The strategies and processes of attitude formation and public participation

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Strategien und Prozesse bei der Meinungsbildung und öffentlichen Partizipation. (Teilprojekt im Rahmen des Nationalen Schwerpunktprogramms NCCR-Projektes "Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century")

Summary / Zusammenfassung
Recent developments in several European countries have demonstrated the high volatility of public opinion as well as the low involvement of individuals in the course of political campaigns. Zaller (1992), for example, acknowledges that most people "tune out" during political campaigns. Furthermore, most individuals hold rather instable and ambivalent attitudes towards most policy issues (Kerkhof 1999). These conditions raise the potential of strategic communication to exert more than a “minimal” impact. We therefore aim to reconsider the “minimal effects model” and to study the conditions and processes of opinion formation and change. The research aim of this project is twofold: First, we examine the processes of attitude formation and change in the course of political campaigns, and second, we focus on the transmission of political information through the mass media in general, and the emergence of knowledge gaps throughout the campaign in particular. We therefore build on theories of attitude formation and change on the one hand and on theories of the construction, distribution and storage of political knowledge across social groups on the other. The study is based on several panel-surveys collected in the course of political campaigns. Linking the media consumption of voters to their changing knowledge, attitudes and political choices will permit an analysis of the media’s influence on individuals’ political opinion formation.

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http://www.nccr-democracy.uzh.ch/nccr/index_html

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