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Social Expertise and the Foundations of Political Involvement

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Abstract

The correlation between social ties and political participation has been evident for some time, though very little attention is devoted to examining the causal mechanisms producing this relationship. This paper moves the literature in this direction by examining how an important feature of social networks – levels of political expertise – affect the attitudes underlying involvement. After outlining a model for explaining the relationship between social expertise and involvement, analysis of the 2000 American National Election Study shows that people who are in sophisticated social networks are less likely to be ambivalent about candidates and more likely to feel efficacious. This shows that social expertise supports participatory democracy by helping demystify politics, thus building up the reservoir of attitudinal resources necessary for involvement in politics.

1 Introduction

The willingness of citizens to engage in political action depends on whether their social environments support such action, a point on which there is increasingly strong evidence of causality (Nickerson 2008, Klobstad 2007*b*, Klobstad, McClurg & Rolfe Forthcoming, Lazer, Rubineau, Katz & Chetkovich 2007). Yet in spite of increasing interest in the social foundations of political participation, a number of questions remain unanswered. First, under what conditions should social ties facilitate participation and when should we expect them to inhibit it? Second, is it possible for social networks to encourage participation without undercutting other normatively desirable behaviors, such as increased tolerance and deliberation (Mutz 2006)? This paper addresses these questions with an in depth examination of how political expertise embedded in egocentric social networks—hereafter referred to as social expertise—affects the attitudinal foundations of political participation (McClurg 2006*a*).

The principal argument is that social expertise is important for providing cueing information, which contextualizes political decisions by helping relate their predispositions to the choices available to them and therefore more likely to participate. Such information helps people become willing to make judgments about candidates and to exhibit increased confidence in their perceptions. In the case of elections, this implies that social expertise should affect how clearly people are able to sort through political information, define how it relates to their own predispositions, and how confident they are about politics. And, by influencing these attitudes, social expertise increases the likelihood of participation. Data from the 2000 American National Election Study (ANES) are used to explore the empirical implications of this model. Specifically, the analysis shows that social expertise in voter network is related to lower levels of candidate ambivalence, an increased willingness to take positions on important political issues, and higher internal efficacy. Importantly, these results hold even while controlling for what has been seen as the principal source of political information in social networks—political disagreement.

2 Social Networks and Political Involvement

2.1 Social Networks, Communication, and Involvement

The last two decades has seen a resurgence of interest in social networks, with particular attention paid to the consequences they hold for political participation. Analysis of data sources specifically designed for studying how social relations relate to political behavior establish correlations between networks and participation (Leighley 1990, Knoke 1990, Kenny 1992, Lake & Huckfeldt 1998, McClurg 2003). Though this implies a causal link between the political character of social networks and political participation, evidence in support of such an assumption has traditionally been lacking.

First, the direction of causality has been suspect on the grounds that people can select their networks, making it possible that the political stimuli reflect individual attitudes rather than influence them. As observational data are generally not up to the task of tackling this criticism head on, progress on this question has been slow. However, the use of innovative experimental (Nickerson 2008), quasi-experimental (Klofstad 2007*b*), and longitudinal (Lazer et al. 2007) research designs put causal claims on much stronger footing. Both individual selection and social influence are undoubtedly at play in networks (Lazer et al. 2007), suggesting that the earliest observational studies overstate the strength of these relationships (Klofstad 2007*a*), yet the evidence is clear—social influence occurs.

Second, there has been little theory or evidence about the causal mechanism linking networks to involvement. While Kenny (1992) implies that networks produce participatory norms, McClurg (2003) emphasizes the importance of networks as a source of political information. Others have suggested that social connections function as pathway for second-order effects stemming from partisan mobilization campaigns (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993, McClurg 2004, Nickerson 2008). Although all—or none—of these mechanisms may be at play, there has not been an attempt to provide an empirically verified account of the social processes at work other than Mutz's (2002*a*, 2002*b*) research on disagreement. With stronger evidence supporting the assumption that networks cause behavior, this issue can no longer be sensibly ignored if we want to understand the social foundations of participation.

2.2 Social Communication, Political Disagreement, and Social Expertise

Traditional explanations of social network effects argue that they stem from social communication. With respect to networks and involvement, this is best illustrated by interest in political disagreement (Berelson, Lazarsfeld & McPhee 1954, Huckfeldt, Johnson & Sprague 2004, Mutz 2006, McClurg 2006*b*). Debate here focuses on how cross-cutting political discussion—exposure to people who challenge your political views—influences the propensity of people to participate and *how* those effects arise. Although debate about the substantive size of disagreement effects (McClurg 2006*a*, McClurg 2006*b*, Sokhey 2007) and relative levels of disagreement (Mutz 2006, Huckfeldt, Johnson & Sprague 2004) persists in the literature, the evidence un-mistakenly shows that it makes participation less likely by inducing ambivalence and stimulating conflict avoidance (Mutz 2002*a*, Mutz 2002*b*). Though this represents a promising start to a fuller understanding of the causal mechanisms underlying network effects on involvement, political disagreement cannot be the sole explanation. Most clearly, the focus on disagreement explains conditions under which participation is less likely but is ill-positioned to explain the preponderance of evidence showing that networks also *increase* the likelihood of involvement.

One promising way to expand the study of causal mechanisms is to focus on social expertise, or relative levels of political sophistication in social networks. People are not only good at identifying experts in their network, but their informant's level of knowledge is more important in determining how often the dyad talks about politics than are whether political preferences are shared (Huckfeldt 2001). Building on this observation, there has been some evidence provided that social expertise predicts political involvement, even more strongly than does disagreement (McClurg 2006*a*, Lake & Huckfeldt 1998).

Unlike the aforementioned studies of disagreement, there has been no attempt to explain how social expertise influences participation. Does it influence involvement in the same way that social support does, by reducing ambiguity? Or, does it operate through a different set of attitudes? Can social expertise help explain when networks encourage participation, unlike disagreement which principally shows when they do not? And perhaps most importantly, does social expertise counteract what are perceived of as negative consequences of political disagreement for political participation?

3 Social Expertise and the Foundations of Political Involvement

Answers to these questions are derived by focusing on how social expertise helps contextualize politics and thereby makes involvement more likely. This involves two assumptions. One is that network effects arise from how they influence the political information available to people. Although information can come from a variety of other sources, the implication is that variation in social networks influences both exposure to and interpretation of political information (McClurg 2003). The second assumption is that networks effects flow from how they shape the attitudes that underlie political behavior. This is equivalent to saying that social influence depends on whether it is assimilated by individuals. It also has the more practical consequence of focusing attention on how perceptions of the political context changes in response to networks, rather than simply on how people perceive their networks.¹

Together these assumptions imply that network effects arise from a process of political learning. People who are embedded in qualitatively different networks should be exposed to different types of information and therefore have different views about candidates and issues. The question then becomes how social expertise affects learning in a way that makes people more or less likely to become involved. In some sense, this is similar to the manner in which arguments about political disagreement are developed, with people who experience social disagreement becoming more ambivalent about politics. But social expertise is a different in the sense that people are not simply hearing different sides of an issue, but are hearing a different type of information with potentially different consequences.

3.1 Social Expertise as an Information Source

Zaller's (1992) discussion of media information provides a good starting point for categorizing information into two types: 1) persuasive messages or 2) cueing messages. The former refers to arguments for and against specific points of view, while the latter is described as information that "enable[s] citizens to perceive relationships between the persuasive messages they receive and

¹In this sense, this follows the approach used by Mutz (2006) to understand political involvement rather than the efforts of Huckfeldt and his collaborators (2004) to explain the persistence of disagreement.

their political predispositions, which in turn permits them to respond critically to the persuasive messages” (Zaller 1992, p. 42). I consider both types in turn here.

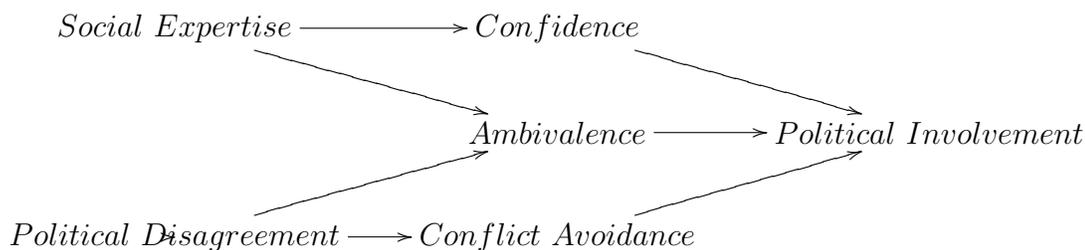
General political expertise a proxy for individual levels of political information (Carpini & Keeter 1996), meaning that networks rich in political expertise should be deep sources of political information. Thus, a network with political experts is likely to provide access to many pieces of factual information (e.g., how to register to vote) as well as varying arguments for and against political positions. Socially expert networks undoubtedly serve as good sources of persuasive information that is either a direct subsidy of participation or useful for sorting through candidates and issues.

Nevertheless, there are good reasons to expect that this is not the main reason they influence involvement. Unlike political disagreement, social expertise does not suggest anything about the bias of these messages. A network high in social expertise could be polarized along partisan lines just as it could be homogeneous. From a more theoretical perspective, people who consult their networks for persuasive information are doing so in order to reduce the costs associated with political behavior (Downs 1957). Someone engaged in such rent-seeking behavior is unlikely to be so moved by the information that they are spurred to participate, particularly in higher cost forms of involvement such as campaign work or displaying paraphernalia. Finally, political psychology research shows that these kinds of messages are rarely internalized. Simply put, consultation with political experts is unlikely to increase your own political expertise significantly; all of the same reasons you were not a political expert in the first place still apply to what you do with the information received from the network.²

The more important consequences of social expertise, then, likely stem from exposure to cueing messages/information (McClurg 2006a). Another way of saying this is that social expertise influences the *quantity* of political information available in a network, but that its effects are more likely to emanate from how it shapes the *quality* of that information. If social expertise in fact provides this kind of information, it should shape how people *understand* politics rather than what they *know* about it. In other words, social expertise is important for influencing how people make sense of politics, a

²On this point, Sohkey and McClurg (n.d.) find little evidence that people make better decisions in expert networks, let alone for how it influences their underlying attitudes about candidates and policies.

Figure 1: A Learning Model of Social Network Effects on Involvement



similar role to political expertise in Zaller’s (1992) original model.

This kind of argument is a distinct departure from studies that focus on opinion leadership and information shortcuts for explaining social network effects (Downs 1957). However, it is very similar to how we understand campaign and media effects. For example, Samuel Popkin (1994) describes a similar process in his discussion of how people go “beyond data” in elections in order to make vote choices. His argument is that people have considerable gaps in their political information and lots of uncertainty about how to assemble that information, making campaigns particularly important for helping people connect the dots in a way that makes them support their candidate. Similarly, to the extent that social networks provide context for relating political information to their predispositions, affecting how sharply people see the electoral context. This in turn should increase the benefits of participation

3.2 Social Expertise and the Foundations for Political Action

If this is true, what are the observable implications? I argue that social expertise effects manifest themselves in two ways—through attitudinal ambivalence and confidence in their understanding of politics. These pathways are graphically represented in Figure 1, along with the links connecting political disagreement to involvement for the purpose of showing how this research differs from earlier studies of disagreement.

Foremost among the consequences of social expertise is that it should reduce ambivalence by helping people recognize differences between candi-

dates and which choice is consistent with their predispositions. As Zaller argues, people who cannot effectively sort through persuasive information in order to reject dissonant arguments are likely to become more ambivalent. And, cueing information is useful for engaging in this rejection-acceptance process. As this kind of ambivalence increases, people should be less likely to engage in multiple forms of political involvement because they will be more uncertain about which side to support. Altogether this means that social expertise—unlike political disagreement—should reduce ambivalence instead of increase it. Indirect evidence exists for this point in McClurg’s (2006a) demonstration that social expertise is related to vote decisions that come earlier in an election

Social expertise also does more than influence a person’s ambivalence. As (McClurg 2006a, p. 740) writes, “. . . sophisticated political networks provide environments that support *clearer* and more *contextualized* communication of political information.” As people are better able to sort through issues and see increased relevance to themselves, we would expect that they would be more likely to take stands on a wider variety of issues and to attribute positions to candidates as well. In other words, social expertise can help people take their political information and organize it into dominant partisan and issue categories. This in turn implies that people should feel as though they have a better understanding of politics. In the vernacular of social psychology, discussing politics with knowledgeable people may increase a person’s internal efficacy, or their view on how capable they are of involving themselves in politics. Any give and take between a person and someone they consider to be knowledgeable potentially improves that person’s confidence in their opinions and understanding. If their confidence rises, it then stands to reason that they would feel a greater ability to participate efficaciously.

Both of these effects increase the chances of involvement by lowering the costs and clarifying the benefits of political activity ranging from voting to working on campaigns. A prerequisite for political involvement—be it in a campaign or on an issue—is a willingness to assess different sides of the issue (related to ambivalence and confidence), the perception of meaningful differences between the difference sides (related to ambivalence), and feeling that you understand what is going on well enough to meaningfully participate (related to confidence). Although other factors undoubtedly influence involvement—e.g., individual resources (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995)—this should not undercut the importance of network effects.

4 Data

The 2000 American National Election Study (ANES) provide data for testing these hypotheses. This long-running survey has information on a random sample of Americans through both pre and post election interviews. Unlike most of its predecessors, the 2000 edition of the ANES included a battery of questions aimed at measuring characteristics of its respondent’s social networks. Each respondent was asked to identify as many as four people with whom they discussed “important matters.”³ Follow-up questions gaged each respondent’s perceptions of these discussants, including whom they voted for in the presidential election and how knowledgeable they are about politics. As the ANES traditionally includes questions on a wide variety of political attitudes, these data appropriate for examining how social networks are related to the attitudinal foundations of political involvement. The remainder of this section discusses the measurement of these variables.

4.1 Network Measures

The principal independent variable in the analyses below is social expertise, or the level of political sophistication contained in interpersonal networks. Ideally, this measure would be derived by directly measuring how much political knowledge is held by each discussant. As there are no discussant interviews in the 2000 ANES, it is instead based on the respondents perception of whether each discussant knows a lot, a little, or quite a bit about politics. Although these answers likely include perceptual errors, previous research shows that actual discussant knowledge is the strongest predictor of the respondent’s perceptions (Huckfeldt 2001).

Using these replies, social expertise is measured as the average level of political sophistication in the network. Respondents who do not name any discussants receive a zero on this measure as they had no access to political experts.⁴ There are roughly 1500 usable replies ranging from zero to two,

³Out of 1807 total interviews, 1551 respondents provided answers to the network questions. The average respondent identified 1.8 discussants, with 399 saying they had no discussants.

⁴An extensive analysis by McClurg (2006a) shows that social expertise effects are robust to multiple specifications for how to treat people that name no discussants. Rather than limit the analysis only to respondents who have networks, I therefore measure them as receiving no information from the network.

indicating networks with no social expertise or full of people knowledge about politics, respectively. The average level of expertise in a network is .93 with a standard deviation of .71, with the averages and standard deviations being fairly constant across all networks with at least one person in them.

Given the amount of attention devoted to political disagreement in previous research and the need to distinguish the effects of social expertise, it is important to also measure levels of social support in the network. Although there is some debate about the best way to conceptualize and measure disagreement (Huckfeldt, Johnson & Sprague 2004, Mutz 2006), the data leave little choice in this manner. I first measure disagreement in each discussion dyad by determining whether the respondent's reported vote choice is the same as her perception of the discussant's vote choice, with any difference indicating a lack of agreement. I then measure the proportion of the respondent's dyads that do not share the respondent's vote choice. Though these measure were gathered in post-election interviews and may overstate levels of disagreement, it is a widely used and facially valid measure of how likely it is that a network is politically at odds with the respondent.

There are also nearly 1500 usable replies to this question.⁵ The average is 33% and a standard deviation of 40% and the vast majority of the networks exhibiting either full agreement(52%) or complete disagreement (19%). For networks with more than one person, there is not significant variation in this measure based on the size of the network. Networks with only one identified discussant (n=291) are equally as likely to contain disagreement as they are agreement, with an average of 51% on this measure.

4.2 Dependent Variables

Testing the hypotheses requires two different dependent variables, one measuring ambivalence and another that measures confidence. Following the practice suggested by Lavine (2001), I combine a respondent's likes and dislikes about each candidate to create ambivalence measures. If P represents positive and N represents negative reactions to candidates, ambivalence is

⁵Respondents who do not identify networks again receive a score of zero, indicating that they experience no disagreement. It is also true that they experience no agreement either, but as noted above the key variation here is the absence, rather than the presence, of support.

shown in in Equation (1) below.

$$\frac{P + N}{2} - |P - N| \quad (1)$$

The first component of this equation represents the intensity of a respondent’s reaction to the candidates, while the second component represents polarity (Lavine 2001, p. 919). This measure can be expanded to measure general ambivalence toward the candidates by include a P and N term for each candidate. The formula for the 2000 presidential election is represented by Equation (2).

$$\frac{P_{Gore} + N_{Gore} + P_{Bush} + N_{Bush}}{2} - [|P_{Gore} - N_{Gore}| + |P_{Bush} - N_{Bush}|] \quad (2)$$

When examining ambivalence toward a single candidate (Equation 1), this measure ranges from -2.5 to 5; when applied to two candidates (Equation 2), it can range from -7.5 to 5. For both versions of the measure, positive values suggest higher levels of ambivalence. In the two-candidate measure, the main differences is that a negative value represents a positive *and* polarized set of attitudes. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for ambivalence and the other dependent variables.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables

Measure	Mean	Std. Dev.	Range	N
Ambivalence				
Gore	-0.51	1.12	-2.5,5	1787
Bush	-0.58	1.06	-2.5,5	1777
Combined	-2.09	2.10	-7.5,4	1767
Internal Efficacy	0.48	0.24	0,1	1534

The second dependent variable is a standard measure of internal efficacy, which I use to gage how much confidence a respondent has in her ability to effectively participate in politics. The measure is a scale based on questions that ask respondents how informed about, qualified for, and understanding they are about politics (Niemi, Craig & Mattei 1991, Craig, Niemi & Silver 1990, Craig & Maggiotto 1982). Earlier research confirms the validity of this scale, which is measured here on a zero to one interval, and how it differs from

the related concepts of external efficacy and political trust. In the case of the 2000 data, the internal efficacy measure has a mean 0.47 and a standard deviation of 0.24.

5 Empirical Results

5.1 Social Expertise and Candidate Ambivalence

A suitable starting point for the analysis is candidate ambivalence. Not only is there indirect evidence that social expertise influences how much ambivalence people have (McClurg 2006a), but this is a pivotal variable for understanding the normative effects of networks. To the extent that networks induce ambivalence, they help potential voters see different sides of political issues and make them less likely to participate. To the extent that social expertise dilutes the negative effect of disagreement, it would suggest that networks do not necessarily need to involve as much of a trade off between deliberation and participation.

Table 2 shows the results from three regression models that investigate the effect of social expertise, political disagreement, and control variables on the ambivalence measured discussed in the previous section. Among the controls are standard demographic controls for gender, race, age, and education. Political variables include 4-point measures of partisan and ideological strength. The respondent's response to ten separate political knowledge questions and post-election report of how closely they followed the campaign are also included.

Each of these models significantly predicts variance in candidate ambivalence over the null model. When the ambivalence toward the candidates is modeled separately, the model predicts roughly 10% of the variance in the dependent variable with small changes improvements in the root mean square error (MSE) over the original standard deviation (on the magnitude of .06 units). Conversely, the model does a much better job of predicting overall ambivalence with an adjusted R^2 of .20 and a root MSE .2 units lower than the original standard deviation. These differences are understandable in light of the theoretical framework. If social expertise is important for providing cueing information rather than persuasive information, then there should not be a strong partisan bias in its impact on ambivalence and it should perhaps be more important for influencing overall attitudes toward politics.

Table 2: OLS Regression Model of Candidate Ambivalence in 2000 ANES

	Combined		Gore		Bush	
	β^*	s.e.	β^*	s.e.	β^*	s.e.
Network Knowledge	-0.44	0.10**	-0.09	0.05#	-0.11	0.05*
Network Disagreement	0.32	0.15*	0.22	0.08*	0.10	0.08
Education	0.06	0.04	0.07	0.02**	0.07	0.02**
Knowledge	-0.10	0.03**	0.003	0.02	-0.02	0.02
Distinctiveness	-0.33	0.05**	-0.08	0.03**	-0.16	0.03**
Partisan Strength	-0.31	0.06**	-0.16	0.03**	-0.09	0.03**
Ideological Strength	-0.26	0.07**	-0.10	0.04*	-0.12	0.04**
Followed Election	-0.10	0.08	-0.07	0.04#	-0.03	0.04
White	-0.03	0.15	0.07	0.08	-0.02	0.07
Female	-0.30	0.12*	-0.16	0.06*	-0.18	0.06**
Age	-0.01	0.004**	-0.01	0.002**	-0.01	0.002**
Constant	0.43	0.26	0.11	0.14	0.17	0.14
N		1335		1348		1343
Adj. R^2		0.20		0.10		0.11
Root MSE		1.89		1.04		1.00
F		29.94**		14.55**		15.59***

<p.10, *p<.05, **p<.01 all two-tailed tests.

Directly pertinent to this paper the results provide strong evidence for the hypothesis that social expertise should reduce ambivalence. In the model of combined ambivalence, every unit increase in network sophistication reduces ambivalence by .45 units. Thus someone who has a network full of political experts will have an overall ambivalence score that is almost one whole point lower than someone who has no access to expertise. This compares favorably to the effect of other variables across their range, such as political knowledge and ideological strength.

As anticipated political disagreement in networks increases ambivalence. But importantly, the effect is *smaller* than the effect of expertise. Moving across the entire disagreement scale—from zero to one—increases ambivalence by 0.32 units, an effect that is roughly one-third the impact of disagreement. Not only is this consistent with earlier evidence that social expertise is more important for explaining participation than disagreement (McClurg 2006a), but it implies that social expertise can more than balance the negative impact of disagreement on participation. And while the corre-

lation between these two measures is not extraordinarily strong, people who experience disagreement on average have networks that are higher in social expertise ($r = .33$).

The other two models provide additional—if qualified—support for the hypothesis. In both cases, network sophistication is statistically significant. If we use two-tailed tests, as does Table 1, the effect is significant at the .10 level for ambivalence about Al Gore but is significant at the .05 level for George Bush. Interestingly, network disagreement is a substantively strong and statistically precise predictor of ambivalence toward Gore but not Bush. This implies that attitudes toward the incumbent party candidate Gore were more substantially influenced by disagreement and those toward the less familiar candidate Bush were more strongly related to expertise. Again, this is somewhat understandable in light of the theory as cueing information should be more important for understanding a new object of evaluation than one that people likely had more information on. Nevertheless, such an argument requires further testing and is not entirely consistent with the theoretical model.

5.2 Effects of Social Expertise on Confidence

A key component of the argument offered in this paper is that cueing information should help people better understand politics, thus leading them to feel more confident. Toward this end, the next step in the analysis is to analyze how capable people feel of participating in politics. There are *two* different components to these feeling—internal and external efficacy (Niemi, Craig & Mattei 1991). The first refers to how capable a person feels of their ability to participate, while the second refers to whether the person sees systemic factors as being roadblocks. Based on the hypotheses offered above, this section focuses on internal efficacy.

Table 3 reports the results of an OLS regression model of internal efficacy. This model is essentially the same set of variables as used in Table 2, though the respondent’s views on how distinct they see the candidates is dropped as a control variable since it is not a clear factor in producing internal efficacy. As above, the model does a good job of predicting variation in internal efficacy with an adjusted R^2 of 36%, a 25% reduction in the root MSE, and a statistically significant test against the null model. Additionally, all of the variables significantly predict variation with the exception of network disagreement, partisan strength, and age. Considering that many

of the underlying cognitive and personality structures that may produce internal efficacy are not controlled here, this is an impressive performance.

Most central to this paper, the results support the hypothesis that social expertise makes people more confident. Each unit increase in network knowledge produces a statistically significant .03 unit increase in internal efficacy. As the dependent variable is on a 0-1 scale, this can be interpreted as a 3% increase in internal efficacy. Although this does not seem very strong at first blush, the effect is comparable to other variables in the model. For example, having a network full of political sophisticates has an effect on par with moving from being a moderate to a weak liberal or conservative. Though other variables remain more important, particularly personal political knowledge and interest, the bottom line remains that people exposed to social expertise exhibit higher levels of confidence.

Table 3: OLS Model of Internal Efficacy in 2000 ANES

	Internal Efficacy	
	β^*	s.e.
Network Knowledge	0.03	0.01*
Network Disagreement	-0.02	0.02
Education	0.02	0.004**
Knowledge	0.03	0.003**
Partisan Strength	0.00	0.01
Ideological Strength	0.02	0.01
Political Interest	0.08	0.01**
White	-0.06	0.02**
Female	-0.08	0.01**
Age	-0.00	0.00
Constant	0.27	0.03**
N		1357
Adj. R^2		0.36
Root MSE		0.19
F		61.03**

<p.10,*p<.05, **p<.01 all two-tailed tests.

One sensible objection to the results in Table 3 would be that the direction of causality may work in the other direction. Unlike candidate ambivalence, which is a temporary response to a specific election and therefore less likely to structure the types of networks measured here (Klofstad, McClurg & Rolfe

Forthcoming), internal efficacy is a more stable attitude that is less about the specific choices than about the individual. Consequently, it is quite possible that people who have high levels of internal efficacy are more likely to feel confident disagreeing with people in their network and having conversations with political experts. To the extent that this is true, it could produce endogeneity or selection bias in these results.

Although a full exploration of causality is not possible here, it is important to tackle this question as directly as possible. Toward that end, I use a simultaneous equation model estimated with two-stage least squares to determine the effect of social expertise on internal efficacy. To do this, it is necessary to have exogenous variables that uniquely explain variance in each dependent variable. For internal efficacy, I use two batteries that measure a respondent's need to evaluate and need for cognition. The first of these is based on two questions that ask a respondent to report on how opinionated she is on issues and relative to other people. The need for cognition battery is based on two questions that ask respondents whether they like thinking and if they prefer complex problems to simple ones. For both batteries, the questions were coded to be on a zero to one scale and then the respondent's answers were averaged across the two questions. Although these questions are some degree correlated with both social expertise ($r = .25$) and internal efficacy ($r = .38$), the specification is based on the assumption that internal efficacy is more strongly related to cognitive structure than are network choices in such a way that the effects on expertise are best understood as being filtered through efficacy.

To predict network knowledge, I use two exogenous variables in the average level of political talk in the network and the percentage of the network is male. While internal efficacy is empirically correlated with these variables ($r = .37$ and $r = .16$, respectively), there is again theoretical justification for the order of effects. First, with respect to political talk the specification is based on the assumption that discussion is imposed upon people to a greater extent than they can control it. Second, a long standing finding in network studies is that men are perceived as being more politically expert than women, even when they are not (Huckfeldt & Sprague 1995). There is no particular reason, conversely, to believe that the gender bias of a person's network depends more strongly on their efficacy.

Estimates of this simultaneous equation model are reported in Table 4. Prior to discussing them it is worth pointing out that these are robust to relaxing the specification assumptions. In a series of results not shown here,

Table 4: Simultaneous Equation Model of Internal Efficacy and Social Expertise in 2000 ANES

	Internal Efficacy		Network Knowledge	
	β^*	s.e.	β^*	s.e.
<i>Endogenous Variables</i>				
Internal Efficacy			0.63	0.24**
Network Knowledge	0.12	0.03**		
<i>Exogenous Variables</i>				
Need for Cognition	0.13	0.02**		
Need to Evaluate	0.18	0.03**		
% Male in Network			0.05	0.02**
Political Talk			0.28	0.03**
<i>Control Variables</i>				
Network Disagreement	-0.00	0.01	-0.01	0.04
Education	0.01	0.004**	0.02	0.012
Knowledge	0.03	0.003**	-0.01	0.01
Partisan Strength	0.00	0.01	-0.01	0.02
Ideological Strength	-0.00	0.01	0.02	0.02
Political Interest	0.07	0.01**	-0.04	0.03
White	-0.04	0.02**	0.08	0.04*
Female	-0.08	0.01**	0.16	0.04**
Age	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
Constant	-0.02	0.04	0.17	0.10
N	1008		100	
R^2	0.42		0.14	
Root MSE	0.18		0.47	
F	67.63**		18.88**	

<p.10,*p<.05, **p<.01 all two-tailed tests.

exogenous variables were placed in what I have labeled as the control variable category. In every case, the evidence remains consistent with the basic hypothesis that expertise increases efficacy.⁶

Although both of the exogenous predictors of internal efficacy are statistically significant at the .01 level, the overall performance of this model is only

⁶It is also worth noting that these results are not weighted, as are those in Tables 2 and 3.

marginally different than in the OLS model. Nevertheless, these estimates satisfy the exogeneity requirements. Interestingly, the effect of social expertise is significantly larger than previously—rising to 0.14 from 0.02. Again, this is evidence in favor of the central arguments in this paper even though it is clear that there are significant feedback effects from internal efficacy to network knowledge. Keeping in mind that these findings should be subject to additional investigation with data more capable of establishing causality, the overall thrust of this evidence is to suggest that social expertise may in part be sought out by people high in internal efficacy, but it still has the effect of increasing their political confidence.

6 Discussion

Social expertise plays a fundamental role in explaining how networks can facilitate involvement in politics. First, it can help counteract increases in ambivalence experienced from disagreement in the networks. This implies that in those situations where disagreement and expertise exist side-by-side in networks, that there is potential for people to gain from their informal deliberation while also increasing their reasons for participating. While neither factor is probably determinative of involvement by itself, it does affect whether people decide to take personal resources and apply them to politics. In this way, social networks can affect the marginal rates of participation of people who are both resource poor and resource rich (McClurg 2003, Klostad 2007a).

However, social expertise does not simply insulate potential voters from disagreeable opinions that make them less likely to participate. If we were to imagine a situation in which there is very little disagreement, significant variability would remain in people’s attitudes about the candidates because of *other* factors. To the extent that having larger social networks creates opportunities to talk politics more frequently with people that can supplement a person’s information, they can have a positive effect on participation simply by reducing this ambivalence. In this way, the evidence in this paper helps explain the positive correlations that are the foundation of this literature.

There are also impressive consequences of social expertise on internal efficacy. Even though we should reserve some judgment about the size of this effect without further investigation, the fact that this relationship holds up in a simultaneous equation framework with minimal exogenous variables suggests that there is an important relationship at work here. And from

the perspective of the theoretical framework, it is particularly important evidence for suggesting that social expertise is important for helping people understand politics rather than simply acting as an additional source of persuasive and factual information.

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