

This is a pre print version of the following article:

Perceived Disagreement and Heterogeneity in Social Networks: Distinct Effects on Political Participation / Guidetti, Margherita; Cavazza, Nicoletta; Graziani, Anna Rita. - In: THE JOURNAL OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY. - ISSN 0022-4545. - 156:2(2016), pp. 222-242. [10.1080/00224545.2015.1095707]

Terms of use:

The terms and conditions for the reuse of this version of the manuscript are specified in the publishing policy. For all terms of use and more information see the publisher's website.

24/04/2026 23:58

(Article begins on next page)

Perceived disagreement and heterogeneity in social networks: distinct effects on political participation

Journal:	<i>The Journal of Social Psychology</i>
Manuscript ID:	17-14-325.R2
Manuscript Type:	Article of Full Length
Key Words:	citizenship behavior, social interaction, others

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

To cite this article: Margherita Guidetti, Nicoletta Cavazza & Anna Rita Graziani (2015): Perceived Disagreement and Heterogeneity in Social Networks: Distinct Effects on Political Participation, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, DOI: 10.1080/00224545.2015.1095707

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2015.1095707>

Published online: 21 Sep 2015.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Perceived disagreement and heterogeneity in social networks:
Distinct effects on political participation

Margherita Guidetti, Nicoletta Cavazza, and Anna Rita Graziani

University of Modena and Reggio Emilia

Corresponding author: Margherita Guidetti - Dipartimento di Comunicazione ed Economia,
Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia, Viale Allegri, 9 - 42121 Reggio Emilia, Italia.
margherita.guidetti@unimore.it

Acknowledgements: This work was supported by the Italian Council of University Research [grant number Cofin-PRIN 2010943X4L_005]. We wish to express our gratitude to Alberto Roverato for the statistical advice.

1
2
3 1 Perceived disagreement and heterogeneity in social networks:4
5 2 Distinct effects on political participation6
7 3
8
9 4 Abstract

10
11 5 Although the coexistence of conflicting opinions in society is the very core of democracy, people's
12 6 tendency to avoid conflict could keep them away from political discussion and participation. On the
13 7 other hand, being exposed to diverse political views could motivate citizens to participate. We
14 8 conducted secondary analyses on two 2013 ITANES (ITALian National Election Studies)
15 9 probability samples in order to test the hypotheses that perceived network disagreement (between
16 10 an individual and her/his discussion partners) and heterogeneity (among discussants holding
17 11 different political opinions), exert independent and opposite effects on political participation
18 12 through motivation and knowledge. Results converged in showing that disagreement dampened,
19 13 while heterogeneity encouraged, political participation (voting, propensity to abstain in future,
20 14 offline and online activism, and timing of vote decision) by decreasing or increasing, respectively,
21 15 political interest and, in turn, knowledge.

22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32 17 Keywords: social network, heterogeneity, disagreement, political discussion, political participation,
33 18 voting.

34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43 19
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 1 Perceived disagreement and heterogeneity in social networks:

4
5 2 Distinct effects on political participation

6
7 3 People holding and expressing contrasting opinions in social groups, and across society as a
8
9 4 whole, is the hallmark of democracy. According to cognitive consistency theories (Heider, 1946;
10
11 5 Festinger, 1957), however, people are conflict avoidant and, in fact, the idea that diversity in
12
13 6 discussion networks depresses turnout and, in general, dampens political participation is widespread
14
15 7 both in the common sense and among scholars (e.g., Mutz, 2006). Studies on the link between
16
17 8 networks' political diversity and participation actually obtained inconsistent results (e.g., Gimpel,
18
19 9 Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003; Mutz, 2002a; Scheufele, Nisbett, & Brossard, 2003). However, this
20
21 10 inconsistency can be unfolded by taking into account that those findings concerned various forms of
22
23 11 diversity (e.g., disagreement or heterogeneity) and different levels of analysis (from close
24
25 12 relationships to electoral districts).

26
27
28
29 13 Drawing on the literature linking social network diversity and participation, we
30
31 14 distinguished between network disagreement (between the individual and her/his discussion
32
33 15 partners) and network heterogeneity (among individual's discussion partners holding different
34
35 16 political opinions) and hypothesized that both factors independently affect political participation. In
36
37 17 addition, we expected that perceived disagreement would decrease participation by weakening
38
39 18 citizens' motivation (i.e., their interest in politics), whereas perceived heterogeneity would stimulate
40
41 19 participation by increasing interest in politics and political knowledge. Finally, while previous
42
43 20 studies focused either on participants' main discussants or on their whole municipality or county,
44
45 21 we present two studies adopting an in-between level of analysis, by considering the broad set of
46
47 22 relations experienced in the different sub-networks to which individuals belong.

51 23 **Social networks and Political Participation**

52
53
54 24 Citizens' participation is essential for the maintenance of democracy. Therefore, to
55
56 25 understand why people vote and participate in politics, and why they do not, is a fundamental task
57
58 26 for scholars. In synthesis, we can identify three classes of factors explaining political participation
59
60

1 (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995): Individual opportunities (time, money and civic skills),
2 psychological engagement (motivation), and contextual opportunities to be mobilized to politics
3 (being involved by others, such as leaders, activists, parties or media).

4 Though mobilization has been mostly operationalized through macro-environmental factors,
5 such as campaign spending and party or candidate contacting, involvement in informal political
6 discussion has also been shown to mobilize to politics (e.g., Leighley, 1990; Kenny, 1992; Putnam,
7 2000; McClurg, 2003), and mobilization via social networks has been recognized as one of the
8 major factors promoting turnout (e.g., Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady
9 1995). In addition, the size of social networks is positively associated with participation: the greater
10 the number of people one discusses with, the more likely s/he is to engage in political activities,
11 particularly when conversations concern politics (Leighley, 1990; McClurg, 2003, 2006a, 2006b;
12 Pattie & Johnston, 2009). However, the wider a social network is, the more likely its members will
13 disagree with each other (Huckfeldt, Mendez, & Osborn, 2004b; Pattie & Johnston, 2009), and
14 disagreement is supposed to have detrimental consequences for participation.

15 **Paradoxical Consequences of Conflict Avoidance**

16 Both liberal (Mill, 1974; Held, 1987) and deliberative (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996)
17 theories of democracy emphasize the need for different opinions to be held, expressed and resolved
18 among citizens. However, Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory (1957) and Heider's balance
19 theory (1946) acknowledged, and more recent research (Cooper & Stone, 2000; Matz & Wood,
20 2005) confirmed, that interpersonal disagreement is a source of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive
21 consistency theories also claim that individuals are conflict avoidant and motivated to reduce the
22 psychological discomfort associated with dissonance whenever possible. In the interpersonal
23 domain, this can be done in different ways (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995): People can adapt to
24 others' views (acquiescence or silence), persuade others, reinterpret what others say to reconcile it
25 with their own beliefs (e.g., misperception, false consensus), or avoid political discussion and/or

1
2
3 1 discussants holding opinions conflicting with their own (selective exposure). Hence, dissonance
4
5 2 reduction yields two paradoxes for lasting democracy.

6
7 3 First, the conflict avoidance tendency seems to hinder disagreement and result in politically
8
9 4 homogeneous networks (Downs, 1957; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944), thus undermining
10
11 5 democracy. Indeed, individuals' lifestyle choices often bring them into unanimous social groups
12
13 6 (Cavazza & Corbetta, 2015; Huckfeldt, 2007; Mutz, 2006). However, the survival of disagreement
14
15 7 within communication networks has been documented by several election studies conducted both in
16
17 8 the US and in other countries (e.g., Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Huckfeldt, Beck, Dalton, & Levine,
18
19 9 1995; Huckfeldt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2004a; Ikeda & Huckfeldt, 2001; Richardson & Beck, 2007;
20
21 10 Schmitt-Beck, 2003), suggesting that this is the rule rather than the exception.

22
23 11 According to Huckfeldt and colleagues (2004a), political disagreement can survive because
24
25 12 each person's communication network consists of different sub-networks (e.g., family, friends and
26
27 13 colleagues) that rarely overlap: each person can thus be supported in her/his view in a sub-network,
28
29 14 while holding the minority opinion in another sub-network. Therefore, while agreement seems to
30
31 15 prevail within sub-networks, disagreement is socially sustained between the individuals connecting
32
33 16 different sub-networks.

34
35 17 The second paradox is that if people avoid conflict, they devalue the object of conflict, and
36
37 18 thus escape politics which, in fact, has been often equated with conflict (e.g., Fiorina & Peterson,
38
39 19 1998). Indeed, Ulbig and Funk (1999) found that the more conflict avoidant citizens are, the less
40
41 20 they participate in political activities that imply some degree of conflict, such as protest, campaign
42
43 21 support and discussion. Looking back, the idea that disagreement dampens participation originates
44
45 22 in Lazarsfeld and colleagues' research (1944): They found that cross-pressured people (i.e., those
46
47 23 with contrasting affiliation, such as wealthy Protestants) were less likely to participate. More recent
48
49 24 studies (Mutz, 2002a) confirmed that cross-cutting discussions decreased political participation,
50
51 25 because they increased both intrapersonal ambivalence and interpersonal accountability. However,
52
53 26 if democracy needs open dialogue with all opinions expressed, but this leads citizens to withdrawal
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1 from politics – either to avoid dissonance or to preserve social harmony – then democracy is
2 undermined. In sum, deliberative democracy seems to oppose participatory democracy (Mutz,
3 2006).

4 A more careful examination of this literature, however, suggests that the picture is far more
5 complex than it appears, since inconsistent results emerged from different approaches and
6 operationalizations of concepts. Indeed, most studies on this topic focused either on a few
7 participants' discussants or on the whole community (such as a municipality or county) to which
8 participants belong. The first line of research used individual-level data and usually measured
9 perceived disagreement between respondents and up to five (usually three or four) persons with
10 whom s/he discusses either political or important matters. The second approach used community-
11 level data on political preferences and assessed heterogeneity in respondents' county or
12 metropolitan area.

13 **Disagreement and Participation**

14 At the individual level, although some empirical works indicated that disagreement
15 discourages participation (Bélanger & Eagles, 2007; Mutz, 2002a; Mutz, 2006; Hopman, 2012), all
16 the possible results have actually emerged: some scholars did not find any effect of disagreement on
17 participation (Huckfeldt et al., 2004a, 2004b; Knoke, 1990; Nieuwbeerta & Flap, 2000; Nir, 2005);
18 others found that the strength and direction of this relationship are moderated by a number of
19 factors, such as characteristics of the network (McClurg 2006a) and the individuals (Djupe,
20 McClurg, & Sokhey, 2010; Lee, Kwak, & Campbell, 2013), aspects of the broader social context
21 (McClurg, 2006b), degree of disagreement (Bello, 2012; Nir, 2011), measures of disagreement and
22 forms of participation (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Klofstad, Sokhey, & McClurg, 2013; Lee, 2012;
23 Pattie & Johnston, 2009). Finally, other studies even found a positive effect of disagreement on
24 participation (Kwak, Williams, Wang, & Lee, 2005; Leighley, 1990; McLeod et al., 1999b;
25 Scheufele et al., 2003; Scheufele, Nisbet, Brossard, & Nisbet, 2004; Scheufele, Hardy, Brossard,
26 Waismel-Manor, & Nisbet, 2006).

1
2
3 1 A more stringent analysis of these studies suggests that their inconsistent findings could be
4
5 2 due, at least in part, to differences in the conceptualization and operationalization of network
6
7 3 disagreement. Discussion networks characterized by disagreement have been labelled with different
8
9 4 terms, such as “heterogeneous” (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Scheufele et al., 2004, 2006), “cross-
10
11 5 cutting” (Mutz, 2002a, 2002b, 2006), “ambivalent” (Nir, 2005), and “diverse” (Huckfeldt &
12
13 6 Sprague, 1995; Marsden, 1987). These expressions have been used as synonyms denoting a (certain
14
15 7 degree of) discrepancy between an individual and her/his discussion partners. In order to measure it,
16
17 8 most researchers used the “name generator” method, in which participants are asked to name up to
18
19 9 five (usually three or four) persons with whom they talk about either important matters or politics,
20
21 10 and then to indicate their political views. The degree of disagreement in the network is then
22
23 11 estimated by comparing respondents’ opinions with their perception of their discussants’ opinions—
24
25 12 for instance, as summed discrepancies between their vote preferences, or average perceived
26
27 13 disagreement in political attitudes.

28
29
30
31
32 14 By focusing on those few discussants, scholars disregarded the broader social context in
33
34 15 which individuals are embedded, and the overall exposure they have to diverse political views
35
36 16 (Baldassarri, 2010), thus underestimating the actual level of disagreement (Sokhey & Djupe, 2014),
37
38 17 hidden by selective exposure of the main discussion partners. In addition, the exclusive assessment
39
40 18 of disagreement with a few discussants is probably reductive, being unable to capture the complex
41
42 19 assortment of diverse opinions held in each person’s network.

43
44
45 20 Bello (2012) and Nir (2011) argued that the problem is the linear assessment of
46
47 21 disagreement and actually found curvilinear effects with some disagreement to be beneficial, but
48
49 22 complete disagreement to be detrimental, for participation. Eveland and Hively (2009) proposed to
50
51 23 distinguish between disagreement and heterogeneity: While the former indicates a dissimilarity
52
53 24 between the ego and the alters, the latter implies a diversity among the alters, irrespective of the
54
55 25 ego’s position.

56 57 58 26 **Heterogeneity and Participation**

59
60

1
2
3 1 While most individual-level studies mainly looked at participants' disagreement with a few
4
5 2 discussants, some of them (Kwak et al., 2005; McLeod et al., 1999b, 2003; Scheufele et al., 2003,
6
7 3 2004, 2006) assessed the frequency of political conversation with people that diverge from the
8
9 4 respondents as regards to gender, ethnicity and ideology. These studies, hence, adopted a more
10
11 5 inclusive perspective in terms of both the definition of the network and the operationalization of
12
13 6 what their authors called "heterogeneity" or "diversity". They actually found a positive association
14
15 7 between diversity and participation.
16
17

18
19 8 The second line of research, instead, adopted a structural-level perspective and measured
20
21 9 heterogeneity or diversity looking at the distribution of partisanship or ideology in a respondent's
22
23 10 county, metropolitan area or community. For instance, Gimpel et al. (2003) found that adolescents'
24
25 11 political engagement increased as a function of their community political diversity.
26
27

28
29 12 In his dual motivation theory of public engagement, Campbell (2004, 2006) argued, and
30
31 13 found, that political heterogeneity discourages civic participation (including volunteer activity or
32
33 14 community service), but fosters political participation (i.e., a form of collective action aimed at
34
35 15 influencing public policy). What is more interesting are the mechanisms expected to drive these
36
37 16 opposite effects. Campbell proposed that civic participation is higher in homogeneous environments
38
39 17 because people share civic norms and care about others' expectations and judgments. In contrast,
40
41 18 political participation is rooted in conflict and should blow up in heterogeneous places, where
42
43 19 people feel that their interests are threatened and thus participate in order to defend or advance
44
45 20 them.
46
47

48
49 21 Various pieces of literature suggest that network heterogeneity is stimulating as it increases
50
51 22 information seeking and knowledge. Classic pluralist accounts of democracy suggest that diversity
52
53 23 should mobilize people to represent the different opinions at stake (Dahl, 1989). In addition,
54
55 24 deliberative democracy theories contend that being confronted with different views motivates
56
57 25 individuals to carefully re-evaluate the debated issues and learn about challenging ideas (Knight &
58
59
60

1
2
3 1 Johnson, 1994; McPhee, Smith, & Ferguson, 1963), thus promoting well-informed and firmly held
4
5 2 opinions (Fishkin, 1995; Fearon, 1998).

6
7 3 Empirical work confirmed that heterogeneity should provide citizens with both the
8
9 4 motivation and the ability to take part in politics. Indeed, some individual-level studies found a
10
11 5 positive association between network diversity, on the one hand, and citizens' news-media use
12
13 6 (McLeod, Sotirovic, & Holbert, 1998; Nisbet, Moy, & Scheufele, 2003; Scheufele et al., 2004,
14
15 7 2006) and discussion frequency (Bello, 2012) on the other hand, suggesting that heterogeneity
16
17 8 encourages participation since it prompts information seeking and interest in politics. This
18
19 9 heightened interest should, in turn, enhance citizens' political knowledge and understanding (Price,
20
21 10 Cappella, & Nir, 2002; Mutz, 2002b; Scheufele et al., 2004, 2006). Also at a structural level,
22
23 11 Gimpel et al. (2003) found a positive association between the partisan diversity of the community
24
25 12 and adolescents' tolerance, political knowledge, frequency of political discussion and political
26
27 13 efficacy – all important elements in fostering participation later in life.

28
29
30
31 14 A further clue came from an experimental socio-psychological study (Green, Visser, &
32
33 15 Tetlock, 2000) investigating how people cope with accountability cross-pressures. Accountability,
34
35 16 the social pressure to justify one's views to others, has been shown to influence individuals' ways
36
37 17 of thinking (Tetlock, 1992). When those others hold multiple or conflicting positions, and the
38
39 18 individual is "caught in the middle", the situation is even more complex. Green and colleagues
40
41 19 showed that the participants that were accountable to conflicting constituencies with strong
42
43 20 arguments were more integratively complex in their consideration of an issue (i.e., they recognize
44
45 21 alternative viewpoints, make connections among them, and identify trade-offs) than those
46
47 22 participants that were non-accountable, or accountable to unanimous constituencies. In other words,
48
49 23 these results suggest that competition among different viewpoints is cognitively stimulating:
50
51 24 expecting to confront with people holding conflicting views motivates individuals to choose high
52
53 25 cognitive effort strategies, since an obvious solution is not immediately accessible, and needs to be
54
55 26 reached through effortful thinking.
56
57
58
59
60

1 Overview and Hypotheses

2 Summing up what we have learned from the different literatures briefly reviewed above, we
3 can outline the objectives of the present work. First, individual-level studies mostly addressed the
4 divergence between respondents' opinions and those of their main three or four discussion partners,
5 as perceived by respondents, neglecting both the broader social context and the complex pattern of
6 political differences among their sub-networks. This line of research elicited inconsistent results
7 regarding the link between disagreement and political participation – probably due to different
8 operationalizations of disagreement and definitions of network. Indeed, the studies adopting a more
9 inclusive view highlighted a positive association between diversity and political participation.

10 Broadening the perspective, structural-level studies focused on the heterogeneity of political
11 preferences held in citizens' whole communities and found a positive effect on political
12 participation. However, the diversity of opinions held in an individual's county or district is
13 probably experienced through the many people s/he is in contact with (rather than through the three
14 persons s/he discusses politics with). Huckfeldt et al. (2004) also suggest that disagreement is more
15 likely to survive between sub-groups than within them, hence this level of analysis may be more
16 able to capture the degree of disagreement and heterogeneity actually perceived by citizens.

17 Drawing on Eveland and Hively (2009), Nir (2011), and Bello (2012), we anticipated that
18 people need support for their opinions, but in a stimulating context where different views coexist.
19 Therefore, we separately assessed both perceived disagreement and heterogeneity in social
20 networks, and expected that they exert independent and opposite effects on political participation.

21 Based on cognitive consistency theories (Heider, 1946; Festinger, 1957) and individual-level
22 evidence of the negative association between disagreement and participation (e.g., Mutz, 2006), we
23 hypothesized that disagreement deters political participation (Hp1). On the contrary, based on
24 democracy theories (e.g., Fearon, 1998), and on individual- (e.g., Scheufele et al., 2006) and
25 structural-level (e.g., Campbell, 2004) evidence of the positive association between diversity and
26 participation, we hypothesized that heterogeneity stimulates participation (Hp2).

1
2
3 1 In addition, we tried to identify the different processes accounting for these relations. As far
4
5 2 as disagreement is concerned, we reasoned that citizens can lose interest in politics, in order to
6
7 3 reduce cognitive dissonance, when they are surrounded by people holding opinions that are
8
9 4 contrasting with their owns: Indeed, devaluing the object of controversy and getting away from it
10
11 5 has been proposed as one of the strategies for avoiding conflict (Festinger, 1957; Hopman, 2012).
12
13 6 On the other hand, as suggested in the previous section, network heterogeneity has been shown to
14
15 7 foster political interest and knowledge that, in turn, are positively associated with various forms of
16
17 8 political participation (e.g., Inglehart, 1979; McLeod et al., 1999a).

18
19
20 9 Therefore, we expected that disagreement would decrease political participation mediated by
21
22 10 political interest (Hp3), whereas heterogeneity should increase participation mediated by both
23
24 11 political interest and knowledge (Hp4). The effect of political interest on participation could be
25
26 12 direct or indirect through knowledge (see Figure 1).

27
28
29 13 Since previous research has shown that interest in politics and political participation vary as
30
31 14 a function of a series of socio-demographic and political factors, in order to detect the net
32
33 15 contribution of disagreement and network heterogeneity, we controlled for participants' age,
34
35 16 gender, education level, social class¹ and political efficacy in all of the subsequent analyses.

36
37
38 17 In order to test our hypotheses, we conducted secondary analyses on two ITANES (ITALian
39
40 18 National Election Studies) databases: the 2013 Rolling Cross Section (RCS) two-wave panel
41
42 19 survey, and the 2013 post-election survey (for a complete and detailed description of the general
43
44 20 survey goals, designs, questionnaire construction, sampling and weighting procedures see Vezzoni,
45
46 21 2014; for the descriptive results see Itanes, 2013). ITANES is a research group carrying on a

53
54
55 ¹ Following Goldthorpe's theory (1980) applied to the Italian case by Cobalti and Schizzerotto (1994), social class
56 was coded into four categories according to the participants' profession, or the previous work of those retired, or
57 the bread-winner work of students or housewives: upper class (entrepreneurs, professionals, managers), non-
58 manual workers (semi-professionals, technicians, routine employees in administration and commerce), petty
59 bourgeoisie (small proprietors, artisans, shopkeepers and farmers, with or without employees), and manual workers
60 (skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled manual workers in all sectors of activity). We entered three dummy variables
into the models, with manual workers as the reference category.

1
2
3 1 longstanding Italian tradition of electoral research, which began in 1968 with the first collection of
4
5 2 data (www.itanes.org).
6

7
8 3 Rather than using the “name generator” method, the ITANES surveys we analyzed
9
10 4 employed a recently introduced (Baldassarri, 2010; Pattie & Johnston, 2009) measurement of
11
12 5 political discussion networks. For our purpose, we examined a set of questions tapping the
13
14 6 perceived proportion of political agreement participants find in some of the different groups to
15
16 7 which they belong. It is worth noting that the data were not gathered directly from respondents’
17
18 8 networks, thus we do not truly know if the persons in those networks actually agree or disagree with
19
20 9 participants’ political inclination. Indeed, as in most research on this topic, we measured the
21
22 10 perceived rather than the actual disagreement and heterogeneity in participants’ networks. In this
23
24 11 way, disagreement is probably underreported and underestimated. However, in our opinion, this is
25
26 12 not a problem, but even an advantage, given our purpose of investigating the individual
27
28 13 consequences of disagreement and heterogeneity, which can occur only when they are recognized
29
30 14 and experienced by respondents.
31
32

33
34 15 Before proceeding with the test of our hypotheses, it seems useful to provide some
35
36 16 contextual information. The 2013 general election was particular because it came in the middle of a
37
38 17 deep economic crisis, recession and social tensions, with an overall public opinion climate
39
40 18 characterized by extreme political dissatisfaction and lack of trust in the party system as well as in
41
42 19 democratic institutions (Vezzoni, 2014). It followed the so-called “technocratic government”
43
44 20 finalized to deal rapidly with the dramatic economic problems, and led by Mario Monti who
45
46 21 resigned after 15 months of office. This election was characterized by a diversified and new
47
48 22 political supply, with four main coalitions (and related leaders) contesting each other at the voting
49
50 23 booth. Among them, the Five Stars Movement, guided by the former comedian Beppe Grillo, ran
51
52 24 for the first time and unexpectedly became the second most voted party. This situation may have
53
54 25 made more difficult the voting decision, in fact 26% of the respondents to the RCS post-election
55
56 26 survey reported they decided with certainty for whom to vote in the week preceding the election,
57
58
59
60

1 while 9% decided in the booth. In addition, overall voter turnout decreased from 80.5%, in 2008, to
2 75.2%.

3 Study 1

4 Data and Measures

5 For the first study, we used data from the 2013 ITANES RCS two-wave panel survey,
6 administered via Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) system to a probability sample of
7 3,008 Italian electors. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in
8 the study. As the general election took place on 24-25 February, the pre-election questionnaires
9 were filled in from the 5th of January to the 23rd of February, and the post-election questionnaires
10 were filled in from the 26th of March to the 8th of April.

11 For our purposes, we focused on two questions (included in the first section of the pre-
12 election questionnaire) tapping the proportion of political agreement participants perceived in their
13 family and friendship networks. The items read as follows: “Think of the members of your family /
14 your friends. How many of them have political views similar to yours?”. Participants answered on a
15 7-point scale with the following options: *None of them (0%), A few of them (around 10%), Some of*
16 *them (around 25%), About half of them (around 50%), Many of them (around 75%), Most of them*
17 *(around 90%), All of them (100%),* plus the *I don’t know* response (chosen by 3.8% of respondents
18 for the family members item and 6.1% for the friends item), which was subsequently recoded into
19 missing.

20 We computed our predictors from those two items. First, the response scales were recoded
21 as proportions of disagreement ranging from 0 to 1: for instance, when participants selected the
22 answer *Some of them (around 25%),* we equated that level of disagreement to .75. We then
23 computed the mean of these proportions as *perceived disagreement* score and their absolute
24 difference as *perceived heterogeneity* score. Both scores range from 0 to 1 and were computed only
25 for participants who indicated the level of agreement encountered in both networks.

1
2
3 1 Dependent variables were indicators of political participation. As in most research on
4
5 2 political engagement (e.g., Hopman, 2012; Huckfeldt et al., 2004b; Mutz, 2002a, 2004; Nir, 2005,
6
7 3 2011; Pattie & Johnston, 2009), we first considered whether respondents reported, in the post-
8
9 4 election survey, that they had voted in the previous general election (dummy variable). However,
10
11 5 this variable is oddly distributed since Italian turnout is quite high, compared with other Western
12
13 6 countries, and the turnout question over-estimated actual participation in the vote. Indeed, 91.4% of
14
15 7 respondents declared that they did vote. We thus considered a further indicator of electoral
16
17 8 engagement, namely the *propensity to abstain*. In the pre-election questionnaire, a question placed
18
19 9 at the end of a scale measuring the propensity to vote for each party asked “How likely is it that in
20
21 10 the future you will abstain from voting?” (answer from 0 = *not likely at all* to 10 = *very likely*).
22
23

24
25 11 Besides self-reported voting and propensity to abstain, we also computed an index of *online*
26
27 12 *political activism*² as the sum of six items measuring the occurrence of the following behaviors in
28
29 13 the previous week: visiting political parties’ or candidates’ websites, visiting parties’ or candidates’
30
31 14 social network profiles/pages, sharing campaign-related contents on social networks, taking part in
32
33 15 online discussions about political issues or the electoral campaign, taking part in a political event
34
35 16 after being invited online, subscribing to a mailing list or activating RSS feeds to be updated on the
36
37 17 campaign. These items were presented in the pre-election questionnaire. We computed a summative
38
39 18 score of online political activism by summing the number of participatory behaviors enacted in the
40
41 19 previous week (range 0-6).
42
43
44

45 20 Finally, though not directly concerning participation, we also included the *timing of vote*
46
47 21 *decision* as a further dependent variable. Following previous studies considering this dependent
48
49 22 variable (e.g., Mutz, 2002a; Nir, 2005, 2011), we reasoned that deciding late should make
50
51 23 participation in the campaign activities unlikely. In the post-election questionnaire, respondents
52
53 24 were asked “Could you please tell me when you decided with certainty for whom to vote in the last
54
55

56
57 ² While access to Internet was quite widespread in Italy, with 76% of the population older than 2 years having
58 access to the web in February 2013 (Audiweb data), the actual use of internet is slightly lower. Indeed, according
59 to Eurostat, 58% of Italians aged 16-74 used internet at least once in the three months preceding their 2013
60 survey.

1
2
3 1 general election?”. They answered on a 4-point scale where 1 = *In the booth, while I was voting*, 2 =
4
5 2 *In the week preceding the election*, 3 = *A few weeks before the election*, 4 = *Much earlier*.

6
7 3 Since the items assessing factual knowledge were placed in the post-election questionnaire,
8
9 4 while some of the dependent variables were assessed in the pre-election questionnaire, we could not
10
11 5 include knowledge as a potential mediator in Study 1. Therefore, in this first study we could only
12
13 6 partially test the expected model, including *interest in politics* as the only intervening factor. This
14
15 7 was computed as the mean of three items measuring the general interest in politics, the frequency of
16
17 8 conversations about politics in the previous week and the interest in the election results ($\alpha = .72$). As
18
19 9 different response scales were associated to these items, we normalized the ratings before
20
21 10 computing the mean, thus the variable ranged from 0 to 1.

22
23
24
25 11 In order to obtain an index of *political efficacy* to be used as a control variable, we averaged
26
27 12 the degree of agreement with the two statements: “People like me don’t have any say in what the
28
29 13 government does” and “Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like
30
31 14 me can’t really understand what’s going on” (response scale from 1 = *Not at all true* to 4 =
32
33 15 *completely true*). The scores were reversed before computing the mean ($\alpha = .49$; $r = .33$, $p < .001$).

34 35 36 16 **Results**

37
38 17 Table 1 reports correlations among the measures, along with descriptive statistics. Perceived
39
40 18 heterogeneity was positively correlated with interest in politics but not with the dependent variables,
41
42 19 whereas perceived disagreement was correlated in the expected direction with interest, voting,
43
44 20 propensity to abstain and early decision, but not with online activism. Perceived heterogeneity and
45
46 21 disagreement were positively correlated, probably because in this study we could only consider two
47
48 22 social contexts. Interest was correlated in the expected direction with all the dependent variables.

49
50
51 23 In order to test our hypotheses, we ran a mediational analysis on each dependent variable
52
53 24 using PROCESS, the SPSS macro provided by Hayes (2013). We tested four Models 4, setting
54
55 25 5,000 bootstrap resamples, in order to estimate the effects of network heterogeneity and
56
57 26 disagreement on our dependent variables directly and indirectly, through interest (see Figure 1). As
58
59
60

1
2
3 1 stated above, we controlled for participants' age, gender, education level, social class and political
4
5 2 efficacy. Results are displayed in Table 2.

6
7 3 Beginning with the total effects, perceived heterogeneity significantly lowered, and
8
9 4 perceived disagreement marginally increased, the propensity to abstain. In addition, perceived
10
11 5 heterogeneity significantly fostered, while disagreement discouraged, the earliness of decision.
12
13 6 Finally, voting was marginally more likely at increasing levels of perceived heterogeneity, and
14
15 7 significantly less likely at increasing levels of disagreement. Online activism, in contrast, was not
16
17 8 affected by the predictors.

18
19
20 9 Concerning the indirect effects, perceived heterogeneity significantly increased, while
21
22 10 disagreement decreased, participants' interest in politics, even after controlling for each other and
23
24 11 for the covariates. In turn, interest in politics made voting significantly more likely and increased
25
26 12 online activism, fostered early decision and decreased propensity to abstain. More importantly, the
27
28 13 95% confidence intervals reported in the last four rows of Table 2 indicated that both perceived
29
30 14 heterogeneity and disagreement in social networks exerted significant indirect effects on all of the
31
32 15 dependent variables through interest – the former encouraging, and the latter discouraging, voting,
33
34 16 early decision and online activism, and, respectively, reducing and increasing the propensity to
35
36 17 abstain.

37
38
39 18 As the total effects of perceived heterogeneity on voting, propensity to abstain and early
40
41 19 decision, and those of perceived disagreement on voting and propensity to abstain became non-
42
43 20 significant after entering the mediators into the regressions, we can affirm that those effects are
44
45 21 fully mediated by political interest. In contrast, the total effect of perceived disagreement on early
46
47 22 decision weakened after controlling for the mediator, but it remained significant, suggesting that
48
49 23 interest only partially mediated this relation. Finally, although both predictors did not significantly
50
51 24 affect online activism, they exerted significant indirect effects on it through interest.

52
53
54
55
56 25 **Discussion**
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 1 Our analyses allowed us to show that, as expected, perceived disagreement in social
4
5 2 networks indirectly reduced political participation and delayed vote decision, whereas perceived
6
7 3 heterogeneity indirectly promoted political participation and early decision, through interest in
8
9 4 politics. However, due to database constraints, we could not verify whether political knowledge also
10
11 5 mediated the effects of disagreement and heterogeneity. In addition, our predictors were computed
12
13 6 with reference to only two social contexts, namely family and friends. A third limitation is that the
14
15 7 RCS survey only assessed online activism, neglecting more traditional forms of political
16
17 8 participation such as taking part in political meetings and rallies. This variable would be important,
18
19 9 since propensity to abstain and, particularly, voting could be weakly sensitive to social influence in
20
21 10 Italy, where the majority of people do vote.
22
23

24
25 11 This is why we turned to the second ITANES 2013 survey that included a measure of factual
26
27 12 knowledge (in the same questionnaire assessing the independent and dependent variables),
28
29 13 information about four social contexts and a battery assessing traditional offline activism.
30
31

32 Study 2

33 Data and Measures

34
35
36 16 For the second study, we employed data from the 2013 ITANES post-election survey,
37
38 17 administered via Computer Assisted Personal interviewing (CAPI) system by trained interviewers
39
40 18 immediately after the general election. Respondents were a probability sample of 1,508 Italian
41
42 19 electors. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. The
43
44 20 interviews were held from the 21st of March to the 4th of May, 2014.
45
46

47 21 In order to build our predictors, we focused again on the questions regarding the perceived
48
49 22 agreement encountered in some of the different groups to which participants belong. The questions
50
51 23 were the same as in the first study but, besides family and friends, they also concerned colleagues
52
53 24 and Facebook friends (the “I don’t know” responses were again chosen by a minority of
54
55 25 respondents: from 2.2% for the FB friends item to 7.6% for the friends item). As in Study 1, we
56
57 26 computed *perceived disagreement* as the mean of the proportion of disagreement perceived in those
58
59
60

1
2
3 1 social contexts. *Perceived heterogeneity* was computed as the coefficient of variation of the same
4
5 2 four proportions. Both variables were computed for participants who indicated the proportion of
6
7 3 agreement perceived in at least two networks.
8

9
10 4 Four indicators of political participation and one measure of decision timing were examined.
11
12 5 *Voting* (83.8% voted), *propensity to abstain* and *early decision* were measured by the same
13
14 6 questions used in Study 1. *Offline activism* was obtained by summing eight questions asking
15
16 7 whether respondents engaged in each of the following political activities in the previous two years
17
18 8 (range 0-8): Signing a public request for a referendum or law; sending letters or complaints to
19
20 9 public authorities or newspapers/media; attending political debates or rallies; participating in a
21
22 10 demonstration; buying or refusing to buy a product for political, ethical or environmental reasons;
23
24 11 donating money to a party or political movement; distributing fliers or other materials for a party or
25
26 12 movement; and voting in the primary elections of a party or movement.
27
28

29
30 13 We also computed a measure of *online political activism* as the sum of participatory
31
32 14 behaviors enacted during the electoral campaign (range 0-8): visiting political parties' or
33
34 15 candidates' websites; visiting parties' or candidates' social network profiles/pages; watching
35
36 16 campaign-related TV content; sharing campaign-related contents on social networks; taking part in
37
38 17 online discussions about political issues or the campaign; taking part in a political event after being
39
40 18 invited via the Internet; following a politician or a political party/coalition on Facebook; and
41
42 19 exchanging ideas about the campaign with Facebook friends (594 participants reported not having
43
44 20 access to the Internet, thus they were not asked these questions).
45
46

47 21 As far as the hypothesized mediators are concerned, *political interest* was computed as the
48
49 22 mean of two questions asking about the general interest in politics and the frequency of
50
51 23 conversations about politics in the previous two months ($r = .58, p < .001$). We also computed a
52
53 24 *factual knowledge* index, based on the correctness of three open-ended questions concerning the
54
55 25 electoral system: "Who elects the President of the Republic?", "How many years does the President
56
57 26 of the Republic stay in office?", "Do you know, approximately, how many representatives sit in the
58
59
60

1 Chamber of Deputies?”. The answers to the first two questions were coded as either wrong (=0) or
2 correct (=1), whereas those to the third question were coded as wrong (=0), nearly correct (=1) or
3 correct (=2). Then the three scores were summed in a total score ranging from 0 to 4.

4 *Political efficacy* was computed as the mean ($\alpha = .71$) of four reversed items, the same two
5 included in Study 1 plus “Usually, people we elect to the Parliament quickly lose touch with the
6 people” and “Parties are only interested in people's votes, but not in their opinions” (response from
7 1= *not at all true* to 4= *completely true*).

8 **Result and Discussion**

9 Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables are displayed in Table 3. Perceived
10 heterogeneity was positively correlated with interest and with both offline and online activism.
11 Perceived disagreement was correlated in the expected direction with all the mediators and the
12 dependent variables. Political interest and knowledge were, in turn, associated with all the
13 dependent variables. Perceived heterogeneity and disagreement were not correlated in this study
14 assessing those measures across four social contexts.

15 In order to test our hypotheses, we verified a two-step model in which perceived
16 heterogeneity and disagreement induce interest in politics which, in turn, improves factual
17 knowledge that finally makes the various kinds of participation more likely and leads to earlier vote
18 decision. To this end, we ran five Models 6 of PROCESS, setting 5,000 bootstrapped resamples.
19 This analysis, besides providing the total and direct effects, allows testing three indirect paths: the
20 first includes only political interest as the intermediate factor, the second includes only knowledge
21 as the intermediate factor, and the third includes the complete sequence whereby interest affects
22 knowledge. Again, we controlled for participants' age, gender, education level, social class and
23 political efficacy in all of the analyses. Results are displayed in Table 4.

24 Total effects of perceived heterogeneity in networks were only significant, and positive, on
25 offline and online activism, whereas those of perceived disagreement were significant and negative

1
2
3 1 on all of the dependent variables – except on propensity to abstain, which increased with
4
5 2 disagreement.

6
7 3 Both perceived heterogeneity and disagreement significantly predicted participants' interest
8
9 4 – the former positively and the latter negatively – even after controlling for each other and for the
10
11 5 covariates. Knowledge, in contrast, was not affected by any of the predictors but increased with
12
13 6 interest and, in turn, significantly encouraged voting and online activism, marginally increased the
14
15 7 earliness of decision, and reduced the propensity to vote. Political interest also made voting more
16
17 8 likely, fostered offline and online activism and lowered the propensity to abstain. The coefficients
18
19 9 and standard errors of the indirect effects, along with the 95% confidence intervals, were displayed
20
21 10 in the last six rows of Table 4. The models that included only interest as an intermediate factor were
22
23 11 largely significant for all of the dependent variables – except for decision earliness, which was not
24
25 12 significantly predicted by interest. As it marginally increased with knowledge, however, the
26
27 13 complete path with interest promoting knowledge, which in turn fosters early decision, was
28
29 14 significant. The complete sequence was also significant for the other dependent variables – except
30
31 15 for offline activism, which was not impacted by knowledge.

32
33
34
35
36 16 As the total effects of perceived heterogeneity on voting, propensity to abstain and early
37
38 17 decision were not significant, its effects on those variables through interest and knowledge were
39
40 18 indirect effects, rather than mediation. Instead, since the total effects of perceived heterogeneity on
41
42 19 both offline and online activism, and the total effects of perceived disagreement on propensity to
43
44 20 abstain, early decision and offline activism got lower, but remained significant, after entering the
45
46 21 mediators into the regressions, we can affirm that these were partial mediations. Finally, the total
47
48 22 effects of perceived disagreement on voting and online activism were fully mediated by interest and
49
50 23 knowledge, as they became non-significant after controlling for the mediators.

51 52 53 54 24 **General Discussion**

55
56 25 Two studies conducted on two large representative samples of Italian citizens supported our
57
58 26 hypotheses, showing that perceived disagreement and heterogeneity in social networks exerted
59
60

1
2
3 1 independent indirect effects on political participation through interest and knowledge, even after
4
5 2 controlling for structural variables and political efficacy. Those effects were opposite in their
6
7 3 direction, as perceived disagreement (between respondents and their contacts) discouraged, while
8
9 4 perceived heterogeneity (among sub-networks) encouraged, participation. Our results are in line
10
11 5 with previous findings and reconcile their inconsistencies, confirming that, as already suggested by
12
13 6 others (Bello, 2012; Eveland & Hively, 2009; Nir, 2011), individual participation is promoted by a
14
15 7 social context that is supportive but also diverse and, hence, stimulating.

16
17
18 8 In addition, we examined the processes explaining the above illustrated relations: as
19
20 9 expected, both perceived disagreement and heterogeneity impacted upon participation through
21
22 10 interest in politics. Study 2 also showed that, for all the dependent variables except offline activism,
23
24 11 interest affected participation by increasing factual knowledge. An unexpected result emerged with
25
26 12 regard to this: indeed, while we hypothesized this sequence for perceived heterogeneity only, we
27
28 13 also found it for disagreement. In other words, the negative effect of perceived disagreement on
29
30 14 interest extended to knowledge as well.

31
32
33
34 15 Some of the paths were full or partial mediations and some were indirect effects, but the
35
36 16 substance of the processes does not change, and informs on the psychological mechanisms driving
37
38 17 opposite consequences for the two predictors. Indeed, in line with cognitive consistency theories
39
40 18 (Heider, 1946; Festinger, 1957) and individual-level evidence on the detrimental effects of
41
42 19 disagreement (Bélanger & Eagles, 2007; Mutz, 2002a, 2006; Hopman, 2012), the perception of
43
44 20 being surrounded by people with opinions conflicting with one's own seems to lead to disregard
45
46 21 for the object of controversy, and loss of interest in politics, maybe in order to reduce the cognitive
47
48 22 dissonance that originates from interpersonal disagreement. In contrast, the perception of being
49
50 23 surrounded by significant others with political preferences that are conflicting with each other,
51
52 24 seems to be cognitively stimulating, since it increases interest, political knowledge and, in turn,
53
54 25 political participation. These results are consistent with studies indicating that network
55
56 26 heterogeneity induces information seeking, political knowledge (Bello, 2012; Gimpel et al., 2003;
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 1 McLeod et al., 1998; Nisbet et al., 2003; Price et al., 2002; Scheufele et al., 2004, 2006) and
4
5 2 integrative complexity in reasoning (Green et al., 2000), and suggest that the positive effects on
6
7 3 participation are driven by this heightened motivation to learn about, and understand, politics.

9
10 4 Our results were partially derived from cross-sectional data. Therefore, the problem of
11
12 5 direction of effects arises for all of the associations hypothesized and observed. It is, indeed,
13
14 6 possible that the more involved and expert in politics individuals are, the more they perceive their
15
16 7 significant others as holding their own opinions or selectively talk with people who agree with
17
18 8 them. However, many individual-level studies have drawn causal inferences about the effect of
19
20 9 disagreement on participation (e.g., Huckfeldt et al., 2004; Mutz, 2002a) despite using cross-
21
22 10 sectional data for their analyses. In addition, we believe that the network assessment employed in
23
24 11 our studies makes the problem of selective exposure far less serious than it could be with the
25
26 12 traditional “name generator” method. On the contrary, the false consensus bias risk remains; hence
27
28 13 we can cautiously consider the relation between network disagreement and interest/knowledge as
29
30 14 bidirectional, whereas the community-level research (see Campbell, 2004, 2006; Gimpel et al.,
31
32 15 2003) on the effects of heterogeneity on political engagement reassured us about this direction. In
33
34 16 addition, two dependent variables (voting and decision timing) were measured in the second wave
35
36 17 of Study 1, excluding the possibility that they affected the predictors – rather than the reverse.

37
38
39
40 18 Notwithstanding these shortcomings, this investigation helps to clarify the previous
41
42 19 contrasting findings, making a unique and valuable contribution to the understanding of the
43
44 20 association between social networks’ characteristics and political participation. Indeed, our research
45
46 21 relied on a set of questions tapping respondents’ overall social context, while retaining the
47
48 22 specificity of individuals’ personal relations (see also Baldassarri, 2010): This approach allowed us
49
50 23 to capture the level of network disagreement and heterogeneity actually perceived by respondents
51
52 24 and more likely to affect their behavior. Thanks to the adoption of an in-between level of analysis,
53
54 25 rather than an individual- or community-level, and by considering the broad set of relations
55
56 26 experienced in the different sub-networks to which individuals belong, we showed that perceived
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1 disagreement and heterogeneity in social networks exerted distinct and opposite effects on political
2 participation. These effects, however, were driven by the same motivational processes: indeed,
3 disagreement dampened participation by decreasing political interest and, in turn, knowledge, while
4 heterogeneity encouraged participation by increasing political interest and, in turn, knowledge.

5 Moreover, although the present studies concern a specific domain (politics), a specific kind
6 of social behavior (political participation) and were carried out in a specific context (Italy), we
7 believe that our results may be generalized to other domains and contexts where different opinions
8 coexist and perceived disagreement and heterogeneity in social networks could affect individuals'
9 commitment in pursuing their ideas. The former process is well known: as people are conflict
10 avoidant, social support is crucial to undertake any difficult or costly action. For example, support
11 from social networks has emerged as a major factor in maintaining a vegetarian or vegan diet (Jabs,
12 Devine, & Sobal, 1998), while absence of support seems one of the most common barriers to these
13 choices (Lea & Worsley, 2003). The detrimental effect of disagreement we documented is thus
14 easily recognizable in many domains other than politics. Less known is the general effect of
15 perceived heterogeneity. Our findings suggest that people are willing to take action if they have to
16 face with different views in their social environment: individuals in heterogeneous social networks
17 need to collect information to increase their knowledge in order to defend and exchange their
18 opinions, and this in turn makes them more involved and committed. There is no reason to expect
19 that this effect would be specific to Italian politics. Further research is needed to understand
20 whether the processes we highlighted apply to different domains and political contexts.

21

References

- Baldassarri, D. (2010). *Social Networks, Political Heterogeneity, and Interpersonal Influence. Evidence from the 2006 Italian Elections*. Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Washington DC.
- Bélanger, P. & Eagles, M. (2007). Partisan cross-pressure and voter turnout: The influence of micro and macro environments. *Social Science Quarterly*, 88, 850–67.
- Bello, J. (2012). The dark side of disagreement? Revisiting the effect of disagreement on political participation. *Electoral Studies*, 31, 782–795.
- Brady, H. E., Verba, S., & Schlozman, K. L. (1995). Beyond SES: A resource model of political participation. *American Political Science Review*, 89, 271-294.
- Campbell, D. E. (2004). *Community heterogeneity and participation*. Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 2–5 September Chicago.
- Campbell, D. E. (2006). *Why we vote: How schools and communities shape our civic life*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cavazza, N., & Corbetta, P. (2015). The political meaning of dining out: Testing the link between lifestyle and political choice in Italy. Submitted.
- Cooper, J. & Stone, J. (2000). The role of group identity in dissonance processes. In D. Terry & M. Hogg (Eds.), *Attitudes, behavior and social context*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Dahl, R. (1989). *Democracy and its critics*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Djupe, P., McClurg, S. D., & Sokhey, A. (2010). *The political consequences of gender in social networks*. Working Papers. Paper 42. Retrieved from http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/pn_wp/42
- Downs, A. (1957). *An economic theory of democracy*. New York: Harper Row.
- Eveland, W. P. Jr. & Hively, M. H. (2009). Political Discussion Frequency, Network Size, and “Heterogeneity” of Discussion as Predictors of Political Knowledge and Participation. *Journal of Communication*, 59, 205–24.

- 1
2
3 1 Fearon, J.D. (1998). Deliberation as Discussion. In J. Elster (Ed.) *Deliberative Democracy* (pp. 44–
4
5 2 68). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
6
7 3 Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
8
9 4 Fiorina, M. P., & Peterson, P. E. (1998). *The New American Democracy*. Boston, MA: Allyn &
10
11 5 Bacon.
12
13 6 Fishkin, J. S. (1995). *The Voice of the People*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
14
15 7 Gimpel, J. G., Lay, J. C., & Schuknecht, J. E. (2003). *Cultivating democracy: Civic environments
16
17 8 and political socialization in America*. Brookings Institution Press.
18
19 9 Goldthorpe, J.H. (1980). *Social mobility and class structure in modern Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon
20
21 10 Press.
22
23 11 Green, M. C., Visser, P. S., & Tetlock, P. E. (2000). Coping with accountability cross-pressures:
24
25 12 Low-effort evasive tactics and high-effort quests for integrative complexity. *Personality and
26
27 13 Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26, 1380-1391.
28
29 14 Gutmann, A. & Dennis, T. (1996). *Democracy and Disagreement*. Harvard University Press.
30
31 15 Harvard University Press.
32
33 16 Hayes, A. F. (2013). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis*. New
34
35 17 York, NY: Guilford Press.
36
37 18 Heider, F. (1946). Attitudes and cognitive organization. *Journal of Psychology*, 21, 107–112.
38
39 19 Held, D. (1987). *Models of Democracy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
40
41 20 Hopmann, D. N. (2012). The Consequences of Political Disagreement in Interpersonal
42
43 21 Communication: New Insights from a Comparative Perspective. *European Journal of
44
45 22 Political Research*, 51, 265–287.
46
47 23 Huckfeldt, R. (2007). Unanimity, discord and the communication of public opinion. *American
48
49 24 Journal of Political Science*, 51, 978–995.
50
51 25 Huckfeldt, R., & Sprague, J. (1995). *Citizens, politics, and social communication*. New York:
52
53 26 Cambridge University Press.
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 1 Huckfeldt, R., Beck, P. A., Dalton, R. J., & Levine J. (1995). Political environments, cohesive
4
5 2 social groups, and the communication of public opinion. *American Journal of Political*
6
7 3 *Science*, 39, 1025-1054.
- 8
9
10 4 Huckfeldt, R., Johnson, E. & Sprague, J. (2004a). *Political disagreement: The survival of diverse*
11
12 5 *opinions within communication networks*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- 13
14 6 Huckfeldt, R., Mendez, J. M. & Osborn, T. (2004b). Disagreement, ambivalence and engagement:
15
16 7 The political consequences of heterogeneous networks. *Political Psychology*, 25, 65–95.
- 17
18 8 Ikeda, K., & Huckfeldt, R. (2001). Political communication and disagreement among citizens in
19
20 9 Japan and the United States. *Political Behavior*, 23, 23–51.
- 21
22
23 10 Inglehart, R. (1979). Political action: The impact of values, cognitive level and social back-ground.
24
25 11 In S. Barns & M. Kaase (Eds.), *Political action: Mass participation in five Western*
26
27 12 *democracies* (pp. 343–380). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- 28
29
30 13 Itanes (eds.) (2013). *Voto amaro. Disincanto e crisi nelle elezioni del 2013*. [Bitter vote.
31
32 14 Disenchantment and the crisis in the elections of 2013], Bologna, Il Mulino.
- 33
34 15 Jabs, J., Devine, C. M., & Sobal, J. (1998). Maintaining vegetarian diets: Personal factors, social
35
36 16 networks and environmental resources. *Journal of the Canadian Dietetic Association*, 59,
37
38 17 183–189.
- 39
40
41 18 Kenny, C. B. (1992). Political Participation and Effects from the Social Environment. *American*
42
43 19 *Journal of Political Science*, 36, 259-267.
- 44
45 20 Kenny, C. B. (1992). Political Participation and Effects from the Social Environment. *American*
46
47 21 *Journal of Political Science*, 36, 259-67.
- 48
49
50 22 Klofstad, C. A., Sokhey, A., & McClurg, S. D. (2013). Disagreeing About Disagreement: How
51
52 23 Conflict in Social Networks Affects Political Behavior. *The American Journal of Political*
53
54 24 *Science*, 57, 120-134.
- 55
56 25 Knight, J. & James J. (1994). Aggregation and Deliberation: On the Possibility of Democratic
57
58 26 Legitimacy *Political Theory*, 22, 277–296.
- 59
60

- 1
2
3 1 Knobloch-Westerwick, S., & Meng, J. (2009). Looking the other way: Selective exposure to
4
5 2 attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal political information. *Communication Research*,
6
7 3 36, 426-448.
8
9
10 4 Knoke, D. (1990). Networks of political action: Toward theory construction. *Social forces*, 68,
11
12 5 1041-1063.
13
14 6 Kwak, N., Williams, A.E., Wang, X., & Lee, H. (2005). Talking politics and engaging politics: An
15
16 7 examination of the interactive relationships between structural features of political talk and
17
18 8 discussion engagement. *Communication Research*, 32, 87-111.
19
20
21 9 Lazarsfeld, P. F., Berelson, B. R., & Gaudet, H. (1944). *The people's choice: How the voter makes*
22
23 10 *up his mind in a presidential campaign*. New York: Columbia University Press.
24
25 11 **Lea, E., & Worsley, A. (2003). Benefits and barriers to the consumption of a vegetarian diet in**
26
27 12 **Australia. *Public Health Nutrition*, 6, 505-511.**
28
29
30 13 Lee, F. L. (2012). Does discussion with disagreement discourage all types of political participation?
31
32 14 Survey evidence from Hong Kong. *Communication Research*, 39, 543-562.
33
34 15 Lee, H., Kwak, N., & Campbell S. W. (2013). Hearing the Other Side Revisited: The Joint
35
36 16 Workings of Cross-Cutting Discussion and Strong Tie Homogeneity in Facilitating
37
38 17 Deliberative and Participatory Democracy. *Communication Research*.
39
40
41 18 Leighley, J. E. (1990). Social Interaction and Contextual Influences on Political Participation.
42
43 19 *American Politics Quarterly*, 18, 459-75.
44
45 20 Marsden, P. V. (1987). Core Discussion Networks of Americans. *American Sociological Review*,
46
47 21 52, 122-131.
48
49
50 22 Matz, D. C. & Wood, W. (2005). Cognitive Dissonance in Groups: The Consequences of
51
52 23 Disagreement, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88, 22-37.
53
54 24 McClurg, S. D. (2003). The Role of Social Networks in Explaining Political Participation. *Political*
55
56 25 *Research Quarterly*, 56, 449-64.
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 1 McClurg, S. D. (2006a). The electoral relevance of political talk: Examining disagreement and
4
5 2 expertise effects in social networks on political participation. *American Journal of Political*
6
7 3 *Science, 50*, 737-754.
8
9
10 4 McClurg, S. D. (2006b). Political disagreement in context: The conditional effect of neighborhood
11
12 5 context, disagreement and political talk on electoral participation. *Political Behavior, 28*,
13
14 6 349-366.
15
16 7 McLeod, J. M., Scheufele, D. A., & Moy, P. (1999a). Community, Communication, and
17
18 8 Participation: The Role of Mass Media and Interpersonal Discussion in Local Political
19
20 9 Participation. *Political Communication, 16*, 315–336.
21
22
23 10 McLeod, J. M., Scheufele, D. A., Moy, P., Horowitz, E., Holbert, R. L., Zhang, W., Zubric, S., &
24
25 11 Zubric, J. (1999b). Understanding Deliberation: The Effects of Discussion Networks on
26
27 12 Participation in a Public Forum. *Communication Research, 26*, 743–74.
28
29
30 13 McLeod, J., Sotirovic, M., & Holbert, R. L. (1998). Values as sociotropic judgments influencing
31
32 14 communications patterns. *Communication Research, 25*, 453–485.
33
34 15 McPhee, W. N., Smith, R. B., & Ferguson, J. (1963). A theory of informal social influence. In W.
35
36 16 N. McPhee (Ed.), *Formal theories of mass behavior* (pp. 74–103). New York: Free Press.
37
38
39 17 Mill, J. S. (1974). *On liberty*. Harmondsworth: Pelican.
40
41 18 Mutz, D.C. (2002a). The consequences of cross-cutting networks for political participation.
42
43 19 *American Journal of Political Science, 46*, 838–855.
44
45 20 Mutz, D.C. (2002b). Cross-cutting social networks: testing democratic theory in practice. *American*
46
47 21 *Political Science Review, 96*, 111–126.
48
49 22 Mutz, D.C. (2006). *Hearing the other side: Deliberative versus participatory democracy*.
50
51 23 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
52
53
54 24 Nieuwbeerta, P. & Flap, H. (2000). Crosscutting social circles and political choice. Effects of
55
56 25 personal network composition on voting behavior in The Netherlands. *Social Networks, 22*,
57
58 26 313-335.
59
60

- 1
2
3 1 Nir, L. (2005). Ambivalent Social Networks and Their Consequences for Participation.
4
5 2 *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 17, 422–442.
6
7 3 Nir, L. (2011). Disagreement and opposition in social networks: Does disagreement discourage
8
9 4 turnout? *Political Studies*, 59, 674-692.
10
11 5 Nisbet, M. C., Moy, P., & Scheufele, D. A. (2003, May). *Religion, communication, and social*
12
13 6 *capital*. Paper presented to the Political Communication Division of the International
14
15 7 Communication Association, San Diego, CA.
16
17 8 Pattie, C. J. & Johnston, R. J. (2009). Conversation, Disagreement, and Political Participation.
18
19 9 *Political Behavior*, 31, 261–85.
20
21 10 Price, V., Cappella, J. N., & Nir, L. (2002). Does Disagreement Contribute to more Deliberative
22
23 11 Opinion? *Political Communication*, 19, 95–112.
24
25 12 Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York:
26
27 13 Simon & Schuster.
28
29 14 Richardson, B. & Beck, A. (2007). The flow of political information: Personal discussants, the
30
31 15 media and partisans. In R. Gunther, J.R. Montero & H. Puhle (Eds.), *Democracy,*
32
33 16 *intermediation and voting on four continents*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
34
35 17 Rosenstone, S. J. & Hansen, J.M. (1993). *Mobilization, Participation and Democracy in America*.
36
37 18 NewYork: Macmillan.
38
39 19 Scheufele, D. A., Nisbet, M. C., Brossard, D. (2003). Pathways to participation? Religion,
40
41 20 communication contexts, and mass media. *International Journal of Public Opinion*
42
43 21 *Research*, 15, 300-324.
44
45 22 Scheufele, D. A., Nisbet, M. C., Brossard, D., & Nisbet, E.C. (2004). Social structure and
46
47 23 citizenship: examining the impacts of social setting, network heterogeneity and
48
49 24 informational variables on political participation. *Political Communication*, 21, 315-338.
50
51 25 Scheufele, D.A., Hardy, B.W., Brossard, D., Waismel-Manor, I.S., & Nisbet, E.C. (2006).
52
53 26 Democracy Based on Difference: Examining the Links between Structural Heterogeneity,
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 1 Heterogeneity of Discussion Networks and Democratic Citizenship. *Journal of*
4
5 2 *Communication*, 56, 728–53.
6
7 3 Schmitt-Beck, R. (2003). Mass communication, personal communication and vote choice: The filter
8
9 4 hypothesis of media influence in comparative perspective. *British Journal of Political*
10
11 5 *Science*, 33, 233–259.
12
13 6 Sokhey, A. E., & Djupe, P. A. (2014). Name generation in interpersonal political network data:
14
15 7 Results from a series of experiments. *Social Networks*, 36, 147-161.
16
17 8 Tetlock, P. E. (1985). Accountability: The neglected social context of judgment and choice. In B.
18
19 9 Staw & L. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 7, pp. 297-332).
20
21 10 Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
22
23 11 Ulbig, S. G. & Funk, C. L. (1999). Conflict avoidance and political participation. *Political Behavior*
24
25 12 *21*, 265–282.
26
27 13 Verba, S., Schlozman, K.L., & Brady, H.E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in*
28
29 14 *American politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
30
31 15 Vezzoni, C. (2014). Italian National Election Survey 2013: A further step in a consolidating
32
33 16 tradition. *Rivista italiana di scienza politica*, 1/2014, 81-108.
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Table 1. Correlations and descriptive statistics for dependent and independent variables (Study 1).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Perceived heterogeneity	--	.108***	.083***	.030	-.036	.022	-.010
2. Perceived disagreement		--	-.229***	-.049*	.045*	-.128**	-.029
3. Interest			--	.217***	-.352***	.233***	.329***
4. Voting (0/1)				--	-.314***	-- ^a	.068***
5. Propensity to abstain					--	-.247***	-.054**
6. Early decision							.079***
7. Online activism							--
<i>M</i>	.18	.61	.67	.91	3.23	3.00	1.70
<i>SD</i>	.19	.24	.24	.28	3.73	1.03	1.94
<i>N</i>	2742	2742	2989	2883	2888	2591	2928

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Point b-serial correlations were reported for voting.

^a The correlation between turnout and early decision was not computed because only participants who voted were asked to report the timing of decision.

SOCIAL NETWORK AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

31

Table 2. Direct and indirect effect, through interest in politics, of perceived heterogeneity and disagreement on political participation (Study 1).

	Interest	Voting (0/1)	Propensity to abstain	Early decision	Online activism
Age	.18***	.01** (.00)	-.05*	.09***	-.15***
Gender (1=males)	.13***	-.08 (.15)	-.03	.05*	.03°
Education	.16***	.25* (.12)	.01	-.03	.02
Upper class	.08**	.02 (.25)	.00	-.03	-.02
Non-manual workers	.06*	-.09 (.21)	-.06*	.03	-.07*
Petty bourgeoisie	.06**	.16 (.30)	-.02	-.01	-.03
Political efficacy	.19***	.01 (.10)	-.12***	.09***	.10***
Interest		2.87*** (.34)	-.30***	.16***	.30***
Perceived heterogeneity	.09***	.68° (.41) (.28 (.41))	-.04* (-.01)	.04* (.03)	-.01 (-.04*)
Perceived disagreement	-.20***	-.68* (.29) (-.15 (.30))	.03° (-.03)	-.11*** (-.08***)	-.02 (.04*)
R^2	.18	.10 ^a	.14	.07	.13
N	2721	2640	2665	2405	2693
Bootstrapped indirect effects estimates (<i>SE</i>)					
Perceived Heterogeneity <i>LLCI, ULCI</i>	.30 (.07), .17, .46	-.56 (.12), -.81, -.34	.07 (.02), .04, .11	.28 (.06), .17, .41	
Perceived disagreement <i>LLCI, ULCI</i>	-.53 (.09), -.72, -.38	1.00 (.11), .79, 1.24	-.14 (.02), -.19, -.09	-.51 (.06), -.64, -.40	

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49

SOCIAL NETWORK AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

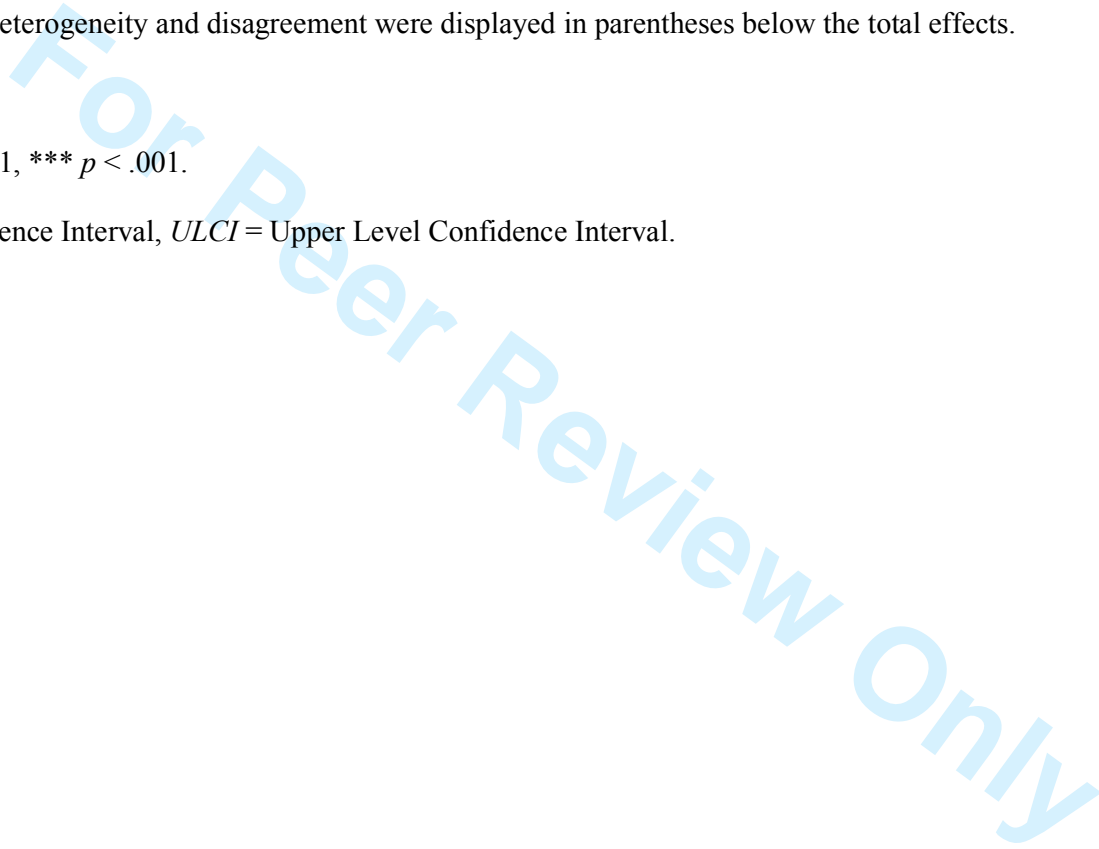
Results of linear regressions for mediators and continuous dependent variables (beta standardized coefficients are reported), and of binary logistic regression for turnout (b unstandardized coefficients are reported along with standard errors in parentheses).

Direct effects of perceived heterogeneity and disagreement were displayed in parentheses below the total effects.

^a Nagelkerke R^2 .

^o $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

LLCI = Lower Level Confidence Interval, *ULCI* = Upper Level Confidence Interval.



SOCIAL NETWORK AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

33

Table 3. Correlations and descriptive statistics for dependent and independent variables (Study 2).

	1	2	3	4	6	7	8	9	10
1. Perceived heterogeneity	--	-.044	.070*	.017	-.002	-.008	.007	.085**	.106**
2. Perceived disagreement		--	-.263***	-.059*	-.089**	.118***	-.155***	-.210***	-.115**
3. Interest			--	.374***	.255***	-.277***	.124***	.461***	.358***
4. Knowledge				--	.212***	-.197***	.064*	.238***	.199***
6. Voting					--	-.371***	-- ^a	.193***	.087**
7. Propensity to abstain						--	-.172***	-.186***	-.105**
8. Early decision								.113***	.100**
9. Offline activism								--	.464***
10. Online activism									--
<i>M</i>	.375	.594	.441	2.234	.851	2.986	3.142	1.092	1.441
<i>SD</i>	.365	.216	.278	1.332	.356	3.481	.932	1.493	1.960
<i>N</i>	1178	1182	1508	1508	1499	1429	1270	1508	910

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Point b-serial correlations were reported for voting.

^a The correlation between turnout and early decision was not computed because only participants who voted were asked to report the timing of

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49

SOCIAL NETWORK AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

decision.

For Peer Review Only

SOCIAL NETWORK AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

35

Table 4. Direct and indirect effect, through interest in politics and factual knowledge, of perceived heterogeneity and disagreement on political participation (Study 2).

	Mediators models			Dependent variables models			
	Interest	Knowledge	Voting (0/1)	Propensity to abstain	Early decision	Offline activism	Online activism
Age	.17***	.08**	.00 (.01)	-.03	.14***	-.03	-.22***
Gender (1=males)	.12***	.15***	-.53** (.20)	.01	.07*	.01	.08*
Education	.26***	.24***	.24 (.16)	-.04	-.08°	.11**	.03
Upper class	.03	.09**	.00 (.43)	.01	.01	.05	.04
Non-manual workers	.03	.13***	-.19 (.28)	-.02	-.03	.05°	.02
Petty bourgeoisie	-.04	.05°	-.32 (.27)	.02	-.02	.00	.02
Pol. Efficacy	.04	.03	.36° (.20)	-.09**	-.03	.07*	.06°
Interest		.21***	1.54*** (.43)	-.14***	.04	.36***	.31***
Knowledge			.29*** (.08)	-.11***	.06°	.03	.11**
Perceived heterogeneity	.08**	-.01	-.07 (.25) (-.17 (.25))	-.01 (.00)	.04 (.03)	.08** (.05*)	.11** (.08*)
Perceived disagreement	-.23***	.03	-1.24** (.47) (-.89° (.49))	.10*** (.06*)	-.14*** (-.13***)	-.19*** (-.11***)	-.10** (-.03)
R^2	.17	.21	.12	.08	.07	.24	.18
N	1174	1174	1171	1125	1039	1174	790

SOCIAL NETWORK AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Bootstrapped indirect effect estimates (SE)

Perc. heterogeneity → Interest → DV <i>LLCI, ULCI</i>	.09 (.04) .02, .20	-.11 (.05) -.22, -.03	.01 (.01) -.004, .03	.12 (.05) .03, .21	.18 (.06) .07, .32
Perc. heterogeneity → Interest → Knowledge → DV <i>LLCI, ULCI</i>	.02 (.01) .005, .04	-.02 (.01) -.04, -.01	.00 (.00) .0003, .01	.00 (.00) -.002, .008	.01 (.01) .003, .029
Perc. Heterogeneity → Knowledge → DV <i>LLCI, ULCI</i>	-.01 (.02) -.07, .04	.01 (.03) -.04, .08	.00 (.01) -.02, .003	-.00 (.00) -.02, .004	-.04 (.02) -.10, -.003
Perc. disagreement → Interest → DV <i>LLCI, ULCI</i>	-.43 (.15) -.73, -.17	.51 (.14) .27, .83	-.04 (.03) -.11, .02	-.60 (.09) -.79, -.44	-.67 (.13) -.94, -.44
Perc. disagreement → Interest → Knowledge → DV <i>LLCI, ULCI</i>	-.09 (.03) -.15, -.03	.09 (.03) .04, .16	-.01 (.01) -.03, -.001	-.01 (.01) -.03, .01	-.04 (.02) -.09, -.02
Perc. disagreement → Knowledge → DV <i>LLCI, ULCI</i>	.05 (.05) -.03, .19	-.08 (.06) -.23, .002	.01 (.01) -.01, .03	.01 (.01) -.005, .04	.04 (.04) -.03, .14

Results of linear regressions for mediators and continuous dependent variables (beta standardized coefficients are reported), and of binary logistic regression for turnout (b unstandardized coefficients are reported along with standard errors in parentheses).

Direct effects of network heterogeneity and disagreement were displayed in parentheses below the total effects.

^a Nagelkerke R^2 .

^o $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

LLCI = Lower Level Confidence Interval, *ULCI* = Upper Level Confidence Interval.

SOCIAL NETWORK AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Figure 1. The expected and final mediation model. The continuous arrows were the paths confirmed in the final model.

