 2008). Furthermore, discussion between opposing groups has been found to be exclusively possible if a group member or leader raises the topic (Homan, van Kippenberg, Van Kleef, & De Dreu, 2007).

A second opportunity for interaction is direct contact between groups. The direct contact model deals with structural properties of issue networks as intergroup contact is expected to happen without brokerage. This type of contact is less probable given the incentives for homophily and

reducing cognitive dissonance generated by political differences. However, the success of attempts to search for outgroup actors online or to find them accidentally, is determined by issue network structures. Issue networks are formed by the connections that issue related actors establish between themselves, as these are taken to demarcate issue spaces online (Rogers 2002). This means that structural conditions for contact need to be studied as a product of deliberate networking practices of actors who establish the boundaries of public discussion. In this approach, the probability that contending groups meet each other online is expected to be a function of the visibility of the actors of each group on the issue network. Furthermore, this will determine a central condition under which the contact takes place: the Majority/minority status.

**Table 1 – Proposed specification of the online mobilization intergroup contact approach**

Elements in the contact model	Intergroup contact in online mobilization
Outgroup	Political adversary (opposing issue stance)
Contact space	Exposure to outgroup websites (grievances and arguments from opposing issue stances)
Contact	Group interaction in mobilization to protest in position issues
Mediated contact	Brokerage (linkages to opposing issue stance actors)
Direct contact	Online visibility of outgroup
Contact Valence	Emotions toward protest issue (assumed to be related to the mobilization agents' discourse)

### **Mobilization practices and perspective taking**

Scholars have long raised awareness on the importance of social movement organizations as brokers in political environments. Brokerage has been attributed as “*establishing, severing, or realigning connections among social sites*” (Tilly 2001, P. 575) and as the “*linking of two or more unconnected social actors by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites*” (Tarrow 2005, p. 190). This is the main function on which micromobilization actors will be assessed as it serves as a proxy for their encouragement of intergroup contact. But who are the actors that perform the communicative tasks involved in ICT-enabled brokerage? The main interest is in the mobilization agents who are most capable in capturing issue-attention and those recognized as trusted sources in a two-step communication of political issues within groups that share a stance on a contentious issue.

Brokerage between political adversaries is proposed as a research matter that deals with communicative practices that overcome group borders and connect with opposing issue stances. In this way, brokerage implies communication attributes within the tradition of deliberative politics in terms of the context and practices needed to guarantee dialogue between conflicting adversaries. In the mobilization processes of particular contentious positions it implies tasks of mediated diffusion in which the broker transfers discourses between otherwise disconnected actors (Tilly & Tarrow 2007). This process of connecting arguments and discourses of actors with opposing issue stances can then be studied by assessing the communicative tasks involved

in brokerage: Acknowledgement of political adversaries or certification of opposing actors, realigning connections by changing language, frames and terms and contextualising arguments by providing reference to adversaries and the particular framework for their line of reasoning.

Perspective taking has long been explained as a cognitive process that develops as individuals become more attentive and move from purely egocentric viewpoints to understanding the views of others (Flavell 1975, cited in Thomson 2007). Other explanations consider the development of cognitive constructs which affect the ability to take another's viewpoint in a need for sustaining social interaction (Hale & Delia 1976). This explanation also implies the importance of the process of coming into contact with varied social interactions, in the sense that more diversity in interpersonal exchanges demands greater abilities to organize complex information with situational elements and contradictory contents.

Research on intergroup dialogue have conclusive evidence on how dialogue processes affect attitude change, and broad agreement on accepting dialogue as a critical opportunity for individuals to examine the socially constructed norms and ideologies that guide their beliefs (Nagda et al. 2004). In this sense it leads to further exploring intergroup dialogue in political processes, and particularly into looking at the argumentative process in contentious politics where group differences are most evident. These arguments coincide with the study of deliberation processes in the political science and communication fields. Theory on deliberative democracy has been studied in terms of group dialogue with multiple emphases for empirical research on outcomes. Explaining individual attitudes in these processes may also provide further opportunities for understanding political behavior.

Looking into the differences between the protesters' dispositions for taking the perspective of their political adversaries is expected to provide further evidence in order to explain participation under exposure to disagreement. **The main research question addressed in this paper is whether contact between political adversaries in protest mobilization affects individual's disposition for perspective taking.** Working hypotheses that deal with the contact conditions in the particular context of online mobilization are presented in the following section and summarized in Table 2.

*Table 2 – Working hypotheses*

**H1: Online mobilization is positively related to perspective taking**

1.1. Higher frequency of internet usage for political purposes will intensify the effect of online mobilization on perspective taking for followers of mobilization agents

**H2: Online contact motivated by brokerage practices is positively related to perspective taking**

2.1. More interaction between groups (higher levels of brokerage) will be associated with higher levels of perspective taking



2.2. Negative contexts in intergroup interaction online (Anger and frustration toward protest issue) will be associated with lower levels of perspective taking

### **Mobilization as mediated contact**

Previous research has provided evidence that perspective taking is developed through interaction (Sherrod, Flanagan & Youniss 2002), and this is a central matter as the role of mobilization in protest politics implies a need for public discussion and defense of particular stances. It is therefore expected to be associated with public interaction for collective reasoning.

Studies on “media-inspired discussion” look at the role of social influence in perspective taking as a form of socially shared cognition (Paluck 2010). In this sense, perspective taking is expected to be produced in a similar manner during protest mobilization, as mobilization implies ingroup communication processes which are built on a particular type of referential knowledge that taps self-awareness of one’s own situation in the political context of the protest issue.

Particularly, micromobilization actors’ acknowledgement of political adversaries and recognition of disagreement is likely to be related to the perception that mobilized individuals hold about their political adversaries. This perception varies between attributions of others according to a particular stereotype (simple informational cue), or complex situational attributions where individuals are seen in relation to various aspects of a situation (comprehensive understanding of political positions) (Hale & Delia, 1976 cited in Thomson 2007). In this sense, it is expected that issue knowledge or at least a greater exposure to the public forums in which the contentious stances develop and become shared cognition, influence individual levels of perspective taking.

Rich interaction with outgroups is expected to provide a constructive exposure to differences of political opinion or a more civil orientation to conflict. Individuals who put up with challenging positions are expected to develop acceptance for differences between opposing groups in order to have social harmony (Mutz 2002). This implies the occurrence of two mechanisms that lead from exposure to political disagreement to political empathy for opposing viewpoints: an increased awareness of rationales for differing viewpoints as a process of de-provincialization in which individuals become aware that their life-styles and beliefs are not unique when they face opposing perspectives; and a second mechanism which is not based on cognition but on an affective tie - *“individuals recognize that the content and extent of people’s political discussions are less important than the quality of the personal relationships that they develop”* (Mutz 2002, P 114). These cognitive and affective mechanisms are expected to be related with the function of brokerage in two ways:

Reference – as the practice of acknowledging otherness through the deliberate introduction of the involved actors and the discussion of their arguments with due consideration for contextual features and circumstances. This function plays a significant role in promoting inclusion in decision spaces by encouraging comprehension for difference and diversity.

Translation – a deliberate production of associations between self-positions and the stances of opposing actors through argumentative allusion and assimilation. (Souza Santos 2003).

In this sense, mobilization processes that deal with political disagreement are expected to promote a comprehensive perspective of political issues and to be relevant in the encouragement for acquiring issue knowledge and holding a publicly defensible political stance. Thus, cross-references introduced during mobilization processes may provide individuals with a confident introduction into political conflict by intermediaries who supply arguments and issue expertise. In this sense, the main hypothesis proposed is that **mobilization practices which provide intergroup interaction (high levels of brokerage between opposing issue-stances) are positively related to perspective-taking.**

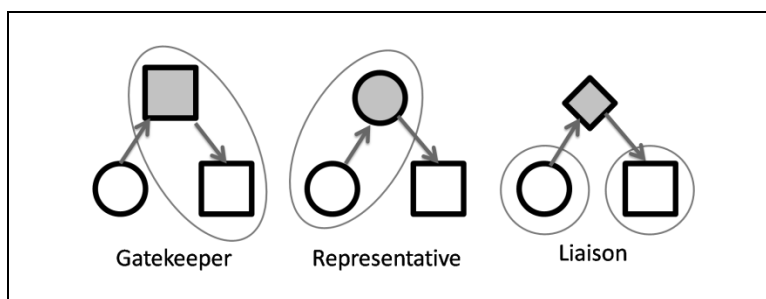
Exposure to movement media can happen in diverse channels and different levels of brokerage can be identified for each channel. This means that intergroup interaction levels can vary in terms of the channel-specific messages, considering the differences in how political adversaries are dealt with in the construction of ingroup identity. Furthermore, differences between the perceived importance of mobilization channels are expected between cases, considering channel preferences and internet use practices. However, as internet communication is believed to open spaces for performing mobilization functions in issue-specific public spaces and for addressing controversies, especially within publics that have developed alternative online media as a way to capture issue attention in new political spaces, the most relevant concern is whether online mobilization is a significant factor for explaining perspective taking. This result is expected given the differential opportunities for intergroup interaction online as compared to other mobilization channels in the argumentative phase prior to the protest events. Therefore, the first working hypothesis is that **online mobilization is positively related to perspective taking and higher internet usage for political purposes will intensify the effect of online mobilization on perspective taking for followers of mobilization agents.**

The proposed contact model addresses the question on the type of interaction that takes place between groups in online issue networks. Differences in the way that mobilization agents deal with political adversaries are expected to determine the extent of the contact experience. Mobilization agents decide how to present their issue positions and arguments online: They can provide references and acknowledge complete and contextualized perspectives of political issues acting as brokers between groups, or they can isolate their group by ignoring contending

arguments. Brokerage in online environments implies establishing network connections either by structural linkages (hyperlinks) or by references in the media contents. The relevant question in this approach to intergroup contact is to examine whether higher brokerage between politically opposed groups provides richer interaction experiences and turns out to be associated with higher dispositions for perspective taking. Thus, the second working hypothesis is that **higher interaction between groups (higher levels of brokerage between actors with opposite issue positions) will be associated with higher levels of perspective taking.**

An additional matter regarding the quality of intergroup interaction is that brokerage can take different forms. Five cross-network mediation structures have been identified as “*qualitatively different [as they] emerge when actors in transaction networks are differentiated into nonoverlapping subgroups*” (Gould & Fernandez 1989). These are brokerage roles in which intermediary actors provide bridges for interaction between other actors who have no access to one another. The brokerage role identified by social movement theory as a relational mechanism that links “*two or more previously unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with one another*” ((McAdam, Tarrow, y Tilly 2001): 26) turns out to be the main interest for intergroup interaction. The specific brokerage roles which are considered are not the ingroup linkages, but the outgroup links between political adversaries on opposing issue-stances. Three types of brokers make these cross-stance linkages: representatives, gatekeepers and liaisons, as described in Figure 1 – Three types of cross-stance brokers). In the first case, the broker belongs to the same subgroup as the initiator of the relation with another group. For the second case, the gatekeeper is a member of the same subgroup as the receiver of the indirect relation. In the last case the initiator, the receiver and the liaison broker belong to three different groups.

**Figure 1 - Three types of cross-stance brokers**



Source: Adapted from Gould and Fernández 1989

The analyses are performed for two group networks and neutral positions or third-party actors (such as mainstream media) are not considered. The model focuses mainly on representatives as it is assumed that only this type represents a deliberate intention to mediate in intergroup contact will determine the contact conditions. The fact that mobilization agents assume the condition of

representatives and guide their groups out of the boundaries and into the uncomfortable space of political disagreement is expected to provide a much richer interaction with political adversaries than acting as a gatekeeper. Gatekeepers are then expected to take a more passive role in shaping intergroup contact. In online environments, this implies that they simply receive hyperlinks which may not respond to their behavior.

The final element in the proposed model addresses the question of contact valence. Is interaction with political adversaries a positive experience? And most importantly what are the implications of the quality of interaction.

In the first part of this article analysis of the contact space in online mobilization has focused on the level of interaction as a function of the structural conditions that determine brokerage. This approach needs to be complemented by looking into the quality of intergroup interaction. Two elements are central in this purpose: looking into link polarity and the general discourse tone. The first approach is an effort to test whether hyperlinks between actors in opposing stances indicate outgroup acknowledgment or if they are signals or references with a negative connotation which guide into negative contact experiences. The second method is looking at the more general mobilization discourse as it provides more possibilities for expanding the brokerage functions and determining the quality of intergroup interaction.

Mobilization agents have the power to build discourse and to determine whether it is self-referential or rather contextualized in a political controversy where grievances are exposed. Discourse can be interpreted as a roadmap to navigate a complex situation as it implies considering particular assumptions and judgments, and it provides worldviews which can then be shared intersubjectively. It has the power to promote as well as to constrain thought, speech, and action as it embodies a particular conception of common sense and acceptable interpretations. Most importantly, discourse may embody power by recognizing some interests as valid while repressing others (Dryzek 2005). This is especially relevant for reversing the undesirable consequences of information fragmentation - the tendency to select information to reinforce political beliefs (Bimber 2003, Mutz & Martin 2001) which leads to isolated discourses disconnected from a pluralistic conception of democracy (Sunstein 2003). In this way, mobilization agents are expected to promote what Dryzek proposes as meta-consensus – an “*agreement on the legitimacy of certain positions*” in which individuals do not aim for a final agreement, but they acknowledge each other and the legitimacy of opinions that differ. In this view individuals argue “*between people accepting each other’s colliding positions as legitimate*” (Dryzek & Niemeyer 2008).

Mobilization discourse is a central matter in determining interaction attributes and context as valence not only settles the tone for civility or disrespect in the interaction context, but it is also

responsible for establishing group salience (Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin 2010) and distance to outgroups. Differences between mobilization agents and their connection with protesters can signal to what extent perspective taking is related not only to different levels of intergroup interaction, but also to the contact conditions. Studying protesters emotions toward the protest issue provided the opportunity to test contact valence as one of the conditions regarding the effectiveness of contact. Although a general emotion is not directly related to the contact space, or the role of mobilization agents, it is expected that **negative contexts in intergroup interaction online will be associated with lower levels of perspective taking**.

## Data and methodological approach

The methodological approach is a similar case analysis in which three protest events in Spain are studied in order to keep the political context relatively constant. A mixed-method approach is used by combining individual level protest survey data with social network analysis online in order to assess both individual attitudes and behaviours and meso-level mobilization practices. With this approach it is possible to identify the central mobilization actors and explore hyperlinking practices and the contents of their mobilization messages in order to assess the contact space, as well as the individuals who have intergroup interaction.

Protest surveys were carried out during two major demonstrations in Spain for the project "Caught in the act of protest: Contextualizing contestation"<sup>3</sup>. These were the protest against changes to the abortion legislation "España Vida Sí" in May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010 in Madrid (From now on Pro-Life or PL) and the Catalan self-determination demonstrations on June 12<sup>th</sup> and July 10<sup>th</sup> in Barcelona ("Autodeterminació es democràcia" - AED, and "Som una nació" - SUN, respectively - Details of the events and the survey in Annex table A1). The three cases are position issues in which political disagreement is explicit between opposing stances and therefore they provide a convenient sample for studying the effects of exposure to dissimilar opinions

For the dependent variable, perspective taking was tapped through a single question on individual levels of agreement with the statement: "I always try to look at everybody's side of an argument before I make a decision". This question is a limited version of the perspective-taking battery proposed by Davis' (1980) 7-item subscale<sup>4</sup> and makes part of the protest survey.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.protestsurvey.eu/>

<sup>4</sup> The seven items proposed by Davis (1980) on a five-point scale anchored by 0 "does not describe me well" and 4 "describes me very well":

1. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.
2. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments (-)

Respondents of the protest survey identified the protest conveners for particular events and the mobilization channels from which they received the call to action. The main explicative variable was built by grouping individuals according to their report of the main mobilizing agents. The sites of these organizations were then used in order to identify issue networks (Rogers 2002) for each protest event<sup>5</sup>. The identified protest conveners (mobilization actors) served as seeds in an internet crawl as they were defined along other key issue players which include different issue-stances and types of organizations. Issue networks result in broader networks than those of the mobilization actors as they are formed by the interlinkings between central actors on the given issue. The organizations reported by survey respondents as their main mobilization sources online and organizations which are identified as the most salient in online issue networks were traced and evaluated for their contents and network features. Two types of analyses were carried out:

1. Structural analysis of online networks provides further evidence for reference between opposing stances as linkages between websites indicate how contents are put together for navigation and how they get indexed as search engine results<sup>6</sup>. These elements are the devices that permit adversarial views to come together in online communication experiences in the cases when they serve as cross-cutting bridges (brokerage) and can also be used as within group connections which form isolated echo-chambers (self-reference).
2. Contents analysis of political discourse was used in order to establish issue stances.

In order to determine which individuals are exposed to online mobilization, multiple channels which mobilization agents can use in order to convey their movement frames and especially their positions of political adversaries and opposing stances are considered: Organization websites, social networks and email. Individuals exposed to the online mobilization discourse and to the particular linkage structure of their reported mobilization agents experienced different levels of contact according to their entrance point into the issue network. In this sense, respondents are grouped according to the reported micro-mobilization agent in order to look at within and between group variance. Differences in perspective taking between the demonstrators of each of the three protest events are interpreted by looking into the online mobilization network for each event in order to explore the levels of exposure to political disagreement, both in terms of network effects or contextual influence.

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3. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.

4. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both.

5. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view. (-)

6. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.

7. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while.

<sup>5</sup> Hyperlink network analysis was performed using the Issue Crawler by the Digital Methods Initiative

<sup>6</sup> A complete explanation and justification of this approach is presented in other paper - Cristancho 2010

Perspective taking is expected to vary according to the level of intergroup interaction between the mobilization sources. Six main cases were identified in the three events: three mobilization actors for the Pro-Life demonstration, one for each of the Catalan self-determination demonstrations (the main organizer and central protest platform) and a group of people who reported no mobilization agent.

A central objective in this study was to isolate as much as possible the effects of online protest mobilization from media channels, social networks and other political information sources. Multiple questions of the protest survey were used in order to determine traditional sources of intergroup contact or exposure to political disagreement as to control for additional effects to the main independent variable - online exposure. (Details are presented in Table 3).

**Table 3 – Proposed explicative factors for perspective taking**

<b>Main independent variables</b>	<b>Proxies used in empirical analysis</b>
i. Political use of the internet*	Frequency of internet use and political use of the internet
ii. Brokerage by mobilization actor network	Hyperlink network analysis (not in survey) – Brokerage levels in hyperlink network and content analysis of the websites of mobilization actors
iii. Emotions toward protest issue	Assessment of anger and frustration toward the protest issue
<b>Control variables</b>	
i. Political discussion	Frequency of political discussion
ii. Social centrality	Membership in associations
<b>Other individual level traits relevant for attitudes</b>	
i. Issue knowledge	Press, TV or radio reported as most important mobilization channel (as a proxy for media consumption)
ii. Group identity	Identification with protest organizers and other protesters

\* Internet use for the PL cases

Contact between opposing stances in online mobilization can of course represent a very small portion of intergroup contact and the analysis needs to consider a much wider mobilization context. Additional sources of intergroup social influence from individual level networks is one of the most important controls in the analysis as strong ties such as close friends, relatives and work colleagues have been shown to be critical in determining individual acceptance of opposing issue positions through indirect contact (Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns, & Voci, 2004). Political discussion is a central practice for social influence and has been the main research interest in the study of political conflict. As a central element of deliberation it has been considered “the elementary building block of participatory democracy” (Katz 1994, p. 30) and has been proposed as a participatory practice in itself (Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs 2004). How frequently individuals discuss politics can represent multiple preferences or individual

traits which include interest in politics or opportunities for socialization. As we can control for those interpretations, discussing politics frequently will be interpreted as an individual disposition for argumentation and dialogue. In this way, it implies holding and defending a political stance publicly and this entails not only a cognitive effort but also empathic attitudes or social competences (Davis 1983) which are both expected to augment the levels of perspective taking when facing political differences. However, the most direct effect of political discussion in this analysis is when it occurs in heterogeneous networks as defined by opposing issue stances. Network heterogeneity can be analyzed both on the micro-level of political discussion or as a contextual factor for social pressures; this differentiation will shed some light on how perspective taking is affected at both contextual and individual levels. Independently of the fact that individuals report frequent political discussion, heterogeneous contexts can be expected to provide opportunities for intergroup contact and it is therefore expected to affect individual positions towards political adversaries. Being part of heterogeneous networks has been found to increase one's likelihood of confrontation as individuals find opposing points of view on political issues (Krassa 1990) and get a need to confront them in order to defend their own positions. Membership in associations is proposed as an indicator of individual levels of socialization and in this sense it is considered for its potential to increase the opportunities for interaction and information exchange in issue related or at least politicized topics. From the available data it is impossible to know whether socialization resulting from membership in associations takes place within homogeneous groups or rather spreads out to intergroup interaction. However, the cognitive value of increased interaction in associative life is considered in the analysis in order to control for possible sources of exposure to political information.

Further controls for additional information sources and knowledge levels are desirable, but the only data available is the identification of the press, radio or television as mobilization channels. The relationship between media information on the protest issue and individual attitudes may be mediated by cognitive factors. Media consumption has been shown to be positively related with higher levels of political sophistication or expertise (Guo & Moy 1998). It can then be expected to increase issue knowledge independently of whether it is single sided information or not as it provides contextual data such as representations, and problem analyses which are expected to provoke greater self-awareness. Individuals who have found out about the demonstration through these channels are expected to have higher levels of issue knowledge than those who did through face to face channels<sup>7</sup> or through advertisement (flyers, and/or posters).

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<sup>7</sup> Partner and/or family, Friends and/or acquaintances, People at school or work or (Fellow) members of an organization or association



## **Mobilization context and case description**

The three cases which are analyzed took place within a very short time span between May and July 2010 under a similar institutional context but with important differences in the particular issue contexts. They are long standing contentious issues in Spanish politics and the demonstrations were triggered by policy changes (or demands for) and staged by organized movements with fairly stable actors. All the cases were selected as position issues, but the main difference between them is that political disagreement is much harder to identify in the Catalan self-determination cases as there is no organized action for Spanish nationalism in the way that the pro-choice movement has. Furthermore, the fact that constitutional revision of the Catalan statutory agreement implies a very different procedure than the legislative process of the abortion issue, in terms of time-spans, political responsibility and visibility of the implied actors. Spanish nationalists' lobby was not very active after the Partido Popular and the autonomous regions of Aragon, Balearic Islands and the Valencian Community contested the Constitutional agreement on 2007. This implies that their discourse is much less organized through group action and much less centralized than in the Pro-choice actors who argued and actively lobbied in favor of the policy change. Notwithstanding, a counter-demonstration to the SUN event was organized in Madrid on the same day (July 10<sup>th</sup>) by UPyD (a national conservative party with minor parliamentary representation) to demand respect from the government for the Constitutional tribunal decision and to condemn the fact that the Catalan government was heading a demonstration which endangered the constitutional order<sup>8</sup>. This position was similar to the party's leader position two years before regarding the Catalan independence consultations.

The Spanish nationalism actors are quite varied and Catalan parties such as the conservative Ciutadans (C's) and the PPC (regional party of the Partido Popular) along with minor extreme right parties and some Catalan civil society organizations and opinion leaders are the most pressing adversaries in the Catalan public sphere. In the country-wide level the actors who share the Spanish nationalism side of the cleavage are most of the parties in the political right (PP, UPyD) and the extreme right (Democracia nacional, Falange, Fuerza Nueva) as well as sectors of the left-wing parties such as PSOE. Media interventions of political elites and prestigious bloggers shape the Spanish nationalist discourse in the public sphere, and a big presence of the extreme right movements is also visible in the online issue network. A big proportion of the

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<sup>8</sup> "Manifiesto en defensa del orden constitucional" in: UpyD website  
[http://www.upyd.es/contenidos/noticias/5/42644-MANIFIESTO\\_EN\\_DEFENSA\\_DEL\\_ORDEN\\_CONSTITUCIONAL](http://www.upyd.es/contenidos/noticias/5/42644-MANIFIESTO_EN_DEFENSA_DEL_ORDEN_CONSTITUCIONAL) -  
Last visited in February 10th 2011

media actors have been classified as holding particular stance as both Catalan and national coverage media have explicitly expressed their stances on the Catalan Statute issue<sup>9</sup>.

Mobilization actors are also quite different between cases due to the movement traditions and organizational traits. The main difference between the two demonstrations on the Catalan Statute issue is the stance of the mobilization groups on Catalan independence. In the AED demo, the PDD played a central role with actors in the left-independence movement and the political elite in favor of Catalan independence while in the SUN demo the PDD was part of the bigger coalition with other parties and civil society organizations who question the independence alternative and promote the autonomic way for Catalan sovereignty. This implied internal confrontation between the organizers in the SUN demo in order to deal with the opposing stances on independence or greater autonomy through a statutory way. The political elite in Spain is positioned along the nationalist cleavage with the Catalan independence parties and the autonomist or federalist parties at one side and the Spanish nationalists at the other. The most prominent Catalan independence party, ERC, led the campaign under the slogan “good-bye Spain” and framed the protest issue as a “clash between opposing legitimacies” as they signaled the Constitutional Court as their political adversary and sustained it had lost its prestige and turned into the battlefield of the big national parties. The more moderate autonomist parties (CIU, PSC) framed their call in defense of national dignity and respect and also blamed the Constitutional court as having an inflexible and closed interpretation of the Constitution which is at odds with the 1978 constitutional agreement. Both parts finally agreed on the common slogan “We are a nation, we decide” in order to present a single expression in favor of a broad conception of Catalan sovereignty. The decision to appeal to a wide range of actors in the SUN demonstration implied the need to avoid heated encounters between the organizers and discerning actors, especially in the case of the regional parties and their national counterparts (PSC, CIU) and this is reflected in their mobilization discourse.

Regarding organizational differences, PDD has a highly coordinated organization of local campaigns which has been set up in the last five years in order to carry out independence consultations (Coordinadora Nacional de Consultes per la Independència) with the assistance of local governments. Omnim Cultural is a centrally coordinated entity with 27 local offices in Catalonia which lead the SUN platform besides the local offices of the parties involved in the organization. Survey results show significant differences between levels of identity with other people present at the demonstration between the SUN and AED demos as well as identity with any organization staging the demonstration between Omnim and the PDD. These may be indicative of differences in the mobilization processes as well.

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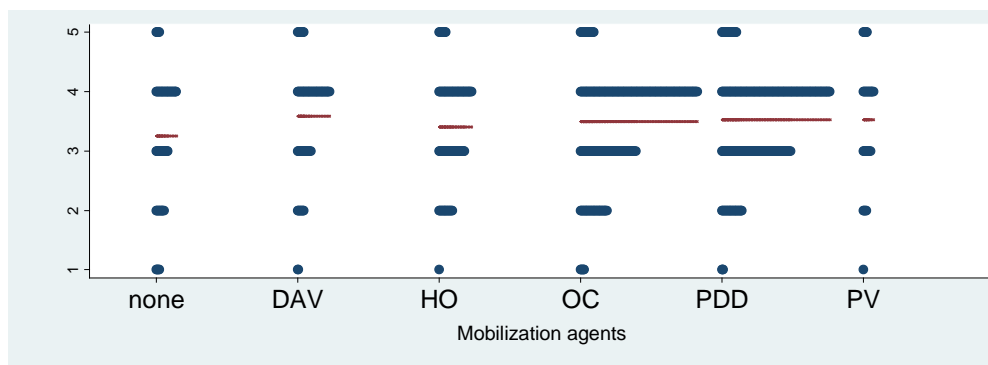
<sup>9</sup> On November 26<sup>th</sup> 2009, 12 Catalan newspapers published a common editorial titled “La dignitat de Catalunya” which was also endorsed by other media with local presence.

In the Pro-life event the differences between micromobilization actors are also relevant in assessing the type of mobilization discourse. The pro-life movement has a yearly ritual demonstration that takes place on March 25<sup>th</sup> for the “Day of Life” or the “Day for the Right to be born”, but in 2010 it turned into a contestation to the government for changes to the established law (March 7<sup>th</sup>). The main actors in the movement were divided in their efforts since 2009 and therefore Provida (the Spanish federation of pro-life associations) was not part of the organization of the event. However, 13% of the survey respondents reported this organization as their mobilization source. The bigger part of the mobilization effort was made by HO and DAV. HO is the most active pro-life advocacy organization online with multiple local offices in Spain and worldwide and a vast presence on online social networks. It was the central organizer of the PL event and co-directs DAV which is a campaign on the “right to life” that started on 2008 as a response to the incumbent government abortion policies.

### Descriptive statistics

Differences within and between micromobilization actors were analyzed for the three demonstrations in order to assess the effects of particular mobilization discourse on perspective taking. Low variations were obtained between cases in the dependent variable – Perspective taking. This can be explained by the habitual difficulties involved in measuring attitudes and furthermore considering that only a single indicator is available.

*Figure 3 – Distribution of the dependent variable (Perspective Taking) by mobilization actor*



### Differences in mobilization strategies between cases

Alternative online media and email communication have been expected to become central factors for protest mobilization in current research (Van Laer 2010). However, from the three case studies which are analyzed, and in comparison to other Spanish data (CIS 2736 data and other cases in protest survey research), there are big difference between mobilization channels depending on the protest events.

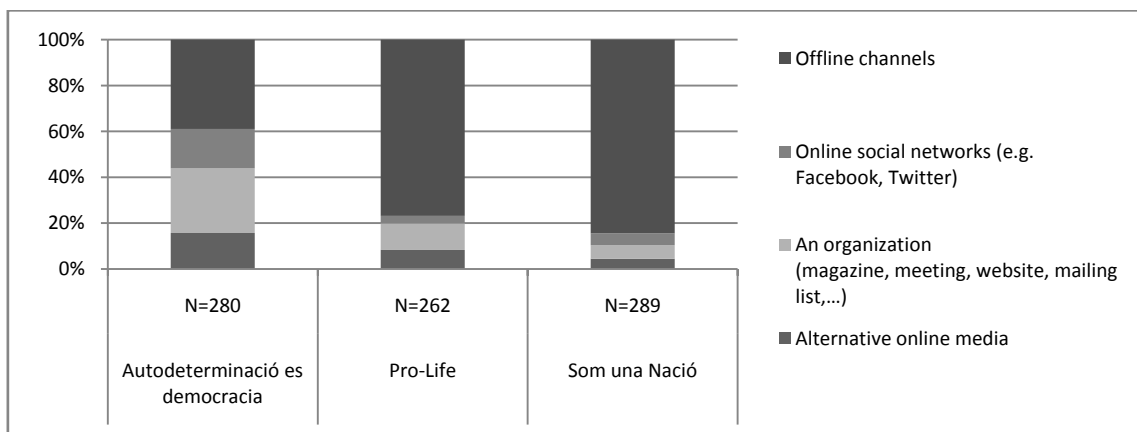
The Pro-Life protest was staged by a long-standing movement and a tight network of conservative media and therefore mobilization was carried out through organizational channels

and movement media. The fact that three major micromobilization actors were identified responds to the fact that previous demonstrations in the Pro-life movement had given different levels of visibility to the actors and that one of them had differences with the other organizations in the main event platform for the 2010 event.

The AED case was lead by a rather tight network of organizations involved in the Catalan independence consultation, but it appealed to a wider public united not only around the Catalonian independence stance, but also interested in the wider self-determination claim. Not surprisingly, this protest platform created with the purpose of putting together existing groups and advertising the event had the higher mobilization results comparatively with the other demonstrations and with other micromobilization actors in the AED demo. This case was quite an internally-focused event as 70% of the respondents reported receiving information from the event organizers frequently. The AED is also the only case in which online mobilization represents more than 60% of the mobilization channels as for the PRL and SUN the three online channels only represent the 35.1 and 15.6 percent of the mobilization channels identified in each case (Figure 4 - Most important mobilization channel by case).

For the SUN case there are some differences as the protest event was co-organized by many groups who concentrated their efforts around an existing organization. Although all the mobilization effort was built upon a protest platform the strength of the trigger for social unrest that signified the Constitutional court ruling, lead to the involvement of a wide range of actors and this privileged the role of the media not only in providing their own positions, but in following closely the formation of the SUN platform.

**Figure 4 - Most important mobilization channel by case**



Newspapers were also considered as a source to find out about the demonstration (no difference was made between online and printed press in the survey). They played a very important role in the SUN case (28.4%), and this reflects the fact that 16 papers from the Catalan press made a

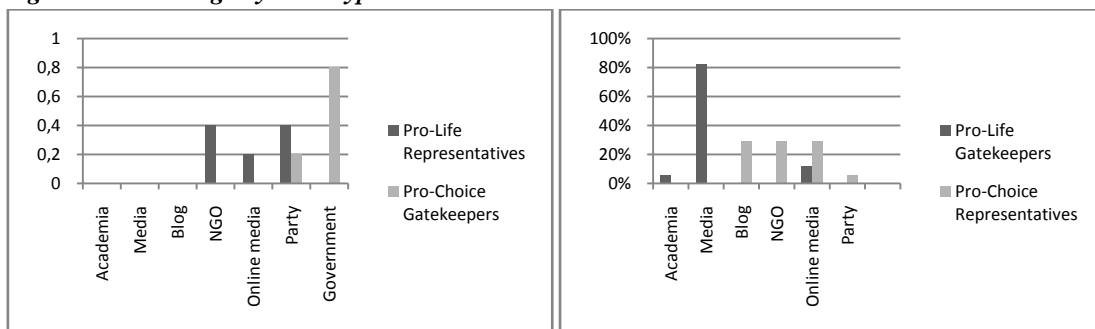
common editorial on the Statute issue. Radio and television played the most important role in mobilization to the demonstrations both for the SUN (49.8%) and PRL (32.1%) cases. Only the media actors who took an explicit issue stance are considered for the hyperlink network analysis.

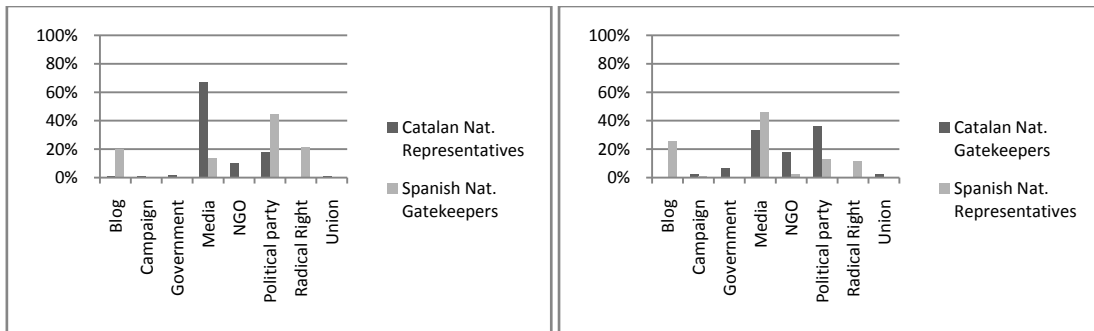
**Brokerage: the online contact space**

Differences between actors in terms of their involvement and compromise for facing political disagreement in the mobilization to the protest events are a central matter. PDD and HO played a similar role in leading two of the events in which they needed to provide arguments for their causes within their mostly homogeneous networks. PDD’s Catalan independence stance and HO’s antigovernment discourse were sharply focused on particular publics within a singular perspective of their respective issues and on the protest targets (The government and the Constitutional tribunal respectively) rather than on the more general adversarial stances. Conversely, the role of organizations in the OC mobilization network (and SUN platform) was less prominent in the call to action and allowed for broader perspectives on the issue discourses. The fact that PV was not involved in the organization of the event lead to its more natural position in defending the prolife perspective rather than attacking the government or defending an argument on the particular legislation. OC had a particular issue context in which an encompassing discourse that brought together all the involved actors also allowed for a broad discussion of multiple positions on the issue stance. The traditional media and the heterogeneity of the actors involved in the staging and framing processes also favored a rich discourse that dealt with adversarial positions.

The structural assessment shows very low brokerage activity for cross-cleavage communication for the three issue networks. This means that contact spaces are available to a low portion of the mobilization agents’ publics. In both catalan self-determination cases a higher proportion of actors were brokers in cross-cleavage discourse than in the PL case, but very low levels of direct interlinking between political adversaries is the norm for the three cases (Figure A1 - Annex).

**Figure 5 - Brokerage by actor type**





The identified brokerage patterns (Figure 5) show that traditional media actors play a central role in online communication for highly salient political conflicts such as the ones studied; notwithstanding that only media actors who took an explicit issue-stance were considered. Civil society organizations, movement and alternative online media, as well as the blogosphere play secondary roles after the media and political elites in the issue networks. The main roles in group representation were carried out by media actors except for the pro-life stance, where alternative online media and partisan media to the right of the political spectrum took an active role. The traditional media played the central gatekeeping role in the prolife stance, as well as the Catalan media acting as entry points into cross-cutting communication. It is no surprise that protest platforms and campaigns play a minor role in representing issue stances, but it is quite unusual that they get so little attention. A possible explanation is that they serve an aggregative purpose and act as portals for identifying the actors that support group positions. This gives them an impersonal character which may deter other actors from interaction.

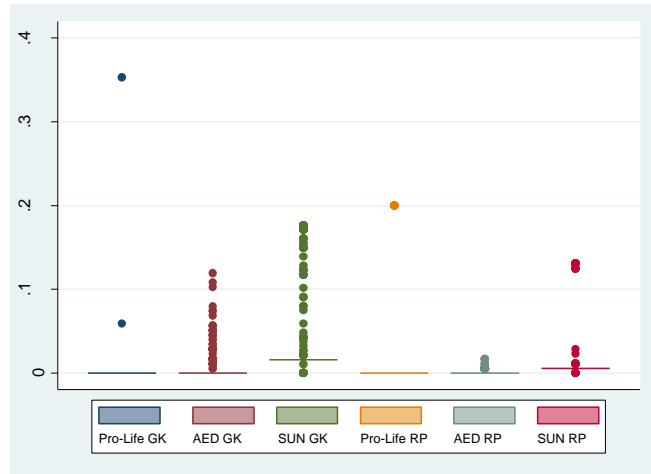
Government actors play the most prominent gatekeeping role in the PL case as they capture the attention as proposers of the changes in the abortion law. Political parties and especially the far right receive the most references from the catalan nationalist's contestation and a similar role is taken by parties that favor catalan nationalism. In the PL case, right wing parties take the leading role in representing the Pro-life stance while the liberal parties mostly limit themselves to a more receptive role.

An active representation is carried out by organizations (NGO's) using their movement media for both cases. In the Catalan self-determination cases, organized civil society also takes a central gatekeeping role given that they act as protest conveners and so they get high levels of media attention as they challenge the statu quo.

The mobilization agents identified by protesters are responsible for more than 45% of the brokerage in the SUN case, 27% in the AED event and 2.5% in the prolife case (Figure A1 in the Annex). This exorbitant difference can be interpreted by the role played by protest platforms and campaigns in the PL and AED cases. In spite that both organizations represent highly organized and traditional movements, in the AED case, the mobilization effort was widely

distributed under the PDD campaign, in contrast with the isolated activity of Hazte Oir in the PL case. However, the major organizers had a low profile in the campaign and their websites had very low visibility. This explains that although they centralized a big ingroup network, the differences between brokerage levels remain even when mobilization networks are considered as the unit of analysis (Figure 6 - Brokerage by mobilization agent).

**Figure 6 - Brokerage by mobilization agent**



### **Perspective taking and internet use**

In order to explain differences between groups, three regression models are proposed for measuring the effect of each of the main explicative factors that derive from the possibilities of intergroup contact. Ordered logistic regression models were ran in order to include control variables progressively. Individuals who reported being mobilized by the same organization are expected to be exposed to similar frames for understanding the contentious claims and therefore the observations are not expected to be independent. A regression with robust standard errors clustered by micromobilization actor is used in order to deal with between group variation and account for this effects. The three models take respondents who reported no micromobilization actors as the reference groups. The first model presents the results including the socio-demographic characteristics of the individuals and further controls for alternative sources for intergroup contact. Differences between participants provide further insight into the details of each case.

Brokerage scores for the mobilization agents are introduced in the second model considering a binary variable which signals any representative or gatekeeper functions. A third model was used in order to assess the incidence of the valence of the interactions between the publics of mobilization agents. The central assumption in this test is that the protesters' general feeling toward the issue of the demonstration reflects to some extent the mobilization agents' discourse tone toward the issue and the political adversaries.

**Table 4 - Ordered logistic regression results for perspective taking (Grouped by mobilization agents)**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Age	0.003 (0.007)	0.003 (0.006)	0.003 (0.009)
Male	0.338* (0.189)	0.336* (0.190)	0.280 (0.237)
Education (Primary)	0.069 (0.768)	0.009 (0.746)	0.076 (0.491)
Education (Secondary)	-0.734 (0.497)	-0.790 (0.481)	-0.532** (0.266)
Education (Tertiary)	-0.730 (0.464)	-0.796* (0.443)	-0.653** (0.331)
Class (Lower middle)	0.213 (0.149)	0.226 (0.152)	0.350* (0.213)
Class (Upper middle)	0.188 (0.195)	0.209 (0.206)	0.203 (0.245)
Issue Knowledge	-0.009 (0.187)	-0.006 (0.181)	-0.048 (0.241)
Group identity	0.450*** (0.158)	0.427*** (0.164)	0.333 (0.299)
Political discussion	0.359*** (0.098)	0.353*** (0.100)	0.311*** (0.084)
Social centrality	0.078 (0.062)	0.078 (0.062)	0.076 (0.075)
<b>Derecho a Vivir</b>	-1.010*** (0.329)	-1.055*** (0.322)	-2.703*** (0.486)
<b>Hazte Oir</b>	-1.779*** (0.224)	-1.773*** (0.217)	-2.312*** (0.337)
<b>Ominum Cultural</b>	-0.394*** (0.111)	-0.687*** (0.068)	-1.855*** (0.295)
<b>PDD</b>	-0.559** (0.238)	-0.624*** (0.222)	-1.688*** (0.399)
<b>Pro Vida</b>	5.249*** (0.199)	5.182*** (0.195)	6.682*** (0.502)
Internet use	-0.291*** (0.058)	-0.285*** (0.056)	-0.600*** (0.083)
Internet use*DAV	0.634*** (0.124)	0.645*** (0.122)	1.138*** (0.188)
Internet use*HO	0.775*** (0.064)	0.770*** (0.062)	0.899*** (0.083)
Internet use*OC	0.410*** (0.049)	0.406*** (0.048)	0.705*** (0.070)
Internet use*PDD	0.355*** (0.059)	0.353*** (0.057)	0.675*** (0.090)
Internet use*PV	-1.494*** (0.075)	-1.477*** (0.071)	-2.051*** (0.181)
Brokerage		0.306*** (0.114)	0.508*** (0.144)
Angry/Frustrated			-0.088* (0.054)
cut1 Constant	-4.085*** (0.418)	-4.111*** (0.410)	-5.357*** (0.292)
cut2 Constant	-1.918*** (0.459)	-1.944*** (0.445)	-3.274*** (0.319)
cut3 Constant	-0.355 (0.489)	-0.380 (0.475)	-1.667*** (0.323)
cut4 Constant	2.584*** (0.619)	2.564*** (0.606)	1.362*** (0.420)
Observations	612	612	532
r2_p	0.0302	0.0310	0.0338

Robust standard errors in parentheses

No education, Working class and no mobilization source are the reference categories

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

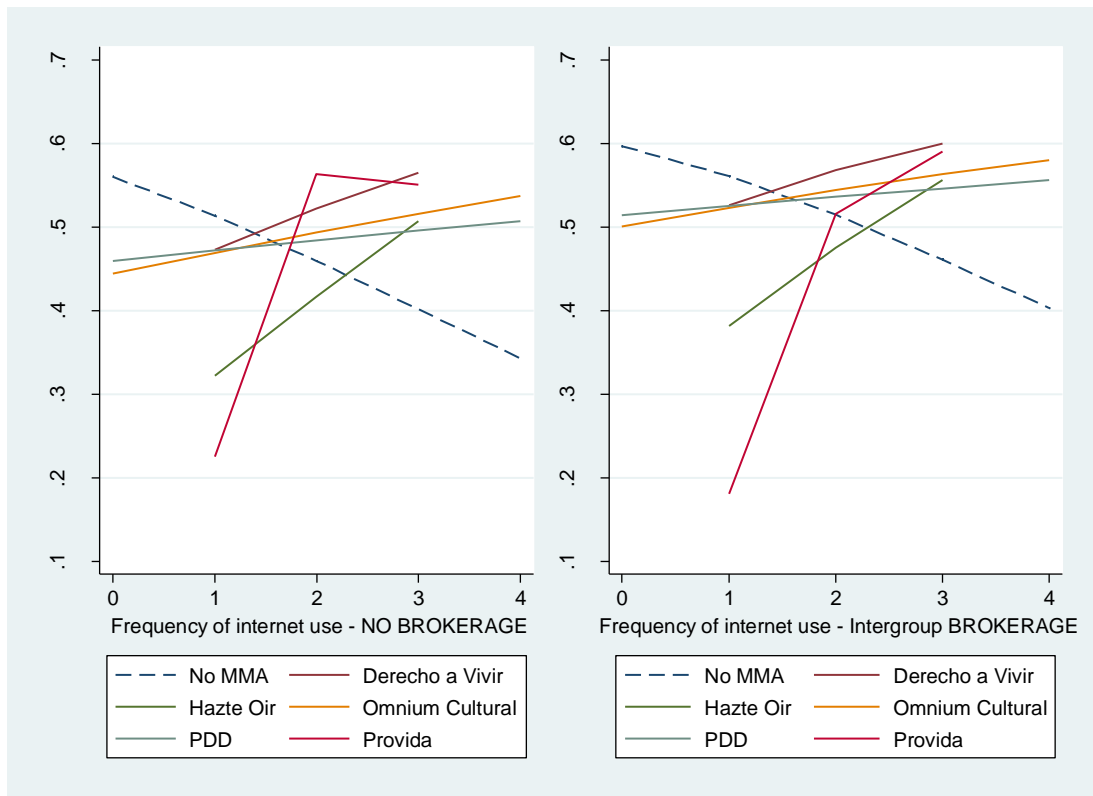


The first model deals with online mobilization, taken as the interaction between internet use and being mobilized by any of the protest conveners. It provides evidence to confirm the first hypothesis as for all individuals who follow mobilization agents online, frequency of internet use is positively related to perspective taking and the contrary is true for internet users that do not report a mobilization agent. (Figure 7 - Perspective Taking by Internet use)

The fact that internet use has a significant and negative effect on perspective taking is a good test for the idea of the mediation in the online intergroup contact model. It indicates that protesters who make a political use of the internet without mediation either get no cross-stance interactions, or they lack the meditational role of for having enabling conditions for attitudinal change.

The results are valid controlling for additional sources of intergroup contact or cognitive or affective factors such as issue knowledge and group identity. Political discussion serves as an important source of interpersonal interaction and although the available data does not indicate intergroup interaction, discussing politics in general explains part of the disposition for considering the other side of the argument. The evidence shows a significant effect which could mean additional contact opportunities either direct or mediated. The political nature of discussion is important considering that social centrality was expected to have similar effects but turns out to have no significance.

**Figure 7 – Perspective Taking by Internet use**

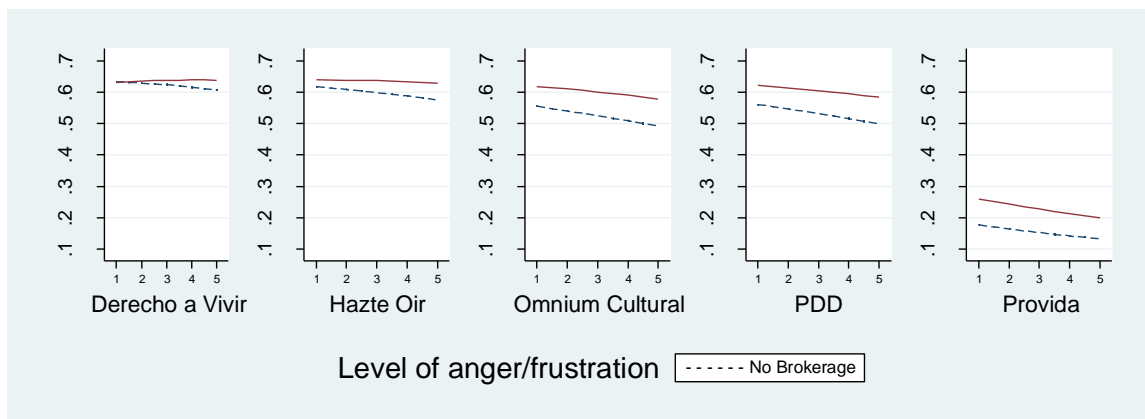


The second regression introduced a brokerage measure as to determine the extent in which the structure of online network determines the conditions of the contact space. Differences between both graphs in figure 6 reveal that online mobilization has an effect but what mobilization agents do online matters. Brokerage slightly increases the effect of online mobilization as intergroup contact for all of the five cases of contact mediated by any of the mobilization agents.

Individuals who do not follow any mobilization agent (the reference case in dash line) lower their disposition for perspective taking as they use the internet more frequently but those that who encounter an online environment in which mobilization agents broker between opposing issue stances have higher probabilities for perspective taking. These may result from the effect of brokerage in determining the shape of issue networks to a greater extent than their network proximity.

The third analysis introduces a variable which taps a combined assessment of individual levels of anger and frustration toward the protest issue. The results show a significant effect of these emotions in reducing the disposition for perspective taking (Figure 8). There is no evidence to explain differences between mobilization agents, but the results for the Provida case can be interpreted to be produced by its low involvement in the event and its differences with the protest conveners.

**Figure 8 - The effect of emotions on perspective taking between followers of online mobilization agents**



## Discussion

The central claim of this research is that online mobilization can be studied as a particular form of intergroup contact and consequently it should produce positive effects on individual dispositions for intergroup contact in the particular context of high compromise participation and well informed issue-publics. This implied the recognition of the relevance of micromobilization actors in avoiding polarization by promoting informational contexts that result beneficial for democratic values and attitudes. The results obtained from the analyses

provide some limited evidence that confirms these assertions. Relying exclusively on survey data, there is evidence for the role of online mobilization being positively related with perspective taking. This step is relevant in order to prove useful the claim that micromobilization actors matter and that a further look into mobilization contents is a valid approach. Given the assumption that issue networks are the most prominent entry point into information about the demonstration and the general issue situation online, this is an important result at recognizing the central role of micromobilization actors in shaping online contents even if their direct efforts for convening participants or informing about the event result do not have any relation with attitude differences.

On the second hypothesis, the available data ran very short for the methodological pretensions of studying differences between brokerage roles and the conditions of the online contact space. Sample size in the survey and difficulties for identifying mobilization agents lead to a very limited number of cases and this restricts the possibilities for analysis. Although low levels of intergroup interaction were expected between political adversaries in mobilization processes, the weak involvement of some of the identified micromobilization actors in the particular protest events provided few possibilities for explaining differences between cases in the main independent variable. The purpose of assessing intergroup interaction through structural network analysis relies on a very simple raw measurement of brokerage in the issue networks for the three events, but it is a novel approach to structural analysis which provides evidence for the consequences of mediation in intergroup interaction online.

In order to look into the particular issue contexts and the mediational role, a contextual approach was used by considering the emotional setting for each case as an additional factor related to brokerage. This was used as a proxy for evaluating mediation roles, and taken as indicative of contact valence. Anger and frustration seem to affect the online contact space in reducing the disposition for perspective taking, and the mediation carried out by mobilization agents reduces the effect. Further research is needed in order to have direct interpretations of mobilization discourse in order to capture noteworthy differences at the organizational level that provide better explanations for the relationship between mobilization sources and attitudes.

The main contribution of this research is a particular approach to contact theory in a purely political context that takes place in protest mobilization. Focusing on online interaction between opposing issue-stances provides the opportunity for advancing the study of the conditions in the contact space. The significance of internet usage for explaining perspective taking is a first step for justifying further research on the conditions of online spaces and the possibilities of mediation. Many problems resulted in putting together this research design and therefore the main limitations of the study are commented in order to consider further implications of the results.

## **Limitations of the Study**

### **Endogeneity problems – effects of exposure to political disagreement?**

The “mobilization effects” approach of the study is a major problem as it implies causality between the experience of dealing with issue information, protest frames and a wider political discourse in a particular manner, and individual attitudes or dispositions towards others. The research design does not provide temporal or subjective elements in order to rule out reciprocal effects or reverse causality between cognitive experiences and attitudes or behaviours. Individuals may choose heterogeneous mobilization networks precisely because they appreciate the experience of intergroup contact for dealing with opposing viewpoints.

The most important caveat is that this study is limited to conclude about the direction of the possible correlation between mobilization stimuli and individual attributes. Notwithstanding, conclusive evidence on the direction of causality obtained through meta-analysis of contact studies indicates the path from contact to reduced prejudice is much stronger than the possibility of prejudice reducing contact (Pettigrew 1997, Powers and Ellison 1995).

### **Sample selection**

The protest survey procedure is designed with the aim of having a probability sample by covering all the demonstration area in such a way that every protester gets the same chance to be surveyed. However, mail-back questionnaires imply respondent self selection. Face to face short surveys are held during the event in order to control for differences between protestors on site and mail-back surveys completed.<sup>10</sup>

### **Limitations regarding the measurement of key variables**

Given the limited space of the mail-back survey and in order to avoid respondent fatigue, the survey contained only one question to assess perspective taking and included it within the items of efficacy battery - I consider everybody's side of an argument before making a decision. Including other questions in order to tap this concept would have potentially increased the reliability of the measure and placing it out of the efficacy battery could also expand the number of such reported behavior.

The results of political use of the internet are likely to overestimate the amount of exposure to online political contents in which protest participants engage. Respondents are left to decide what constituted “political, social or current affairs” on their following the news or other types of information online. This broad framing was chosen in order to disregard internet use for information seeking on contents like work, leisure or entertainment or to limit it to very

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<sup>10</sup> A complete description of the protest survey process is available in Walgrave & Verhulst 2009 - “Protest Surveying. Testing the Feasibility and Reliability of an Innovative Methodological Approach to Political Protest” in <http://www.protestsurvey.eu/index.php?page=publications&id=1>

particular issue-specific contents exclusively. However, as the study was conducted during a highly intense political moment on the particular issues assessed, the political controversy generated high levels of interest and media coverage and these most likely stimulated higher levels of online action by mobilizing groups.

Mobilization channels are identified from the question of “the most important source of information for finding about the demonstration”. This approach leaves out the component of the call to participate which is central to the mobilization concept which is used. The final definition of the online mobilization indicator as considering any of three channels involves the presence of organizations as micromobilization actors, but can definitely overestimate the effect by considering any input that comes from social networks.

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## Annex

*Table A1- Description of the events and the survey*

Issue	Prolife Movement	Catalan Nationalism	
Event	España Vida Sí 07.03.2010	Autodeterminació es Democràcia 12.06.2010	Som Una Nació: Nosaltres decidim 10.07.2010
Prominent Mobilization agents (cases)	Hazte Oír Derecho a Vivir Pro Vida	PDD	Ominum Cultural
Mobilization Agents (Seeds in Issue network)	Médicos por la vida España vida sí La vida importa Foro de la familia Iglesia Católica Profesionales por la ética Intereconomía Socialistas por la vida Ginecólogos por la vida Plataforma por la vida Cada vida importa Diario ABC Diario La razón Estudiantes por la vida Red Madre Referendum vida sí Árbol de la vida A. de familias numerosas A. padres de la Iglesia Evangélica Cívica Conferencia episcopal F. Medicina CEU-San Pablo Fundación Madrina Manos Limpias Marcha por la vida Nasciturus Pediatras por el derecho a la vida Red Misión The Benenson Society UNICEF Vida y familia	Plataforma Pel Dret a Decidir Coordinadora Nacional Consultes Independència Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya Reagrupament Sobirania i progrès Candidatures d'Unitat Popular Omnium Cultural Deumil en xarxa per l'Autodeterminació Maulets Sobirania i justícia Acte de Sobirania Ateneu Sobiranista Català Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya Convergència i Unió JERC Joventut Nacionalista de Catalunya Plataforma per la llengua Taule d'Entitats Cíviques d'Arbúcies Associació Narcis Roca Farreras Associacions Municipals Coordinadora d'associacions per la llengua Endavant Organització Socialista d'Alliberament Nacional Fundació Randa Independència i Democràcia Joventuts Revolucionàries Catalanes Joves d'Esquerra Plataforma Defensem la Terra Plataforma per Autodeterminació Plataforma pro selecció catalana Revolta Global	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya Convergència i Unió Catalan Socialist Party Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds Comisiones Obreras Unio General de Treballadors Plataforma Pel Dret a Decidir Reagrupament Candidatures d'Unitat Popular Esquerra Unida i Alternativa Plataforma per la llengua Accio Cultural del Pais Valencià Ateneu Barcelonès Casa Amaziga Cercle Català de Negocis Confederación patronal de les micro, petites i mitjanes empreses i els autònoms de Catalunya Coordinadora Nacional Consultes Independència Federació Sardanista Orfeo Català Plataforma Selecció Catalana Sindicat de treballadors de l'ensenyament Sobirania i progrès Taula d'inmigrants
Protesters	278 (Postal survey) Turnout: 10.000 (Police estimate)	301 Individuals (Postal survey) Turnout: 5.000 (Police estimate)	309 (Postal survey) Turnout: 1.100.000 (Police estimate)

**Table A2 - Descriptive statistics**

	Autodeterminació es democràcia		Pro-Life		Som una Nació	
	# cases	%	# cases	%	# cases	%
<b>Age group</b>						
Less than 18	2	0.67	0	0	3	0.97
18-30	33	11.07	40	14.71	65	21.04
31-45	88	29.53	65	23.9	98	31.72
46-65	140	46.98	120	44.12	125	40.45
65 or more	35	11.74	47	17.28	18	5.83
N	298		272		309	
<b>Gender</b>						
Women	101	34.24	132	48.18	155	50.32
Men	194	65.76	142	51.82	153	49.68
N	295		274		308	
<b>Education</b>						
None, did not complete primary education	3	1.03	0	0	2	0.65
Primary or first stage of basic	23	7.88	15	5.6	8	2.61
Lower secondary or second stage of basic	21	7.19	10	3.73	28	9.15
Upper secondary	53	18.15	36	13.43	53	17.32
Post secondary, non-tertiary	51	17.47	44	16.42	52	16.99
First stage of tertiary	89	30.48	106	39.55	109	35.62
Second stage of tertiary	52	17.81	57	21.27	54	17.65
Post tertiary	0	0	0	0	0	0
N	292		268		306	
<b>Class (Subjective assessment)</b>						
Lower	3	1.07	2	0.8	3	1.01
Working	98	35	56	22.49	85	28.72
Lower middle	124	44.29	69	27.71	123	41.55
Upper middle	55	19.64	117	46.99	83	28.04
Upper	0	0	5	2.01	2	0.68
N	280		249		296	
<b>Perspective taking</b>						
	<i>I consider everybody's side of an argument before making a decision</i>					
Strongly disagree	5	1.69	4	1.49	9	2.93
Disagree	27	9.12	39	14.55	39	12.7
Neither	94	31.76	75	27.99	78	25.41
Agree	148	50	122	45.52	160	52.12
Strongly agree	22	7.43	28	10.45	21	6.84
N	296		268		307	
<b>Frequency of Internet use<sup>o</sup></b>						
Never	38	13.38	0	0	58	21.01
Monthly	34	11.97	36	14.06	35	12.68
Weekly	46	16.2	61	23.83	38	13.77
Daily	64	22.54	159	62.11	67	24.28
Constantly	102	35.92	0	0	78	28.26
N	284		256		276	
<b>Online mobilization</b>						
Offline channels	109	38.93	170	64.89	244	84.43
Any online channel	171	61.07	92	35.11	45	15.57
N	280		262		289	

<sup>o</sup>Political use of the internet for Autodeterminació es democràcia and Som una Nació cases

**Figure A1 – Mobilization actors and brokerage roles in mobilization network**

(Percentages in the Categories represent absolute brokerage levels for each role and the proportion of brokers in the mobilization network)

