
Editorial

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In this issue, in addition to original articles by Klaus Brummer on Germany's participation in the Kosovo war in 1999 and by Mathijs van Leeuwen, Willemijn Verkoren and Freerk Boedeltje on the 'liberal peace' debate, we pay special attention to the notion of 'diploma democracy', advanced by Mark Bovens and Anchrit Wille (2010) in a recent issue of *Acta Politica* (see also Bovens and Wille, 2011). Building on long-standing research in political science that has consistently observed a robust and positive relationship between education and political participation (for example, Almond and Verba, 1963; Verba *et al.*, 1995), as well as a more recent body of scholarly work that has identified an emerging cultural conflict dimension in Western democracies (for example, Kriesi *et al.*, 2008), they identify a so-called education gap in Dutch politics. Bovens and Wille argue that well-educated citizens are significantly more likely to engage in various forms of participation, and that new forms of participatory and deliberative democracy, as well as new modes of participation and activism made possible by the rise of modern communication technologies, give disproportionate access to those with higher levels of educational attainment. Moreover, the discrepancies in terms of descriptive participation have important consequences for political representation, if only because of the disparities in the policy preferences of different educational groups. Their argument has clearly struck a chord within the academic community, and beyond, with some scholars, however, questioning some of their findings and conclusions. In this issue of *Acta Politica*, we publish two of those critical reviews and have invited Bovens and Wille to respond to the critiques they raised.

Hakhverdian and colleagues take Bovens and Wille up on their longitudinal claim, that is, that the political gap between different educational groups has increased over time. Focusing on different forms of political participation and political trust, and using time-series data from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (1971–2010), they conclude that there is no evidence of the gap between groups with different educational backgrounds increasing with time. Most of the existing differences have tended to remain stable, while the discrepancies in political interest between the most and least educated has actually diminished. While Hakhverdian and colleagues largely concur with Bovens and Wille that education is and remains an important determinant of political behaviour, Waterborg and colleagues take a slightly different view. Using the same data as

Bovens and Wille but a different methodology, they arrive at the conclusion that education does in fact not sufficiently explain the rise of a new conflict dimension in Dutch politics. They basically find no substantial differences in the political preferences between groups with different educational backgrounds. Although there may be some discrepancies in terms of the intensity of preferences, with the lower educated tending to use the extreme values of the scale more than the higher educated, the direction of preferences is by and large similar between different groups. Therefore, there would appear to be little danger of over- or underrepresentation of political interests.

In their rejoinder, Bovens and Wille offer a rebuttal of most of these criticisms, both on substantive and methodological grounds. We suspect that their riposte does not conclusively settle the debate and that the last word on this important issue has yet to be spoken. We would like to thank the authors for their contributions to this lively and constructive debate and hope that *Acta Politica* may continue to serve as the forum for the exchange of original and innovative academic ideas.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to announce a change in the editorial team. Janine van der Woude is stepping down as the Editors' Secretary in order to take up new challenges elsewhere. She will be replaced by Seeta Autar, who works at the Knowledge Institute for Urban Society, and the Department of Political Science and Research Methods at the University of Twente. We want to express our gratitude to Janine for all her hard work on *Acta Politica* and welcome Seeta on board as a new member of the editorial team.

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