Group Rhetoric and Public Opinion

Lene Aarøe

PhD Dissertation

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Acknowledgments

This project begins in Paris in the old leather sofas in the library at *Fondation Danoise*. The context of the riots in the French banlieues motivates vivid discussions about the power and mechanisms of group rhetoric as a political tool for responding to political controversies. Since this planting of the project idea, it has been a long journey to complete the research project. Along the way I have benefitted from the help of many people, and I am grateful for this opportunity to express my gratitude:

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Lene Aarøe

Preface

This report is part of my PhD dissertation *Group Rhetoric and Public Opinion* conducted at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University. The PhD project studies how variations in the way groups are invoked in political communication influence public opinion. The project consists of this report and the following five papers and articles:

- Aaroe, Lene (2010a). Tolerance of Religion in the Public Space, Perceived Threat and the Position of Target group Members (Working paper)
- Aaroe, Lene (2010b). Does Tolerance of Religion in the Public Space Depend on the Salience of the Signaling of Religious Group Membership? (Manuscript invited to revise and resubmit at *Political Behavior*).
- Aaroe, Lene (2010c). Episodic versus Thematic Rhetoric: Effects on Frame Strength in Competitive Contexts (working paper).
- Aaroe, Lene (forthcoming a). Investigating Frame Strength: The Case of Episodic and Thematic Frames, paper accepted for publication in *Political Communication*.
- Aaroe, Lene (forthcoming b). When Citizens Go Against Elite Directions: Partisan Cues and Contrast Effects on Citizens' Attitudes, paper accepted for publication in *Party Politics*.

The articles and papers present the central theoretical and empirical findings from the project elaborately. This report provides the reader with an overview of the project. It raises some important discussions that go beyond the individual articles and papers by motivating the research question, by discussing the research strategy and by pointing to the implications for future research. The more detailed theoretical discussions and the specific empirical analyses can be found in the individual papers and articles.

Chapter 1
Group Rhetoric and Public Opinion

Public opinion is one of the most important foundations of modern democracy. As cemented by the authors of *The Federalist*, 'all government rests on public opinion' (Publius 1788).[1] Democratic competition leads political elites to respond to electoral pressures from below. Thus, public opinion constitutes one of the most central concepts in the analysis of democratic politics (Kinder 1998: 778).

Classic studies have demonstrated that citizens' attitudes towards social groups are one of the key factors shaping public opinion (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964; Conover & Feldman 1984; Conover 1988). For example, Converse (1964) found that when Americans were asked to evaluate political parties and candidates, they typically named benefits and deprivations that parties had visited upon social groups. Likewise, more than a quarter of a century later, in their study of public opinion on racial equality, Kinder & Sanders (1996) demonstrated that racial resentment was implicated in whites' views on not only issues of affirmative action but also on welfare, capital punishment, gay rights and defense spending. As illustrated in these two prominent examples, public opinion can be characterized as group-centric – 'shaped in powerful ways by the attitudes citizens possess toward the social groups they see as beneficiaries (or victims) of the policy' (Nelson & Kinder 1996: 1055).

A look at current political debates supports the impression that groups are highly influential categories when political issues are discussed and opinions are formed. An illustrative example of the prominent position of group categories in public debate is current civil liberty disputes in Western Europe about religion in the public space: These disputes are not carried out in the abstract but focused on the right of specific groups to practice their religion: In 2004 in France, the debate about the introduction of the ban on conspicuous religious symbols in public schools focused overwhelmingly on Muslim headscarves (e.g., Bowen 2007). While France has been the most prominent example, the recent Belgian conflict over the introduction of a ban on the burka in the public space (Coene & Longman 2008: 304-5), the dispute in

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[1] http://teachingamericanhistory.org/ratification/timeline-federalist. html (July 20, 2010).

the Netherlands about whether Muslim police officers should be allowed to wear the headscarf instead of the official headgear (e.g. Verhaar & Saharso 2004) and the Danish debate about Muslim and Christian symbols in the dress code for judges constitute other salient and illustrative cases. In line with the insight from classic studies of public opinion, these examples from the contemporary debate support the impression that group categories are fundamental to how political issues are discussed and opinions are formed.

Specifically, elites shine the spotlight on different groups in society (Palmer 2010: 1) to construct which target group will be influenced by a policy (Schneider & Ingram 1993: 334). Such constructions of target groups are carried in popular images of groups or persons which are portrayed in positive or negative terms and through rhetorical devices such as symbolic language, metaphors, stories and frames (Schneider & Ingram 1993: 334; Nelson & Kinder 1996). Moreover, political elite groups also struggle to position themselves favorably as sources or sponsors of specific policies. Citizens may evaluate proposals and policies on the basis of such cues supplied by political parties (Campbell et al. 1960:128).

In sum, group rhetoric about the group sponsoring or targeted by a given policy holds an essential position in current political debates and influences public opinion.

Through a series of articles and papers, this dissertation advances our understanding of how and under what conditions group rhetoric influences citizens' political opinions and emotional reactions to political controversies. Research demonstrates that the effect of group orientations on citizens' opinions depends on the specific rhetorical choices made by political elites (e.g. Nelson & Kinder 1996; Kinder & Sanders 1996). However, although the invocation of groups is a fundamental part of the political debate we still have limited knowledge of how and under what specific rhetorical circumstances group rhetoric becomes politically significant to citizens' attitudes. Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to advance our knowledge of how and under what conditions group rhetoric influences citizens' political opinions and emotional reactions.

The general argument underlying the investigation of the research question is that we may gain a better understanding of the effects of group rhetoric through a better incorporation of the linkage between elite rhetoric and citizens' information processing systems.

In particular, the dissertation investigates the general research question focusing on three fundamental dimensions: First, the dissertation examines how the effects of target group cues are reinforced or restricted by contextual information about what behavior the target group members are per-

forming and about what position the target group members hold: We know from prior research that target group cues influence opinion. In contrast, it remains a more unsettled question how the effects of target group cues are reinforced or restricted by contextual information about what behavior the target group is performing and where the behavior is taking place. This dissertation extends prior research (Gibson & Gouws 2001, 2003; Hurwitz & Mondak, 2002; Marcus et al. 1995) by demonstrating that the effect of target group cues on citizens' opinions are influenced by contextual information about what behavior the target group is performing and what position the target group members hold (Aaroe 2010a, 2010b). The findings highlight that even on issues where group divisions may be deep, citizens respond to group rhetoric in a nuanced way and adjust their reactions to target group cues according to the contextual information accompanying them. These findings suggest that citizens' processsing of group rhetoric is more sophisticated than implied by prior studies.

Second, the dissertation extends prior research by demonstrating that the effect of group rhetoric is shaped by the format of the way we talk about target groups. Specifically, I demonstrate that citizens' emotional and attitudinal response to political controversies depends on whether target groups are constructed in faceless thematic frames or in episodic frames featuring specific examples of the 'lots' and 'stories' of specific target group members. Thus, prior research has established that episodic and thematic frames are two essential types of political news reporting (Iyengar 1991) and effect studies have shown that these frames influence citizens' attributions of responsibility, their policy views (Iyengar 1991) and the intensity of their emotional reactions (Gross 2008: 169). Yet, it remains surprisingly underexplored whether the use of episodic or thematic frame rhetoric to invoke groups in the public debate is most effective in influencing citizens' opinions and emotions. The dissertation extends prior research by demonstrating that whether we communicate about the groups who are victims and beneficiaries of policies in episodic or thematic frames affects how citizens respond emotionally and attitudinally to political messages in non-competitive as well as competitive debate contexts (Aaroe 2010c, forthcoming a). Thus, the findings also highlight that we can gain a better understanding of the effects of target group framing through better incorporation of the role of emotions.

Third, the dissertation investigates how information about which partisan group is the source of a message can influence opinions. The dissertation extends prior research (Campbell et al. 1960; Mondak 1993; Kam 2005; Taber & Lodge 2006) by demonstrating that citizens can also use partisan source group cues to go against elite opinion leadership and move their attitudes

away from the viewpoint advocated in a persuasive message. The findings thereby highlight the constraints on elite opinion leadership.

Through the investigation of these three dimensions of the research question the dissertation offers a multifaceted and comprehensive discussion of the issue. This makes the cross-cutting conclusions of the project more robust and allows for an outline of implications that reach beyond the specific debates in the different literatures in the field of public opinion that discuss the role of groups in citizens' attitude formation.

In covering the three dimensions of the research question, the project uses a rich variation in experimental data and research designs which strengthens the robustness and generalizability of the cross-cutting conclusions. Specifically, the experiments analyzed in the project were embedded in five different surveys. The surveys have been collected over the internet as well as by paper and pencil questionnaires and with approximately nationally representative samples and student samples. The constructions of target groups investigated span from classic Muslim and Christian religious group members, over welfare recipients to victims of a specific immigration policy, the Danish 24-year rule. Likewise, the partisan source group cues include governing parties as well as wing parties. The issues investigated include tolerance of religion in the public space, welfare benefit rates, the war in Iraq, the Danish 24-year rule and free speech.

In the next chapter, I present the research question and the dimensions investigated more elaborately. In Chapter 3, I describe the methods and research designs in the project and I provide an overview of the data sets analyzed in the project. Chapter 4 summarizes the central findings from the project, and Chapter 5 discusses the central implications and new research questions raised by the findings.

Chapter 2
Background and
Research Question

This chapter presents the research question that connects the project, and explains how the individual articles and papers advance our understanding of this question. First, I place research on group orientations in the general literature on public opinion. Second, I discuss what we know and need to know about effects of group rhetoric to present how the project addresses central but understudied questions in the literature.

The classic puzzle of the functional citizen and groups as an answer

As introduced in Chapter 1, public opinion is a central foundation of democracy. Yet, the early literature in the modern history of the field seriously questioned citizens' competence to put together consistent political opinions. Already Lippmann (1925/1993: 6) noted that 'it is well known that nothing like the whole people takes part in public opinion'. This observation was supported by later research which found that the public lacked knowledge about the particular issues of the day (Berelson 1952: 318; Campbell et al. 1960: 42), paid little attention to campaigns and rarely changed its minds because of new information (Lazarsfeld et al. 1948). The findings indicated that ordinary citizens were characterized by an absence of recognition and understanding of general ideological frames of references and that their opinions were minimally connected to ideological principles (Converse 1964: 246). In Converse's (1964: 245) words: '[t]he substantive conclusion imposed … is simply that large portions of an electorate do not have meaningful beliefs, even on issues that have formed the basis for intense political controversy among elites for substantial periods of time'.

Yet democracy persists. This is one of the most fundamental puzzles in the literature: '[A]pparently dysfunctional citizens who compose an apparently functional public' (Taber 2003: 433). Extensive investigations have sought to understand how it is possible for citizens to form sensible political opinions without knowing all the specific details of an issue (Sniderman et al. 1991: 2, Sniderman 2000: 67-68). Specifically, prior generations of public opinion research have taught us that the following three factors constitute

central ingredients of public opinion: 'the material interests that citizens see at stake', 'commitment to the political principles' and 'the sympathies and resentments that citizens feel towards social groupings' (Kinder 1998: 800).

A longstanding claim in the literature is that self-interest is a central motivational factor in citizens' attitude formation, leading them to maximize individual preferences (Sears 1997: 492). The definition of self-interest itself has been an issue of much debate. Yet, the influential work of Sears & Funk (1991: 16) suggests that 'an individual's self-interest in a particular attitudinal position should be defined in terms of (1) its short to medium-term impact on the (2) material well-being of the (3) individual's own personal life (or that of his or her immediate family).' Conceptualized in this way, different empirical studies have generally only found small effects of self-interest on public opinion (Krosnick et al. 2010: 1307) – except for situations including 'very large and clear stakes or a severe and uncertain threat to one's own well-being' (Sears 1997: 492, for a review see Citrin & Green 1990). Chong et al. thus sum up: 'In the study of public opinion, the influence of self-interest on policy preferences has often proved to be weak in comparison to general orientations such as political ideology, party identification, and racial attitudes' (Chong et al. 2001: 541).

As indicated in Chong and colleagues' observations, political principles or values constitute another central line of research in the literature on the puzzle of the functional citizen and the central ingredients in public opinion. Like the concept of self-interest, the definition of the concept of political values is subject to discussion in the literature. According to Rokeach's influential work a value is 'an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence' (Rokeach 1973: 5). Classic studies emphasize that political values are a central force in opinion formation (Conover & Feldman 1984; Feldman 1988; Zaller 1992). Extant research supports that citizens use their values to make up their minds about policies and candidates and that they typically support the candidate or policy that matches their values (e.g. Kinder & Sanders 1996; Hurwitz & Peffley 1987).

Yet, while political principles are no doubt important, they do not tell the full story of how citizens form opinions. Specifically, prior research places citizens' basic orientation towards social and political groups as a third powerful force shaping public opinion (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964; Conover & Feldman 1984). A group can be defined as 'any set of people who constitute a psychological entity for any individual' (Adorno et al. 1950: 146). In this definition, Christians and Muslims, blacks and whites as well as Republicans and Democrats are classic examples of groups that are recur-

rently salient in the public debate. Also welfare recipients, criminals and intellectuals, for example, can constitute groups 'in so far as they are social categories or regions in an individual's social outlook – objects of opinions, attitudes, affect and striving' (Adorno et al. 1950: 146). In particular, Nelson & Kinder (1996: 1056) explain: 'In psychological language, group-centrism functions as an efficient *heuristic* that conveniently reduces the complexity of policy politics to a simple judgmental standard'. This line of reasoning is consistent with the argument made by Sniderman et al. (1991: 114-15), who explain that the mass public may use its likes and dislikes towards pairs of opposing groups as an intellectual short cut to figure out the issue position of strategic groups in politics without necessarily knowing very much about politics or ideology. Nelson & Garst (2005) directly test the relative persuasive power of value-based speech and shared group membership in the form of party affiliation. They find that the persuasive power of value-based speech 'can be undercut' when the speaker crosses the boundaries defined by his or her party designation (Nelson & Garst 2005: 510). Thus, Sniderman et al. (1991: 115) sum up that likes and dislikes towards social groups can 'provide a certain cement to mass belief systems'. Based on such likes and dislikes towards social groups citizens can reason about political issues at least when salient social groups are involved (Sniderman et al. 1984: 92).

Group rhetoric as a fundamental ingredient in public debate

Because group categories are a fundamental force in opinion formation, political elites struggle to define which target groups are the beneficiaries or victims of specific policies and to place their own partisan group favorably as sponsor of viewpoints in the popular debate. Political parties solicit support by making a case for the policy they favor or against their opponents' policies (Sniderman 2000: 80). Thus, because of citizens' lax interest in politics, elites hang flashlights on different groups in society (Palmer 2010: 1) to explain what (i.e. who) a policy is about (Schneider & Ingram 1993: 334). As indicated in the introduction of this section, the central position of group rhetoric in the competitive democratic debate can be observed in two ways:

First, as a fundamental part of politics, political elites struggle over how to define and construct which social groupings should be seen as beneficiaries or victims of specific policies (Schneider & Ingram 1993: 334). Schneider & Ingram explain that the construction of target groups 'become[s] part of the re-election calculus when public officials anticipate the reaction of the target

population itself to the policy and also anticipate the reaction of others to whether the target group *should* be the beneficiary (or loser) for a particular policy proposal' (1993: 335, original italics). As explained by Edelman (1988: 12), problems as articulated in political discourse 'signify who are virtuous and useful and who are dangerous or inadequate (…) They constitute people as subjects with particular kinds of aspirations, self-concepts, and fears'. Thus, a central part of competitive democratic debate is the struggle over the construction of who is the target group of a policy.

Second, as an equally essential part of politics, political elites struggle to position themselves favorably and opponents unfavorably as sources or sponsors of specific policies. Campbell et al. (1960: 128) explain that a political party is a 'supplier of cues by which the individual may evaluate the elements of politics'. As emphasized by Dancey & Goren (2010: 686) '[w]hen partisan elites debate an issue and the news media cover it, partisan predispositions are activated in the minds of the citizens and subsequently constrain their policy preferences'.

In conclusion, group rhetoric defined as information about the group sponsoring or targeted by a specific policy holds an essential position in competitive democratic debate and affects public opinion.

A new central puzzle: How and when does group rhetoric matter?

While group rhetoric is a fundamental part of public debate, prior research also demonstrates that the effect of group orientations on citizens' opinions varies (e.g. Nelson & Kinder 1996; Kinder & Sanders 1996). In response to such observations, a large body of research has traditionally focused on how individual differences shape group-centrism in opinion formation. As the perhaps most famous and monumental example, *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), Adorno et al.'s study of anti-Semitism in the US in the 1940s, concluded that some individuals simply are ethnocentric and more personally invested in group orientations than others. Authoritarianism (e.g. Altemeyer 1981; Duckitt 1992; Feldman 2003), social dominance orientation (e.g. Pratto et al. 1994) and right-wing authoritarianism (e.g. Altemeyer 1981) are other prominent examples of individual-level factors identified to influence how disposed citizens are to react against other groups.

In addition to this bottom-up approach to the explanation of variations in the effect of group rhetoric, there is also substantial evidence of a top-down perspective focusing on how the information environment provided by elites

matters. Kinder & Sanders (1996: 275) point out: 'in choosing how to formulate the public debate over issues of race, elites have some say over the extent to which white opinion is laced with racial resentment. The devil is in the details: the nature of the issue and how the issue is framed both matter a lot'.

However, while we know that the elite construction of specific linkages between groups and political issues influences public opinion, a number of questions remain unresolved concerning the specific rhetorical variations which are powerful in shaping citizens' attitudes. Already V.O. Key (1960: 536) pointed out that '[t]he missing piece of our puzzle is this elite element of the opinion system'. Four decades later, many key pieces are still missing to the argument attempting to specify the rhetorical conditions under which group rhetoric would be more or less influential in politics (e.g. Nelson & Kinder 1996: 1073). Thus, the question of how and under which conditions group rhetoric should be expected to affect public opinion constitutes a new central puzzle in public opinion research.

Awareness of the centrality of this puzzle goes across the research agendas in the sub-disciplines that investigate different forms of group rhetoric in the field of public opinion:

Within the framework of the literature on political tolerance, extant research has demonstrated that tolerance judgments are not abstract and context-free but highly influenced by contextual factors. Thus it matters *who* the target group one is asked to tolerate is, *what* the behavior of the target group is and *where* the behavior is taking place (Gibson & Gouws 2003: 95). Yet while prior research on tolerance has demonstrated that such contextual information about 'who', 'what' and 'where' has central impact on tolerance (e.g. Marcus et al. 1995; Mondak & Hurwitz 1998; Gibson & Gouws 2001), our knowledge of the specific contextual factors shaping tolerance judgments remains limited (Gibson & Gouws 2001: 1069, 2003: 97; Petersen et al. forthcoming: 3).

Likewise, within the framing literature, Nelson & Kinder (1996: 1073) state: 'group-centered frames appear to be important, and they are certainly popular in everyday political discourse. But we are far from knowing everything about them. … We have spoken of "group-centered" frames and "group-centric" opinions without elaborating much on the obvious variety within each of these categories'. Thus, while we know from prior research that group-centered frames affect citizens' opinions, knowledge is still limited of how rhetorical variations in the format applied to construct groups in frames shape framing-effects.

Finally, within the literature on partisanship and persuasion, scholars also discuss how party cues influence public opinion. Specifically, while extant

studies have demonstrated that partisan source group cues can enhance the support for a given policy position among political supporters, we have a limited understanding of whether failed attempts at persuasion simply leave opinions unchanged or whether citizens also use partisan cues to go against elite opinion leadership: Thus, Wegener et al. (2004: 19) conclude: 'researchers have not generally asked questions about resistance that parallel the questions asked about persuasion'.

Therefore, as introduced in the previous chapter, the question of how and under what conditions group rhetoric influences citizens' opinions and emotional reactions is the research question that connects the articles and papers of this PhD dissertation. Specifically, I advance our understanding of this question by illuminating three central dimensions of the question consistent with the three major debates and shortcomings identified in the sub-literatures above. Thus, the first dimension concerns how the effects of target group cues are reinforced or restricted by contextual information about what behavior the target group is performing and where the behavior is taking place. The second dimension concerns how the effect of group rhetoric is shaped by the format of the way we talk about target group cues. Finally, the third dimension concerns how cuing information about which partisan group is the source of a political message influences citizens' opinions. In the next three sections, I elaborate on these research dimensions and present the main arguments of the project.

How does the contextual way we talk about target groups matter?

A wide literature has demonstrated that target group cues influence citizens' attitudes (e.g. Brader et al. 2008; Mondak & Hurwitz 1998; Marcus et al. 1995; Sniderman et al. 2004; Sniderman & Hagendoorn 2007). In contrast, a more unsettled question is how the choice of contextual information applied in the broader construction of target groups shapes the impact of group rhetoric. In the next sub-section, I discuss this gap in the current literature and the contributions of the project in more detail.

Within the literature on public opinion, the literature on political tolerance has been pioneering in demonstrating that when citizens are asked to form an opinion on a policy it is important *who* the target group is, *what* behavior the group has, and *where* the behavior is taking place (Gibson & Gouws 2003: 95). For example, Marcus and colleagues' seminal work (1995) demonstrated how contextual information about violent behavior affected political tolerance towards the least-liked group. Within the framework of the lite-

rature on political tolerance, Hurwitz and Mondak (2002) also assessed the relative impact of target group cues and contextual information about the specific behaviors of the target groups. This debate in the tolerance literature resonates with discussions in the broader literature on public opinion: Also in the broader literature on public opinion, there is an increasing awareness that in understanding citizens' reactions to target group cues, contextual information about the behaviors and characteristics of the specific target group members needs to be taken into account. For example, Petersen et al. (2010a) demonstrate that cueing information about the deservingness of welfare recipients affects citizens' support for welfare.

However, while we know that it not only matters *who* the target group is but also *what* the contextual behaviors and characteristics of the group are and *where* the behaviors take place, many questions remain unresolved. Within the framework of the current cutting-edge debate in the tolerance literature, Petersen et al. (forthcoming: 3) emphasize that our understanding of the effects of such contextual factors 'lack knowledge about which elements are significant, why they are, and when they are.' In particular, we continue to have limited knowledge of how contextual information about behaviors of target group members and the positions they hold shape the impact of target group cues on citizens' opinions.

The public debate about the role of religion in the public space is a key empirical development. This debate highlights that we can advance our understanding of target group cues and under which conditions they shape citizens' opinions through better incorporation of the effect of contextual information. The pivotal point in the political debate about freedom of religion in Western Europe is *who* should be allowed to signal *what, in what position*. The present project combines insights from social identity theory and research on the social functions of religion with extant research on tolerance to advance our understanding of this issue. Specifically, focusing on the fundamental issue of tolerance of religious symbols in the dress code in the public space, this project extends prior research by investigating how the impact of Christian ingroup and Muslim outgroup cues is shaped by the conspicuousness of the manifestation of religious outgroup membership. I demonstrate that conspicuous manifestations of religious outgroup membership (i.e. wearing a Muslim headscarf) spark stronger intolerance than subtle manifestations (i.e. wearing a necklace with a Muslim crescent) and that anxiety is a central mediator of the effect of conspicuous manifestations of religious outgroup membership (Aaroe 2010b).

Moreover, the project also demonstrates how citizens' willingness to grant ingroup and outgroup members the same religious rights depends vitally on

whether the target group members in question are public representatives (i.e. teachers, social workers) or private citizens (i.e. parents). I demonstrate that discriminatory outgroup bias in religious tolerance judgments drops significantly when the target group members are private citizens rather than public representatives, and that the effect of the position of the target group members is mediated by perceived value threat (Aaroe 2010a).

As a part of the investigation of these issues the research presented in the project also looks into how individual differences influence the effects of such contextual information on citizens' opinions. Thus, in developing an understanding of how contextual rhetorical elements shape the effect of group rhetoric the project links back to the classic literature which emphasizes the explanatory power of individual differences. Specifically, I demonstrate how the effect of contextual information about behaviors and the position of the target group members is conditioned by individual-level factors (i.e. outgroup threat perception (Aaroe 2010a) and individual support for secularism (Aaroe 2010b).

How does the format of the way we talk about target groups matter?

As observed by Schneider & Ingram (1993: 335), groups may be portrayed either through the example of specific persons or as a collective entity. This distinction corresponds to the general distinction between episodic and thematic news framing, two of the most fundamental forms of political news reporting (Iyengar 1991). Prior effect studies have shown that these frames influence citizens' attributions of responsibility, their policy views (Iyengar 1991) and the intensity of their emotional reactions (Gross 2008: 169). Yet, the question of the relative capacity of episodic and thematic frames to influence citizens' opinions remains surprisingly underexplored (Aaroe forthcoming a), just as investigations of the dynamics between these types of frames and citizens' emotional reactions have been very limited (Gross 2008). Scholars have only recently started to include emotions on the framing research agenda, and Brewer & Gross (2010: 178) accordingly observe: 'To date, relatively little research has examined emotional responses to frames for political controversies'. There are no prior studies of whether the intensity of citizens' emotional reactions can moderate the relative capacity of episodic and thematic frames to influence opinions.

Moreover although competition is one the most fundamental features of the democratic debate (Schattschneider 1960: 138; Druckman 2010: 101), we also still have very limited knowledge of framing effects in competitive

contexts, i.e. 'the presence of frames aimed at supporting different sides of an issue'. In particular, no prior study has investigated the relative capacity of episodic and thematic frames to influence citizens' emotional reactions to political controversies in competitive contexts. In de Vreese's (2010: 207) words: 'There is no doubt that pushing framing effects research to the next level involves designs that do justice to the presence of multiple and often contradictory news frames in the news flow'.

Focusing on the case of the construction of target groups, this project extends prior research on the impact of group rhetoric and frames. Specifically, the project investigates whether the choice between episodic versus thematic framing of welfare recipients and citizens subjected to the Danish 24-year rule affects citizens' opinions and emotional reactions. The findings indicate that in competitive as well as non-competitive conditions, episodic frames can trigger stronger moral emotional reactions than thematic frames. Moreover, the findings also indicate that the relative capacity of episodic and thematic frames to influence citizens' political opinions depends on the intensity of citizens' emotional reactions.

How do elite group sources of political messages affect citizens' opinions?

As pointed out above, the concept of group rhetoric is not limited to the construction of the social groups which are the *targets* of specific policies. Group rhetoric also covers cuing information about the political elite groups which are the *sources or sponsors* of political messages.

As emphasized above, we know that information about which political group is the source of a political message can influence citizens' attitudes, but we know less about *how* and among which segments of the electorate such information is most influential. While an impressive body of research has demonstrated that elite cue-taking is one of the most fundamental mechanisms in citizens' attitude formation in the complex world of politics (e.g. Arceneaux 2008: 139; Campbell et al. 1960: 128; Lau and Redlawsk 2006: 232; Mondak 1993: 186; Zaller 1992), these studies mainly focus on situations where partisan source cues can enhance support for a given policy position among political supporters. In contrast, research on failed elite persuasion is very limited (Abelson and Miller 1967: 332-33; Taber and Lodge 2006: 756; Wagner 2007: 1). In particular, we have limited knowledge of whether failed attempts at persuasion simply leave opinions unchanged or whether citizens also use partisan group cues to go against elite opinion leadership: Is it always 'cost-free' for partisan elite representatives to sound off in public de-

bate? Or can attempts at increasing policy approval in one segment of the electorate come at the expense of a loss of support in other segments? (Aaroe forthcoming b: 1). Research on source group cue-taking leaves us with a limited understanding of these issues. Thus, we still have a limited understanding of how partisan group sources qualify the impact of political messages and frames on citizens' attitudes (e.g. Chong & Druckman forthcoming: 21-22).

It is important to gain a better understanding of whether citizens not only use elite group cues to subscribe to the proposals of their 'own' partisan group but also to move their attitudes away from the positions sponsored by elite groups they oppose. An illumination of this question can lead us to a better understanding of the constraints on partisan elite opinion leadership. Moreover, it is crucial to challenge the biased attention to successful elite persuasion which has nurtured an inflated perception of elite groups' influence on public opinion (Druckman 2001: 1061).

My results support the occurrence of contrast effects and suggest that it is not always 'cost-free' for partisan elite representatives to sound off in public debate. The findings suggest that citizens' capacity to go against political elite groups may be stronger than implied by prior studies.

Chapter 3
Experimentation as Research Strategy

Grasping how and under what conditions group rhetoric influences citizens' political opinions and evaluations raises challenging methodological issues. This chapter presents the general research strategy and the data employed to handle these challenges. The chapter proceeds in three sections: First, I give an overview of the data collected to investigate the research question. Second, I discuss why experimentation was chosen as the central methodology for the project and I outline of the unique strengths of the method in the study of the effects of group rhetoric. Third, I discuss the most important potential limitations of experimentation as a research strategy and show how the experiments in the project were designed to minimize the potential weaknesses of the method.

Outline of the collected data

Five data sets form the basis of the five studies in the project (see Table 1). The data were collected from February 2007 to May 2010. The field work for collection of data set 1 and 2 was carried out by the polling agencies Capacent and You Gov Zapera. The field work for data set 3-5 was conducted by the author. Combined, the five data sets constitute a good foundation for investigating under what conditions group rhetoric should be expected to matter and which psychological processes underlie the effects. As can be seen from Table 1, the data have been collected at different times, using different modes of data collection, different samples and focusing on the rhetorical construction of different empirical target groups and partisan source groups. This pluralism strengthens the validity of the cross-cutting conclusions in the project.

Table 1: Overview of the Data Sets in the Project[a]

Data set	1	2	3	4	5
Data set applied in ...	Tolerance of Religion in the Public Space...	Does Tolerance of Religion in the Public Space...	Episodic versus Thematic Rhetoric	Explaining Frame Strength...	When Citizens Go Against...
Content	How the position of the target group member conditions the effect of ingroup and outgroup cues on religious tolerance	How the salience of the signaling of religious outgroup membership influences tolerance	How emotional response is influenced by episodic and thematic frame rhetoric in competitive and non-competitive contexts	How episodic and thematic frame rhetoric influence emotional reactions and opinions	The influence of partisan cues on citizens' attitudes
Method	Survey experiment	Survey experiment	Experiment[b]	Experiment	Experiment
Mode of data collection	Online survey interviews (CAWI)	Online survey interviews (CAWI)	Paper-and-pencil questionnaire	Paper-and-pencil questionnaire	Paper-and-pencil questionnaire
Experimental stimuli	Variation in question wording	Variation in question wording	Variation in 'debate extracts'	Variation in 'debate extracts'	Variation in 'debate extracts'
Empirical target/ source group investigated	Muslims and Christians	Muslims and Christians	Welfare recipients	Young people subject to the Danish '24-year rule'	The party leaders of the Danish People's Party and the Liberals
Empirical issue investigated	Tolerance of religious symbols in the dress code for judges	Tolerance of religious symbols in the dress code for teachers, social workers and private citizens	Welfare benefit rates	The Danish 24-year rule	Free speech, the war in Iraq, welfare benefit rates
Subjects	Approx. representative sample of Danish citizens	Approx. representative sample of Danish citizens aged 18-74	Students	Students	Students
Total number of cases in the experiment	1905	1139	605	1590	707
Period of data collection	March 2010	December 2008	March and April 2008	April and May 2010	February 2007
Field work conducted by	Capacent	You Gov Zapera	The author	The author	The author

a. The structure of the table is adapted and developed from Serritzlew (2004: 24-25) and Slothuus (2008: 31).

b. I apply the term experiment rather than laboratory experiment because, as explained later in this chapter, the experiments were not carried out at the university laboratory but in the subjects' immediate environment.

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Data set 1-4 were collected to investigate how the way we talk about target groups influences citizens' political opinions and reactions to political controversies. Specifically data set 1 and 2 (applied in Aaroe 2010a, 2010b) were collected to investigate the effects of different types of contextual information applied in the broader substantial construction of who the target group of a policy is. Data set 3 and 4 (applied in Aaroe 2010c; forthcoming a) were collected to investigate the effects of the stylistic construction of how the target group should be seen (i.e. portrayed through episodic or thematic frames). Data set 5 (applied in Aaroe forthcoming b) serves to investigate how the partisan elite group source of a political message affects citizens' opinions.

Experimentation as research strategy

The causal relationship between group rhetoric and citizens' political opinions and evaluations is at the core of the current project. Therefore, it was fundamental to choose a research strategy maximizing the possibilities of making valid inferences about causal relationships. Specifically, it was necessary to be able to determine the causal order of exposure to group rhetoric on an issue and citizens' attitudes on that issue and to establish an efficient control for rival explanatory factors. Second, it was essential to be able to operationalize variation in different types of group rhetoric in a precise manner. Finally, it was central to choose a research strategy that could alleviate consistency pressures and social desirability effects because group centric opinions are a sensitive research topic which is particularly susceptible to these threats to the validity of the findings.

The cross-sectional sample survey has long been one of the most dominant approaches to the study of public opinion (Kinder 1998: 782; Sniderman & Grob 1996: 377-78). Yet with traditional cross-sectional surveys it can be difficult to separate the order between group rhetoric in the public debate on an issue and citizens' attitudes (Slothuus 2008: 34). In particular, it may be difficult to decide whether the use of group rhetoric in the public debate reflects or creates citizens' attitudes. Likewise, it may be difficult to establish efficient control for rival explanatory factors because the available data easily become insufficient. It may also be difficult to obtain a clear and exact variation on the independent variable because public debate tends to encompass a concatenation of rhetorical elements simultaneously and be relatively stable in the short run. Finally, traditional survey instruments can make it challenging to create research settings that effectively give respondents the opportunity to express opinions and sentiments without feeling ex-

posed to censure and condemnation. Gaines et al. (2007: 1) sum it up as follows: 'Many perils attend efforts to infer causal relationships from cross-sectional survey data'.

In contrast, the unique advantage of the experimental method is that it allows for inferences about causal relationships. An experiment is 'a deliberate test of a causal proposition, typically with random assignment to conditions' (Druckman et al. 2009: 3). In an experiment, the presumed cause is manipulated and the subsequent outcome is observed. The experimentalist observes whether variation in the cause is associated with variation in the effect, and the use of the random assignment of conditions controls for other explanations of the effect (Shadish et al. 2002: 6; Gravetter & Forzano 2009: 205). Therefore, the unmatched strength of experimentation is that it allows for high internal validity, i.e. ability to 'infer that a relationship between two variables is causal or that the absence of a relationship implies the absence of cause' (Cook & Campbell 1979: 37). Thus, in his widely-cited methodological article from 1971, Lijphart observes: 'The experimental method is the most nearly ideal method for scientific explanation' (1971: 683).

Specifically, if we want to draw valid causal inferences about how and under what conditions group rhetoric matters, experimentation helps us 1) distinguish between cause and effect and make efficient control for alternative explanations, 2) operationalize the independent variable and 3) minimize social desirability effects and consistency pressures. In the next three sections, I discuss in more detail why experimentation is an advantageous research strategy in terms of these three challenges.

Efficient to distinguish cause and effect

A central issue when investigating the current research question is whether the use of group rhetoric influences or reflects public opinion. This challenge is generalizable to the broader literature on the impact of elite communication on citizens' attitudes (Slothuus 2008: 34). Prior to the introduction of experimentation in Danish political science, Jørgensen et al. pointed out that the effect of rhetorical actions, 'should they have had one, is impossible to distinguish' through traditional electoral research (1994: 11, my translation from Danish). Therefore, we need a research strategy that can control the direction of the relationship between group rhetoric in communication and citizens' opinions and reactions to political issues.

In an experiment, the researcher controls which values subjects are assigned to on the independent variable. In the methodological terminology, the independent variable, which is manipulated, is often referred to as the

treatment conditions (Gravetter & Wallnau 2008: 14). The experimentalist controls the operationalization of the independent and the dependent variable and the time of exposure to the experimental stimuli. Therefore, the chronology between exposure to the stimuli and the measurement of response on the dependent variable can be controlled and measurement errors can be minimized (Slothuus 2008: 32). So, in the current project, the chronology between the exposure to different variations of group rhetoric and the measurement of political opinions and emotional reactions could be controlled.

Moreover, in an experiment the random assignment to conditions, if implemented correctly, controls for all known and unknown rival explanatory factors: Since the experimental groups are created through random assignment, the groups will be probabilistically similar to each other on average – except with respect to the experimental treatment (McGraw 1996: 771-72; Shadish et al. 2002: 13). Therefore, any observed differences between the experimental groups in the dependent variable may be attributed to the variation in the independent treatment variable (McGraw 1996: 771-72). Thus, when investigating the effect of the treatments with different variations in group rhetoric the random assignment to conditions ensures that alternative explanations can be eliminated.

The design does not rule out that political elites' use of group rhetoric in the public discourse in some instances may be a reflection of opinions in the mass public. Yet, the focal point of the current research is to investigate how and under what conditions group rhetoric *influences* citizens' opinions and reaction. Experimentation constitutes a strong research strategy to grasp this question.

Efficient to test effects of specific components of group rhetoric

A second central advantage of the experimental research strategy is the ability to vary, isolate and test the effects of specific components of group rhetoric in a precise manner.

In 'real-world' public debate, the specific groups, contexts and types of information which elites politicize may be relatively stable, at least in the short term. In circumstances where both elite communication and opinion are stable, studying this relationship is extremely difficult (Slothuus 2008: 35). King, Keohane & Verba (1994: 148) thus point out: 'Trying to estimate a causal inference with explanatory and dependent "variables" that are both constant is hopeless'.

As emphasized by Kinder (2007: 158) one strategy to overcome this challenge is to wait for a 'decisive shift' in the information flows in a real-world setting which takes 'place in such a way that the putative effects on public opinion – if such effects there be – are fortuitously captured'.

Yet, for one thing such shifts may be rare (Kinder 2007: 158). Second and importantly, this research strategy also implies a high risk of confounding different rhetorical attributes of a political message into a single category (Shah et al. 2010: 215-16). At the aggregate level, political communication 'encompass[es] a concatenation of messages, channels and sources, all of which may influence the audience, often in inconsistent directions' (Iyengar 2009: 6-7). This is certainly also true for group rhetoric: As exemplified in the rhetorical questions posed by Iyengar (2009: 7), which specific elements of the 'Willie Horton' add were thought to have pushed so many Americans away from voting for Dukakis in the 1988 presidential election? Was it the construction of his violent nature or the characteristic that he was a convict, or something else? Or to give a classic example from the Danish context, what in the tabloid newspaper campaign 'the foreigners' [De fremmede] in the Danish newspaper *EkstraBladet* in 1994 is thought to have fuelled opposition to immigration? Was it the emphasis on abuse of the welfare system or was it the use of strong one-liners or a third factor? One of the most central advantages of experiments is that they enable us to isolate and investigate the discrete elements of political messages which move the audience (Iyengar 2009: 7). As emphasized by Shah et al. (2010: 228): 'Only in an experimental context can we pick these apart, allowing us to make sense of often contradictory findings from survey research and guide reasonable, theoretically coherent content analysis'.

Experimentation is therefore a strong research strategy when we want to isolate the effects of different variations in group rhetoric and surmount the challenge of limited short-term variation in group rhetoric.

Efficient to handle social desirability and consistency pressures

Researchers who investigate the effect of group rhetoric on citizens' opinions and evaluations risk that respondents will try to respond in the same way to different target groups in order to appear consistent while in reality their opinions and evaluations may differ (Petersen et al. forthcoming: 9). Schuman & Presser (1981: 29) demonstrated that Americans' willingness to allow foreign communist reporters to come to the US and send news home was strongly influenced by whether they had been asked their opinion on whether com-

munist countries should allow American reporters to come in an send news back to the US prior to the question about accepting communist reporters. When investigating how and under what conditions group rhetoric matters it is therefore important to choose a research strategy that does not allow artificial consistency biases.

Related to this point is the need to avoid results biased by social desirability effects. Social desirability effects refer to instances where people 'are not giving honest answers to conform with societal norms and not be embarrassed by their responses' (Streb et al. 2008: 78). A long line of research demonstrates that people provide socially desirable responses to survey questions (Corstange 2009: 45). For example extant studies demonstrate that people over-report church attendance (Smith 1998) and participation in elections (Presser 1990). It also shows that people have a tendency to say they voted for the winner of the election even though they did not (Wright 1993). Finally, in a Danish context, a prominent illustration of this phenomenon is the recurrent mismatch between the support for the right wing party, the Danish People's Party, detected in the opinion polls and the actual proportion of the vote the party receives on election day.

Some research indicates that '[n]owhere' (Streb et al. 2008: 78) are social desirability effects more of a challenge than in investigations of opinions on controversial issues such as matters involving gender and racial groups (see for example also Gilens et al. 1998: 178-79). Thus, when investigating how and under what conditions group rhetoric matters it is important that the research strategy efficiently remedies social desirability effects and minimizes pressure to favor one response over another.

The experimental method allows the researcher to remedy consistency pressures and social desirability effects when investigating how and under what conditions group rhetoric influences citizens' opinions and reactions. In particular, by only exposing each respondent to one target group cue or one group centric frame on a political issue the experimental method allows the researcher to minimize consistency biases (Petersen et al. forthcoming: 9).

Especially on controversial issues, experimentation offers the possibility of using specialized unobtrusive designs devised to give respondents confidence that they can express opinions and sentiments that others may find objectionable without the interviewer being aware that they have expressed this opinion (Sniderman 2009: 15). The showpiece of permissive designs developed within the experimental framework is the List Experiment (Sniderman 2009: 15). Briefly, in the baseline condition, the interviewer states: 'now I'm going to read you three things that sometimes make people angry or upset. After I read all three, just tell me HOW MANY of them upset you. I don't

want to know which ones, just HOW MANY' (Kuklinski et al. 1997: 405). The interviewer then reads a list of items. In the treatment condition everything is the same except that the list of items is expanded to include one more item about for example a black family moving in next door. To determine the proportion angered by a black family moving in next door, the researcher only needs to compare the mean angry responses in the baseline and the treatment condition (Sniderman 2009: 16; Kuklinski et al. 1997: 406).

As illustrated in the example of the List Experiment, the principle underlying permissive experimental designs is to generate a research setting where respondents have the opportunity to express opinions and sentiments without feeling exposed to censure (Sniderman 2009: 16; Kuklinski et al. 1997: 406). The investigation of the differences in group bias in public and private settings in Aaroe (2010a) includes a permissive as well as a standard experimental design to demonstrate the robustness of the findings across different research designs and controlling for social desirability pressures. Specifically, building on the logic underlying permissive designs, Aaroe (2010a) presents subjects with a description of a specific woman, Jamila Al-Hashami, and describes her dress (type of shirt, type of skirt, their colors). The description of her dress in the treatment conditions also includes information about a religious symbol (i.e. a headscarf or a cross). The respondents in the control group do not receive the information about a religious symbol in her dress. The subjects are asked to give an overall reaction to her dress, not the specific elements. To determine the intolerance triggered by the religious ingroup and outgroup symbols we only need to compare responses in the treatment conditions with the control group. For the subjects this research design generates a response situation where feelings of exposure to censure are minimized.

Handling threats to external validity

Despite the strengths of the method, experimental studies are often criticized for their low external validity (see e.g. Barabas & Jerit 2010; Kinder 2007; Gaines et al. 2007). McGraw observes: 'external validity – the ability to generalize – is "the Achilles heel" of political science experimentation' (1996: 774). External validity concerns inferences about the extent to which 'causal relationships hold over variations in persons, settings, treatments, and outcomes' (Shadish et al. 2002: 464). As accentuated in Shadish and colleagues' conceptualization, external validity goes beyond the representativeness of the sample (Barabas & Jerit 2010: 227) and should include multiple dimensions. Specifically, their conceptualization highlights that assessment of external

validity should include concerns about realism of the treatments (Kinder & Palfrey 1993: 27) and the realism of the manner in which treatments are received (Kinder 2007: 157).

The challenge of ensuring external validity is also central to my study of how and under what circumstances group rhetoric influences citizens' opinions and evaluations. In the next three sections, I therefore discuss the challenges of ensuring external validity in the choice of subjects, the construction of the treatments and the settings for the research. In doing so, I discuss the specific strategies applied in the current project to accommodate these challenges.

Choice of subjects

Experimental studies often use non-representative (student) samples: Focusing on the period 1990 through 2006, Kam et al. (2007: 419-20) found that a quarter of the experimental articles in general political science journals relied on non-representative student samples, and over 70 percent did so in more specialized journals. Therefore, the question about the implications of the use of non-representative samples is a central aspect in the debate about the limited external validity of experimental research in political science (Druckman & Kam 2009).

Brought about by Sears' (1986) widely cited argument, the use of non-representative student samples has inspired skepticism among political scientists towards the external validity of findings from experimental studies (Gerber & Green 2008: 358). Specifically, Sears (1986) argued that students differ systematically from other people in that they are more self-absorbed, have less crystallized attitudes, less sense of self, higher rates of compliance, less stable peer relationships, and stronger cognitive skills.

One obvious solution to this criticism is to increase the use of experiments embedded in surveys conducted with representative samples of the population of interest – so-called survey experiments (Sniderman & Grob 1996; Piazza & Sniderman 1998; Brewer & Gross 2010: 169). Survey experiments provide results which are both internally valid and generalizable to the population from which the representative sample was drawn.[2] Reflecting the recognition of the strengths of the survey experiment, Gaines and colleagues

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[2] An additional advantage of survey experiments is that it is often possible to obtain large samples (Brewer & Gross 2010: 169). In hypothesis testing this can be a means to increase statistical power to reduce the risk of type II error, i.e. failing to reject a false null hypothesis. Alternatively, a larger sample makes it possible to increase the number of experimental conditions to nuance the test of the hypotheses.

conclude: 'We fully expect the next generation of survey experimentation to take the study of public opinion and political psychology to new and as yet unanticipated heights' (Gaines et al. 2007: 18). Thus, in the current project, the use of survey experiments can increase the generalizability of the findings with respect to how 'real people' respond to group rhetoric.

Yet, survey experiments are expensive and sometimes not an option. While extra caution certainly is needed when generalizing from non-representative student samples, the importance of having a representative sample to the external validity of the findings depends on the nature of the research question (Druckman & Kam 2009: 7) and on how the specific issue and the specific stimuli under study may interact with the predispositions of the given student sample (Brewer & Gross 2010: 167).

Specifically, when the research question does not concern the distribution of attitudes in the population but rather the broader process of opinion formation, the majority view in social psychology is that most psychological processses differ relatively little from student populations to broader non-student populations (Brewer & Gross 2010: 167). Within the framing literature extant studies using both student samples and non-student samples support this claim (e.g. Druckman 2004: 673, 677). Likewise Roth (1988) observes that many experimental findings using student samples have proved very robust. A considerable part of the research in this study focuses on the process of citizens' attitude formation. This increases the validity of applying student samples.

When it comes to certain politically relevant background variables new research suggests that student samples can be constructed so that they vary relatively little from nationally representative samples (Druckman & Kam 2009: 19, 22). Thus, when working with non-representative student samples generalizability can be improved by sampling aiming at increasing the variation on relevant background variables such as party preference so that the distribution ideally approximates the distribution in the population of interest.

In the present project, the two studies investigating how contextual information influence discriminatory group bias in tolerance of Muslim and Christian symbols in the dress code are based on survey experiments conducted with approximately nationally representative samples (Aaroe 2010a, 2010b). The two studies investigating how the format of the construction of the target group alters the effect of group rhetoric using the case of welfare recipients and subjects to the '24-year rule' are based on student samples (Aaroe 2010c, forthcoming a). This also goes for the study of the contrast effect of partisan source group cues (Aaroe forthcoming b).

The resources were distributed in this way because prior research on tolerance indicates that '[o]f all the social influences that help to shape the public's attitudes toward civil liberties, none, except for education, appears to have a more powerful effect than age' (McClosky & Brill 1983: 387). Furthermore, prior Danish research indicates that age affects the related question of attitudes towards ethnic minorities and that young people tend to be more positive towards ethnic minorities than the rest of the Danish population (Thomsen 2006: 73). These findings from the tolerance literature and Danish research on attitudes towards ethnic minorities indicate that using a student sample could bias the results in the direction of underestimating religious intolerance and the impact of religious target groups on citizens' religious tolerance judgments. Therefore, priority was given to a nationally representative sample in these studies.

Students' attitudes towards welfare recipients and the Danish 24-year rule display more variation, and, in line with Druckman & Kam's argument, on central background variables such as party preference it is feasible to obtain a distribution that resembles the distribution in the national adult electorate. Specifically, to maximize variation on central background variables the students in each study were recruited from different schools in different geographical regions and with different socio-structural and political characteristics.[3] This strengthens the external validity of the findings.

Finally, recent research suggests that in some special cases, the use of student samples may 'make for more challenging assessments' (Druckman & Kam 2009: 22). Some research suggests that this might be the case when studying partisan source cues. Specifically, Kam (2005: 176) argues that in student samples party identification might be weaker because the students' party affiliations remain in a formative stage. Should this be the case, the student sample generates a more conservative test of the hypotheses about the impact of partisan group cues, because the consequence would be that the partisan cue would have weaker significance. This suggests that using a student sample actually could provide for a conservative test of the contrast hypothesis in Aaroe (forthcoming b)

Realistic stimuli

A second concern about external validity is whether the experimental treatments themselves are externally valid (Barabas & Jerit 2010: 227; Brewer &

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[3] Details of the specific composition of the samples are provided in the relevant papers.

Gross 2010: 170). Barabas and Jerit specifically warn that '[t]o the extent that treatments in survey experiments are overly strong or atypical, the observed effects may not generalize beyond the particular study at hand' (2010: 227).

Specifically, as emphasized earlier in this chapter one of the strengths of the experimental method is that it allows the researcher to overcome challenges of lack of short-term variation and the simultaneous presence of multiple rhetorical elements in political communication. Yet, this advantage is a double-edged sword. The experimentalist should always balance it against maintaining realism in the experimental treatments and in the strength of the experimental treatments.

In the current research, three strategies have been applied to increase realism in the construction of the stimuli: First, all empirical studies focus on real issues that have been part of the public debate. The choice of real issues that have actually been a central part of public debate (Haider-Markel & Joslyn 2001: 523, 538) and thus 'echo ongoing contemporary discussions' (Chong & Druckman 2007: 641) increases the realism of the experimental stimuli (Aaroe forthcoming a, 2010c) as well as the relevance of the findings to real-world politics. In particular, the choice of 'real' political issues is important to enhance external validity in studies of the impact of group rhetoric on emotions. As Brader (2006: 76) explains, emotions occur as 'responses to the relevance or meaning that external stimuli hold for an individual'. Subjects may think that a fictive issue *could* move them without actually experiencing emotional reactions. The use of real political issues has a stronger potential to tap into the impact of rhetoric on genuine emotions (Brader 2006: 76).

The complication in using real and relatively salient issues is the need to take account of potential so-called unmeasured real-world pre-treatment effects. The concept of real-world pre-treatment effects refers to situations where information the respondent has recently heard in the 'real-world' debate on the issue influences experimental results (Gaines et al. 2007: 10, 15). The expected implications of such real-world pre-treatment effects depend on the specific hypotheses under investigation (Gaines et al. 2007: 15). As emphasized by Gaines et al. (2007: 9), the solution is not that experiments should be isolated. Instead, the researcher should take these 'real-world' effects into account when designing the study and interpreting the findings, and alert readers to risks of crossover effects when it is relevant (Gaines et al. 2007: 10). When interpreting and specifying the generalizability of the specific findings in the current research, I therefore take this point into consideration (see e.g. Aaroe forthcoming a: 22-23; Aaroe 2010b: 10).

As the second strategy to increase the realism of the stimuli, discussions with target group members were applied to construct operationalizations of

religious target group cues which resonated with the real world context. The contextual content of Christianity and Islam as the religions are practiced in Denmark limits the range of realistic manipulations which can be made of religious group cues. For example, wearing the burka and the nun's habits represent religious group practices which are extremely rare in Denmark. To avoid giving artificially strong religious group cues, these practices were unselected for the experiments in Aaroe (2010a, 2010b).

Third, careful reading and investigation of actual media coverage of the political debate concerning the empirical issues chosen for the analyses was used as a stepping stone in constructing the stimuli for the experiments, in particular for Aaroe (2010c, forthcoming a, forthcoming b). In line with the procedures described by Slothuus (2008: 40), in the study of how partisan elite group sources of political messages affect citizens' attitudes, the viewpoints promoted by the party leaders either reflected the actual positions taken by the parties or were varied in a way which was 'not directly at odds with the positions, the parties had taken in actual policy discourse' (Slothuus 2008: 40).

Moreover, focusing on ensuring not only the external validity of the stimuli but also the internal validity, the research in the current project applies pretests and manipulation checks to ensure that the stimuli vary on the intended dimensions and are alike on other dimensions (e.g. Aaroe 2010b; 2010c; forthcoming a). While such procedures are often included in psychological research (e.g. Gravetter & Forzano 2009: 211), application in political science has been more limited. In line with Chong & Druckman (2007), the current project accentuates the value of incorporating checks of the stimuli material to protect the internal validity when investigating effects of political rhetoric.

In sum, by applying these strategies the project has sought to accommodate the emphasis in the literature on the importance of realistic stimuli while maintaining internal validity.

Choice of settings

Experiments usually aim at inferring to the real world. A third central concern about external validity is to create experimental research contexts that resemble real-world environments (Barabas & Jerit 2010: 227; Gaines et al. 2007: 9-10). Assigning subjects to meet in a university laboratory and perform highly specialized and unfamiliar actions may alter their responses (Slothuus 2008: 37). For example, Gaines et al. (2007:16) explain that the sterile research context may inflate treatment effects.

In this project, three strategies where applied to create experimental research contexts that resemble real-world environments: First, the data collection was carried out in the respondents' immediate environment. The survey experiments were carried out using Computer Assisted Web Interviews. The CAWI-technique allows the subjects to participate in the survey in their immediate environment, at a time of their own choice and in the context of the natural level of distractions they live in. Likewise, the three studies using student samples were all collected at the students' local schools in their daily class rooms. While being at school is certainly not the same as being at home, it is still a more familiar and reassuring research context, which is closer to the subjects' daily life than the university laboratory. These strategic choices bring the research context closer to the subjects' real-world environment.

Second, the design of the actual experiments also included features that mimicked the real-world debate context. As emphasized in recent studies (Brewer & Gross 2010: 164; Callaghan & Schnell 2005: 6; Druckman 2010: 101; Sniderman & Theriault 2004: 133; de Vreese 2010: 207) an unrealistic monopolistic modeling of the political debate context may weaken external validity. In line with recent studies in the field (e.g. Sniderman & Theriault 2004; Chong & Druckman 2007), the study of episodic and thematic frames in Aaroe (2010c) thus contributes to the methodological development in the field by modeling a more realistic debate context in the experiment. To mimic the competitive nature of democratic debate, some respondents were exposed to two contrasting frames, others only to one frame. This design strengthens the generalizability of the findings across different debate contexts.

Chapter 4
Findings

The empirical investigations in the project have generated a number of find-ings which together advance our understanding of the effects of group rhe-toric and the role of group orientations in shaping citizens' attitude formation. The individual papers and articles have also contributed to the specific litera-tures on tolerance, framing, and partisan cues. This chapter summarizes the most central findings from the project and relates them to the research ques-tion along the dimensions identified in Chapter 2. Details about the empirical analyses and operationalizations of the variables can be found in the indi-vidual papers and articles, which I will refer to during the presentation of the central findings. Chapter 5 discusses the general implications of the findings for our understanding of the effects of group rhetoric and citizens' opinion formation.

The project investigates the research question across a wide range of target and source groups ranging from fundamental social groups such as religious denomination and partisanship to situational 'minimal' groups such as victims of the 24-year rule. The empirical analyses have illuminated the research question across a variety of issues on the political agenda in West-ern European politics including religious symbols in the dress code, integra-tion, the war in Iraq, welfare benefit rates and freedom of expression after the cartoon crisis. The pattern of the findings supports the fundamental role of group rhetoric in shaping citizens' attitudes. Importantly, the findings ad-vance our understanding of this issue by identifying new and important con-tingencies in the impact of group rhetoric on citizens' attitude formation and by illuminating the psychological processes underlying these effects. The project also extends prior research by coupling these findings to individual-level moderators such as outgroup threat perceptions and support for secu-larism.

The next sections present the main findings from the project structured along the dimensions of the research question identified in Chapter 2.

Effects of group rhetoric depend on contextual information about target group behavior and positions

The first dimension of the research question concerns how contextual information about behaviors of target group members and the positions they hold shape the impact of group rhetoric on citizens' opinions. Focusing on the issue of tolerance of religion in the public space, the findings extend prior research on how contextual factors influence tolerance judgments (e.g. Gibson & Gouws 2001, 2003; Hurwitz & Mondak 2002; Petersen et al. forthcoming).

Specifically, the project has integrated prior research on social identity theory and studies of religion into the tolerance literature to argue that the impact of religious target group cues on tolerance judgments is shaped by the salience of the signaling of religious outgroup membership (Aaroe 2010b). Focusing on the issue of tolerance of religious symbols in the dress code for judges, the empirical findings support the following conclusions:

- Consistent with prior research, the empirical findings overall support that both the conspicuous and the subtle religious outgroup symbols trigger stronger intolerance than the religious ingroup symbol in the dress code for judges. Thus, both the respondents receiving the subtle Muslim crescent and those responding to the conspicuous Muslim headscarf expressed significantly greater intolerance than participants receiving the Christian cross.
- Importantly, the findings also extend prior studies by demonstrating that conspicuous religious outgroup practices spark stronger intolerance than subtle outgroup practices (Aaroe 2010b, Table 1 and Figure 1). Specifically, the respondents were more intolerant of allowing the Muslim headscarf than a necklace with a Muslim crescent in the dress code for judges. Thus, the mere salience of the signaling of religious outgroup membership had significant influence on the magnitude of the classical ingroup-outgroup bias in citizens' tolerance judgments. Specifically, the difference in citizens' tolerance of Muslim and Christian symbols in the dress code was reduced when the Muslim symbol was subtle instead of conspicuous (Aaroe 2010b, Table 1 and Figure 1).

Furthermore, the project has also integrated prior research on social identity theory into the tolerance literature to argue that the impact of religious target group cues and the magnitude of discriminatory outgroup bias in citizens' to-

lerance judgments should be expected to depend on whether the target group members hold a position as public representatives (i.e. teachers, social workers) or appear as private citizens (i.e. parents) (Aaroe 2010a). Focusing on the issue of tolerance of religious symbols in the dress code in a public school and at the local government office the empirical findings support the following conclusions:

- The findings indicate that the impact of religious target group cues and the magnitude of discriminatory outgroup bias in citizens' tolerance of religious symbols in the dress code are conditioned by whether the target group members hold a position as public representatives (i.e. teachers, social workers) or private citizens (i.e. parents).
- When the target group member held a position as a public representative (i.e. a teacher or a social worker) a strong discriminatory group bias in citizens' tolerance judgments was observed (Aaroe 2010a, Figure 2 and 3).
- When the target group member appeared as a private citizen (i.e. a parent), the discriminatory outgroup bias in citizens' religious tolerance judgments was significantly and substantially reduced (Aaroe 2010a, Table 2 and 3).

Individual differences as moderators of the effects

The findings support that the effects of the salience of the signaling of religious outgroup membership and the position of the target group members are conditioned by individual level differences.

- The findings support that individual support for secularism conditions the effect of the salience of the signaling of religious outgroup membership on tolerance judgments. Among citizens who are strongly opposed to secularism, the salience of the signaling of the religious outgroup membership has a strong effect on tolerance. In contrast, among citizens who strongly favor secularism, there is almost no effect of the salience of the manifestation of the religious outgroup membership on tolerance judgments, and (in)tolerance of ingroup and outgroup symbols in the dress code becomes approximately the same (Aaroe 2010b, Table 3 and Figure 3). In empirical terms, citizens who strongly favor secularism are approximately equally tolerant of the Christian cross and the Muslim crescent and headscarf in the dress code for judges. In contrast, citizens who are strongly opposed to secularism differentiate substantially among the

Christian ingroup symbol and the Muslim outgroup symbols as well as between the conspicuous Muslim headscarf and the subtle crescent. Thus, the research introduces support for secularism as a relevant predisposition which affects religious tolerance judgments by conditioning the effect of contextual information about the behavior of the target group on religious tolerance judgments (Aaroe 2010b).

- Moreover, the analyses support that dispositional perception of outgroup threat conditions the effect of the position of the target group members on the impact of religious target group cues on tolerance judgments (Aaroe 2010a). In particular, the analyses supported the following conclusions:

- Among citizens who perceive the religious outgroup as a strong threat, a strong conditioning effect of the position of the target group member on discriminatory group bias in religious tolerance judgments is observed. Specifically, the findings demonstrate that among respondents who perceive Islam as a strong threat the shift from the public representative (i.e. a teacher) to the private citizen (i.e. a mother) decreases the difference in the political and social intolerance of the Muslim headscarf and the Christian cross in the dress code substantially. In contrast, among respondents who do not perceive Islam as a threat the conditioning effect of the position of the target group member on the difference in intolerance of the Muslim headscarf and the Christian cross in the dress code is much weaker (Aaroe 2010a, Figure 6).

Effects of the choice between episodic versus thematic frame rhetoric

The findings also support that the effect of the construction of the target group is shaped by the choice between episodic and thematic frame rhetoric. As emphasized in Chapter 2, extant research demonstrates that episodic and thematic frames are two generic types of frames. However, we have surprisingly limited knowledge of whether the use of episodic or thematic frame rhetoric to construct target groups in political communication is most effective to affect citizens' emotions and opinions.

In relation to this dimension of the research question the main findings indicate that episodic and thematic framing of target groups have different capacity to influence citizens' emotional reactions and their political opinions. Thus, the findings suggest that we may gain a better understanding of the effect of group rhetoric through better incorporation of the linkage be-

tween the generic types of frame rhetoric applied in communication and citizens' information processing systems. More specifically, across two studies investigating the construction of welfare recipients (Aaroe 2010c) and subjects to the 24-year rule (Aaroe forthcoming a), the analyses gave rise to the following conclusions:

Consistent with Gross' findings (2008), my results supported that episodic frames can trigger stronger moral emotional reactions than thematic frames in communication contexts where citizens are only exposed to one frame (Aaroe forthcoming a, Table 1; Aaroe 2010c, Table 3 and Figure 1). Extending Gross' findings (2008), my results indicate that in a competitive environment where citizens are exposed to two contrasting frames, episodic frames may have a stronger capacity than thematic frames to trigger moral emotional reactions in the audience (Aaroe 2010c, Table 4 and Figure 2). Thus, whereas prior research on framing effects in competitive contexts seems to suggest that framing effects either simply cancel each other out (Sniderman & Theriault 2004; Brewer & Gross 2005: 938) or that the capacity to move citizens otherwise is an inherent property of the frame (Chong & Druckman 2007; Druckman 2010), the present research indicates that we may advance our understanding of the factors that shape frame strength in competitive conditions through a better incorporation of the linkage between the choice of elite rhetoric in a frame and citizens' information processing systems.

Finally, the findings indicate that episodic frames can have a stronger capacity than thematic frames to direct emotional reactions into support for the policy position argued by the frame (Aaroe forthcoming a, Table 2.) The findings therefore indicate that when citizens' emotional reactions are intense, episodic frames have a stronger capacity than thematic frames to move citizens' political opinions. In contrast, when no emotional reaction is elicited in the audience, thematic frames seem to retain a stronger capacity than episodic frames to influence opinion (Aaroe forthcoming a, Table 3 and Figure 1).

In conclusion, across two studies investigating the construction of both a classical target group like welfare recipients and a specific target group as subjects to the 24-year rule the findings indicate that the effect of group rhetoric depends on whether an episodic or a thematic framing is applied.

How the impact of group rhetoric depends on the partisan group source

The third dimension of the research question concerns how the partisan source of a message influences opinion. The central contribution of the findings is that partisan elite group cues not only have the capacity to elicit support among voters of the party or among citizens who feel sympathy towards the party leader but also to decrease support for political viewpoints among voters of opposing political parties and citizens with no sympathy for the party leader (Aaroe forthcoming b). The findings demonstrate that partisan elites cannot always put down markers in the public debate 'free of charge'. Attempts at persuasion directed at one segment of the electorate can be at the expense of a loss of policy support in other segments (Aaroe forthcoming b). Thus, the findings highlight the perspective that group rhetoric not only should be understood as a device elites may use to garner support for policies. From the perspective of the citizens, group rhetoric also provides cues which members of the mass public can use to go against elite directions. More elaborately the findings support the following conclusions:

- Party leader cues can elicit increased opposition to the viewpoint advocated in a political message among those voting for an opposing party and those who find the party leader non-likeable.
- Across two different party leader cues (the leader of the Danish People's party and the leader of the Liberals), three viewpoints on three different issues (free speech, welfare benefit rates and the war in Iraq) and two measures of political opposition (voting for an opposing party and finding the party leader non-likeable) the general pattern of response supports the occurrence of contrast effects (Aaroe forthcoming b).

Chapter 5
General Discussion
and Implications

The theoretical arguments and empirical findings generated in this project advance our understanding of how and under what rhetorical circumstances group rhetoric influences citizens' opinions and emotional reactions to political controversies. The project opens to view aspects of the dynamics of the impact of group rhetoric which have hitherto been out of sight. In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical implications and the generalizability of the findings as well as the new questions opened for future research. Thus, at the theoretical level and in an empirical Danish context, the chapter re-opens the discussion about the reach and dynamics of the effects of group rhetoric and the capacity of political elites to shape citizens' attitudes.

Theoretical implications, generalizability and future research

The theoretical arguments and the empirical findings presented in the individual articles and papers of the PhD project have a number of specific theoretical implications for future research on group rhetoric in the literatures on tolerance, framing and partisan cue-taking. In the context of each manuscript I discuss these implications in detail. Yet, the pattern of the findings also indicates some broader theoretical lessons and implications. This section discusses how the general pattern of the findings extends our general understanding of the new puzzle of how and under what conditions group rhetoric matters and contributes to the debate about the classic puzzle of the functional citizen. Moreover, I also consider the generalizability of the findings and discuss the new questions opened for future research.

Revisiting the puzzle of how and when group rhetoric matters

As described in Chapter 2, a large body of research has demonstrated that groups are an efficient heuristic which citizens can use as a 'shortcut' in their opinion formation to reduce the complexity of political debates to a simple judgmental standard. Reflecting this fundamental role of group heuristics in shaping public opinion, Sniderman & Hagendoorn give this general diagnosis of the state of affairs in the literature: 'It is widely assumed that citizens

know where they are on issues of minorities and care deeply about what is done' (2007: 135).

Yet, extant research also shows that there are variations in the effects of group rhetoric. Thus, the question of the contingencies of the effects of group rhetoric marks the research agenda across the literatures on tolerance, framing and partisanship in the research field of public opinion. Across the studies undertaken within the framework of these literatures the general pattern of my findings support that the effect of group rhetoric depends on the substantial contextual information applied to construct the group in communication and on the generic type of frame rhetoric put into operation. The findings qualify the assumption that citizens simply 'know' how to respond to issues involving groups by suggesting that the specific effects of group rhetoric depend on the broader information environment. A citizen's response to the rhetorical construction of who the victims or beneficiaries of a policy are is contingent on the behaviors and positions of the target group members and whether episodic or thematic frames are applied to construct the group members.

This conclusion is consistent with Converse, who posited that the centrality of groups depends on whether the individual is endowed with 'some interstitial "linking" information', which signals why the policy or party is relevant to the group (1964: 237) and with Nelson & Kinder (1996: 1059), who 'contend that there is nothing inevitable or invariable about group-centric political thinking'. This project adds key pieces to this seminal research by specifying that the description of the position of the target group members and their manifestation of group membership as well as the stylistic choice of rhetoric applied to invoke groups are crucial variables shaping the impact of group rhetoric. These findings indicate that opinion formation is relatively concrete and that citizens are capable of taking the contextual content of the public debate into account and form relatively nuanced opinions.

Future research could further strengthen our understanding of the effects of group rhetoric by illuminating whether and how the effect of the construction of the target group is conditioned by the partisan group source of the political communication. A stronger integration of theoretical work on the impact of target group cues and the effects of source group cues has the potential to advance our understanding of how and when group cues shape opinion. Such research can also further advance our understanding of how citizens integrate specific rhetorical components from the public debate when they form opinions.

Moreover, my research highlights that our understanding of the effects of group rhetoric can be advanced through a better incorporation of the politi-

cal debate context. Specifically, competition is one of the most fundamental features of democratic debate. It is fought out between opposing parties or ideological factions who frame issues in opposing terms (Schattschneider 1960: 138). Yet most effect studies present their rhetorical stimuli in a non-competitive context. In this project, I have investigated the effects of episodic and thematic frame rhetoric in competitive and non-competitive debate contexts. In line with the work of Sniderman & Theriault (2004) and Chong & Druckman (2007) this dissertation therefore contributes to pushing the research agenda towards a better incorporation of the competitive structures of the public debate.

Yet, competition comes in many forms. In line with Sniderman & Theriault (2004) I have focused on the competitive situation where one frame is opposed by one contrasting frame. Competition can also come in asymmetrical pressures (Chong & Druckman 2007: 638) just as it can take the form of 'forced' exposure to opposing messages or as choices on a market offering a multitude of viewpoints. As emphasized by Bennett & Iyengar (2008), information channels have proliferated and become more individualized. If the implication of these developments is audience isolation where citizens only expose themselves to messages that resonate strongly with their prior beliefs and stereotypes, the implication could be a diminished role for group rhetoric as a persuasive strategy to win support and an increased role for group rhetoric as a strategic tool to mobilize an already like-minded audience and galvanize opinion. The incorporation of such contextual elements from the political debate context can further advance our understanding of how and under what conditions group rhetoric matters.

An important venue for future research also is to investigate the generalizability of the findings across different types of political issues and across different national contexts. Within the sphere of stable Western democracies the impact of the specific group cues and specific frames investigated may also be context dependent.

Importantly, the analyses in the current project mainly focus on relatively salient political issues. Contextual information about what the behavior of the group is, what position the target group members hold and whether episodic or thematic frames are applied to construct the group members might work differently on low-salient issues. The same goes for the effect of partisan source group cues and the occurrence of contrast effects. On low-salient issues, citizens' group stereotypes may be weaker overall. This could weaken the overall effect of group cues and citizens' ability and motivation to adjust their reactions to the group cues based on information about what the behaviors of the group are and what positions the target group members hold.

Therefore, on low-salient issues, the pattern of response could also be dominated more by additive effects of group cues and information about behaviors and positions.

With respect to the effect of whether episodic and thematic frame rhetoric is applied, the pattern of response could also be different on low-salient issues. Specifically, a caution concerning the generalizability of the findings is that the differences in the effects of episodic and thematic frames may come out less clear on more low-salient and disengaging issues because emotional arousal may generally be more limited (Aaroe forthcoming a). Moreover, as emphasized in Aaroe (forthcoming a) it is plausible that emotions and policy evaluations may be closer connected in some episodic frames than others – depending on the consistency and quality of the frame as well as the specific human details information included in the frame. Future research should investigate the strength of the connection between emotion and opinions on episodic frames of lower quality or featuring more ambiguous human interest details. Cognition and emotion may be more disconnected for this type of episodic frames. Likewise, a special subcategory of thematic frames may also carry statistical information with "chock effect" which could strengthen their capacity to trigger emotional response. Thus, an important venue for future studies opened by the current research is to theorize and test the strength and underlying psychological processes of particular subcategories of episodic and thematic frames (Aaroe forthcoming a: 23).

Finally, a central question raised by the findings in the current research is the question of how group rhetoric influences citizens' attitudes over time. Future research should look into group rhetoric as a dynamic and unfolding process which develops and flows across multiple stages. A central challenge will be to study the life course of target group constructions in political rhetoric from its origins in the strategic thinking of political entrepreneurs, on its way through the mass media to its effect on citizens' attitudes over time: Which elements of group rhetoric remain influential over time? and do different segments of the electorate differ with respect to what elements of group rhetoric they respond to over time? Such research is important because it increases our understanding of the breadth and dynamics of group rhetoric as a persuasive tool in elite communication and citizens' capacity to respond to it.

Overall, my findings highlight the potential of integrating classic theories on the role of groups in citizens' opinion formation with theories of the social functions of different types of actions and communication theories about the characteristics and functions of different forms of political frames and messages. My findings support that this approach opens up to a more qualified

and complete understanding of how and under what rhetorical conditions group rhetoric influences citizens' political opinions and emotional reactions.

Revisiting the classic puzzle

The studies of the effects of group rhetoric in the project also advance our understanding of the process of citizens' attitude formation and survey response. These contributions feed back into the classic discussion of the puzzle of the functional citizen and the debate about the competences of ordinary citizens. As described by Zaller & Feldman (1992: 579), '[t]he standard view is that when survey respondents say they favour X they are simply describing a pre-existing state of feeling favourably toward X'. Yet, as emphasized by Gibson & Gouws (2001: 1070-71) citizens do more than just recall opinions. Instead, Gibson & Gouws suggest, many citizens 'are actually *creating* opinions' (2001: 1071, original italics). In real-world politics this involves a process of 'figuring out how incidents in the political environment connect with attitudes and values' (2001: 1071). Gibson & Gouws urge that '[i]n order to understand the nature of mass opinion, it is therefore necessary to reproduce something of the structure of actual political controversies within our surveys' (2001: 1071). By incorporating different variations of the contextual information about the characteristics of target groups and of the type of rhetoric applied to construct them in real-world debate, my research reproduces and tests central structures of actual political controversies. In line with recent findings (e.g. Dancey & Goren 2010; Brader et al. 2008; Petersen et al. 2010a), the general pattern of the findings in the project suggests that ordinary citizens can be more responsive to the contours of political debate than implied by classic pessimistic accounts of citizen competences. My findings highlight that ordinary citizens do not mindlessly respond to group rhetoric. In line with recent studies of partisanship (Dancey & Goren 2010), social welfare (Petersen et al. 2010a) and anti-immigrant sentiments (Brader et al. 2008; Sniderman et al. 2004), but based on a broader set of groups and political issues, my findings indicate that citizens can respond in a meaningful way to changes in the information environment. My findings support that when elites debate political issues citizens can incorporate the specific contextual elements in the construction of a target group in their political attitudes. In a broader perspective, this suggests that attitudes are not simply 'looked up' but shaped in important ways by the concrete context citizens face.

Moreover, the findings also feed back into the classic discussion about citizens' competences by qualifying our understanding of group rhetoric as a persuasive tool: Specifically, the findings demonstrate that citizens can also

apply partisan source group cues to go against elite directions and to opt out of elite opinion leadership in its classic form. This is important because as emphasized by Wegener et al. (2004: 19) 'researchers have not generally asked questions about resistance that parallel the questions asked about persuasion'. Already Druckman (2001: 1061) emphasized that there had been an almost exclusive focus on successful framing attempts. The findings in this dissertation highlight the constraint on elite opinion leadership by demonstrating that group cues may trigger contrast effects in addition to the persuasive effects which have been emphasized in prior research (Aaroe forthcoming b: 18).

Empirical implications for our understanding of Danish public opinion

Empirically, the PhD project contributes to our understanding of the dynamic aspect of Danish public opinion formation and the effects of group rhetoric in a Western European context.

In the context of the increased professionalization of political communication we have limited knowledge of the breadth and nature of elite opinion leadership on public opinion in Denmark. In line with recent Danish research (e.g. Petersen et al. forthcoming; Slothuus 2010; Gaasholt & Togeby 1995: 164), my findings support that elite rhetoric can influence citizens' opinions. Prior research has demonstrated that public opinion formation in Denmark is shaped by principled values but also to some extent susceptible to arguments and new information (Gaasholt & Togeby 1995; Slothuus 2010). In line with recent studies, my findings add the contribution that opinion and attitude formation in Denmark also depends on the political elite sources accompanying political messages (see also Slothuus & de Vreese 2010; Andersen & Borre 2007; Petersen et al. 2010b) and the content of political elite communication (see also Petersen et al. 2010a). In the most recent volume from the Danish Election Study, Andersen & Borre (2007: 305) thus conclude that 'the perception of the political leaders did have some influence on the election result' (my translation from Danish). Likewise Slothuus (2010) demonstrates that a shift in party framing may shift public opinion. My results add that political elite group sources can also influence citizens' evaluations of specific viewpoints. Combined, this cluster of findings accentuates the capacity of elites to lead opinion in a Danish context.

The findings also contribute to the Danish research agenda on social groups and Danish public opinion. In 1999, the Danish Election Study

launched the debate about whether the movement away from past voting configurations is leading to a more simplified rationality and passivity or whether we observe an ability to form own impressions and opinions on political controversies in the electorate (Andersen et al. 1999: 11). In this debate, recent studies demonstrate that the static divisions in the conflict about New Politics, i.e. authoritarian-liberal values (e.g. Borre 1995), is anchored in educational groups (e.g. Stubager 2010, 2009, 2008). These findings accentuate that social group membership still has substantial influence on the structure of Danish public opinion. By linking the dynamic elite level to Danish public opinion, the present research demonstrates, in line with Petersen et al. (forthcoming, 2010a, 2010b, Slothuus 2010), that group rhetoric influences public opinion formation in Denmark. Combined, the findings suggest that citizens' membership of and orientations towards social groups continue to be a central structuring factor in Danish public opinion.

Importantly, however, the conclusions in this project also accentuate that citizens' responses to group rhetoric are nuanced and contingent on the broader construction of the target group in terms of which characteristics and reputations (Petersen et al. 2010a, forthcoming), behaviors and positions are made salient (Aaroe 2010a, 2010b) and on the choice of frame rhetoric (Aaroe 2010c, forthcoming a). This indicates that citizens respond to target group constructions in a reflected and active manner and that the processing of group rhetoric is sophisticated.

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English Summary

How and under what conditions does group rhetoric influence citizens' political opinions and evaluations? The cross-cutting theme of this PhD dissertation is to advance our understanding of this question.

Classic studies of public opinion have demonstrated that group categories are fundamental to how political issues are discussed and opinions are formed. Thus, group rhetoric about the group sponsoring or targeted by a given policy holds an essential position in current political debates and influences public opinion.

Yet, while extant research has demonstrated that the invocation of groups in political communication can affect citizens' opinions, we continue to have a limited knowledge of how and under what specific rhetorical conditions group rhetoric matters. Through a series of articles and papers this dissertation therefore investigates *how and under what conditions group rhetoric influences citizens' political opinions and emotional reactions to political controversies*. The general argument underlying the investigation of the research question is that we may gain a better understanding of the effects of group rhetoric through a better incorporation of the linkage between elite rhetoric and citizens' information processing systems.

Specifically, the dissertation advances our understanding of this question by illuminating the following three dimensions of the research question: First, I investigate how contextual information about the behavior and the position of the target group of a policy shapes the impact of group rhetoric. I develop a theoretical account of how cuing information about the conspicuousness of the manifestation of group membership and the public position of the target group members shape opinion. I demonstrate empirically that these factors have a central impact on citizens' opinions.

Second, the project investigates how the format of the way we talk about target groups shapes the impact of group rhetoric. Specifically, I demonstrate that citizens' emotional and attitudinal responses to political controversies depend on whether the target group of a policy is constructed in faceless thematic frames or in episodic frames featuring specific examples of the "lots" and stories of specific target group members.

Third, the dissertation investigates how information about which partisan group that is the source of a political message can influence opinions. The dissertation extends prior research on the persuasive effects of partisan group cues by demonstrating that citizens can also use partisan source

group cues to go against elite opinion leadership and move their attitudes away from the viewpoint advocated in political messages.

The dissertation is composed of five articles and papers (see the Preface of this publication) and the current report which provides an overview of the project.

Danish Summary/ Dansk resumé

Hvordan og under hvilke omstændigheder påvirker gruppe-retorik borgernes politiske holdninger og evalueringer? Det tværgående tema for denne ph.d.-afhandling er at fremme vores viden om dette spørgsmål.

Klassiske studier af politisk holdningsdannelse har vist, at gruppekategorier er fundamentale for, hvordan politiske emner bliver diskuteret og holdninger formet. Gruppe-retorik om hvilken gruppe, som er målet for en given politik, eller hvilken politisk gruppe, som er afsenderen til en given politik, indtager således en fundamental position i den offentlige debat og former borgernes politiske holdninger.

Mens tidligere forskning har vist, at konstruktionen af gruppe-kategorier i politisk kommunikation er et retorisk værktøj, der kan påvirke borgernes politiske holdninger, har vi fortsat en begrænset viden om, under hvilke specifikke retoriske omstændigheder gruppe-retorik især påvirker borgernes holdninger, og om hvornår den mister sin effekt. Gennem en serie på fem artikler og manuskripter undersøger denne ph.d.-afhandling derfor, *hvordan og under hvilke retoriske betingelser gruppe-retorik påvirker borgernes politiske holdninger og følelsesmæssige reaktioner til emner i den offentlige debat.* Det underliggende argument, som går på tværs af belysningen af forskningsspørgsmålet, er, at vi kan forbedre vores forståelse af gruppe-retorikkens effekter gennem en bedre indarbejdelse af forbindelsen mellem politisk eliteretorik og de psykologiske systemer, som borgerne bruger til at forstå og behandle den information, de møder i den offentlige debat.

Mere specifik belyser afhandlingen forskningsspørgsmålet gennem en afdækning af følgende tre dimensioner: For det først undersøger jeg, hvordan effekten af grupperetorik påvirkes af kontekstuel information om, hvilken adfærd og hvilken position målgruppen for en given politik har. Specifikt udvikler og tester jeg en teoretisk forklaring på, hvordan borgernes holdninger påvirkes af kontekstuel information om, hvor iøjnefaldende medlemmer af målgruppen viser deres gruppemedlemskab, og hvilken position målgruppemedlemmerne har.

For det andet undersøger projektet også, hvordan effekten af grupperetorik formes af det retoriske format, som målgruppen for en given politik beskrives i. De empiriske analyser viser, at borgernes følelser og holdninger til politiske emner påvirkes af, om målgruppen til en politik italesættes i ansigts-

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løse tematiske frames eller gennem episodiske frames, der fokuserer på konkrete personers historie og eksempel.

For det tredje undersøger afhandlingen også, hvordan information om, hvilken politisk gruppe, som er kilde til et politisk budskab, kan påvirke borgernes holdninger. Afhandlingen viser, at borgerne også kan anvende sådanne cues til at fravælge eliternes klassiske opinionslederskab og flytte deres holdninger bort fra de synspunkter, som fremføres i politiske budskaber.

Foruden denne sammenfatning består afhandlingen af fem artikler og manuskripter (se 'Preface' i denne publikation).