Department of Political Science
CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

THE RELEVANCE OF MICRO SOCIAL CONTEXTS FOR INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

By

Oana Lup

A Doctoral Dissertation

Submitted to the Central European University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August, 2011

Supervisory committee:

Gábor Tóka, Central European University

Paul Allen Beck, Ohio State University

Tamás Rudas, Central European University& ELTE

I hereby declare that this work contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions. This thesis contains no materials previously written and/or published by another person unless otherwise noted.

Oana Lup
August, 2011

Abstract

In my dissertation I explore the role played by the micro social contexts in which ordinary citizens are embedded on their political engagement. I start my examination with the assumption that participation in informal political conversations promotes individuals' political participation and contribute to an increase in their level of political cognition. I analyze the effects of everyday political discussion in two types of micro social settings – close, intimate and generic ones. Results indicate that political discussion in either type of social setting has both direct and indirect effects on voting and political knowledge. Most of the direct effects are moderated by macro contextual factors. Specifically, frequency of political talk in intimate settings appears to advance individual political knowledge in those countries characterized by extensive political talk in the micro social settings. Political agreement with close, intimate peers stimulates electoral participation, especially in newly democratized countries. Frequent political talk within generic social settings, on the other hand, generates an increase in political knowledge in less developed countries. With regard to the indirect effects, my results indicate that political discussion stimulates individuals' attention to political news in media and general political interest. Political interest and media attentiveness are, in turn, the most significant antecedents of voting and political knowledge.

I continue with an empirical examination of the hypothesis that political discussion is a significant antecedent of individual political engagement and test different directions of influences between the two. Results indicate that the assumption present in the previous literature might not be tenable in its original form. In the context of Japan, the classical direction of effects seems to be reversed; more politically knowledgeable and opinionated people are more likely to

engage in political conversations. On the other hand, there is evidence that informal political talk influences individuals' levels of political opinionation and knowledge indirectly. More frequent political discussion and membership in loosely connected networks of political conversation strongly affects individuals' interest in politics, which, in turn, influences their level of political knowledge. For the relationship between political discussion and participation, my results confirm the expectations formulated by the previous literature; frequent political conversation stimulates participation in political and civic activities in Hungary.

Having established that in some contexts and under specific circumstances micro social settings play an important role in politics, I examine the supply side of those politically relevant features of social networks, in countries dissimilar in their democratic experiences. The results indicate that people from countries with a more recent democratic experience are, in general, part of smaller, less diverse, less politicized and more politically homogeneous social networks compared to their counterparts from older democracies. Within the group of newly democratized countries, people who were socialized in a democratic period are similar to young generations from consolidated democracies in their patterns of social connectivity. However, in the new democracies, those generations who were socialized in democracy tend to participate less in political conversations compared to those who became adults under authoritarian regimes.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank those who lent their scholarly expertise and support at various stages of writing my PhD dissertation. My supervisor, Gabor Toka, deserves great appreciation for his constant and extremely valuable guidance from the early stages of my project. He taught me many things from writing a proposal to dealing with various statistical methods, but, most important, he taught me what rigorous research means. I cannot thank him enough for all the time he spent and all the interest he put in my project.

Paul Allen Beck became involved later in supervising my PhD project and, from the very beginning, we shared an interest for the study of social influences in politics. I would like to thank him firstly for accepting to mentor me during my visit at Ohio State University and for being always available to answer my questions and discuss my research problems. I am especially appreciative of his constructive criticism and scholarly rigor. Also, I want to thank both him and Richard Gunther for granting me access to the CNEP data that I used in my dissertation and for assisting me in using it.

Perhaps one of the most challenging collaboration was the one with Tamas Rudas. The best that can happen to a student is to be exposed to a different framework of approaching a problem and this describes my experience with Tamas Rudas' way of looking at my project. I am grateful to him for teaching me the values of good research and the importance of approaching problems in an inquisitive manner. I hope that my best way of 'repaying' him would be by passing the same standards to my students, in the future.

I want to express my gratitude to Ken'ichi Ikeda, for his numerous interventions in my project. He gave me access to the Japanese data sets that I employed in my analysis, read my

chapter on Japan and always gave timely and constructive feedback on my research. His scholarly passion for the study of social networks is an example for me.

I benefitted a lot from my discussions with Robert Tardos. Not only did he help with compiling some of the Hungarian data that I used in my dissertation but he also gave extremely valuable insights into networks dynamic in the Hungarian context.

I learned a lot about how to use statistical methods from Levente Littvay. He was always available when I needed his help on nitty-gritty problems with my statistical analysis. Also, special thanks to Thomas Rudolph who always gave timely answers to my questions on multilevel analysis.

During my visit at Ohio State University I had the opportunity to meet two very important scholars, whose research is particularly relevant for me. I want to thank Erik Nisbet and Wiliam 'Chip' Eveland for advising me on my project. Wiliam 'Chip' Eveland read an important part of this dissertation and gave constructive and useful feedback. I owe special thanks to Philipp Rehm, whose apparently small comment contributed to an important turn in my paper.

In the process of writing my dissertation I benefited from grants and fellowships offered within EU framework programs. I participated in the Workshop „connecting Excellence on European Governance" Connex „Civil Society Involvement in European Governance", hosted by the Centre for European Social Research MZES, in Mannheim. I want to thank especially Jan van Deth, Sonja Zmerli and Sigrid Roßteutscher for their helpful comments in the early stages of my dissertation writing. Also, Jan van Deth gave me access to the CID data that I used in my dissertation and advised me on various issues related to these data sets. I also benefited from the visits at the European Centre for Analysis in the Social Sciences (ECASS) at the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex, supported by the Access to Research Infrastructures action under the EU Improving Human Potential Programme, and at the European

Data Laboratory for Comparative Social Research (EUROLAB) supported by the European Community under the 'Structuring the European Research Area' specific programme, Research Infrastructures Action of the 6th Framework Programme. I owe special thanks to Ingvill Mochmann for her assistance during my stay at the EUROLAB.

The whole process of thinking over and writing this dissertation was a lengthy one. Many people helped with comments in formal and less formal settings. I owe special thanks to my colleagues from the Political Behavior Research Group (PolBeRG), and to Balazs Vedres, Zsolt Enyedi and Marina Popescu. Very often, casual conversations were extremely useful in sparking arguments and helping me to reflect on the foundations of this project. Daniela Lup and Peter Maas were my companions in this enterprise.

Last and for sure not least I owe many thanks to my academic writing instructors, John Harbord and Thomas Rooney; I learned a lot from them. Oana Pop's help is greatly appreciated; she was extremely patient and supportive in her help with editing this text.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my parents who always trusted me.

Table of contents

List of Tables and Figures

Introduction

Ordinary citizens' participation in political discussions has been seen as a desirable feature of democracies ever since the heydays of the Athenian demos. More recently, advocates of deliberative democracy have suggested that everyday political talks function as fora in which people learn about politics, form and refine their political preferences, and prepare to express them through political actions. In short, the give and take of everyday political conversations is believed to lead to an increase in levels of political interest, knowledge and participation. A less optimistic view about informal political conversation though, is that this is a mere form of social entertainment and sometimes might hinder political knowledge and lead to political intolerance. This happens when political discussion exposes people to one-sided views and insulates them in politically homogeneous micro social settings, in which a dialogue between holders of divergent political views becomes impossible.

In the previous literature, the empirical test of the statements that describe potential benefits of informal political conversation revealed inconsistent findings, tradeoffs between equally desirable political outcomes that are related to political talk and, for most of the cases, several limitations imposed by available data. One of the most challenging conclusions was reached by Mutz's study, which suggested that the type of political communication that advances political participation – one that exposes people to similar political views – is incompatible with the one that promotes political tolerance – political conversation that exposes people to dissimilar views (Mutz 2006). This finding indicates that informal political discussion is not a panacea for alleviating all democratic dysfunctions. On the contrary, it invites a more nuanced approach in

studying the role of political communication for individual political engagement. However, Mutz's results are not conclusive. Other scholars found evidence that exposure to political disagreement does not hinder political participation (Horan 1971, Nir 2005) and might even promote it, through an increase in political knowledge (Leighley 1990, McLeod *et al.* 1999, Scheufele *et al.* 2003, Scheufele *et al.* 2004, Kwak *et al.* 2005). Notwithstanding the inconsistencies of their results, most of these studies cannot say much with regard to the direction of the influences flowing between political communication and engagement. Although most of them found a significant relationship between some features of informal political conversation and political engagement, they were unable to establish whether political talk drives political engagement or, on the contrary, political engagement leads to an increase in levels of informal political conversation.

The study of the relationships between social networks and political engagement is worth pursuing for both theoretical and practical reasons. From a theoretical point of view, it is important to clarify the role of interpersonal communication among other classic predictors of individual political engagement. Previous research documented the existence of strong relationships between the micro social settings in which individuals are embedded and their levels of political participation and cognition. Therefore, empirical models that fail to consider the social nature of individual political engagement (and fail to include features of political discussion in social networks among other explanatory variables) are underspecified and lead to biased estimates and erroneous conclusions. To give an example, some studies showed that, when social networks are included in models that predict political behavior and knowledge, the effects of classical predictors, such as education and income drop or diminish. This suggests that the mechanism through which these demographics operate is by placing people in more politicized settings, for instance (Abrams *et al.* 2010). Equally important, thus, the inclusion of sociological

factors into models of political engagement should be accompanied by an explanation of the mechanisms that make political communication a significant antecedent of political participation and knowledge. Besides these technical concerns about omitting social context from empirical models of individual political behavior, there are equally important practical ones. These theoretical aspects have practical consequences. Understanding the circumstances and the mechanisms that make participation in political conversations a significant antecedent of political engagement can inform policies designed to create a more politically educated and participative citizenry. Such measures should be preceded by a comprehensive examination of the effects that various features of political communication might have on forms of political engagement. As Mutz pointed out, equally valuable political outcomes, such as participation and political tolerance, for instance, appear to be served by different informal discursive practices. If this is indeed the case, social scientists and public policy pundits should find effective ways to equip with their citizens so that they get along with exposure to political disagreement in their social networks while keeping social cohesion and harmony in their social interactions.

There is abundant evidence that the way individuals understand various facts and behave in different realms of their lives is both a matter of their individual characteristics and of the social contexts to which they belong. People do not make decisions – be they political or not – in isolation but as they find themselves embedded in diverse social networks they are susceptible to employ and adopt the ideas and norms that flow through those groups. In short, people are connected and thus, the understanding of their attitudes and behaviors should take into account the structure of the linkages among them and what flows within those groups, i.e. ideas, social norms (Christakis and Fowler 2009).

My dissertation contributes to existing research on these topics in the following ways. First, my study enlarges the scope of previous analysis by examining the relationship between

interpersonal communication and political engagement across countries that differ in their histories and political cultures. This comparative assessment makes it possible to answer the question whether these relationships are general or context dependent. Previous studies were conducted in a limited number of countries, mostly the US and more recent in the UK, Germany, Spain and Japan, and therefore there is a lack of a comprehensive examination of the effects that political discussion has across diverse polities. Second, in my analysis I test directions of the effects between interpersonal communication and political engagement. This allows me to answer the question whether the oft-documented relationship between political communication and engagement is due to the fact that communication enhances engagement or the other way round. The vast majority of previous research could not answer such questions, mostly because of the lack of appropriate data. The third contribution of this study lies in providing an explanation of the mechanism that links interpersonal communication and political engagement. There is limited reflection on these issues beyond the finding of a significant relationship between the two. Building on social psychological theories, especially theories of social identity, uses and gratification, I suggest that political discussion influences forms of political participation and cognitive involvement with politics through an increase in political interest. Finally, my study explores the supply side of these politically relevant features of the interpersonal communication and test the hypothesis that length of democratic tradition predicts them. In the same context, it investigates generational effects on social networks usage and political discussion patterns between people who were socialized under authoritarian regimes and those who grew up in democracies.

To explore these questions I draw on several comparative studies, namely the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), the Comparative National Election Project (CNEP), and Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy (CID), and panel data collected in national studies

conducted in Japan and Hungary. The results of my investigation show that interpersonal communication has both a direct and an indirect effect on an individual's level of political engagement. Moreover, these effects are moderated by macro level factors, such as length of democratic experience, level of economic development, and norms of social and political communication in the countries analyzed. Specifically, political similarity between respondents and their intimate, close peers functions as an incentive for electoral participation. This effect appears to be stronger for those people living in countries with a more recent democratic experience. Additionally, political similarity with close discussion partners has a positive effect on political knowledge for those living in older democracies, more economically developed countries, and societies that have higher averages of political agreement. On the contrary, more frequent talk with people who are part of generic social networks has a positive effect on political knowledge for those people who live in less economically developed countries. The indirect effect of interpersonal communication operates through an increase in levels of political interest and media attentiveness. More frequent political talk in either intimate or generic settings leads to an increase in levels of political interest and media attentiveness in all countries analyzed. Both political interest and media attentiveness are among the strongest antecedents of political knowledge and participation. However, political agreement in intimate settings appears to discourage media consumption and this is even more the case in older democracies and more economically developed countries. Also, political conversations in intimate settings cease to have a stimulating effect on media attentiveness in those societies characterized by extensive informal political talk.

When the assumption that interpersonal communication affects political engagement is questioned, results show mixed evidence. The classic assumption that political talk promotes knowledge and diversity of political opinions does not hold in the political context of Japan. On

the contrary, in my analysis I find that those people who are more politically knowledgeable and hold a diversity of political opinions are more likely to engage in political conversations with their peers. For the relationship between political discussion and participation though, results show that the classic assumption holds when tested in the context of Hungary. Those people who have more political discussants among their close others participate more often in civic and political activities. With regard to all these analyses, there is evidence that political discussion affects both political participation and knowledge through an increase in levels of interest for politics. The amount of political discussion in one's micro social settings signals the importance attributed to this topic in those social environments. Theories of social identity and those of uses and gratification would predict that this acts as an incentive for group members to seek political information either through media or political conversations. My analysis also confirms the existence of reciprocal effects between engagement in political discussion and levels of political interest.

Finally, there is evidence that the supply of these politically relevant features of the micro social settings varies across countries. People who live in countries with a non-democratic past are embedded in smaller and less diverse social networks, tend to discuss less politics in their everyday social settings and participate in more politically biased conversations. Within countries with a more recent democratic experience, people who were socialized during democratic years are less likely to discuss politics compared to people who were socialized under authoritarian regimes. This suggests that past legacies might be transmitted between generations, although this finding might be also indicative of differences in regime type and openness of the political competition in the aftermath of democratization.

My dissertation proceeds as follows. In the first chapter I introduce the main concepts of my research and discuss terminological distinctions with regard to their use across existing

studies. I give an overview of the conclusions reached in previous research on the social underpinnings of political engagement and highlight the gaps that I see in these studies, mostly with regard to their inconsistencies and limitations. I introduce my research questions and give a brief account of the research design employed in my dissertation. More detailed accounts of specific hypotheses, data and research design are given in each of the chapters. In chapter two I present the results of a comparative analysis of the effects that casual political conversation in close, intimate social settings has on individual electoral participation and political knowledge. Chapter three complements this analysis with an examination of the effects that political discussion in generic social settings has on individual voting and political cognition. These analyses employ data collected in countries with dissimilar histories and political cultures, including different democratic experiences. In both chapter two and three, I test the moderating role of macro contextual variables on the relationship between informal political discussion and engagement. These macro level variables are the length of democratic experience in the countries analyzed, their level of economic development, and norms of social and political interactions. In chapter four, the classic direction of influence between political communication and engagement is examined empirically. Specifically, in this chapter I test for reciprocal effects between political communication and two forms of cognitive involvement with politics, namely political knowledge and diversity of political opinions. Chapter five continues the examination of direction of effects between political communication and another form of individual political engagement, namely political participation. Chapter six explores the determinants of those politically relevant features of the interpersonal communication. Specifically, it looks at differences in patterns of social networks and informal political discussion between old and new democracies. It also test whether, in countries with a more recent democratic experience, there are significant differences

between people who were socialized under authoritarian regimes and those who came of age under democracies, with regard to social network usage and political discussion patterns.

Throughout my dissertation I employ statistical methods that were previously used by scholars engaged in research on similar issues. On the one hand, this makes possible a comparison between my results and the findings of extant research. On the other hand, as discussed in my chapters, other methods might be more appropriate for the study of the problems raised by my investigation. Moreover, as highlighted in the last part of each individual chapter, there are limitations imposed by the use of specific methods.

Chapter 1: Social networks, political discussion and engagement: the state of the art

In this chapter I introduce the main concepts that I employ in my research and highlight various terminological uses that they received in the previous literature. I discuss the findings of the extant literature on the sociological underpinnings of individual political engagement and point at some inconsistencies and gaps in their conclusions. I then present the research design of my study: research questions, general expectations on the role of interpersonal communication on individual political engagement, the data and the methods that I employ to explore these issues.

1.1. Main concepts

Social networks

Social networks refer to the social interactions that people have in their everyday lives. They include, but are not necessarily limited to, interactions that occur within families, groups of friends, workmates and various voluntary organizations to which individuals belong. Social networks are seen as sources of social capital (Coleman 1988, Putnam 1995). They provide resources, such as trust and cooperation, to people who are engaged in regular social interactions (Coleman 1988, Putnam 1995). Such resources make possible 'the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible' (Coleman 1988: 98). Equally important, social networks function as channels of information diffusion and, therefore, can contribute to an increase in levels of political information, knowledge and participation (Granovetter 1973, Putnam 1995).

Recent advancements in network analysis made possible sophisticated research on diffusion of information, norms and behaviors in large networks (Christakis and Fowler 2009). A major drawback of such studies, though, is that they are conducted in restricted contexts and, therefore, their conclusions cannot be generalized. Surveys are the most common method of collecting social networks data. This way, researchers can gather information on a large number of individuals and have the ability to generalize their conclusions to the population sampled. On the other hand, network data collected in surveys gives a partial representation of the micro social contexts in which individuals reside. This is due to the fact that usually there are limits in the number of people that can be indicated as part of one's networks and very often there is no information about the relationships within the network of an individual respondent (ego-centric network).

Some scholars who studied the political role of social networks distinguished between micro-social contexts, which are those environments in which people reside, such as neighborhoods, for instance, and social networks, which are those social interactions selected from these social contexts. This distinction emphasizes that while social contexts are by and large given – although, they are not totally exogeneous to individual choices – social networks include those people who are chosen from the inhabitants of these given micro social contexts (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987). Granted, in reality, these two concepts overlap and scholars discuss them separately solely for analytical purposes.

In my research, social networks are considered to be the result of an individual's choice, which is structurally constrained by the more generic social settings that she inhabits. In most of the previous research, larger social contexts were measured as small territorial units, such as neighborhoods, for instance. In my research, the macro social units that I investigate are

countries, in which people are expected to share similar norms of social interactions and political communication.

An even subtler distinction is the one between social groups and networks (Huckfeldt *et al.* 2004). This distinction is important for understanding another key element of interpersonal communication that I am discussing below, namely political heterogeneity or cross-pressure. As Huckfeldt and his colleagues show, there are important, though not so obvious implications of conceiving individuals' interdependence in terms of social networks rather than self-contained groups (Huckfeldt *et al.* 2004: 17-8). The understanding of social influences stemming from individuals' embededdness in small groups, in which people are connected among them, is an understatement of the more fluid social reality. In most of the studies conducted before the advancements in network analysis, individuals' interdependence was discussed in terms of embeddedness in such groups. The studies conducted by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944, Berelson *et al.* 1954), for instance, followed this approach. The same method was employed in social psychology research (Festinger 1954). The major drawback of analyzing social influences in politics in the framework of embeddedness in small, self-contained groups is that it underestimates the more fluid nature of these influences and overlooks the social interactions that occur outside the boundaries of these pre-defined groups. Therefore, the concept of 'social networks' might offer a more accurate description of an individual's social interactions. It also captures differences in the social interactions patterns of individuals who are located in similar social groups. People who belong to the same social groups might be exposed to different social influences inasmuch as they attend to social interactions that are not shared by their group fellows. The social interactions occurring outside the boundaries of the pre-defined groups might have stronger influences, as emphasized by Granovetter's model of 'weak ties' and Burt's concepts of 'bridges' and 'holes' in the social networks. Moreover, influences can occur even in

the absence of direct contact and this is captured in Burt's model of social equivalence (Burt 1987).

With regard to social networks' influence in politics, there is evidence that they provide mobilization for electoral participation (McCarthy and Zald 1977, McCarthy 1996, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Verba *et al.* 1995). Social networks work as 'micromobilisation contexts' for political engagement (Snow *et al.* 1980, McAdam 1988, McAdam and Paulsen 1993). Notwithstanding explicit calls for recruitment that might come through these interactions, some structural features of the social networks were found to affect individual's political behavior and cognition. They are the size, diversity, strength and density of the social networks.

Individuals can have smaller or more extensive social interactions; these interactions can provide a protective 'cocoon' or can expose people to diverse opinions and views. Small social networks usually contain close, intimate relationships; this coincides with Granovetter's concept of 'strong ties'. Larger, more generic social networks, on the other hand, might include 'weak ties' along with the strong ones (Granovetter 1973). Each type of ties serves different purposes. 'Strong ties' generate trust and norms of reciprocity, whereas 'weak ties' connects individuals with diverse social contexts and give them access to various and potentially non-redundant information sources (Granovetter 1973). Similarly, Burt discusses about the role of 'bridges' and 'holes' in the social networks, which connects individuals located in different social networks. In Putnam's research, strength of ties enters in his distinction between 'bonding' and 'bridging social capital' and networks. Network density is a concept that social science scholars borrowed from network analysis literature. It measures how connected network members are. In a dense network, two individuals share the same associates (Granovetter 1973, Burt 1987), whereas in sparser networks there are a small number of ties relative to the total number of possible ones. Network density is important for exposure to political disagreement; in a highly connected

network, the chances of exposure to a diversity of political views are severely curtailed. On the other hand, tight networks have their advantages; they enhance social cohesion and are important sources of trust and close cooperation. They provide social and political identity and, consequently, reinforce political views and fuel political engagement.

However, what makes these social interactions particularly prone to create political influence is the explicit exchange of political opinions and arguments that go on within these social networks. Some authors discussed about a politically relevant social capital, which does not come about in the absence of specific political interactions occurring in these networks (Lake and Huckfeldt 1998).

Political talk

Previous studies employed various terminologies to describe political conversations that occur among peers as a by-product of their everyday social interactions. Political talk, civic talk, political discussion, political conversation or informal deliberation, are just a few of them. What they have in common is that these conversations are neither bound by formal rules nor aimed at reaching a consensual result. In fact, this is what some authors believe it separates informal political conversations from other forms of deliberative practices, such as deliberative polls and citizen juries (Klofstad 2011). As Mutz suggests, the standards of the ideal deliberative settings are rather difficult to meet in real life (Mutz 2006).

Information about casual political talk is usually collected in surveys through two types of questions (name-generators) that prompt different relationships. One of them asks respondents to indicate people with whom they usually discuss politics. This explicit request to nominate political discussants is more likely to elicit information about respondents' 'weak ties'. The other type of question requests information about respondents' close, intimate social interactions and

habits of discussing politics with these people. This type of question is more likely to elicit information about respondents' 'strong ties'. However, there is empirical evidence that, in the American context, the two types of questions generate similar types of relationships (Huckfekdt and Sprague 1995). People tend to discuss politics with those with whom they do other activities together. In other words, politics does not lead to a compartmentalization of these relationships. This can be justified from a rational point of view; specialization of relationships comes with a cost and, therefore, people are better off if they use the same contacts to serve diverse interests, such as entertainment and political discussion, for instance (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995: 17).

A different approach on the role of political discussion is pursued by Eliasoph (1998) and Walsh (2004), who observed small communities, over a long period of time. Although this approach produces wealthier information than survey studies do, it has a limited capacity of generalizing the conclusions beyond the contexts in which data was collected.

The features of political talk that were found to have consequences for individuals' political behavior and cognition are the size of these political networks, the frequency of these political conversations, the level of political expertise and agreement in these networks of political discussion.

Political homogeneity/heterogeneity

An important element of informal political conversations is whether they expose people to similar or divergent political views. Whereas the concept of network homogeneity has been consistently used in the previous literature, the one pertaining to the presence of opposing political views is marred by both terminological and measurement issues. A look at previous literature on the social underpinnings of political behavior indicates that the following terms have

been used to describe micro social contexts that expose people to views different from their own ones: cross-cutting social networks (Mutz 2002b), heterogeneous (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995, Scheufele *et al.* 2004, McLeod *et al.* 1999), ambivalent (Nir 2005), diverse (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995) and dangerous (Eveland and Shah 2003, Eveland and Hiveley 2009, Eveland *et al.* 2010) micro social settings.

In the seminal studies on the role of social contexts in politics, Lazarsfeld and his colleagues introduced the concept of 'cross-pressure', understood as an ideological imbalance created by an individual's membership in diverse social groups (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944, Berelson *et al.* 1954). Social categories were employed until relatively recently as proxies for individuals' ideologies and political preferences. More recently, though, survey studies provide direct information about exposure to divergent political views and political cross-pressure in individuals' social networks. These studies include measures of respondents' self-declared partisanship or political leaning and their reports on their relationships' partisan preferences. Such measures can be used to compute direct measures of political heterogeneity or cross-pressure. Some authors continued to employ a combination of the two in order to capture both social and political sources of heterogeneity in people's social surroundings (Scheufele *et al.* 2004, Kwak *et al.* 2005).

However, as Eveland and his colleagues suggest, 'one of the major limitations of this survey-based research is that the definition of disagreement is inconsistent across studies […].' (Eveland *et al.* 2010) This concept was measured in the previous literature with reference to presidential candidate vote choice, partisan preferences and ideological leaning, and socio-demographics, such as gender or race (Eveland *et al.* 2010). Moreover, the indicators of 'cross-pressure' or heterogeneity used in the previous literature do not distinguish between social networks that expose individuals to both similar and divergent political views and those in which

they experience only political disagreement. Disagreement and cross-pressure was measured either as number/ proportion of network members holding political views different from respondents' (Mutz 2002b) or as number/ proportion of network members who support both similar and different views as compared to respondents (Nir 2005).

Differences in how political disagreement is measured across various studies are likely to have consequences for the conclusions reached (Eveland *et al.* 2010). To solve these terminological confusions, Eveland and Hively (2009) propose a distinction among three types of political discussion networks, namely 'dangerous', 'safe', and 'diverse'. In all three cases the reference point in assessing similarity/dissimilarity is respondent's partisan position. 'Dangerous discussion' occurs when network members' positions 'conflict with the views or characteristics of the ego' (Eveland and Hively 2009: 208). This concept is similar to what most of the previous research has labeled as heterogeneous or 'cross-cutting' discussions (Leighley 1990, Mutz 2002b, Scheufele *et al.* 2004). 'Discussion diversity' is measured as 'the degree to which discussions (or discussion partners) in various researcher-designated categories are evenly distributed across those categories' (Eveland and Hively, 2009: 208). Nir's concept of 'ambivalence' is similar to discussion diversity (Nir 2005). Finally, 'safe discussion' is the logical 'inverse of dangerous discussion' and includes 'those discussions that coincide with the views or characteristics of the ego' (Eveland and Hively, 2009: 208). 'Dangerous' and 'safe discussion' are not exclusive circumstances as involvement in one type does not prevent exposure to the other.

1.2. State of the art

This section presents a review of the studies that investigated the relationship between features of interpersonal communication in the micro social settings in which people reside and

their political cognition and participation. This presentation highlights the main inconsistencies in the conclusions reached by these studies and some of their limitations.

The understanding of individual political behavior as a socially rooted phenomenon had its heyday in the 1940s with the research of Lazarsfeld and his colleagues (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944). Despite convincing arguments in favor of considering micro social contexts as important influences for individual electoral behavior, the social model of politics was soon abandoned and replaced by models where political behavior was understood fundamentally (and even exclusively) as an individual act. The last two decades have witnessed an accumulation of research where individual political behavior and knowledge have been approached from a social perspective. This revival came from different research areas, such as studies on the role of personal social networks in politics (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995), social capital (Putnam 2000), and deliberative theories of democracy (Fishkin 1991).

This revived interest in the social underpinnings of politics resulted in a wide agreement in the scholarly literature with regard to the relevance of micro social contexts for normatively desirable outcomes such as political participation (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944, Berelson *et al.* 1954, Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995, Lake and Huckfeldt 1998, Mutz 2002b, 2006, McClurg 2003, 2006a, Huckfeldt *et al*. 2004), and political knowledge and sophistication (Kenny 1998, Holbert *et al.* 2002, Bennett *et al*. 2000, Eveland 2004, Eveland and Thomson 2006, Eveland and Hively 2009).

This accumulation of evidence on the social nature of political behavior and cognition revealed potential theoretical inconsistencies and normative tradeoffs (see especially Mutz 2002b, 2006). For instance, some studies highlighted that the type of social setting that furthers tolerance and knowledge is one that might depress participation and political involvement (Mutz 2006). Specifically, while some studies found that exposure to politically conflicting views in micro

social settings is negatively associated with various forms of participation, (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944, Berelson *et al.* 1954, Mutz 2002b, 2006), others showed a positive effect of political disagreement (Leighley 1990, McLeod *et al.* 1999, Scheufele *et al.* 2003, Scheufele *et al.* 2004, Kwak *et al.* 2005) or a non-significant one (Horan 1971, Nir 2005). Several explanations of this phenomenon were proposed. Some of them attributed the diversity and at times contradictory nature of these findings to the inconsistent way of conceptualizing and operationalizing political disagreement across different studies (Eveland and Hively 2009, Eveland *et al.* 2010). Others suggested that given that 'the "social context" is a multilayered phenomenon', research should take into account both micro and macro social embeddedness as sources of political influence (McClurg 2006a: 350).

Research on the social underpinnings of political behavior originates in the studies of the scholars who became known as the Columbia school of sociologists (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944, Berelson *et al.* 1954). Their research focused on the role of interpersonal communication in electoral campaign. The results of their empirical investigation emphasized the substantial role played by primary groups in molding partisanships and promoting participation. Specifically, their studies showed that frequent and intimate interactions with like-minded others contribute to the maintenance of stable political preferences and voting patterns.

This sociological model of voting established a line of research where direct, frequent and intimate contact was seen as the main force driving the mechanism of political influence at the level of primary groups. This model of influence is referred to by Burt (1987) as the social cohesion model (Coleman 1966). Confronted with the necessity to make a decision, people turn to their close others and solve the problem through debate at the network level until reaching agreement. Thus, very often, the result is similarity of attitudes, beliefs and behavior among network members.

Despite its wide acceptance, the social cohesion model has not remained unchallenged. Burt formulated the structural equivalence model as an alternative framework for explaining social influence. The core of this model is the similarity of positions occupied in the social structure. Two people are structurally equivalent if they are similarly connected to the same alters or if they display 'the same patterns of relations with occupants of other positions' (Burt 1987: 1291). Structural equivalence is not predicated upon direct contact, but awareness of similarly located others. The influence is not the result of debate among close others but of the relative deprivation within status/position experienced by people who acknowledge the existence of structurally equivalent others and thus their substitutability.

Whereas the rationale of the structural equivalence model is clear and also directly proved in the case analyzed by Burt (drug adoption among physicians was not the result of discussion with trusted others but of the feeling of relative deprivation within one's own status) it is less comprehensible when this framework is applied to research on voting behavior (most notably by Huckfeldt and Sprague 1991, 1995). Huckfeldt and Sprague claim that 'a dyad is marked by structural equivalence to the extent that individuals share the same social relationships' (1991: 124). However, as the authors admit, a direct test of the structural equivalence model is quite impossible due to the lack of appropriate data. Therefore, the model can be approximated by finding conditions that might give raise to structurally equivalent people. For them, people are 'more likely to be structurally equivalent if they live in the same neighborhood, drink at the same bars, worship at the same churches, work at the same place of employment, and so on' (1991: 125). The rationale implied here is that people embedded in similar contexts would look at each other's behavior based on the assumption of shared common interests. As the authors point out,

the crucial difference between the two models is that in the structural equivalence model influence might be 'divorced' from strong ties, direct contact, and debate among people.

On the other hand, the studies conducted by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues indicated that exposure to cross-pressure in the micro social groups to which individuals belong led to delay in the formation of voting preferences in the electoral campaign and ultimately depressed electoral participation (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944, Berelson *et al.* 1954). Unstable voters and defectors were shown to come mainly from the group of those that either could not recall any political discussion in their groups or were exposed to conflicting political views (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944, Berelson *et al.* 1954). For Lazarsfeld and his colleagues, the source of cross-pressure was the affiliation to multiple social groups that embodied different and conflicting political views and values. It is important to keep in mind though, that the conflicting potential of these social allegiances was entirely assumed by researchers but was impossible to be established based on the available data.

Further research found little if any support for the theory of cross pressure in its original form or directly measured as exposure to conflicting political views. A replication of the analysis conducted by Lazarsfeld and his collaborators using similar data sets found no support for the cross pressure thesis (Horan 1971). His conclusion is that previous results were due to interpreting social positions as sources of political conflicts. More recent studies included direct measures of exposure to conflicting political views. They are based on respondents' reports on their political preferences and their perceptions on their discussants' political views. However, the results of these studies are inconsistent. People embedded in politically heterogeneous social networks measured as amount of conflicting political views appear to be more likely to refrain from political activity, mainly to avoid putting their relationship at risk (Mutz 2002b: 851, 2006). In studies where cross-pressure is operationalized as a balance of pros and cons, politically

ambivalent settings appear to have no effect on participation, vote choice and crystallization of vote decision (Nir 2005). Other studies indicate that there is a positive relationship between exposures to opposing political views (Leighley 1990, McLeod *et al.* 1999, Scheufele *at al.* 2004) and political participation.

Eveland and Hively suggest that this is due to differences in measuring political disagreement and cross-pressure. As exposed in the previous section of this chapter, they propose a tripartite reference to these concepts, which include all terminologies that were previously employed (Eveland and Hively 2009). These are 'safe', 'dangerous', and 'diverse' political discussion or political networks (Eveland and Hively 2009). However, the root of the inconsistent results reached by previous studies seems to be deeper than these terminological differences. Even after harmonizing the terms, some of the noted differences and inconsistencies remain. 'Diverse discussion' is found to have a negative effect on political participation in some studies (Eveland and Hively 2009), while being non-consequential in others (Nir 2005). Moreover, 'dangerous discussion' has negative effects on participation in some studies (Mutz 2006) and no effects in others (Eveland and Hiveley 2009).

The persistence of inconsistencies suggests that some further specifications might be needed within the concept of micro social contexts. McClurg, for instance, suggested that social context is a 'multilayered phenomenon' (McClurg 2006a: 350) and therefore researchers should examine sources of influences located at different levels of analysis. Some scholars, for example, considered the moderating role of macro social contexts, such as social and partisan composition of the communities where individuals reside, i.e. neighborhoods (Berelson *et al*. 1954, Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995, McClurg 2006b) or the distribution of political preferences at the country level (Anderson and Paskeviciute 2005).

In a larger perspective, the suggestion that social context is a ‘multilayered phenomenon’ generated further thoughts, especially among comparative scholars, who contemplate the idea that the effect of interpersonal contexts might be moderated by macro level features, such as social structures and political cultures. Specifically, Mutz's finding that political disagreement at network level discourages individual political participation mainly for reasons of social conflict avoidance elicits a broader reflection on the role of social norms governing debate across various polities (Mutz 2002b). Peng and Nisbett suggested that exposure to political disagreement might put a stronger strain on Americans compared to people from other countries (Peng and Nisbett 1999 cited in Mutz 2002b). However, there is no empirical evidence with regard to ‘the extent to which political disagreement is deemed socially acceptable.' (Mutz 2002b: 851). One step further, some scholars have specifically inquired into the role of cultural differences in moderating the relationship between networks diversity and political tolerance in Japan as compared to the US, where the bulk of such studies has been previously conducted (Ikeda and Richey 2009).

However, no systematic examination of the moderating role of structural and cultural differences has been conducted so far. The vast majority of existing studies concerned with the relationship between social embededdness and individual participation and knowledge were conducted in the US (but see more recently a few in Japan, Germany, Spain, and the UK). We thus have sufficient, albeit at times contradictory, evidence that social networks play significant informational and mobilization roles in a number of advanced democracies. Nevertheless, we cannot but speculate about the similarity of their roles in transmitting participatory norms and informational cues in countries that have a more recent democratic experience or a different socio-cultural makeup. A nomothetic understanding of the social influence in politics is thus missing and leaves us wondering whether it is always the case that more political talk is linked to more political knowledge and participation and whether political disagreement provoke more

reflection or not across societies that differ in their norms of social interactions and political cultures.

Cultural studies do specifically emphasize that the way individuals understand, communicate, and behave depend both on their individual predispositions and values and the culture to which they belong (Hofstede 2001). In this view, taking political cues from peers, for instance, may turn out to be a more widespread and pervasive feature of societies that, for different historical and cultural reasons, place higher importance on interpersonal communication than on formalized means of communication via media, political parties, and social and civic organizations. However, a higher appetite for political discussion in a society is not necessarily an indicator of its efficiency. More debate may not automatically contribute to an increase in participation and knowledge but may bring about skepticism and demobilization. It is therefore important that micro social influences are investigated both independent of and in conjunction with macro level variables susceptible at moderating their political influences.

Previous literature suggested that it maters a lot whether and to what extent people encounter divergent political views in their everyday interactions (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995, Huckfeldt *et al.* 2002, Huckfeldt *et al.* 2004, Mutz 2002a, 2006). However, homogeneous networks appear to be the norm of social communication as people prefer the company of like-minded others and do their best in preserving the agreeable character of discussion through mechanisms such as selective exposure, avoidance of disagreement and, ultimately, shifts in their preferences and views (Heider 1958, Festinger, 1957). Similar propositions seem to hold true as regards political discussion networks (Bennett *et. al*. 2000, Mutz 2002a, 2006). On the other hand, there are studies claiming that since people cannot have an exclusive control over their social interactions, political disagreement is a quite frequent occurrence of their everyday contacts (Huckfeldt *et al.* 2002, 2004, 2005). This is even more the case for those who are highly

interested in politics and therefore less likely to avoid this topic of conversation (Huckfeldt and Mendez 2006).

In addition to the benefits exerted on participation, everyday political conversation appears to affect positively individuals' ability to understand political issues. When people engage in political talk they become more aware of their views and their rationale, better informed on various issues and more knowledgeable as regards the opposing views. Although a series of studies have found a significant relationship between frequency of engaging in political discussion and being more knowledgeable in matters regarding politics or public affairs generally (Kenny 1998, Holbert *et al.* 2002, Bennet *et al.* 2000, Eveland, 2004, Eveland and Thomson 2006) only a few were able to make a stronger claim about the relationship between the two based on panel data analysis: 'frequency of discussion and discussion elaboration do appear to be significant causes of political knowledge' (Eveland and Thomson 2006: 523). As in the case of the link between political talk and participation, the study of the relationship between discussion and knowledge (or information) is fraught with problems of endogeneity, difficult to sort in cross-sectional analysis.

When partisan composition of political discussion networks is added to the analysis results indicate that homogenous networks are less likely to promote political knowledge (Mutz 2002b, 2006). This seems to be due to the fact that the company of like-minded peers reinforces people's views and give them fewer opportunities to encounter opposing arguments and learn new facts. Informal political conversation might bring cognitive benefits others than factual political knowledge or information. Political talk can spread informational cues or shortcuts that might operate as functional equivalents of the full information and assist people in the process of decision making. Scholars of 'low rationality' in politics have claimed that the limited information people possess in the political sphere does not incapacitate them in making

reasonable decisions (Bartels 1996, Cutler 2002, Lau and Redlawsk 1997, Lupia 1994, Lupia and McCubbins 1998, Popkin 1991). Their claim is that the use of informational cues helps people to 'vote correctly', i.e. make decisions similar to the ones they would have made if they were fully informed. Even if political discussion networks are seen as potential providers of such informational cues, little research has been done to single them out and investigate their effect among other heuristics people use in the process of decision making. Toka's findings, though, revealed that the informational cues provided by casual political conversations are not a substitute of political knowledge in the process of political decision making at individual level (Toka 2010). He showed that participation in political discussion promotes political knowledge but there are no additional benefits of political talk in producing better informed political choices (Toka 2010).

To sum up, I identify three types of gaps in the previous research on social influences in politics. First, there is a lack of examining cross-national variations in the role played by micro social contexts on individual political engagement. Most of the previous research was conducted in a limited number of countries and their results showed inconsistencies on the effects of micro social settings on individual political behavior and cognition. This led to some reflection on the moderating role that macro level features, such as social structures and political cultures, might have on the relationships between micro social contexts and individual political engagement. However, the lack of appropriate cross-national data precluded a more general examination of the patterns of micro social influences in politics. Second, most of the previous research was based on the theoretical assumption that political discussion influences political participation and cognition rather than the other way round. However, many studies admitted that the reverse direction of effects is equally plausible. Finally, the third gap that I identify is related to the limited examination of differences in social networks usage and political discussion patterns between people living in old and new democracies and, within new democracies, between those

people who were socialized under authoritarian regimes and those who came of age in democratic periods.

1.3. Research questions, design and data

In my dissertation I aim at filling in the identified gaps of the previous literature on micro social influences in politics. The research questions that I address in this study are the following. First, are there any general influences that interpersonal communication has on an individual's level of political engagement? Second, do macro level variables, such as length of democratic experience, level of economic development and norms of social and political communication, moderate the effects that interpersonal communication have on political engagement? Third, are there unidirectional or reciprocal effects between features of social and political interaction on the one side, and political engagement on the other? Fourth, what is the mechanism through which interpersonal communication contribute to an increase in levels of political engagement? Finally, what are the determinants of individuals' engagement in political conversations and how do they vary across countries that differ in their democratic traditions?

To answer these questions I draw on data from three comparative studies, namely the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), the Comparative National Election Project (CNEP), and Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy (CID), and panel data collected in national studies conducted in Japan and Hungary. The Social Network Module of the ISSP study was conducted in two waves, one in 1986 and the other in 2001. The 1986 wave includes seven countries, namely Australia, the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, the United States, Great Britain, Hungary, and Italy. The other wave of the ISSP survey was conducted in 2001 and included twenty-seven countries, with separate samples for East and West Germany, Great Britain and

Northern Ireland. In my analysis I retain the group of European countries that are relevant for my research questions and the samples from the US and Canada, as representatives of consolidated democracies that are often discussed together with West European countries.

The CNEP study includes twenty six national election surveys and was conducted in eighteen countries since 1990. It was conducted in three waves and all of them were concerned with intermediation processes through which citizens receive information during the electoral campaign. The selection of the countries does not follow a random procedure and thus the result is a convenience sample rather than one that is representative for the whole set of extant societies. However, the countries are quite diverse with regard to their histories, institutions, and political cultures and this makes the study a relevant source for testing the general character of social influence in politics. The study includes countries from South America, Southern, Eastern and Western Europe, East Asia, and the US. It features both newly and recently democratized countries (Spain, Portugal, Chile, Uruguay, Greece, Bulgaria, and Hungary) and stable democracies (Italy and the US). This study includes a wide range of countries that vary in their histories, cultures and institutions. While a few of them have a long democratic history most of them have a more recent democratic tradition or are not yet fully democratized.

The CID project was conducted between 1999 and 2002 in twelve countries, with separate samples collected for East and West Germany. Out of the other eleven countries there are six with a more recent democratic experience (Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, Russia, Spain and Portugal) and five with a longer democratic past (Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland).

There are various statistical methods that I employ in my dissertation. They are described in details in each of the chapters. In chapter two and three, the comparative study of micro and macro level determinants of individual political participation and cognition employs hierarchical

methods of analysis. The next two chapters – four and five – examine directions of effects between political discussion and political participation and cognition, using structural equation models. Finally, in chapter six I use various types of regression models to test differentials in countries predicting social network usage and political discussion patterns.

Chapter 2: Micro social embeddedness, electoral behavior and political knowledge: a comparative analysis

In this chapter and the next one I examine the relationships between features of political discussion that occurs in the micro social settings in which individuals reside and their level of electoral participation and political knowledge. There are two types of micro social interactions that I explore. One includes those close, intimate relationships that develop among people who interact often. These social networks partly coincide with what has been referred to by previous literature as 'strong ties' (Granovetter 1973) and 'bonding' social capital (Putnam 2000). The model of influence believed to operate in these settings is 'social cohesion' (Coleman 1988). Its driving forces are intimacy, frequent interaction, similarity and trust. The other types of micro social settings that I explore are those that expose people to larger, more diverse social interactions. These social networks can be thought of as 'weak ties' (Granovetter 1973) and suppliers of 'bridging' social capital (Putnam 2000). In this case, influence stems from individuals' exposure to diverse and non-redundant sources of information that might challenge their political views.

The effects of political conversation with close, intimate peers on an individual's decision to cast a vote and her level of political knowledge are explored in this chapter. In the next chapter, I present the results of analyzing the influences that political talk in larger, generic social networks has on voting and political knowledge. These analyses contribute to existing scholarship on the political relevance of micro social embeddednes in two ways. First, by separating between the two types of social interactions, it makes possible an assessment of differential effects that intimate and generic networks have on voting and political cognition.

Most of the existing research analyzed either the effects of one type of social interactions or treat the two types together. This limits our ability to understand whether political communication per se furthers political participation and cognition or the interpersonal contexts of these conversations matter, too. The second contribution of my investigation is that it enlarges the scope of the previous research, by studying relationships between social networks and political engagement in countries with different political traditions, including diverse experiences with democracy. This is particularly relevant for understanding to what extent the influence of political discussion has a general or contextual character. Most of the previous studies were conducted in the US and a few others consolidated democracies. This limits our ability to understand whether, for instance, in newly democratized countries, social networks carry similar political influences as they were found to do in the US.

The analysis draws on cross-country survey data that include societies that differ in their political traditions, including different democratic experiences. I test whether the relationships between micro social context on the one side, and individual turnout and political knowledge, on the other, significantly differ across countries. In addition to this, I analyze whether these relationships are moderated by macro level factors pertaining to the democratic tradition, level of economic development, and two norms of political conversation characterizing these societies, namely supply of political talk and agreement in everyday social interactions. The statistical method that I employ for these tests is multilevel analysis; it allows an investigation of micro and macro levels effects, as well as an examination of their joint influences.

Results indicate that political discussion within micro social settings influences individual electoral behavior and knowledge both directly and indirectly, albeit the latter is stronger and more consistent across all the surveyed polities. Also, the two types of micro social contexts carry different influences. Intimate networks are significantly linked to voting and political knowledge

in a number of countries but they uniformly stimulate interest in politics and media attentiveness, two significant antecedents of electoral participation and political knowledge across all countries included in the analysis. These effects are moderated by macro level variables such as democratic tradition, economic development and norms of casual political conversation. Generic networks are, in their turn, significantly linked to individual turnout and political knowledge in a few countries but they are consistently related to political behavior and knowledge in an indirect way, namely by increasing people's political interest and consumption of political news in media. Also, their effects are moderated by macro level variables measuring the level of country development.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In the first section I review the literature on the relevance of micro social contexts for individual political behavior and knowledge. Drawing on these studies, in the second part of this chapter I formulate hypotheses about the expected influences of both intimate and generic social networks on individual turnout and political knowledge. In the third part I describe the data that I employ for testing the hypotheses and the measures that I include in my statistical models. The next part presents the results of estimating statistical models in which individual electoral participation and level of political knowledge are expressed as a function of measures of political discussion in intimate settings. The results of testing the effects of generic settings on voting and political knowledge are presented in the next chapter.

2.1. Micro social contexts, political behavior and knowledge: a review

There is widespread agreement in the scholarly literature on the critical role played by micro social contexts in shaping individuals' involvement with politics. Specifically, extant research indicated that certain features of the social networks in which individuals are embedded

are significantly linked to their electoral behavior (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944, Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995, Beck *et al.* 2002, Mutz 2006), general political involvement (McClurg 2003, 2006a, Mutz 2002b), and political cognition (Kenny 1998, Holbert *et al.* 2002, Bennett *et al.* 2000, Eveland 2004, Eveland and Thomson 2006, Eveland and Hively 2009). On the other hand, there is empirical evidence coming from these studies that specific features of interpersonal communication benefit some forms of political engagement, while hinder equally important others (see especially Mutz 2006). In general, there is an important amount of inconsistency in the conclusions drawn by studies concerned with the social underpinnings of political engagement.

2.1.1. Micro social contexts and individual turnout

A review of the extant literature that analyzed the relevance of micro social contexts for individual electoral participation, indicate that the most commonly examined aspects of interpersonal communication are the size and diversity of micro social and political interactions – social networks and political discussion networks –, frequency of political conversation, the supply of political expertise in the social networks, and the level of exposure to political disagreement.

Size and diversity of social and political discussion networks was generally found to be associated with an increase in political participation, either through direct mobilization prompted by peers' direct requests or through an increase in political cognition that reduces the costs of participation (McAdam 1988, McAdam *et al.* 1993, Lake and Huckfeldt 1998, Mutz 2002b, 2006, McClurg 2003, Huckfeldt *et al.* 2004, Kwak *et al.* 2005, Nir 2005, Eveland and Hiveley 2009). Notwithstanding some differences in measuring frequency of political talk across various

studies, – i.e. either by asking respondents about frequency of political discussion with specific people from their social networks (Mutz 2002b, McClurg 2003, 2006) or about the number of days per week respondents discuss politics within their social networks (Eveland and Hively 2009) – results were consistent and indicated that more frequent political discussion is positively linked to voting and other forms of electoral and non-electoral political participation (Verba *et al.* 1995, Lake and Huckfeldt 1998, Mutz 2002b, Scheufele *et al.* 2004, Eveland and Hively 2009). Network members' political expertise appeared to be an important antecedent of an individual participation in electoral activities, including voting (Lake and Huckfeldt 1998, McClurg 2006b). McClurg's study even suggested that the supply of political expertise in one's social network can overcome the negative effects resulting from exposure to political disagreement (McClurg 2006b).

Divergent findings though were reported with regard to the effect that political disagreement among discussion partners has on participation. Exposure to ideological cross-pressure that results from membership in various social groups was found to depress electoral participation in some studies, (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944, Berelson *et al.* 1954) and to be non-consequential in others (Horan 1971). Some research that employed a combined measure of cross-pressure stemming from both direct exposure to conflicting political views and interaction with social groups that might hold diverging political views, reported a positive effect of network heterogeneity on participation in a number of political activities (Kwak *et al.* 2005), including voting in the most recent elections (Scheufele *et al.* 2004). The results of those studies that employ a direct measure of political cross-pressure based on respondents' reports of theirs and their discussion partners' political views, revealed inconsistent findings. Exposure to political disagreement was found to depress participation (Mutz 2002b, 2006), increase it, (Leighley 1990, Scheufele *et al.* 2004, Kwak *et al.* 2005) or be non-consequential (Nir 2005).

Eveland and Hively's take on these contradictory conclusions with regard to the role of exposure to disagreement, is that they 'are in fact merely inconsistencies in terminology or operationalization across previous studies' (Eveland and Hively 2009: 209). Specifically, they indicate that there are conceptual differences between heterogeneity understood and measured as interaction that exposes people to discussion that conflicts with their views or characteristics, and heterogeneity as 'degree to which discussions (or discussion partners) in various researcher-designated categories are evenly distributed across those categories' (Eveland and Hively 2009: 208). The former is labeled 'dangerous discussion', while the latter is called 'discussion diversity'. 'Dangerous discussion' is similar to what most of the previous literature has labeled heterogeneous or 'cross-cutting' discussions (Leighley 1990, Mutz 2002b, Scheufele *et al.* 2004). 'Discussion diversity' overlaps with Nir's concept of 'ambivalence' (Nir 2005). The other indicator of the political composition of the networks that was explored in the previous literature is that of political homogeneity. Eveland and Hively calls it 'safe discussion' and sees it as the logical 'inverse of dangerous discussion'. It includes 'those discussions that coincide with the views or characteristics of the ego' (Eveland and Hively, 2009: 208). 'Dangerous' and 'safe discussion' are not exclusive circumstances as involvement in one type that does not prevent exposure to the other. Although in many studies 'safe' and 'dangerous' discussions are seen as ends of the same continuum, the authors emphasize that 'discussion in not a zero-sum game' and the two can carry different political effects (Eveland and Hively 2009: 209).

In spite of their informative terminology and straightforward definitions, I believe that Eveland and Hively's distinction between 'safe' and 'dangerous' discussions makes sense only in those cases where available data makes it possible to compute the two measures as number/or proportion of instances/social settings characterized by total similarity or dissimilarity. In most of the previous studies though, the two types of discussions are extremes of a continuous measure

that runs from most similar to most dissimilar political or structural encounters. However, the conceptual separation they proposed between political heterogeneity understood as amount of opposing political views in one's conversations ('dangerous discussion') and as exposure to both congenial and divergent political views ('discussion diversity') is theoretically sound as it suggests two different paths of micro social influences.

Moreover, when the conclusions of the previous research are expressed with the use of the concepts proposed by Eveland and Hively, some of the previously observed inconsistencies with regard to effects of political disagreement disappear. It is 'dangerous discussion' what appears to increase participation (Leighley 1990, Scheufele *et al.* 2004, Kwak *et al.* 2005), while the effect of 'diverse discussion' seems to be non-consequential (Nir 2005). However, not all of the inconsistencies appear to be attributed to these terminological confusions. The conclusions reached by Mutz, namely that 'dangerous discussion' depress participation (Mutz 2002b, 2006) are at odds with the ones above. Eveland and Hively suggest that this due to the fact that while Mutz (2002b) included both size and frequency of discussion along with measures of political heterogeneity, it is only frequency of political talk that was included in the other two studies by Scheufele *et al.* (2004) and Kwak *et al.* (2005). It is therefore possible that the effect of heterogeneity in these latter studies is overestimated. Even so, some of the noted differences and inconsistencies remain, as Eveland and Hively found that 'diverse discussion' is negatively linked to participation as index of electoral and non-electoral activities as opposed to Nir (2005) who found no effect, while 'dangerous discussion' is non-consequential in their study (Eveland and Hiveley 2009).

McClurg (2006) advances a similar argument with regard to the overestimated effect of exposure to disagreement in models that fail to consider other possible micro social determinants of participation. He indicates that such omissions lead to the following puzzle. Large networks

appear to be positively related to participation, while politically heterogeneous ones are negatively linked to participation. However, previous studies found that 'larger, politicized networks are an empirical correlate of *both* political participation and the likelihood of encountering political disagreement (Huckfeldt *et al.* 2002, 2004; but see Mutz and Martin 2001). In other words, the very networks most likely to create opportunities for cross-cutting discussions are also those that most likely foster involvement. Such a conundrum cannot be explained by the distribution of preference in networks, indicating that we must broaden the theoretical link between networks and participation.' (McClurg 2006: 738-39). His investigation shows that the level of political expertise in the network is a significant antecedent of political participation and, even more important, it reduces the negative effects of exposure to disagreement. This finding has important normative implications, as it suggests that 'the same networks that encourage participation are not necessarily distinct from those that encourage tolerance and consideration of others' viewpoints.' (McClurg 2006: 738).

These inconsistencies suggest that some further specifications may be necessary to reach consistent results with regard to the effects of micro social embeddedness on political behavior. McClurg, for instance, suggested that social context is a 'multilayered phenomenon' (McClurg 2006a: 350) and therefore researchers should examine sources of influences located at different levels of analysis. Similarly, some studies distinguished between social influences stemming from contexts, such as neighborhood, workplace, and volunteer groups, and personal social networks (Scheufele *et al.* 2004, 2006).

A different specification is to distinguish between types of social networks. There is evidence that strong and weak ties may have different effects. The mechanism of influence stemming from interaction with close, intimate others was described by Coleman (1998). As people interact more often, they become more receptive to their peers' ideas, more likely to be

swayed by their arguments and to emulate their behaviors. Putnam attributes the interpersonal influences in tight networks to norms of reciprocity and trust (Putnam 2000). On the other hand, weak ties connect individuals to larger and potentially more dissimilar others. Such settings give access to a diversity of opinions and viewpoints and therefore act as sources of information and mobilization. Mechanisms as diverse as social pressure and deliberation, for instance, operate in these generic social milieus and make individuals susceptible to follow and adopt norms, ideas and behaviors.

Different accounts of the mechanisms of micro social influence in politics have been put forward. The distinction between 'resources' and 'normative' mechanisms of social influences in politics is done solely for analytical reasons as in real life they are very often strongly intertwined. The *'resource' approach* sees social networks and political discussion as providers of skills, resources, and specific information that help reducing the costs of participation (McClurg 2003, Scheufele *et al.* 2004). A narrow understanding of this mechanism is provided by Downs (1957), who was among the first ones to break with the social understanding of politics and propose a pure rational view of political behavior. For him, social networks are solely time-saving sources of information for rational people. More recently, advocates of the 'low-information rationality' see networks as providers of cues or informational shortcuts rather than of full-fledged political information and knowledge (Sniderman *et al.* 1991, Popkin 1991). An elaborated version of the resource mechanism is that social interactions, especially those that put us in contact with politically or structurally different others create opportunities for reflection on our own positions and arguments that support them. This process of deliberation makes us aware of potential inconsistencies in our views and opinions and triggers our attempts to eliminate them. Ultimately, such processes make our political decisions clearer and more consistent. Thus, irrespective whether social networks provide specific knowledge, informational cues or chances

for reflection, they eventually stimulate participation by reducing its costs. Social interactions may provide other types of resources, too. Putnam (1993) and other scholars who carry on his argument (Scheufele and Shah 2000) have argued that social communication creates trust, a resource that furthers participation because it overcomes dilemmas of collective actions.

A different way of accounting for the link between networks and participation originates in social psychology and emphasizes the relevance of social norms in political behavior. I distinguish between a 'dark' and a positive side of this mechanism that operates through social conformity and gratification. Experiments by social psychologists - perhaps the most famous being Milgram (1974) - emphasize the conformity induced by social networks to which the individuals belong. People are unwilling to go against the group norms unless they see some support from other fellow members. The same phenomenon of suppressing one's own views when in the minority has been described by Noelle-Neuman (1993) who coined the theory of 'spiral of silence'. In short, her theory states that individuals who believe themselves to be in a minority became reluctant to voice their opinions out of fear of isolation. This, in its turn, leads to a change in the aggregate preferences over time. This is what I indentify as the 'dark' side of the mechanism that relies on social norms and conformity. Participation that stems from social pressure is not an unambiguously desirable democratic outcome, especially if it is not accompanied by an increase in political understanding, i.e. liberals would probably dislike it as anti-individualistic but communitarians may well dispute the value of such individualsim. The positive side of the mechanism of social pressure that builds up in social interactions is that it stimulates individuals' interest in politics. Being part of a group where politics is more often a topic of debate or whose members are politically active motivate people to seek out more information in order to be able to participate in discussions. Following this line of argument, researchers of the 'Wisconsin school of political communication' (Scheufele *et al.* 2004: 318)

have built a model of political behavior where the link between political discussion and participation is mediated by knowledge and media consumption. Theories of 'uses and gratifications' explicate the individuals' increased interest in media in anticipation of discussions, especially of those where they may encounter political views that conflict with theirs' (Scheufele *et al.* 2004, 2006). Additional insights on this mechanism are given from the rational choice framework. People will be more likely to vote if they see their close others – family and friends – attaching importance to voting (Abrams *et. al* 2010). Strength of social identity and social approval make individuals who belong to more politically active groups more likely to emulate their fellows' behavior and become more active in their turn. I call this the *'normative' mechanism* of social influence because it operates through social norms of identity and approval.

2.1.2. Micro social contexts and political knowledge

As has been already touched upon in the introductory part, political discussion has been found to be significantly related to political knowledge and sophistication.[1] Attempts to conceptualize and measure political knowledge – else labeled political information, sophistication or opinionation - have also resulted in a variety of outcomes. One of the broader, all-encompassing definitions and analyses of political sophistication was proposed by Luskin (1990). I will briefly discuss his argument as his article proposes an elaborated examination of the sources of political sophistication. To start with, he defines political sophistication as the extent to which a person's 'political cognitions are numerous, cut a substantive swath and are highly organized' (Luskin 1990: 332). More important for my line of inquiry, he sees political

[1] In most of the extant research both knowledge and sophistication has been operationalized as factual, quiz-type knowledge (Bennett *et al.* 2000, Holbert *et al.* 2002, Eveland 2004, Eveland *et al.* 2005, Eveland and Thomson 2006), although some operationalizations that tap more 'structural aspects of political knowledge' have been

sophistication as a function of three elements, namely ‘the political information to which individuals are exposed, their ability to assimilate and organize such information, and their motivation to do so’ (Luskin 1990: 331). Through his analysis he shows that among the three elements the most important one is interest, which stands for the motivation to get informed about politics. Although I do find his argument and its empirical investigation fully convincing I disagree with the way he conceives motivation – measured as interest in politics – as intrinsic to individuals. Based on already discussed evidence on the role of political discussion in stimulating media attendance, for instance, I hypothesize that networks and political discussion can spread interest and make people willing to get better informed in anticipation or following discussion with their fellows.

As in the case of participation, the features of the social networks mostly associated with individual political knowledge and sophistication are size, frequency of talk, heterogeneity, and network members' knowledge or expertise. Frequent political discussion leads to a better informed citizenry (Kwak *et al.* 2005, Eveland and Thomson 2006, Eveland and Hiveley 2009) and size of political discussion networks has been consistently found to have a positive relationship with knowledge (Leighley 1990, Mutz 2002b, Huckfeldt *et al.* 2004, Nir 2005). The explanation of the latter is that larger networks increase our chances of getting in contact with people who are either better informed or else, especially if they hold different views, may challenge our opinions and provoke reflection over our own political beliefs. Regarding the heterogeneity, 'dangerous discussion' was found to increase knowledge, although in an indirect way, by increased media use (Eveland 2004, Scheufele *et al.* 2004). No empirical evidence exists so far on the effect of 'diverse networks' on political knowledge (Eveland and Hiveley 2009).

One of the most challenging problems that research concerned with the relationship between networks and political behavior faces is that of a possible normative tradeoff between

two equally relevant democratic outcomes, namely knowledge and participation (see Mutz 2002b, 2006). Mutz (2006), for instance, found that although embededdness in politically heterogeneous networks depresses political participation it acts as an enhancer of political expertise. On the contrary, politically homogeneous settings result in higher political mobilization although are not beneficial for political knowledge. Investigating these issues in a cross-country analysis is particularly relevant as it helps us understanding whether networks would facilitate both participation and expertise under some macro structural circumstances or the two are generally opposing ideals. Regarding network members' political expertise, it was suggested that they are a source of high quality information, incentives for getting better informed, and suppliers of 'clearer and more contextualized communication of political information' (McClurg 2006: 740). 'Political expertise is an important factor for recognizing dissonant information, rejecting it, and subsequently minimizing ambivalence' (McClurg 2006: 740).

This *'motivation-for-information' mechanism* of influence linking political discussion to hard news media use has been described by Scheufele *et al.* (2004) in connection with exposure to political disagreement. The same mechanism is described in the literature of 'uses and gratification', where it is shown that people will pay more attention to news when they anticipate discussion on those topics, especially with non-like-minded peers (Scheufele *et al.* 2004). As in the case of participation, I call this the *'normative' mechanism*, as the main driving force in getting better informed are social norms and conformity.

The other mechanism accounting for how discussion translates into knowledge and sophistication is what I call the *'informational'* one. When people are involved in discussions with their fellows they get to learn new facts or gain a better understanding on various issues and stances. Also, through debate, especially with non-like-minded others, people get a better

understanding of their own opinions and the rationales for supporting them and thus get closer to a better structured knowledge system.

As highlighted before, most of the propositions describing the relationship between social embededness and participation have been tested either in the US or West European polities, i.e. consolidated democracies. At first glance there seem to be good reasons to expect same effects to be observed in different contexts inasmuch as they describe general rules of human behavior. However, an empirical test of these propositions in a cross-country setting is the technical means to answer the question whether networks have a universal effect or not. To this end I define and test hypotheses about the direct and indirect effects of two types of micro social context on individual turnout and political knowledge.

2.2. Hypotheses

To elucidate the influence that intimate and generic social networks has on individual electoral behavior and political cognition, across a broad range of polities that differ in their political cultures, including various experiences with democracy, I define and test the following hypotheses. The first set of hypotheses – H1.1 to H1.3 – state expectations with regard to the direct effects of the two types of micro social settings on voting.

H1.1: People who report more frequent political discussion in their micro social surroundings – whether intimate or generic social settings – are more likely to vote.

H1.2: Individuals who report more instances of discussion with politically like-minded

others – either in intimate or generic social networks – are more likely to participate in elections.

H1.3: Individuals who report more instances of political conversation with peers who hold opposing political views – either in intimate or generic social networks – are less likely to participate in elections.

Based on previously described mechanisms of social influence in politics – and especially on expectations formulated by the 'Wisconsin school of political communication' (Scheufele *et al.* 2004: 318) – I also test for an indirect effect of political discussion, which operates through an increase in political interest and media attendance. Hypotheses H1.4 to H1.6 state expectations with regard to these indirect effects of political communication on voting.

H1.4: People who report more frequent political discussion in their micro social settings – be they intimate or generic – will be more interested in politics and report higher consumption of political news in various media.

H1.5: People who report more instances of discussion with politically dissimilar others – whether as part of intimate or generic networks – will report more political interest and media attentiveness.

H1.6: Discussing politics with more knowledgeable others will stimulates interest in politics and media attentiveness.

In addition to the general effects, I expect some variations due to the moderating role of some macro contextual features. Scholars have extolled the virtues of exposure to diverse viewpoints for its prospects of stimulating reflection, strengthening argumentation, and increasing tolerance, to count just a few benefits. However, some have warned that too much debate and

disagreement at the micro contextual level, i.e. everyday conversations, may have a destabilizing effect in those societies where social consensus is fragile and citizens do not have enough experience with political debates (MacKuen 1990). Newly democratized societies are an example of macro settings where too much disagreement might cause political alienation and withdrawal as most of the people do not have the habit of being engaged in controversial discussions. A different case of disagreement causing political withdrawal is that of societies where social agreeableness is highly valued and looked for. In such settings, political disagreement may have a destabilizing effect, i.e. reducing participation and incentives for getting informed in politics. Newly democratized countries are settings where political transformations have brought about uncertainties next to novelties and complexities in the political scene. Under these circumstances, personal social networks are expected to play an important role in assessing and interpreting the information furnished by means of communication, i.e. media, which have been commonly employed and followed by people living in established democracies.

A stronger effect of networks is also expected in less economically developed societies, where political discussion – especially with better informed fellows – might serve as an alternative mean of receiving information about political issues in the absence of access to media, such as TV or newspapers. In their cross-national study of exposure to sources of political information, Beck and Gunther (2010) found that socioeconomic modernization factors are important determinants of exposure to political news via different media, with less economically developed societies showing lower levels of media consumption via TV and newspapers.

Finally, cultural norms prescribing rules of social interaction are also expected to moderate the relationship between micro social settings and participation. The effect of political discussion would be enhanced in the more politicized macro social settings while exposure to dissimilar political views would be more debilitating in those societies that place a stronger value

on social consensus. Hypotheses H1.7 to H1.11 spell out the expectations with regard to the moderating role of democratic experience, level of economic development, and norms of interpersonal communication, on the relationship between the two types of micro social settings and individual electoral participation.

H1.7: Exposure to frequent political discussion in micro social settings – either intimate or generic networks – is linked to more electoral participation in newer democracies and less economically developed countries.

H1.8: Exposure to more political agreement – in intimate or generic social networks – leads to more participation in newer democracies.

H1.9: People who report more frequent political discussion in their micro social settings – irrespective whether intimate or generic ones – will be more likely to participate if they live in societies characterized by more frequent political talk.

H1.10: The effect of exposure to agreement – in intimate of generic settings – on participation is enhanced in those societies characterized by higher level of political agreement at macro level.

H1.11: The demobilizing effect of exposure to political disagreement – in intimate or generic settings – is enhanced in those societies characterized by higher level of political agreement.

Drawing on previously revised literature with regard to the role that political communication has on political knowledge, I formulate the following expectations. Hypotheses H2.1 to H2.4 describe general effects of political communication in the two types of micro social settings on individual political knowledge.

H2.1: More frequent participation in political conversations – in either intimate or generic networks – leads to an increase in individual political knowledge.

H2.2: Exposure to more instances of discussion with politically like-minded peers – in either intimate or generic settings – leads to an increase in individual political knowledge[2].

H2.3: Exposure to more instances of political discussion with peers who hold opposing political views – in either intimate or generic settings – leads to an increase in individual political knowledge.

H2.4: Participation in political conversation with politically knowledgeable peers increases respondents' level of political knowledge.

Besides a direct relationship, I expect one that is mediated by political interest and media attendance. This follows from *the 'motivation-for-information' mechanism* of influence stating that discussion stimulates interest for politics. Hypotheses H2.5 to H2.7 describe these indirect effects.

H2.5: More frequent political discussion – in both types of social settings – leads to an increase in individuals' levels of political interest and media attentiveness.

H2.6: Exposure to more instances of conversation with people who hold politically dissimilar views – in both types of social networks – leads to an increase in individual political interest and media attentiveness.

[2] A different line of argumentation suggests that people who discuss politics with more similar others might be more politically knowledgeable – in the sense of being better informed about political issues and facts - but not more politically sophisticated as their views are never challenged and thus there is no need for them to develop rationales for their political views. Mutz (2006) found out that similarity of political opinions does not increase political knowledge.

H2.7: Discussion with politically knowledgeable people leads to an increase in individual political interest and media attentiveness.

I expect that some of these relationships will be moderated by macro level factors. As already explained in relation to electoral participation, I hypothesize that people in newly democratized and less economically developed countries will rely more on cues provided by political discussion with peers than their counterparts in established democracies and more economically developed countries. With regard to the mediating role of the norms of social interactions characterizing different societies I expect a stronger effect of discussion in those societies where talk is more frequent and a stronger effect of dissimilarity in societies that accept and value more political debate at informal level. Hypotheses H2.8 to H2.10 spell out the expectations with regard to the moderating role of macro level variables on the relationship between political conversations in micro social settings and individual political knowledge.

H2.8: The relationship between frequency of political discussion – in both types of social settings – and knowledge is stronger in newly democratized countries and less economically developed ones.

H2.9: The relationship between frequency of political discussion – in both intimate and generic settings – and knowledge is stronger in those societies with higher average of political discussion.

H2.10: Exposure to more political disagreement – in either type of social networks – leads to higher political knowledge in those societies with higher average scores of political disagreement.

It is at this point that I shall address an issue that might have intrigued the readers so far. Although I have aimed at avoiding formulations that would imply a causal relationship between political discussion in micro social settings, on the one hand, and participation and knowledge, on the other hand, I am well aware that at times I went beyond such self-imposed prescriptions. There are theoretical and empirical ways of supporting causal claims and while the first ones are in my reach the latter are not. Among the most well-known empirical methods for establishing causality are experimental designs and, within statistical methods, panel data analysis and instrumental variable approach. Although I cannot employ any of them here, in chapter four and five of my dissertation I look at the relationship between networks, participation and knowledge, using panel data.

There are two issues that are difficult to sort out when such relationships are investigated in a cross-sectional design that takes a snapshot of a particular time and is unable to account for changes and consequences. To put them in terms of my research, one is the possibility that it is not – or not only – political discussion that generates participation and knowledge but – or at the same time – the other way round. From a theoretical perspective we can imagine that people who know more or are better informed in politics are also more willing – as perhaps more secure – to engage in political talk with their fellows. Also, people who participate in politics – for whatever reasons – will probably be more likely to talk more about politics with their fellows. In other words, discussion may create a 'virtuous circle' where more talk leads to more participation and knowledge, which in their turn feed into more political debate. Since previous research has brought evidence in favor of the influence flowing from discussion to knowledge (Eveland and Thomson 2006), in this chapter I will also assume that this is the correct specification of this relationship.

The second issue that mars cross-sectional analysis is the possibility that both political discussion and participation/knowledge are the result of some external factors, among which the most plausible candidates is political interest. If political interest, for instance, influences both participation in political discussion and voting/political knowledge, the oft-documented relationship between political talk and participation/knowledge is spurious. For this reason, in my statistical models I include political interest among the predictors of individual turnout/political knowledge. This way, I can assess the independent contribution of political discussion to individual turnout and political knowledge. In chapter four of my dissertation I also analyze the possibility that political interest determines engagement in political conversations. Here though, I see political conversations as social acts and hypothesize them as governed by the general rules of social interactions. In other words, I consider that exposure to political conversations in everyday social interaction settings present incentives and pressures for people to make politics a part of their social identity. This does not imply that political interest cannot emerge independent of embeddedness in social contexts. However, irrespective of what produces political interest in the first place, participation in political conversations with peers has the ability to maintain it high.

2.3. Data, measures and research design

The proper setting for an empirical examination of general influences of micro social embeddedness is a large scale, cross-country study that gives comprehensive information about various social networks to which people belong and their political behavior and knowledge. Ideally, the pool of countries included in the analysis should be free of any selection bias and cover settings that differ in their social structure and political culture.

2.3.1. Data

To my knowledge the study that meets most of these criteria is the Comparative National Elections Project (CNEP) (http://www.cnep.ics.ul.pt/index1.asp). The study includes twenty six national election surveys and was conducted in eighteen countries since 1990. It was conducted in three waves and all of them were concerned with intermediation processes through which citizens receive information during the electoral campaign. The selection of the countries does not follow a random procedure and thus the result is a convenience sample rather than one that is representative for the whole set of extant societies. However, the countries are quite diverse with regard to their histories, institutions, and political cultures and this makes the study a relevant source for testing the general character of social influence in politics. The study includes countries from South America, Southern, Eastern and Western Europe, East Asia, and the US. It features both newly and recently democratized countries (Spain, Portugal, Chile, Uruguay, Greece, Bulgaria, and Hungary) and stable democracies (Italy and the US). The sampling procedures were different and include simple and multi-stage stratified random samples. Data was collected through either face-to- face or mail interviews. This study includes a wide range of countries that vary in their histories, cultures and institutions. While a few of them have a long democratic history most of them have a more recent democratic tradition or are not yet fully democratized. However, not all of the national samples include information that is relevant for this study and therefore only a part of them are included in my analysis.Since not all of the national surveys included relevant data for my study, the list of countries that I retain for the analysis of the effects of intimate social networks are Argentina (2007), Bulgaria (1996), Chile (1993), Greece (1996), Hungary (2006), Mexico (2006), Mozambique (2004), South Africa (2004), Spain (1993), Taiwan (2004), and the US (2004). The list of countries that are included in the analysis of the effects of generic networks include Argentina (2007), Chile (1993), Hungary

(1998), Mexico (2006), Mozambique (2004), South Africa (2004), Taiwan (2004), US (2004), and Uruguay (1994).

2.3.2. Measures

The dependent or response variables in my analysis are *individual turnout* and *political knowledge*. There are two sets of explanatory or independent variables that measure embeddedness in small, private networks and larger, less privatized groups. Henceforth I will refer to these two concepts as *intimate* and *generic social settings/networks*. From a methodological point of view, the distinction between the two types of social settings is facilitated by the methods of data collection that was employed in the CNEP studies.

Specifically, information about political discussion in intimate social networks comes in response to questions asking respondents about their habits of discussing politics with their partner and two people with whom they usually discuss important matters. From a theoretical point of view, these people are expected to be close confidents and therefore my concept of intimate networks is similar to Granovetter's concept of 'strong' ties and to what Putnam sees as a source of 'bonding' social capital (Putnam 2000). On the other hand, information about generic networks comes from questions asking respondents about their habits of engaging in political conversations with friends, workmates, and neighbors. Theoretically, these social interactions can be thought of as a step or more removed from the intimates. My concept of 'generic settings' partly overlaps with Granovetter's term of 'weak ties' and Putnam's 'bridging' social networks. Although it can be objected that the inclusion of friends among generic networks might wipe out the distinction between the two types of social interactions, I consider that within methodological constraints imposed by the available data, it is theoretically relevant to distinguish between closer

and less close relationships. From a practical point of view, this is relevant because it may signal what type of social interactions put a stronger strain on individual political behavior. As we will see, this is specifically relevant when looking at the level of political agreement/disagreement with intimate and generic network members as sources of influences in politics.

Most of the previous research on the social underpinnings of politics has looked at dyadic relationships between respondents and their connections (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1991, 1995). In my analysis I see social networks as unitary structures whose logic of influence differs from the one that stems from dyadic relations. The concept I employ is similar to what Ikeda (2010) calls 'interpersonal political environment (IPE)'. This environment is more than the sum of the dyadic relationships that form it. Social networks create meanings, transmit, and enforce social norms, and, overall, give individuals a sense of identity. Also, depending on their structure and composition, they connect us with larger social structures or isolate us and give one-sided views on social and political issues. Any person can be imagined as the center of a web of relationships that connects her firstly with her intimates, i.e. family then gradually with other people with whom she interacts in her everyday life. The image of the way each and every one of us is connected to smaller and larger social circles permit the understanding of voting as a contagious behavior (Fowler 2005). His simulation of the impact that one's decision to vote has on the whole network indicates that, on average, one's vote will send about three more people to the polls.

In my analysis I measure three aspects of the intimate social networks to which individuals belong, namely frequency of political talk, political composition, and expertise and two aspects of the generic networks, namely frequency of political talk and political composition. To account for the possibility that variation in both political discussion and participation/knowledge are influenced by some exogeneous factors I control for variables that might be related to both of them. These are socio demographics, such as age, gender, education,

and marital status and measures of cognitive involvement with politics, such as political news attendance in various media, political interest, and strength of partisanship.

Response or dependent variables

Individual turnout is a dichotomous measure recording respondents' self-declared participation in the most recent national elections (voted). Respondents' *political knowledge* is computed by summing the number of correct answers given to four factual questions on political issues. The variable takes values from 0 to 4.

Explanatory or independent variables

Frequency of political discussion in generic settings *('Generic talk')* is the sum of three indicators that record respondents' self-declared frequency of political talk during the most recent electoral campaign in three social settings, namely among friends, with workmates, and with neighbors. Each of these variables ranges from 0 indicating that respondents have never talked politics in that setting to 3 meaning that they talked often. '*Generic talk'* takes values from 0 to 9[3].

Political agreement at the level of generic networks ('*Generic agreement'*) is an index of the settings where respondents encounter similar political views. The measure draws on questions asking respondents whether, when discussing politics with friends, workmates, and neighbors they have encountered similar, dissimilar or mixed political views. Using the category of mixed views – or in some samples 'unaware of discussants' views' – as the reference category, I computed dichotomous variables that describe political discussion in each of the three settings as either fully similar or totally dissimilar. I then added up these dichotomous measures and created

[3] I recoded 'don't know' and 'not applicable' to these questions as 'never'.

two variables that record the number of settings where respondents encounter – or at least perceive it so – only congruent political views (‘*generic agreement’*) and the number of settings where they meet only opposing political views (‘*generic disagreement’*). These two measures take values from 0 to 3. If, for instance, respondents report that they always disagree when discussing politics within each of the three settings – friends, workmates, and neighbors, ‘*generic disagreement’* takes value 3 and ‘*generic agreement’* is 0. When respondents report disagreement with neighbors and workmates and agreement with friends,’ *generic disagreement’* takes the value 2 and ‘*generic agreement*’ is 1.

This theoretical distinction between the level of political agreement and disagreement that individuals encounter in their generic social interactions is motivated by a similar approach in Eveland and Hively’s study (2009). As was discussed in the second section of this chapter, the two authors distinguish between ‘safe’ and ‘dangerous discussion’. While ‘dangerous discussion’ is defined as amount of exposure to discussion that conflicts with respondents’ views or characteristics, ‘safe discussion’ is seen as the logical ‘inverse of dangerous discussion' and includes 'those discussions that coincide with the views or characteristics of the ego' (Eveland and Hively 2009: 208). As suggested by the authors, ‘dangerous' and 'safe discussion' are not exclusive circumstances as involvement in one type that does not prevent exposure to the other. Moreover, as shown by the authors, distinguishing between these aspects of political discussion makes possible a better understanding of the circumstances under which communication advances or hinders political engagement.

Frequency of political discussion in intimate settings (‘*Intimate talk’*) is the sum of three indicators that measure how frequent respondents discuss politics with their spouses and two important other people. The measures recording frequency of talk for each of the three dyads

range from 0 indicating that the two people have never talked politics to 3 meaning that they have talked often. '*Intimate talk'* takes values from 0 to 9.

Political agreement in intimate settings *('Intimate agreement'*) measures respondents' exposure to congruent political views. It draws on questions asking respondents how often they agreed with their spouse and two important others when discussing politics during the most recent electoral campaign. The measures range from 0 indicating that the two have never agreed to 3 meaning that they very often have agreed. *'Intimate agreement'* takes values from 0 to 9, where higher scores indicate more political similarity.

Political expertise in the intimate social settings *('Intimate expertise'*) is computed by asking respondents to assess their spouses' and the two discussants' level of political knowledge on a scale ranging from 0 to 3, where 0 indicates that network members were not informed at all and 3 indicates that they were very well informed. By indexing the three assessments on the spouse and the two discussants' political expertise, I created a measure of perceived political expertise in the intimate networks. This measure takes values from 0 to 9, with higher scores indicating that respondents perceive themselves being surrounded by more knowledgeable intimate peers.

Control variables

Age is a variable measuring respondents' self-declared age. E*ducation* is a 7-point variable recording respondents' self-declared highest educational attainment. P*artisanship* is a 4-point variable recording respondents' self-declared strength of party identification[4]. Gender (*female*) is a dichotomous variable where female takes value 1 and male takes value 0. Marital

[4] I recoded 'don't know 'as 'no party preference'.

status (*married*) distinguishes between those who declared being married or living with a partner (coded 1) and those who reported being single, divorced or separated (coded 0).

Media attentiveness *(media*) measures frequency of following political news during the most recent electoral campaign in five types of media, namely internet, magazines, newspapers, radio, and TV. Each of these variables take values from 0 meaning respondent has never followed that medium to 4 meaning respondent very often has done it. The final measure takes values from 0 to 20, with higher scores indicating increased level of media attentiveness. Combining the five media in one single variable might conceal differences between respondents who very heavily rely on one source of information and those who check them all occasionally. One can imagine that the influence of watching TV or reading newspapers everyday is different from the one stemming by occasional use of all five media, although, from a methodological point of view respondents who report either of them will have a similar score on media variable. However, since in my analysis I am interested in exposure to media as an alternative source of influence I opt for the operationalization that I described above although I acknowledge that a separate examination of media sources might reveal important differences within this concept.

Political interest sums two measures recording respondents' self-declared level of interest in politics, in general and in the events of the most recent electoral campaign, in particular. General political interest is measured on a 4-point scale (between 0 and 3) and interest in the most recent electoral campaign is measured on a 5-point scale (between 0 and 4). The resulting measure (*political interest*) takes values from 0 to 7, with higher scores indicating an increased interest for politics

Macro level variables

There are five macro level variables that I employ in my analysis. Democratic experience *('democracy'*) measures for how long a country has been a democracy. Economic development *('GDP'*) reports the national GDP in the year closest to the one where survey was conducted. Human development *('HDI'*) reports country scores on Human Development Index. All three measures come from Pippa Norris' Democracy Crossnational Data, Release 3.0, Spring 2009 (www.pippanorris.com).

The average frequency of political discussion within intimate and generic networks (*'Ave talk')* indicates how frequent politics is discussed in a specific macro setting, i.e. country. The average level of political similarity within both intimate and generic networks ('*Ave agreement')* is indicative of how socially acceptable political disagreement is in a society. Both measures are computed from the individual level data.

2.3.3. Research design

To test the effects that political discussion has on voting/knowledge across various countries I employ as a method of analysis hierarchical models – a.k.a. multilevel models. Hierarchical models (or multilevel models as they are referred to in social sciences parlance) are a type of regression models that are particularly suitable for multilevel data, for the following reasons. First, this statistical method of analysis accounts for 'variance in the dependent variable that is measured at the lowest level of analysis by considering information from all levels of analysis' (Steenbergen and Jones 2002: 219). Predictors from multiple levels of analysis can be incorporated and this is particularly relevant from a theoretical point of view. It also reduces the chances of misspecifications in the estimated models. Second, it makes possible the examination

of ‘causal heterogeneity’. Specifically, the inclusion of cross-level interactions makes possible ‘to determine whether the causal effect of lower-level predictors is conditioned or moderated by higher-level predictors’ (Steenbergen and Jones 2002: 219). Finally, directly related to ‘causal heterogeneity’, the use of multilevel design ‘can provide a test of the generalizability of findings’ (Steenbergen and Jones 2002: 219). It makes possible to answer the question whether the effects of some individual level variables apply to all contexts or only a few. In my research, the use of multilevel analysis allows me to examine general effects that political discussion might have across a wide range of macro contexts (countries) and the joint effects between micro and macro level variables.

There are also technical or statistical reasons for employing a multilevel design. The data that I analyze has a multilevel structure; individuals (respondents in the surveys) are nested within contextual units (countries). Failure to account for this structure would result in downwardly biased standard errors and higher chances of type I error (Steenbergen and Jones 2002: 219-20). This is the results of ignoring the possibility of a nonconstant variance across the macro level units (countries) and the lack of independence of the observations. Hierarchical or multilevel models are one class of methods that can deal with such issues. Nevertheless, they come with some limitations, the most important being the need for a relatively large, random sample of level-2 units, a condition that is usually difficult to meet in survey data analysis.

In my research, the number of macro level units for which I have relevant information is eleven for the analysis with intimate networks as explanatory variables and nine for the analysis of generic networks. The small number of level-2 units calls for great care in interpreting the results of these tests. Bryk and Raudenbush (2002) advise that an analysis shouldn’t employ more than one macro-level predictor per ten level-2 observations, but constrained to test for one level-2 predictor at the time my models may have specification problems. Therefore, I see my results as

preliminary estimates that are made possible by currently available data. The addition of a new wave of CNEP study in the near future will increase the level-2 units and shall allow the estimation of better specified models.

The effects of the explanatory variables can be specified either as fixed or random. Fixed effects are based on the underlying assumption that the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable is expected to be similar across the macro level units. Random effects assume that the influences of the explanatory variables vary across the macro level units and can account for differences among these macro level units. Both intercept and slopes can be specified either as fixed or random.

In my models, the effects of network measures are specified as random. This is aimed at testing whether these effects vary significantly across countries. Another specification of my models is random intercepts. This is due to the fact that I assume that there is significant between-group variability in the dependent variable. To substantiate this claim I test the effects of five macro level variables that are expected to influence the level of variance in the dependent variable. These are length of democratic experience, two indicators of country level of development – GDP and HDI – and two measures of norms of political communication, namely average level of political talk and agreement. These macro level variables are expected to moderate the effects that network measures have on voting and political knowledge. The specific expectations are included in my hypotheses. Specifically, features of political discussion are expected to have a stronger effect in newly democratized countries and less economically developed societies. Also, the effect of frequency of political talk at micro level is expected to be enhanced in those societies in which political discussion is more often a topic of conversation. Finally, exposure to more political disagreement at network level is expected to be more beneficial in those societies characterized by higher average scores of political disagreement. The

joint effects between micro and macro level variables are introduced as product terms in my models.

2.4. Results

In this chapter I present the results of estimating statistical models in which measures of political discussion within intimate social settings are the individual level predictors of voting and political knowledge. The next chapter reports the results of estimating statistical models that include among the individual level predictors measures of political discussion with members of generic networks.

2.4.1. Intimate social networks, voting and knowledge

The set of countries that include data on intimate networks are Argentina (2007), Bulgaria (1996), Chile (1993), Greece (1996), Hungary (2006), Mexico (2006), Mozambique (2004), South Africa (2004), Spain (1993), Taiwan (2004), and the US (2004). I started with estimating statistical models that include direct effects of political discussion in intimate networks on voting and political knowledge (tables 1 and 2). In the second step, I looked at the effects of network variables on two measures of political interest – self-declared political interest and media attentiveness – that have been found to be significant antecedents of both participation (Norris 2000, Scheufele and Shah 2000, Scheufele and Nisbet 2002) and knowledge (Eveland and Scheufele 2000, Scheufele *et al.* 2003). The results of testing these statistical models are reported in tables 3 and 4.

2.4.1.1. Intimate social networks and voting

Table 1 reports the results of estimating multilevel models, in which individual turnout is the response variable. The strategy that I follow is to start with the estimation of a simple model, in which individual turnout is expressed as a function of classical socio-demographic predictors and to include gradually groups of other predictors, both at individual and country level. This approach makes possible an examination of changes in the effects of some variables, once a new group of predictors is introduced. Specifically, it allows a look at the changes in the effects of network variables in the presence of other predictors of individual turnout.

I start the analysis with the estimation of a multilevel model in which voting is expressed as a function of four socio-demographics, namely respondents' age, level of education, gender, and marital status. The effects of these variables are defined as fixed whereas the intercept is specified as random. This latter specification assumes that there are significant differences in the level of turnout across the macro level units (countries). Next, I include in the model the three network measures, namely frequency of political talk, level of political agreement, and expertise within the intimate networks. To test whether their effects vary across the countries analyzed, I specified their effects as random. In the third model, I test the effects of three measures of cognitive involvement with politics on voting. These are partisanship, political interest and consumption of political news in media. The reason for testing this model is to observe how these cognitive measures perform as predictors of voting, in the absence of network measures. The effects of the cognitive indicators are specified as fixed because their relationship with voting is assumed to be similar across the macro level units. In model 4, network measures are added to the socio-demographics and the cognitive involvement predictors. As before, the effects of network measures are specified as random, whereas for the other variables the effects are fixed. I continue the analysis with the estimation of models that include macro level predictors and interactions

between them and network measures. The aim of these analyses is to find out whether the effect of political discussion is moderated by these macro level indicators.

Estimates for all these models were obtained using the multi-level techniques and software Hierarchical Linear and Nonlinear Modeling, HLM, version 6.02, originally developed by Bryk and Raudenbush (1992). All models are estimated using full maximum likelihood (FML). Bryk and Raudenbush (1992) recommend computing models using both restricted maximum likelihood (REML) and full maximum likelihood (FML). I followed this suggestion and the estimates are identical. The advantage of using FML is that it allows testing differences in model fit for nested models.

One customary measure reported in multilevel analysis is the proportion of variance in the dependent variable accounted for by the explanatory variables at each level of the analysis. This measure is the equivalent of R-squared in multiple linear regressions. Based on these measures, it is possible to assess the explanatory power of different sets of predictors at both levels of the analysis. The comparison can be carried between the empty model (the model that has no predictors) and each of the models or among different models, assuming that they are nested (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). The other measure used to assess the model fit is the log likelihood (-2 Log likelihood). This can be used to compare the fit of nested models. However, when dependent variable is dichotomous, the link function is logit and therefore there is no information on proportion of variance accounted for at individual level. Table 1 therefore includes only reports about the variance at the macro level and its changes across various models. In the rest of the analyses though, the proportion of variance at both levels will be reported together with the measures of model fit (-2 Log likelihood).

The first column of table 1 shows the results of estimating a model in which individual turnout is expressed as a function of basic SES variables, namely age, education, gender, and

marital status (Model 1). All of these are defined as fixed effects, while the intercept is specified as random. This is due to the expectation that individual turnout significantly varies across countries. Results confirm the findings of the previous studies of electoral behavior. They show that people who are older and more educated, as well as those who have a partner, are significantly more likely to vote compared to those respondents who are younger, less educated, have no partner. The only surprising effect is that of gender that is not significant. The country-level variance component is statistically significant, indicating that there is significant variance in voting at country level.

Next, the three network measures are added to the model and their effects are specified as random (Model 2). Results show that there is significant variance in their effects across the countries included in the analysis. Frequency of talk appears to have a general positive relationship with individual turnout across the eleven polities. The interesting changes in this model compared with the previous one is that the effects of education and marital status become non-significant once the network measures are included. This suggests that what stimulates a person to vote is the level of political discussion that goes on in her intimate social network rather than her level of education and the presence of a partner.

Measures of cognitive involvement with politics were shown to be significant determinants of voting in the previous literature. For this reason, it is interesting to see what happens with the effects of network measures in the presence of these indicators. Before this test though, I estimate a model that includes only these cognitive measures in addition to the SES predictors (Model 3). The reason for conducting this analysis is to observe the effects of the two sets of variables – cognitive and network measures – both separately and together. The examination of the changes in their effects between the two models – with each of them separately and with them together – makes possible a better understanding of the way they

interact with each other and with the rest of the variables in the model. The results of estimating Model 3 show that strength of partisanship and self-declared political interest are significantly and positively linked to turnout. Interestingly enough, the inclusion of the cognitive measures wipes away the effect of education but makes both marital status and gender significantly and positively related to voting. In other words, among individuals at the same level of partisanship and interest in politics, women and those who live with a partner are more likely to vote.

Model 4 reports the results of the analysis in which both network and cognitive measures are included as explanatory variables. As in model 2, the effects of network variables are specified as random. Results show that after controlling for both SES variables and cognitive indicators, there are not significant differences in the effects that network measures have on turnout across the eleven countries included in the analysis. The only exception is level of political agreement. The effect of this variable varies significantly across countries. There are no general effects though for any of the three network measures. On the other hand, the estimates of all four measures of cognitive involvement with politics become significant, suggesting that these indicators might capture the effects of political discussion. With regard to the other variables in the model, the effect of education remains non-significant, while those of gender and marital status are significant.

Model 5 reports the estimates of cross-level interactions between network measures and democratic experience.[5] These interactions are computed as products between each of the three network indicators and the measure of democratic length in the countries analyzed. Results indicate that political agreement in intimate settings has a positive effect on turnout, and this is significantly more the case in newly democratized countries. This finding is in line with MacKuen's (1990) expectation that political agreement will matter more in those contexts where

[5] Given the skewed distribution of 'years of democracy' I normalized it by taking its natural logarithm.

people are not yet accustomed with debate and where social consensus is more needed to design new political institutions. However, this is the first time to my knowledge that this is demonstrated. Length of democratic experience alone does not have a significant effect on voting.

No significant effects are recorded when cross-level interactions between network measures and GDP, HDI, average political talk and political agreement are included. Hypothesizing that the effect of explanatory variables on vote may differ between countries with and without compulsory voting, I tested for interaction effects between network measures and a variable distinguishing between countries with and without compulsory voting. No changes in the effects of network measures have been recorded, though.

To conclude, this part has shown that although political talk within intimate settings appears to be generally and positively associated with turnout, this effect peters out once cognitive involvement with politics is controlled for. Therefore, hypotheses H1.1 and H1.7 are not supported. A possible explanation is that political discussion influences individuals' cognitive mobilization and this is what the next sections will explore. Another important finding is that political agreement appears to be positively linked to vote across all countries (H1.2) and even stronger in newly democratized countries (H1.8). The effect of networks though does not vary with levels of economic and human development and with norms of political interaction (H1.9 and H1.10).

These findings are theoretically relevant for several reasons. First, the test of models that include different groups makes possible an examination of the effects that network variables have in the presence of some controls. Specifically, when only SES variables are included in the models next to the network indicators, the effect of frequency of talk emerges as significant. This indicates that higher rates of political discussion are positively associated with voting. However, once the indicators of individual cognitive involvement with politics are included among the

explanatory variables, the effect of political talk loses significance. Political interest emerges as one of the strongest predictors of voting and this suggests that the two variables might influence each other. In one of the next sections of this chapter I test for the effect of political discussion on interest. A more detailed examination of the effects between these two variables is conducted in chapter four of my dissertation. Here though, I take this finding as an indication that political discussion leads to an increase in individuals' interest for political issues. The second relevant finding of these analyses is that political agreement with intimate network members works as an incentive for electoral participation and this incentive is even stronger for those individuals who live in countries that have a more recent democratic experience. MacKuen (1990) advanced theoretical arguments as of why political agreement will have a beneficial effect in those societies in which people have limited experience of political disagreement. However, there has been no empirical evidence whether this is indeed the case. This finding has important practical consequences and it requires a complementary examination of the supply of political agreement in the newly democratized countries. This analysis is carried out in chapter five of my dissertation.

Table 1: Micro- and macro-level determinants of individual turnout

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**
Fixed effects					
Constant	1.51*** (.14)	1.84*** (.12)	1.76*** (.1)	1.95*** (.16)	1.96*** (.16)
Age	.02*** (.004)	.02*** (.005)	.02*** (.004)	.02*** (.002)	.02*** (.002)
Education	.13*** (.03)	.06 (.03)	.002 (.04)	.004 (.02)	.004 (.02)
Female	-.04 (.05)	-.02 (.04)	.15*** (.04)	.14** (.05)	.14** (.05)
Married	.3*** (.06)	.04 (.09)	.31*** (.06)	.24*** (.06)	.24*** (.06)
Intimate talk		.14*** (.02)		.04 (.03)	.04 (.02)
Intimate agreement		.04 (.02)		.07 (.04)	.07** (.03)
Intimate expertise		-.01 (.02)		-.08** (.03)	-.09** (.02)
Partisanship			.36*** (.05)	.34*** (.03)	.34*** (.03)
Political interest			.25*** (.04)	.18*** (.02)	.18*** (.02)
Media			.04 (.02)	.03*** (.008)	.03*** (.008)
Knowledge			.11 (.07)	.09*** (.02)	.09*** (.02)
Intimate talk*Democracy					.04 (.02)
Agreement*Democracy					-.08** (.03)
Expertise*Democracy					.05** (.02)
Democracy					.009 (.17)
Random Effects					
Intimate talk		.06*		.05	.03
Intimate agreement		.09***		.11***	.07**
Intimate expertise		.09**		.06	.03
Variance components					
Country level	.49[6]	.6[7]	.34[8]	.54[9]	.54[10]

***p < .01, **p < .05, *p < .10 for two-tailed test

[6] Chi-square=1044.26, df=10, p<.01
[7] Chi-square=580.23, df=10, p<.01
[8] Chi-square= 183.97, df=10, p<.01
[9] Chi-square= 228.54, df=10, p<.01
[10] Chi-square= 229.96, df=9, p<.01

2.4.1.2. Intimate social networks and political knowledge

In this section I follow an approach similar to the one outlined in the previous part. This time I explore the micro and macro level determinants of individual political knowledge. Table 2 reports the results of estimating multilevel models in which the response variable is a measure of individual political knowledge. For each of these models I report the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is accounted for at each level of analysis and an indicator of the model fit.

Similar to the case of voting as dependent variable, I first estimate a model in which political knowledge is expressed as a function of classical SES variables, namely age, education, gender, and marital status (Model 1). All are specified as fixed effects. Results indicate that age, education, and gender have a significant influence on political knowledge. Older and more educated people appear to be more politically knowledgeable, while women are less politically knowledgeable. There are significant differences in level of political knowledge across the countries included in the analysis.

In the second model, I include network measures along with the SES variables and specify their effects as random (Model 2). The results show that the effect of each network measure on political knowledge significantly varies across the eleven polities included in the analysis. Moreover, frequency of political talk and network members' political expertise has a general positive effect on knowledge. The effects of age, education, and gender remain significant, suggesting that their influences are independent of the ones stemming from political discussion. The effect of marital status becomes significant and is negatively related to knowledge. This indicates that after controlling for the amount of political talk with spouse and the other two close relationships in one's intimate network, having a partner does not bring additional informational benefits.

For reasons that have been laid out before I estimate a model in which political knowledge is expressed as a function of measures of cognitive involvement with politics. This estimation precedes the one in which the effects of cognitive and network indicators are tested together. Model 3 reports the results of this analysis. Self-declared political interest and attentiveness to political news in media are positively linked to knowledge. The effect of partisanship does not reach conventional level of significance. There are no changes in the effects of the SES variables compared to their estimates in model 1.

Model 4 includes network indicators, SES variables and measures of cognitive involvement with politics as explanatory variables. The effects of network measures are specified as random. The results show that their effects on knowledge significantly vary across the countries included in the analysis. However, none of them records a general effect. Their effects seem to be taken over by two cognitive measures, namely political interest and media attentiveness. Similar to model 2, the effect of marital status becomes significant. While having a partner appeared to be a positive trigger for voting, it has a negative effect on political knowledge after various measures of political interest have been controlled for. We know from previous research that partners are, for most of the time, politically similar (Zuckerman 2005), and this may not recommend them as a source of new information or as challengers of one's own political views. If this is true, the effect of having a partner on political interest and media attendance should be negative, too. This is tested in the next sections.

Model 5 looks at macro level variables as potential sources of variation in the effects of political discussion across the eleven countries in the analysis. The first measure that I include in my analysis is the democratic experience of the countries. Cross-level interactions between each of the three measures of political discussion and the variable measuring length of democratic experience in each country are added to the explanatory variables from model 4. Results show

that political agreement appears to have stronger effects in older democracies. This is a surprising finding that contradicts expectations with regard to political disagreement as a potential source of political knowledge. A possible explanation is that older democracies display stronger norms of politically agreeableness. In model eight I test the effects of the cross-level interaction between micro and macro levels of political agreement.

Model 6 tests for economic development as a source of variation in the effects of political conversation across countries. Results indicate that political agreement is more beneficial for individuals living in more economically developed countries. This finding might be linked to the one before if there is an overlap between older democracies and more economically developed countries. However, there is no obvious explanation for why this would be the case unless, as hypothesized before, political agreement is more valued in those countries that are more economically developed. It is important to notice that neither democratic experience nor level of economic development has a significant effect on individual level of political knowledge.

Model 7 tests for the moderating effect of a variable meant to capture the general appetite for discussing politics in the surveyed societies. This is a variable that records the average frequency of political talk within intimate networks. Results show that in those countries where political discussion is more frequent, the amount of political talk in one's intimate setting has a stronger effect on her knowledge. This may suggest that in those societies where people use to discuss politics more frequent, social connectedness opens up more informational channels. This is to say that in a more politicized society every single new social connection increases our probability of getting into a political conversation that can bring about more information or sources of debate and reflection. This is a tentative conclusion though, and further research should include measures of overall social connectedness to let us understand the extent to which intimate settings open up or isolate individuals from more extensive social interactions.

Finally, Model 8 looks at the effect of another moderator that relates to a social norm, namely the average political agreement. This measure indicates to what extent political agreement is valued in a society. Results show that agreement has a stronger effect in those macro settings where it is more valued, i.e. those societies that have higher values of average political agreement. Interestingly enough, level of political agreement at macro level is a significant predictor of political knowledge. This finding indicates that specific norms of communication might moderate the influences that political communication has on political engagement. A more detailed examination of these norms of political communication is carried out in chapter six of my dissertation.

To sum up, this section has shown that the effect of political discussion peters out once measures of cognitive involvement with politics, such as political interest and media attentiveness are controlled for. The effects of all measures of political discussion in intimate settings significantly vary across countries included in the analysis, but no general trend can be observed in any of them. Hypotheses H2.1 and H2.2 were thus not confirmed. Interestingly enough, the effect of political agreement appears to be stronger in older democracies and more economically developed countries. These are findings that go against the theoretical expectations formulated in hypothesis H2.8. Finally, there is evidence that macro level variables that approximate norms of political communication moderate the relationships between individual political conversation and political knowledge. Specifically, more frequent political discussion appears to increase individual political knowledge in those countries that display higher average levels of political talk (H2.9). Also, exposure to politically like-minded others have a positive effect on political knowledge in those countries that display a higher average of political agreement at macro level. This latter finding does not necessarily runs against the expectations formulated in hypothesis H2.10, which stated that political disagreement is particularly beneficial for political knowledge

in those societies with higher levels of political disagreement. It only suggests that in those societies where political agreement is a stronger norm of political discussion its effects will be enhanced at micro level.

These results are theoretically relevant for the following reasons. First, similar to the analysis of electoral participation, these findings indicate that the effect of political discussion on political knowledge might be mediated by interest in politics. Although participation in political conversation with peers might not be the prime motivation of interest in politics, it might contribute to an increase in curiosity about the political world and attentiveness to political news in media. These propositions are explored in the next two sections. Second, the results of these analyses brought evidence with regard to the moderating role of norms of political communication. In spite of the fact that average political talk and agreement are imperfect proxies for appetite for political conversation and preference for political agreement, the results show that they enhance the effects of political conversation at individual level. Also, a very interesting finding that is worth exploring further is that frequency of political agreement at macro level is a significant predictor of individual political knowledge. Finally, these results contribute to existing scholarship on the role of partner as source of political mobilization and knowledge. Having a partner appears to contribute to political mobilization while having a negative effect on political knowledge. This is probably due to similarity and conformism stemming from frequent interactions between partners.

Table 2: Micro- and macro-level determinants of political knowledge

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed effects				
Constant	1.67*** (.21)	1.74*** (.21)	1.58*** (.2)	1.68*** (.21)
Age	.04*** (.01)	.03*** (.01)	.04*** (.01)	.03*** (.004)
Age squared	-.0003*** (.0001)	-.0003*** (.0001)	-.0003*** (.0001)	-.0002*** (.00004)
Education	.28*** (.05)	.26*** (.04)	.28*** (.05)	.25*** (.01)
Female	-.33*** (.04)	-.36*** (.04)	-.31*** (.04)	-.35*** (.02)
Married	.007 (.02)	-.09** (.04)	.005 (.03)	-.07*** (.02)
Intimate talk		.07*** (.01)		.03 (.02)
Intimate agreement		-.02 (.02)		-.01 (.02)
Intimate expertise		.04** (.02)		.03 (.02)
Partisanship			.02 (.03)	.004 (.01)
Political interest			.08** (.03)	.07*** (.01)
Media			.05*** (.01)	.04*** (.003)
Random effects				
Intimate talk		.04***		.04***
Intimate agreement		.06***		.06***
Intimate expertise		.07***		.06***
Variance components				
Individual level	1.1	1.04	1.06	1.04
Country level	.71[11]	.71[12]	.65[13]	.69[14]
Percent of individual-level variance explained	71	68	73	70
Percent of country-level variance explained	29	32	27	30
-2xLog Likelihood	61385.69	38172.79	44217.3	32398.87

[11] Chi-square=7690.75, df=10, p<.01
[12] Chi-square=6665.77, df=10, p<.01
[13] Chi-square= 5957.43, df=10, p<.01
[14] Chi-square= 5662.07, df=10, p<.01

Table 2: Micro- and macro-level determinants of political knowledge

	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Fixed effects				
Constant	1.68*** (.19)	1.68*** (.19)	1.68*** (.2)	1.68*** (.15)
Age	.03*** (.004)	.03*** (.004)	03*** (.004)	.03*** (.004)
Age squared	-.0002*** (.00004)	-.0002*** (.00004)	-.0002*** (.00004)	-.0002*** (.00004)
Education	.25*** (.01)	.25*** (.01)	.25*** (.01)	.25*** (.01)
Female	-.35*** (.02)	-.35*** (.02)	-.35*** (.02)	-.35*** (.02)
Married	-.07*** (.02)	-.07*** (.02)	-.07*** (.02)	-.07*** (.02)
Intimate talk	.03 (.02)	.03 (.02)	.03 (.02)	.03 (.02)
Intimate agreement	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.02)
Intimate expertise	.03 (.02)	.03 (.02)	.03 (.02)	.03 (.02)
Partisanship	.003 (.01)	.004 (.01)	.004 (.01)	.004 (.01)
Political interest	.07*** (.01)	.07*** (.01)	.07*** (.01)	.07*** (.01)
Media	.04*** (.003)	.04*** (.003)	.04*** (.003)	.04*** (.003)
Intimate talk*Democracy	-.01 (.02)			
Agreement*Democracy	.05*** (.01)			
Expertise*Democracy	.01 (.02)			
Intimate talk*GDP		-.01 (.03)		
Intimate agreement*GDP		.07** (.02)		
Intimate expertise*GDP		-.05 (.03)		
Intimate talk*Ave Talk			.04** (.02)	
Intimate agreement*Ave Agreement				.07*** (.01)
Democracy	.28 (.2)			
GDP		.49 (.35)		
Ave Talk			.36 (.25)	
Ave Agreement				.68** (.19)
Random effects				
Intimate talk	.04***	.04***	.05***	.04***
Intimate agreement	.03***	.04***	.06***	.06***
Intimate expertise	.06***	.06***	.06***	.06***

Table 2: Micro- and macro-level determinants of political knowledge

	Model 5	**Model 6**	**Model 7**	**Model 8**
Variance components				
Individual level	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.04
Country level	.63[15]	.63[16]	.65[17]	.48[18]
Percent of individual-level variance explained	73	73	72	82
Percent of country-level variance explained	27	27	28	18
-2xLog Likelihood	32380.45	32388.16	32396	32385.42

***p < .01, **p < .05, *p < .10 for two-tailed test

[15] Chi-square=4169.97, df=9, p<.01
[16] Chi-square=4503.51, df=9, p<.01
[17] Chi-square= 4503.42, df=9, p<.01
[18] Chi-square=2255.92, df=9, p<.01

2.4.1.3. Intimate social networks and political interest

To test for the possibility that political discussion in intimate settings affects participation and knowledge not only directly but also indirectly, by stimulating individuals' political interest and appetite for getting informed about politics, I estimate statistical models in which political interest and media attendance are expressed as a function of network measures. I follow a similar approach to the one used for disentangling the effects of network measures among other classical predictors of voting and political knowledge. I first estimate a reduced model, in which political interest is expressed as a function of socio-demographics. In the next step I include the network indicators and I look at their effects and the changes in the effects of the SES variables. This is followed by a model in which measures of cognitive involvement with politics predict political interest. Finally, all these explanatory variables are introduced in one statistical model. I also test for joint effects of micro and macro level variables.

Table 3 reports the results of these estimations. In model 1, political interest is regressed on a set of classical SES variables, namely age, gender, education, and marital status. Results show that respondents who are older and more educated are more likely to report higher interest in politics, while women are much less likely to do so.

When network measures are added to the model, results show that they have significantly different effects across the countries included in the analysis (Model 2). In spite of these differences, frequency of political discussion and level of political expertise in one's intimate network have a general positive influence on political interest. These two measures of political discussion are positively and significantly linked to political interest across all the eleven polities included in the analysis. An interesting observation here is that once we account for the features of political discussion to which individuals are exposed to, their marital status becomes

significant. For individuals who report similar levels of discussion, agreement and expertise, having a partner has a negative effect on their interest in politics. We saw in the previous parts of the analysis that having a partner positively contributes to respondents' decisions to vote while having a negative relationship with their political knowledge. The explanation I formulated with regard to those findings is that partners are mostly structurally and politically similar and this works as a disincentive in getting more information or reflecting on one's own political opinions. The degree of conformism in this habitual interaction might also create a disincentive. Here we see that this seems to be indeed the case as partners do not act as sources of an increased interest in politics.

In model 3 I test for the relevance of measures of cognitive involvement with politics. Results show that strength of partisanship, media attendance, and political knowledge are significantly and positively linked to individual political interest. All the SES variables maintain the effects recorded in model 1.

Finally, model 4 tests for the effects of political discussion while controlling for the SES and cognitive variables. Results indicate that more political talk in intimate settings is generally linked to more political interest and this relationship holds across all the eleven surveyed polities. No significant effects are recorded when joint effects between network measures and macro level variables – democratic experience, economic and human development, average political talk and political agreement – are considered. Those results are therefore not reported here.

This part has confirmed the expectations formulated in hypothesis H2.5 about the mediating effect of political interest. Frequency of political discussion leads to more political interest which, as we saw in the previous sections, is among the strongest predictors of vote and knowledge. Moreover, in the analysis with vote and knowledge as dependent variables we saw that the effect of network measures disappears when political interest is included in the analysis.

None of the other two hypotheses predicting a positive effect of political similarity and expertise on interest are confirmed (H2.6 and H2.7). Thus, what seems to matter more in stirring up people's interest in politics is the amount of talk going on in their intimate settings rather than to how much agreement/disagreement and expertise they are exposed.

Table 3: Micro- and macro-level determinants of political interest

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed effects				
Constant	3.36*** (.28)	3.85*** (.26)	3.42*** (.3)	3.81*** (.28)
Age	.03*** (.01)	.02*** (.01)	.01*** (.005)	.01 (.01)
Age squared	-.0003*** (.00005)	-.0001 (.0001)	-.0001** (.0001)	-.00004 (.0001)
Education	.31*** (.06)	.19*** (.03)	.14*** (.04)	.07*** (.01)
Female	-.36*** (.06)	-.33*** (.04)	-.14** (.06)	-.14*** (.03)
Married	.07 (.06)	-.31*** (.09)	.02 (.06)	-.2*** (.04)
Intimate talk		.3*** (.03)		.2*** (.03)
Intimate agreement		-.05 (.02)		-.03 (.02)
Intimate expertise		.09** (.03)		.05 (.03)
Partisanship			.4*** (.04)	.3*** (.01)
Media			.15*** (.03)	.13*** (.005)
Political knowledge			.21*** (.06)	.17*** (.01)
Random effects				
Intimate talk		.1***		.08***
Intimate agreement		.07***		.04**
Intimate expertise		.1***		.07***
Variance components				
Individual level	1.84	1.64	1.72	1.59
Country level	.92[19]	.85[20]	1.01[21]	.93[22]
Individual-level variance explained	80	79	74	75
Country-level variance explained	20	21	26	25
-2xLog Likelihood	118962.35	68858.96	58541.07	41791.45

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

[19] Chi-square=7722.41, df=10, p<.01
[20] Chi-square=3999.52, df=10, p<.01
[21] Chi-square= 6303.08, df=10, p<.01
[22] Chi-square= 4547.8, df=10, p<.01

2.4.1.4. Intimate social networks and media attentiveness

The other hypothesized mediator in the relationship between political discussion and voting/knowledge is exposure to political news in media. To test for the effects that political discussion has on media attentiveness across different countries I estimated models that include individual predictors and joint effects of micro and macro level variables.

Table 4 presents the results of testing the effects of political discussion in intimate settings on consumption of political news in media or media attentiveness in short. Model 1 reports the results of expressing media attentiveness as an effect of age, gender, education, and marital status. Not surprising, consumption of political news in various media increases with age and education and is lower for women. No significant effect of marital status is recorded.

Next I introduce the measures of political discussion as predictors and define their effects as random (Model 2). The results show that the effects of frequency of talk and political expertise in intimate networks are significantly different across the countries in the analysis. Moreover, the two indicators of political discussion are positively linked to individuals' exposure to political news in various media in all countries analyzed. Having a partner becomes a negative predictor of media attentiveness in this model. This finding complements the conclusions of the previous sections, in which partners appear to have a detrimental effect for both political interest and knowledge. We can thus conclude that, while acting as an incentive for voting, the presence of the most intimate social tie seems to act as a disincentive for knowledge, interest, and media attendance.

Model 3 introduces measures of cognitive involvement with politics along with SES variables as predictors of media attentiveness. Perhaps not surprising, strength of partisanship, political interest, and knowledge are all significantly and positively linked to one's appetite for

getting information about political events via various media. In this model, marital status becomes a positive predictor of media attentiveness, while the effects of the other SES variables are smaller compared to model 1, but in the same direction.

Model 4 includes SES variables, measures of cognitive involvement with politics, and indictors of political discussion as explanatory variables. Results show that the effects of all three network measures significantly vary across the countries in the analysis. Moreover, frequency of political talk has a general positive effect on media attentiveness, while political agreement is negatively related to media exposure. These findings indicate that increased levels of political discussion with close others make respondents more willing to attend to political news, while exposure to agreement in intimate settings decreases their appetite for seeking out more political information.

Model 5 checks for the moderating effect of democratic experience. Cross-level interactions between network measures and length of democratic experience in a country are included among the explanatory variables. Results show that the general effects of political discussion are enhanced for those respondents who live in countries with a longer democratic experience. Specifically, exposure to more political conversations in intimate settings increases the exposure to political news via media and this effect is stronger in older democracies. In addition to this, more political agreement reduces interest for political news in media and this effect is stronger in older democracies. The latter interaction effect seems to account for the previously observed significant difference in the effect of political similarity across countries. Length of democratic experience though does not have a significant effect on media attentiveness.

Model 6 tests the effect that level of economic development has on the relationship between political discussion and media attentiveness. As in the case of the previous model, cross-

level interactions between a measure of economic development and network indicators are included as explanatory variables in the model. The results show that more frequent engagement in political conversations leads to an increase in exposure to political news via media and this effect is stronger in more economically developed countries. A higher level of political agreement though acts as a disincentive for media attentiveness. This effect is also stronger in more economically developed societies. The level of economic development is a strong predictor of exposure to political news via media.

Finally, model 7 tests for the moderating effect of average frequency of political talk at country level. The results are surprising as they indicate that although frequent political talk has a positive effect on media attendance in general, this is not the case in those societies characterized by higher figures of average political talk. Extensive political talk at macro level seems to diminish the effects of casual political conversations at micro level.

To sum up, this part has indicated that political discussion with intimate network members stimulates individuals' interest for following political news in media during the most recent electoral campaign. This holds across all eleven countries (H2.5). More agreeable political conversation acts as a disincentive for media attendance (H2.6). This finding is in line with previous research on this topic that showed that it is political disagreement that stirs up interest in politics. The effect of political expertise on media attentiveness does not reach conventional level of significance and therefore the expectations formulated by hypothesis H2.7 are not confirmed. The effects formulated by hypotheses H2.5 and H2.6 are found in my analysis and they appear to be even stronger in older democracies and more economically developed countries. An interesting finding is frequent political talk at micro level is negatively related to media attentiveness in countries characterized by higher average values of political discussion in intimate settings. This seems to indicate that extensive talk does not raise interest in politics. A

society where people discuss politics a lot might be a place with better informed citizens – as we saw the link between talk and knowledge is enhanced in those societies displaying higher average of political talk – but not necessarily with more enthusiastic ones – there is no evidence of average talk increasing the effects of networks on vote.

Table 4: Micro- and macro-level determinants of media attentiveness

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
Fixed effects				
Constant	5.56*** (.26)	6.04*** (.4)	5.77*** (.43)	6.11*** (.44)
Age	.1*** (.01)	.07*** (.02)	.04*** (.01)	.04*** (.01)
Age squared	-.001*** (.0001)	-.001*** (.0001)	-.0003*** (.0001)	-.0003*** (.0001)
Education	.91*** (.05)	.57*** (.04)	.46*** (.06)	.36*** (.02)
Female	-.68*** (.09)	-.7*** (.08)	-.26*** (.07)	-.41*** (.06)
Married	.06 (.15)	-.47** (.2)	.23*** (.08)	-.11 (.07)
Intimate talk		.48*** (.07)		.31*** (.07)
Intimate agreement		-.1*** (.02)		-.1*** (.04)
Intimate expertise		.18*** (.05)		.09 (.05)
Partisanship			.31*** (.06)	.16*** (.03)
Political interest			.53*** (.1)	.5*** (.02)
Political knowledge			.52*** (.13)	.35*** (.03)
Random effects				
Intimate talk		.2***		.22***
Intimate agreement		.03		.09***
Intimate expertise		.15***		.14***
Variance components				
Individual level	3.66	3.36	3.28	3.14
Country level	.85[23]	1.32[24]	1.42[25]	1.46[26]
Percent of individual-level variance explained	95	87	84	82
Percent of country-level variance explained	5	13	16	18
-2xLog Likelihood	130012.95	74099.06	77839.72	56772.47

[23] Chi-square=1261.01, df=10, p<.01
[24] Chi-square=1836.66, df=10, p<.01
[25] Chi-square= 3107.36, df=10, p<.01
[26] Chi-square= 2859.42, df=10, p<.01

Table 4: Micro- and macro-level determinants of media attentiveness

	Model 5	**Model 6**	**Model 7**
Fixed effects			
Constant	6.11*** (.37)	6.11*** (.33)	6.11*** (.45)
Age	.04*** (.01)	.04*** (.01)	.04*** (.01)
Age squared	-.0003*** (.0001)	-.0003*** (.0001)	-.0003*** (.0001)
Education	.36*** (.02)	.36*** (.02)	.36*** (.02)
Female	-.4*** (.06)	-.41*** (.06)	-.41*** (.06)
Married	-.1 (.07)	-.1 (.07)	-.1 (.07)
Intimate talk	.31*** (.06)	.31*** (.06)	.31** (.08)
Intimate agreement	-.1*** (.03)	-.1** (.03)	-.1** (.04)
Intimate expertise	.09 (.05)	.08 (.05)	.08 (.05)
Partisanship	.16*** (.03)	.16*** (.03)	.16*** (.03)
Political interest	.5*** (.02)	.5*** (.02)	.5*** (.02)
Political knowledge	.35*** (.03)	.35*** (.03)	.35*** (.03)
Intimate talk*Democracy	.15** (.06)		
Intimate agreement*Democracy	-.1*** (.02)		
Intimate expertise*Democracy	-.07 (.05)		
Intimate talk*GDP		.29** (.1)	
Intimate agreement*GDP		-.13** (.05)	
Intimate expertise*GDP		-.08 (.1)	
Intimate talk*Ave Talk			-.1** (.02)
Democracy	.82 (.39)		
GDP		1.79** (.6)	
Ave Talk			-.23 (.5)
Random effects			
Intimate talk	.17***	.16***	.25***
Intimate agreement	.03	.06**	.09***
Intimate expertise	.12***	.14***	.14***

Table 4: Micro- and macro-level determinants of media attentiveness

	Model 5	**Model 6**	**Model 7**
Variance components			
Individual level	3.13	3.14	3.14
Country level	1.23[27]	1.08[28]	1.5[29]
Percent of individual-level variance explained	87	89	82
Percent of country-level variance explained	13	11	18
-2xLog Likelihood	56756.22	56759.09	56766.42

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

[27] Chi-square=1486.38, df=9, p<.01
[28] Chi-square=1232.17 df=9, p<.01
[29] Chi-square= 3128.21, df=9, p<.01

To conclude, the results of investigating the effects of intimate social settings have indicated that political discussion in these settings has both a direct and an indirect effect on voting and knowledge, although the latter is stronger and more consistent. Frequency of political talk with intimate network members has no direct effect on voting, once measures of cognitive involvement with politics are controlled for. The only exception is when the model includes cross-level interactions between network measures and democratic experience among the explanatory variables. When this specification is introduced, results show that level of political agreement has a general positive effect on voting. This effect is even stronger in newly democratized societies. This latter finding confirms theoretical expectations with regard to the beneficial character of political agreement in those countries where people have a limited experience with coming across and handling political disagreement. Similarly, the effects of political communication on knowledge become insignificant once measures of cognitive involvement with politics are introduced as explanatory variables. However, the inclusion of cross-level interactions indicates that political discussion advances knowledge under certain macro level circumstances. Specifically, the level of political agreement appears to have a positive effect on political knowledge in older democracies and countries with a higher level of economic development, as well as in those societies that record a higher level of political talk and agreement at macro level. Moreover, there is evidence that political agreement matters for individual political knowledge. The macro level variable that measures level of political agreement in intimate settings has a positive effect on individual political knowledge. This finding highlights the relevance of norms of political communication characterizing a society for individual political behavior and cognition. A comparative analysis of these norms of political communication and their supply in countries with different political traditions, including length of democratic experience, is carried out in chapter six of my dissertation.

The list of direct effects stops here. As stated before, the significant effect of network measures is generally taken away by indicators of cognitive involvement with politics, especially by measures of political interest. A possible explanation is that political interest is a mediator in the relationship between discussion and knowledge/voting, an idea that has been proposed in some previous research. When the relationships between political discussion and two forms of political interest – self-declared political interest and consumption of political news in media – have been explored, we see more significant effects. Frequency of political discussion with intimate peers has a general positive effect on both political interest and media attentiveness, except for those societies characterized by higher average values of political talk. In these countries, the effect of political discussion on media attentiveness is significantly reduced. The effect of political agreement on interest does not reach conventional levels of significance. It has a negative effect though on media attentiveness generally and even more in older democracies and more economically developed countries.

As we saw when analyzing the determinants of voting and political knowledge, both political interest and media attentiveness are among their strongest predictors. This indicates that it is indeed the case that political discussion within intimate settings affects individual turnout and political knowledge indirectly, by increasing individuals' appetite for getting informed about politics.

Finally, an interesting finding of this chapter is that the closest social tie – spouses – acts as a mobilizing force and increase respondents' likelihood of voting, while it has a negative effect on measures of cognitive mobilization such as political interest, knowledge, and exposure to political news in media. The explanation that I put forward is that the similarity of partners and the conformism induced by frequent interaction act as a disincentive for increased information and deliberation.

The next chapter continues the examination of the effects that political discussion in micro social settings have on individual electoral behavior and political knowledge. It looks at the effects of political communication in larger, generic social settings and seeks to find whether different types of social interactions carry differential effects on an individual's electoral participation and political knowledge.

Chapter 3: Generic social settings, voting and political knowledge: a comparative analysis

This chapter complements the previous one and reports the effects of political discussion within larger, generic social networks on individual turnout and political behavior. As discussed in the previous chapter the aim of this analysis is to see whether there are different influences that these more distant social relationships carry on political engagement. As a reminder, generic social networks refer to those social settings that are seen as one step or more distant compared to the intimate social interactions. Specifically, they include groups of friends, workmates and neighbors. The countries that are included in the analysis with generic social settings as explanatory variables are Argentina (2007), Chile (1993), Hungary (1998), Mexico (2006), Mozambique (2004), South Africa (2004), Taiwan (2004), US (2004), and Uruguay (1994). As has been already discussed, the small number of level-2 cases poses problems, especially when macro level indicators are included in the analysis. Therefore greater caution is needed in assessing the results, especially for the part where macro level predictors are introduced. I report first the results of assessing direct effects of micro social embeddedness and then look at the influences of generic networks on two variables that are expected to function as mediators, namely political interest and media attentiveness.

3.1. Generic social networks and individual turnout

To study the effects of political discussion within generic social networks on voting I employ an approach similar to the one used to explore the influence of embeddedness in intimate

settings on political engagement. Specifically, I start with estimating a reduced model in which voting is expressed as a function of classical socio-demographics that were found to predict electoral behavior in previous literature. I gradually incorporate more sets of predictors, namely indicators of cognitive involvement with politics and measures of political discussion in generic settings. The effects of these variables are tested both separately and together. Finally, I include cross-level interactions between network measures and macro level indicators that are expected to moderate their effects.

Table 5 presents the results of these estimations. Model 1 reports the results of estimating a multilevel model in which individual turnout is expressed as a function of classic SES variables, namely age, education, gender, and marital status. Results show older, more educated, and married people are more likely to participate in elections. The effect of gender does not reach conventional levels of significance.

Model 2 adds to the previous predictors a set of variables that measure different aspects of political conversation in generic social networks. These indicators are frequency of political talk within the three settings, - with friends, colleagues and neighbors -, level of political agreement and disagreement in these interactions. Results indicate that the effects of both political similarity and dissimilarity significantly differ across the surveyed countries. It is only exposure to similar political views that has a general positive effect on voting. All the socio-demographic measures keep their previously recorded effects although there seems to be a significant reduction in the effect of marital status compared to model 1. This suggests that the positive effect of partners is partly conditioned by the amount of political talk and agreement, although this variable also has an independent effect on electoral mobilization.

Model 3 looks at the effects of cognitive involvement with politics on voting. All four measures significantly and positively contribute to individual decisions to participate in elections,

with political interest having the strongest effect. An interesting observation is that the effect of education becomes non-significant once the cognitive measures are introduced. This suggests that it is not education per se that influences participation but rather one's interest and involvement in politics. Marital status has a significant effect and shows that for individuals who are equally interested in politics having a partner stimulates participation.

Finally, I look at the effects of generic social networks while controlling for SES and cognitive measures. Results show that this time it is only the effect of political similarity that significantly differs across the countries. No general trend is recorded in the way political discussion relates to voting across the polities included in the analysis. Three cognitive measures – partisanship, political interest and knowledge – and all socio-demographics are significantly and positively linked to voting. Individual turnout appears to be a function of both individual characteristics and measures of political interest and cognitive involvement with politics.

To summarize this part, there seem to be significant differences in the effects that political agreement and disagreement in generic networks have on individual turnout across the countries analysed. Also, political agreement is uniformly and positively related to voting in these polities. However, once the measures of political interest and cognitive mobilization are introduced as explanatory variables, the effects of network measures become statistically insignificant. This is the same pattern that has been observed in the relationship between intimate networks and voting and it suggests that political discussion might have an indirect on turnout, by stimulating people's interest in politics. Another result of these analyses is that none of the cross-level interactions turned out being significant. In terms of my hypotheses, (H1.1, 2, 3 and H1.7 to H1.11) none of them is supported when generic social settings are assessed. A look at the analysis in which the effects of intimate settings were estimated indicates that the effects of political discussion in either type of settings are taken away by indicators of cognitive involvement with politics. Also,

it seems that only political agreement within close, intimate settings has a mobilizing role in general and a stronger one in newly democratized countries.

Table 5: Micro- and macro-level determinants of individual turnout

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed effects				
Constant	1.56*** (.14)	1.72*** (.12)	1.86*** (.22)	2.01*** (.18)
Age	.01*** (.004)	.03*** (.01)	.02*** (.002)	.02*** (.003)
Education	.14** (.05)	.17** (.06)	.02 (.02)	.1*** (.03)
Female	-.06 (.05)	.1 (.05)	.17*** (.05)	.2*** (.07)
Married	.28*** (.07)	.18** (.08)	.29*** (.05)	.31*** (.07)
Generic talk		.11*** (.02)		.04 (.03)
Generic agreement		.28** (.1)		.16 (.1)
Generic disagreement		.1 (.06)		.04 (.07)
Partisanship			.33*** (.02)	.25*** (.03)
Political interest			.22*** (.01)	.23*** (.02)
Media			.04*** (.01)	.02 (.01)
Knowledge			.22*** (.02)	.19*** (.04)
Random Effects				
Generic talk		.06*		.06*
Generic agreement		.31***		.22**
Generic disagreement		.19**		.12
Variance components				
Country level	.52[30]	.53[31]	.67[32]	.53[33]

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

[30] Chi-square=709.87, df=8, p<.01
[31] Chi-square=179.61, df=8, p<.01
[32] Chi-square= 610.82, df=8, p<.01
[33] Chi-square= 176.44, df=10, p<.01

3.2. Generic social networks and political knowledge

Table 6 reports the results of estimating the influence of political discussion in generic settings on individual political knowledge. Model 1 includes classical socio-demographics as predictors of political knowledge. Results indicate that older, more educated people and those who live with a partner appear to be more politically knowledgeable while women tend to be less knowledgeable with regard to political issues.

Model 2 adds social network measures among the explanatory variables. The results of estimating this model show that the effects of network indicators are significantly different across the analyzed countries. Moreover, frequency of political talk has a general positive effect on knowledge. No changes in the effects of the SES variables are recorded. The only exception is the effect of marital status that becomes non-significant when measures of political discussion are accounted for as explanatory variables.

Model 3 reports the results of testing the effects of measures of political cognition and mobilization on political knowledge. Political interest, partisanship and exposure to political news via various media appear to be positively linked to political knowledge, though none of them has very strong effects. This time, the effect of partners is significant and this suggests that the very core of the intimate network – which is one's partner – functions as a link between the individual and larger, more generic networks.

Model 4 includes all three sets of explanatory variables that were analyzed separately in the previous models. Results show that there are significant differences in the effects of frequency of political talk, agreement and disagreement, across the analyzed countries. No general trends in their effects are recorded though. Among the other explanatory variables, the size and strength of their effects remain relatively unchanged as compared to the previous models. Age, education,

political interest and media attentiveness have a positive effect on political knowledge while gender has a negative effect. Partisanship is the only variable that loses significance in this model compared to model 3.

When macro level variables are considered as moderators in the relationship between political discussion and knowledge, the two measures pertaining to the level of a country development turn out to be significant. Model 5 reports the results of estimating an equation where cross-level interactions between the measures of political discussion and a measure of the GDP are included. Results show again that there are significant differences in network effects across countries. Additionally, frequency of political discussion has a stronger effect in less economically developed countries. This is a positive finding which suggests that political discussion within generic settings may function as an alternative source of information in those societies that mostly need it, i.e. those where access to information via media is limited for economic reasons.

Model 6 includes cross-level interactions between political discussion measures and 'human development index' (HDI), which is composed from data on life expectancy, education, and per-capita GNI. Results show that more frequent political discussion enhances political knowledge in those countries with lower HDI. Similar to the findings in Model 5 this suggests that networks can act as an alternative source of information in those countries where the access to media is limited due to economic scarcity and level of education, i.e. illiteracy.

To sum up, the results of the analyses conducted in this section have indicated that political knowledge is a function of the frequency of political discussion within generic network members but not of the political leanings present in these discussions. However, when individual characteristics and levels of political mobilization and interest are included among the explanatory variables, the effects of political discussion fade away. It is mostly political interest

and media attentiveness what seems to account for the vanishing effect of network measures. However, when cross-level interactions are introduced in the analysis, results show that frequency of political talk might function as an alternative source of political information in less economically developed countries and those that score lower on measures of HDI. This latter finding gives support to my expectation that networks have a stronger effect in less developed countries (H2.8). None of the hypotheses from H2.1 to H2.4 and hypotheses H2.10 and H2.11 is supported. One has to keep in mind though that the small number of level-2 cases significantly reduces the probability of capturing possibly existing effects.

Table 6: Micro- and macro-level determinants of individual political knowledge

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
Fixed effects				
Constant	1.64*** (.28)	1.59*** (.27)	1.52*** (.26)	1.56*** (.27)
Age	.04*** (.01)	.02*** (.004)	.03*** (.003)	.02*** (.004)
Age squared	-.0003*** (.0001)	-.0001** (.00004)	-.0003*** (.00003)	-.0001* (.00004)
Education	.26*** (.04)	.24*** (.01)	.23*** (.01)	.22*** (.01)
Female	-.31*** (.04)	-.3*** (.02)	-.3*** (.02)	-.27*** (.02)
Married	.05*** (.02)	.04 (.03)	.04** (.02)	.02 (.03)
Generic talk		.04** (.01)		.01 (.02)
Generic agreement		.03 (.04)		.04 (.03)
Generic disagreement		.02 (.05)		.04 (.05)
Partisanship			.03*** (.01)	.01 (.01)
Political interest			.08*** (.005)	.06*** (.01)
Media			.06*** (.003)	.04*** (.004)
Random effects				
Generic talk		.04***		.04***
Generic agreement		.11***		.09***
Generic disagreement		.14***		.13***
Variance components				
Individual level	1.1	.97	1.03	.96
Country level	.83[34]	.81[35]	.79[36]	.8[37]
Percent of individual-level variance explained	64	59	63	59
Percent of country-level variance explained	36	41	37	41
-2xLog Likelihood	61181.81	19050	43193.58	17506.74

[34] Chi-square=8525.88, df=8, p<.01
[35] Chi-square=6050.09, df=8, p<.01
[36] Chi-square= 8353.48, df=8, p<.01
[37] Chi-square= 6036.78, df=8, p<.01

Table 6: Micro- and macro-level determinants of individual political knowledge

	Model 5	**Model 6**
Fixed effects		
Constant	1.56*** (.24)	1.56*** (.25)
Age	.02*** (.004)	.02*** (.004)
Age squared	-.0001* (.0001)	-.0001* (.0001)
Education	.22*** (.01)	.22*** (.01)
Female	-.27*** (.02)	-.27*** (.02)
Married	.02 (.03)	.02 (.03)
Generic talk	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Generic agreement	.03 (.03)	.05 (.04)
Generic disagreement	.04 (.05)	.05 (.06)
Partisanship	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Political interest	.06*** (.01)	.06*** (.01)
Media	.04*** (.004)	.04*** (.004)
Generic talk*GDP	-.06** (.02)	
Generic agreement*GDP	.06 (.05)	
Generic disagreement*GDP	.06 (.08)	
Generic talk*HDI		-.17** (.05)
Generic agreement*HDI		.15 (.16)
Generic disagreement*HDI		.17 (.25)
GDP	.6 (.4)	
HDI		1.42 (1.28)
Random effects		
Generic talk	.03***	.02***
Generic agreement	.08***	.08***
Generic disagreement	.13***	.13***

Table 6: Micro- and macro-level determinants of individual political knowledge

	Model 5	**Model 6**
Variance components		
Individual level	.96	.96
Country level	.71[38]	.75[39]
Percent of individual-level variance explained	64	62
Percent of country-level variance explained	36	38
-2xLog Likelihood	17485.05	17493.45

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

[38] Chi-square= 4731.47, df=7, p<.01
[39] Chi-square= 5272.46, df=7, p<.01

3.3. Generic social networks and political interest

To account for the possibility that generic networks influence political knowledge and voting indirectly, I looked at the effects of political discussion in these settings on two measures that are usually found to be the strongest antecedents of participation and knowledge in the literature, namely political interest and exposure to political news via various media. Table 7 reports the results of estimating diverse models with political interest as response or dependent variable. Model 1 looks at political interest as a function of individual characteristics, namely age, gender, education, and marital status. The strongest predictor among them is education, while women appear to be significantly less interested in politics. Age positively affects political interest, while the effect of marital status does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Also there seems to be significant differences in levels of political interest across the countries included in the analysis.

Model 2 estimates the effect of network measures on political interest. As in the previous analyses, the effects of these measures are specified as random. Results show that there are significant differences in the influence of political discussion across the surveyed countries. Moreover, frequency of political talk is the strongest predictor of individual political interest and this holds across all countries in the analysis. Education is the only other predictor that reaches conventional level of statistical significance in this estimation. Interestingly enough when measures of political discussion are accounted for, none of the other SES variables retains a significant effect. This suggests that socio-demographics are exogeneous factors that tailor both our access to social resources – by placing us in some specific social contexts such as neighborhoods, workplaces and so on – and our social choices, which are partly defined by our education, age, or gender.

Model 3 looks at the effects that cognitive involvement with politics and political mobilization has on one's level of political interest. Partisanship appears to be the strongest predictor among them, followed by measures of political knowledge and media attentiveness. Education has a significant, though much smaller effect compared to previous models. Age is positively linked to interest, i.e. older people are more interested in politics, while women appear to be less interested in politics.

Finally, model 4 includes all three sets of measures as explanatory variables. Results show that after controlling for individual characteristics and measures of cognitive involvement with politics, frequency of political talk is significantly and positively linked to interest in all countries that are part of the analysis. Also, frequency of talk is the second strongest predictor of political interest.

To conclude this part, we see that frequency of political talk with generic network members is a significant predictor of political interest across countries analyzed. This supports the expectations formulated by hypothesis H2.5. Hypothesis H2.6 is not supported though; political heterogeneity does not appear to stir up individual interest in politics. None of the effects of the cross-level interactions included in the analysis reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

Table 7: Micro- and macro-level determinants of individual political interest

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed effects				
Constant	3.69*** (.3)	3.76*** (.5)	3.69*** (.36)	3.85*** (.44)
Age	.03*** (.01)	.001 (.01)	.01** (.005)	.004 (.007)
Age squared	-.0003*** (.0001)	.0001 (.0001)	-.00004 (.00005)	.00003 (.0001)
Education	.29*** (.05)	.19*** (.01)	.12*** (.01)	.09*** (.02)
Female	-.37*** (.07)	-.03 (.04)	-.08** (.03)	.02 (.04)
Married	.09 (.06)	.04 (.04)	-.03 (.03)	.01 (.04)
Generic talk		.22*** (.02)		.15*** (.02)
Generic agreement		.12 (.05)		.01 (.05)
Generic disagreement		.01 (.05)		-.04 (.03)
Partisanship			.42*** (.01)	.25*** (.02)
Media			.16*** (.004)	.11*** (.01)
Political knowledge			.22*** (.01)	.14*** (.02)
Random effects				
Generic talk		.05***		.07***
Generic agreement		.13***		.12***
Generic disagreement		.13***		.05
Variance components				
Individual level	1.9	1.61	1.69	1.5
Country level	.91[40]	1.41[41]	1.07[42]	1.33[43]
Percent of individual-level variance explained	81	57	71	56
Percent of country-level variance explained	19	43	29	44
-2xLog Likelihood	120962.07	27702.82	58079.05	23230.72

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

[40] Chi-square=5520.98, df=8, p<.01
[41] Chi-square=6622.3, df=8, p<.01
[42] Chi-square= 6632.22, df=8, p<.01
[43] Chi-square= 23230.72, df=8, p<.01

3.4. Generic social networks and media attentiveness

The other variable that is expected to mediate the relationship between political discussion in generic settings and individual political behavior and cognition is the frequency of following political news in various media or media attentiveness in short. Everyday political conversations are expected to make people more interested in following political news either as a result of these discussions or in anticipation of them. In this part I present the results of investigating these hypotheses.

Table 8 presents the results of estimating the effects of political discussion on media attentiveness. As before, I start with an estimation in which media attentiveness is expressed as a function of age, gender, education, and marital status (Model 1). Results indicate that all these variables have a significant effect. Older, more educated people as well as those who live with a partner are more likely to follow politics in media. Women are significantly less likely to do so.

Model 2 introduces network measures along with the SES indicators and specifies their effects as random. Results show that there are significant differences in the way frequency of talk and political dissimilarity relate to media attentiveness across the countries analyzed. Moreover, frequent political discussion in generic environments is positively related to media attentiveness across all national samples. With regard to the effects of the other variables, age becomes non-significant once the measures of political discussion are introduced in the model and the effects of education and gender are reduced. The effect of marital status is stronger than in the previous model, suggesting that the positive influence of partners is independent of the amount of political discussion to which people are exposed in their everyday life.

In model 3 media attentiveness is regressed on SES variables and measures of cognitive involvement with politics and political mobilization. All these measures appear to have strong,

positive effects on an individual appetite to follow political news in media. The effects of the SES variables are positive, with the exception of gender that is negatively linked to media attentiveness. Women thus appear to be significantly less likely to follow political news than men.

Finally, model 4 presents the results of estimating media attentiveness as a function of individual characteristics, measures of cognitive mobilization, and indicators of political discussion within generic social settings. Results show that once we introduce all these indicators as explanatory variables, it is only the effect of frequency of political talk that significantly varies across countries. Also, this is the only aspect of political discussion that has a general, positive and strong relationship with media attentiveness. All other variables keep their significance, with the exception of age. Specifically, we see that more educated people, party supporters, those who are more interested in politics and more politically knowledgeable are also more likely to follow political news in media. Also those who live with a partner report higher exposure to political news in media. Partners thus have a stimulating role on media attentiveness. As in the previous models, women are less likely to report following political news.

The results in this section confirm hypothesis H2.5 with regard to the beneficial effect of frequency of political talk on media attentiveness. Hypothesis H2.6, which expected that embeddedness in more politically heterogeneous social settings will stimulate media attentiveness, is not confirmed. None of the cross-level interactions between political discussion and macro level indictors turned out to be significant here.

Table 8: Micro- and macro-level determinants of media attentiveness

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed effects				
Constant	5.76*** (.32)	6.49*** (.55)	5.94*** (.52)	6.5*** (.55)
Age	.09*** (.01)	.006 (.02)	.04*** (.01)	-.002 (.01)
Age squared	-.001*** (.0001)	0002 (.0002)	-.0004*** (.0001)	.0001 (.0002)
Education	.85*** (.02)	.61*** (.03)	.46*** (.02)	.41*** (.03)
Female	-.66*** (.05)	-.32*** (.09)	-.27*** (.05)	-.2** (.08)
Married	.13** (.05)	.28*** (.09)	.31*** (.06)	.23** (.09)
Generic talk		.43*** (.07)		.27** (.07)
Generic agreement		.04 (.07)		-.04 (.06)
Generic disagreement		.07 (.1)		.09 (.07)
Partisanship			.22*** (.02)	.24*** (.04)
Political interest			.59*** (.01)	.51*** (.03)
Political knowledge			.57*** (.03)	.43*** (.04)
Random effects				
Generic talk		.18***		.2***
Generic agreement		.11		.06
Generic disagreement		.2**		.11
Variance components				
Individual level	3.7	3.39	3.25	3.22
Country level	.97[44]	1.64[45]	1.55[46]	1.63[47]
Percent of individual-level variance explained	94	81	81	80
Percent of country-level variance explained	6	19	19	20
-2xLog Likelihood	130556.39	33766.25	77545.66	32864.74

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

[44] Chi-square=1156.06, df=8, p<.01
[45] Chi-square=1689.8, df=8, p<.01
[46] Chi-square= 3017.86, df=8, p<.01
[47] Chi-square= 1839.17, df=8, p<.01

The conclusions drawn from investigating the effects of generic social settings on individual turnout and political knowledge are as follows. Frequency of political discussion with generic network members appears to be a significant antecedent of political knowledge, while political agreement in these settings is positively and significantly linked to individual turnout. Both findings confirm the hypotheses that I formulated based on similar observations in previous research on this topic. However, once indicators of cognitive involvement with politics and political mobilization are controlled for, these relationships disappear, thus suggesting that the influence of social networks might be an indirect one.

This has appeared to be the case indeed. When the relationship between generic social settings on one side, and political interest and media attentiveness, on the other, are looked at, we see that frequency of talk is among the most significant predictors of both interest in politics and consumption of political news in media. Political interest in turn is significantly and positively linked to both voting and knowledge, while media attentiveness has a positive relationship with political knowledge. An additional finding of this analysis is that political discussion in everyday social settings – but not necessarily with intimate ones – may function as an alternative source of political information in less developed countries.

Let us now look comparatively at the role played by intimate and generic social settings on voting and political knowledge. A first conclusion is that political discussion in either intimate or generic social settings has both a direct and an indirect effect on voting and knowledge, albeit the indirect one is stronger and more consistent. The relationship between both types of social settings and voting/knowledge appears to be mediated by two variables pertaining to people's cognitive involvement with politics, namely political interest and exposure to political news in various media.

Second, a look at the direct effects of political discussion indicate that frequency of political talk in intimate settings is positively linked to knowledge in those countries that display higher average values of political talk. The effects of intimates, thus, appear to be sensitive to the specificities of the macro environments in which individuals reside. The effects of political discussion in larger, generic social settings do not appear to be moderated by how politicized everyday conversations are. More frequent political talk within generic social settings, though, appears to advance political knowledge for people living in less developed countries. This suggests that political conversations with 'weak ties' might function as an alternative channel of political information in those environments in which media access is limited for economic reasons. Political agreement with intimate network members is a general incentive for voting and an even stronger one in newly democratized countries. This does not apply to political conversations that take place in generic networks, though. This finding suggests that the oft-documented mobilizing role of political agreement stems from social interactions with close, intimate peers. They are, seemingly, more likely to reinforce one's own political views and furnish incentives for participation. Political agreement in intimate settings has also a positive effect on political knowledge, for those living in older democracies, more economically developed countries, and societies that have higher averages of political agreement. None of these latter effects hold when generic networks are looked at. This strengthens the conclusion that political discussion within intimate settings is more politically consequential. However, there is evidence that political agreement with generic network members is positively and significantly linked to voting but this effect disappears once I control for measures of political interest. The list of direct effects ends here.

Third, when indirect effects are considered, there is evidence that political discussion affects voting and political knowledge through an increase in individuals' attention to political

news in media and general political interest. More frequent political talk in either intimate or generic settings is generally associated with more political interest and media attentiveness across all the surveyed countries. However, political talk in intimate settings ceases to have a stimulating effect on media attentiveness in those societies where there is extensive talk going on. We have to keep in mind, though, that political talk in these societies, i.e., with high averages of political talk, benefits individual political knowledge. Political agreement in intimate settings appears to discourage media consumption and this is even more the case in older and more economically developed countries. Both interest and media attentiveness are among the strongest antecedents of voting and political knowledge. This indicates that it is indeed the case that more talk stimulates voting and knowledge indirectly, by increasing individuals' appetite for getting informed about politics, while more agreement seems to act as a disincentive for getting more informed.

3.5. Conclusions and limitations

The aim of this chapter and the previous one has been to find out whether we can talk about a general influence that micro social settings have on individual electoral behavior and political knowledge. On the one hand, previous research has constantly found a significant relationship between the frequency of political discussion and the political composition of the micro social contexts to which individuals belong and their political behavior and knowledge. On the other hand, there has been no systematic examination in the previous literature of these relationships across macro contexts that vary in their social and political makeup.

A review of previous research reveals the diverse and sometime contradicting character of the results. Social cohesion, the most influential model of the interpersonal influence established by the seminal studies of the Columbia sociologists (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944, Berelson *et al.* 1954) has been

constantly contended thereafter. Structural equivalence was proposed as an alternative framework for explaining the rationale of the social contagion at large (Burt 1987) and afterwards was indirectly tested in studies of electoral behavior (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1991, 1995). None of the other factors found to account for the influence of the social context on electoral behavior have remained unchallenged. Embeddedness in politically heterogeneous social settings was found to be both detrimental (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944, Mutz 2002b) and either neutral or even beneficial (Horan 1971, Nir 2005).

In my study I sought to understand whether the lack of consensus seen across these studies should be taken as a proof of the contextual character of the influence that political discussion in social settings have on voting and political knowledge. The results have indicated that although social embeddedness is a significant antecedent of electoral behavior and knowledge, this is more of an indirect effect. Discussing politics in intimate or generic social setting does not necessarily makes people more participative or knowledgeable – although it also does so under specific macro circumstances, – but stimulates their political interest and make them more willing to seek out for political information in media. These are two preconditions for them getting more involved in politics and better informed/knowledgeable.

With regard to macro level indicators as moderators of the relationship between social embeddedness and vote/knowledge, some interesting findings have emerged. First, in line with my expectations, political agreement with close others acts as an incentive for electoral participation in newly democratized countries. This indicates that in countries experiencing political and social changes, intimate social milieus play an important role in 'cushioning' individuals' political decisions and providing support for their political decisions. The same is not true for larger, more generic settings, though. 'Strong ties', therefore, appears to provide political identity in newly democratized countries

Second, political agreement in intimate settings appears to act as a disincentive for people seeking out for more political information via media. The same is true for those macro social contexts characterized by extensive political talk. On the other hand, the closest social tie – spouses – appears to be a mobilizing force for voting, while acting as a disincentive for political information, perhaps because of too much structural and political similarity between partners. Finally, political discussion within generic social settings appears to act as an alternative and efficient source of political information for people living in less developed countries. This finding is worth further investigation as it might inspire some policies aimed at increasing individuals' level of political information and cognition.

Before moving to a discussion about the relevance of these findings, I draw attention to the limitations of this study and their consequences for the results of my analyses. First of all, the small number of level-2 cases in my multilevel analysis, makes impossible to test the effects of more than one macro level predictor at a time. This might lead to problems of model specification. It has been shown, though, that the use of maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) can overcome these issues. Specifically, Raudenbush indicates that MLE will perform well even in the presence of an unbalanced design, which is the case with my data (Raudenbush 1988 cited in Steenbergen and Jones 2002). Nevertheless, this calls for great care in interpreting the results of my tests.

The other issue stemming from the structure of the data is that the level-2 cases – countries – are not randomly chosen. This is a convenience sample and, therefore, the conclusions drawn from this study cannot be generalized. However, a look at the proportion of the variance that is accounted for at each level of the analysis indicates that country level factors have quite an important share. This is unusual for response variables measured at the individual level. In most of the hierarchical analyses in which the dependent variable is measured at the

individual level, the biggest proportion of variance is accounted for by individual level predictors (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002).

Here, the high proportion of the variance accounted for by country level characteristics indicates that the countries included in my analysis are very different in those aspects that explain the dependent variables. This suggests that, although the cases included in my analysis might not be representative of the whole universe of countries, their diversity makes possible to see the findings as indicative of the relationships between social networks and political engagement in a larger perspective.

Finally, an important limitation of this study is that the cross-sectional data that I employ makes impossible an examination of the direction of these effects. Specifically, the finding of a significant relationship between political discussion and knowledge, for instance, tells us nothing with regard to the direction of the effect. It can be interpreted as evidence that exposure to political conversations with peers leads to an increase in individual political knowledge or that those who are more politically knowledgeable are more attracted by political conversations in their everyday social encounters. In these analyses I assume that the classical direction of influence, i.e. from political discussion to political engagement, applies. Recent research that used panel data provided evidence with regard to effects flowing from participation to knowledge (Eveland *et al.* 2005a, Eveland and Thomson 2006) and electoral and civic participation (Shah *et al.* 2005, Toka 2010). Moreover, the results of a very recent experimental approach conducted by Klofstad (2011) lend strong empirical support to the claim that political discussion advances civic participation. In the next two chapters of my dissertation these assumptions are examined in greater details by using a panel data design. I specifically look at the direction of the effects between measures of political discussion and forms of political participation and cognition.

What is the relevance of these findings? First of all, they give strong empirical support to the claim that people do not make their political decisions in isolation; the web of the social interactions in which they are enmeshed significantly affects their political behavior and cognition. It indicates the validity of sociological models of voting and political behavior, in general, and suggests that failure to include micro social contexts among explanatory variables would result in biased estimates of the other predictors and erroneous conclusions with regard to the antecedents of individual political engagement.

Second, these findings suggest that political discussion in micro social environments functions as a link between private and public spheres. When two friends engage in a political conversation while sipping their coffees, their private relationship opens to the public sphere. They might agree or disagree, but when accepting to discuss political issues, they engage in a process that might have far reaching consequences for their political decisions and cognition. Their discussion is no longer one between two private egos but one in which two people negotiate their understanding of citizenship. They can do this while discussing issues as salient as the most recent comments of the electoral candidates on TV or their take on some specific healthcare policy.

Last but not least, these findings suggest that the relationships between micro social embeddedness and individual political engagement are worth further investigation. A possible avenue is to continue developing an understanding of the role that different types of social interactions have on individual political behavior and cognition. My results showed that intimates exert stronger political influences, although 'weak ties' can be more beneficial in those societies that mostly need them as an alternative source of information, i.e. less economically developed countries. In short, in spite of some general effects that political discussion seems to have, its contextual effects are worth further investigation.

I continue the investigation of these relationships with an examination of directions of the effects between political discussion and two forms of political engagement, namely cognitive involvement with politics and political participation. These analyses are carried out in two different political contexts, namely Japan and Hungary. The assumptions present in the previous literature that political discussion leads to political engagement are questioned in these analyses by using a panel data design. Results indicate that while some of these assumptions are supported by empirical results, others are not confirmed. Specifically, there is evidence that in the Japanese context, political conversation with peers does not result in an increase in opinionation and knowledge. On the contrary, political knowledge drives political talk. On the other hand, political communication leads to participation and this confirms expectations formulated by previous literature.

Chapter 4: Political communication and cognitive involvement with politics: examining directions of effects in Japan

In this chapter I examine the direction of the effects in the relationships between political conversation and individual political engagement. One of the major conundrums of research on the role of political discussion is whether discussion leads to greater cognitive involvement or it is rather that higher cognitive involvement with politics drives participation in political conversations. Previous research on these relationships has constantly found an association between features of political communication that occurs among individuals in their everyday social interactions and their political participation, vote choice, and political knowledge (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944, Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995, Bennett *et al.* 2000, Beck *et al.* 2002, Holbert *et al.* 2002, McClurg 2003, 2006a, Mutz 2002, 2006, Eveland 2004, Eveland and Thomson 2006, Eveland and Hively 2009). This was interpreted as evidence that participation in political discussion promotes an increase in political engagement, although the reverse direction of influence, i.e. from political engagement to communication, is equally plausible.

The main reason for this interpretation is that scholars who explored these relationships were primarily interested in finding out whether participation in everyday political conversations contributes to the creation of a more knowledgeable and participative citizenry. The opposing direction of influence, although theoretically plausible, is not particularly relevant for scholars of political behavior and public policy pundits. In addition to these theoretical reasons, there are also empirical ones stemming from the use of cross-sectional data in most of these studies. In the cross-sectional research design, indicators of political communication and political engagement

are measured at the same point in time, and this makes it difficult to establish whether political communication precedes political knowledge and participation[48].

Different empirical approaches of these relationships are possible though, and one model should not be favored over another. There are four ways in which political communication and political engagement can be related. First, the observed association between them can be partly, or even completely, due to an external factor that is determining both of them. The oft-found association between them can thus be either overestimated or just spurious. Education, for instance, can play the role of such a confounder that affects both of them. More educated people usually have better cognitive abilities for processing information, and this can influence their level of political knowledge, which, in turn, reduces the costs associated with political participation. Education can also have a direct effect on political discussion, by sorting highly educated people in social contexts where politics is an important topic of conversation. Second, political discussion can affect an individual's level of political engagement. This specific direction of influence has received scholars' attention so far. Third, political engagement can fuel political discussion. Those people who, for various reasons, are more politically knowledgeable and participative will be more likely to engage in political conversation with their fellows. Finally, both directions of influence can coexist and reinforce each other. Some features of the everyday political talk with peers can lead to more political engagement, which, in turn, flows into more political communication. Although most of the existing studies focused on exploring the second scenario, they acknowledged that other models might give an equally good description

[48] This is not to say that analyzing the direction of the effects based on cross-section survey data is not possible. However, looking at the existing studies of the relationship between political communication and political engagement that drew on cross-section data, it rapidly becomes obvious that such techniques are very rarely employed, mostly because finding instrumental variables or specifying path models is relatively difficult.

of the relationship between political talk and engagement. Nevertheless, they claimed that their choice was supported by solid theoretical arguments.

In this chapter and the next one I conduct an empirical examination of statistical models that describe different possible directions of effects between political communication and forms of political engagement that are usually seen as minimum requirements for a good functioning of democracies, be they competitive, participatory or deliberative. Specifically, in this chapter I explore the direction of the effects in the relationship between political communication and various forms of cognitive involvement with politics, while in the next one I look at the direction of the influences flowing between political communication and participation. All definitions of democracy, no matter how 'thin' or elitist, agree on the necessity of citizens' involvement. In democratic systems, people are expected to express their preferences and promote their interests, and this requires a minimum level of attention to politics, understanding of political issues, and participation. Most of the scholars so far have presumed that some features of political discussion promote political engagement. In my research I question this assumption and test competing conjectures about these relationships. Since all four models that I outlined before describe theoretically plausible effects, the choice should be grounded on an empirical examination. This way, the risk of accepting an underspecified model that would produce biased estimates is reduced.

My study draws on panel data in which individual measures of political communication and forms of cognitive involvement with politics are recorded at more points in time. This allows an evaluation of changes in measures of cognitive involvement with politics over time and the role of political communication in these transformations. Granted, the research design that I employ is not in itself a solution for settling problems pertaining to the direction of the effects. Much depends on specifying appropriate statistical models, with tenable assumptions. However,

if these conditions are met, the use of the panel data research design makes possible a sounder examination of attributable effects and their directions (Finkel 1995).

The data that I employ in this chapter was collected in national survey studies conducted in Japan between 2001 and 2005. There are two approaches that I undertake to explore the direction of the effects flowing between political communication and forms of cognitive involvement with politics. First, I rely on theoretical assumptions present in extant research on the social underpinnings of political engagement and test whether changes in cognitive involvement with politics can be attributed to specific features of everyday political conversation. To this end, I define and estimate statistical models in which indicators of political knowledge, opinionation, and interest measured at time T2 are expressed as a function of their values at a previous point in time T1 and measures of political communication at T1. The inclusion of a prior measure of response variables makes possible a stronger inference with regard to changes in political cognition being attributed to characteristics of political discussion. Specifically, a significant effect of political discussion measured at T1 on political knowledge measured at T2, is interpreted as an indicator of how much change in knowledge is accounted for by communication compared to what would have been expected given previous measures of knowledge (Finkel 1995). These models also control for variables that can affect both political communication and forms of cognitive involvement with politics. The inclusion of such measures among predictors test for the possibility that political discussion and cognition are either spuriously correlated or simply determined by an external factor, whose omission might lead to an overestimation of the observed effect.

However, the assumption that effects flow only from political discussion to knowledge, opinionation and interest might be untenable. One can plausibly hypothesize that more politically knowledgeable people, for instance, will be more likely to strike up or be caught in a political

conversation. To account for these possibilities, I explore alternative directions of effects flowing between political discussion and cognition and reciprocal influences between them. To this end, I define and comparatively test the fit of statistical models with unidirectional influences flowing either from political communication to political engagement or in the opposite direction, and models with reciprocal effects between political discussion and political engagement. These influences can operate either in an instant manner or over time. Effects that build up over time are incorporated in what Finkel defines as cross-lagged models, while influences that operate in a short time are included in what he calls contemporaneous or synchronous models (Finkel 1995). The fit of all these models is compared and the best fitted one is chosen as being the best descriptor of the relationships between political communication and engagement in the data under investigation.

The results of testing classical, uni-directional models of influences that political discussion has on political cognition are as follows. First, frequency of political discussion in the context of the Japanese electoral campaign is positively related to one out of three indicators of political opinionation, after controlling for prior values of opinionation. Political communication does not have a significant effect on political knowledge once prior measures of knowledge are controlled for. However, political communication appears to be a significant antecedent of political interest, which is among the strongest predictors of political knowledge. This latter finding is consistent with results reported in the previous chapters of my dissertation where I showed that political interest mediates the relationship between micro social embededness and individuals' electoral participation and political knowledge. The test of the alternative models of influence shows mixed evidence with regard to the commonly held assumption that political discussion leads to an increase in political knowledge and opinionation. The effects of opinionation on political communication are significantly stronger than the ones flowing in the

opposite direction. Moreover, the model that best describe the relationship between political communication and knowledge is one with unidirectional effects flowing from political knowledge to communication. In other words, in the Japanese context, those people who are more politically opinionated and knowledgeable are more likely to participate in political discussions with their peers. These findings run against the theoretical expectations with regard to the informative role of casual political conversations and conflicts with results of previous empirical research that found political discussion to affect political knowledge (Eveland *et al.* 2005). The only case where there is evidence of reciprocal effects is the relationship between political discussion and interest in politics. The influences flowing from political communication to political interest coexist with and equal in size those going in the opposite direction.

A cautionary note is needed before proceeding further. The fact that I explore directions of the effects between features of everyday political discussion and forms of political cognition does not imply a test of causal relationships. The use of panel data, which includes repeated observations of the same respondents' behaviors at different points in time, makes possible stronger inferences with regard to changes in response variable being attributed to the explanatory one. However, this does not exclude the possibility that the significant associations that I observe between my measures are determined by some external factors that remain unaccounted for in my statistical models. Therefore, any casual claim in my study would be mere speculation. The thorny issue of causality cannot be disentangled using observational data of the sort I employ here. The only possible inferences – based on correct specifications of the statistical models, which in itself is a challenging requirement – regard the direction of the effects flowing either from one of the variables to the other or in both directions. A more extensive discussion on these issues is presented in the last part of this chapter. Here though it is important to warn against interpreting the results that I will be presenting as evidence of causality in the relationship

between political discussion and cognition. Nevertheless, within these limitations, my research contributes to scholarship on the role of political discussion by proposing an examination of classical assumptions in a different political context.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The first part lays out the theoretical background of my inquiries. Part two introduces the research design for examining direction of the effects in the relationships between political communications in everyday social encounters and cognitive involvement with politics. It also presents the results of estimating models of unidirectional and reciprocal effects between structural features of political discussion in informal social settings and individual political knowledge, opinionation, and interest. The last part summarizes and discusses the findings. It also reflects on the limitations of these research designs and on possible alternatives for exploring these questions.

4.1. Direction of effects between political communication and cognitive involvement with politics: the state of the art

Most of the previous research exploring the relationships between political communication and political engagement found a significant link between various aspects of political conversations in informal social settings and individuals' level of political knowledge and opinionation (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Kim *et al.* 1999, Bennett *et al.* 2000, Holbert *et al.* 2002, Eveland 2004, Kwak *et al.* 2005, Mutz 2006, Eveland and Hively 2009). The theoretical assumption of these studies is that engagement in political conversation with peers contributes to an increase in the level of political information, knowledge, and sophistication. Participation in political conversations in everyday social encounters creates opportunities for

learning new facts, systematizing the existing views and, more generally, developing the abilities to reason on political issues.

However, there is little empirical examination of this specific ordering assumption. Other models might offer an equally good description of these relationships. The finding of a significant relationship between political communication on the one side, and political knowledge, opinionation, and interest on the other, tells us nothing about the direction of the influences. It might be an indication that political communication and political engagement are spuriously correlated, that political engagement leads to more communication, or the other way round, or that there are reciprocal effects between the two.

A few studies addressed these shortcomings and employed a panel data research design to test the direction of effects flowing between political communication and knowledge. A study by Eveland and Thomson (2006) drew the analysis on two waves of panel data collected in a national survey study conducted in the US in 2000 and 2001. The study tested a unidirectional, lagged model, where changes in political knowledge between the two waves of the survey are linked to political discussion with peers and discussion elaboration measured in 2001. The authors found that indicators of frequency of political talk and discussion elaboration measured in 2001 are significantly and positively linked to political knowledge measured in 2001, after controlling for measures of political talk and interest in 2000. Changes in political knowledge, therefore, appear to be related to the amount of time people find themselves embedded in political conversations with their peers and the attention they dedicate to these encounters. Similar conclusions with regard to the effects of participation in political discussion on political knowledge were reached by Toka (2010). In a study that draws on a two-wave panel data conducted in Hungary in 2003 and 2006, he showed that frequency of political discussion with

peers has a positive, significant effect on factual political knowledge, after controlling for previous measures of political knowledge.

These studies, though, were based on the assumption of unidirectional effects flowing from political communication to political knowledge. In an article published in 2005, Eveland and his colleagues presented an empirical research design for exploring reciprocal effects in the relationship between political communication and knowledge (Eveland *et al*. 2005). They defined models of unidirectional and reciprocal influences with both lagged and synchronous effects estimated. Among them, the best fitted and most parsimonious model is the one where political knowledge at T2 is predicted by measures of news use and political discussion at T2, after controlling for values of political knowledge at a previous point in time T1. These results suggest that a unidirectional model with contemporaneous effects of media attentiveness and political conversation with peers on political knowledge is the best description of the relationships among there three variables. It also indicates that influences operate in an instant fashion rather than a remote one. As the authors suggest, replications with different time lags, different operationalizations of the same concepts and data collected in different social and political contexts is needed to increase confidence in these findings (Eveland *et al*. 2005: 439).

4.2. Research design, data and measures

In this chapter I employ research designs similar to the ones used in the articles discussed in the previous section (Eveland *et al*. 2005, Eveland and Thomson 2006, Toka 2010) and explore direction of the effects between political communication and three forms of cognitive involvement with politics, namely political knowledge, opinionation and interest.

Political knowledge and opinionation were often referred to as elements of political sophistication. In Converse's (1964) classical understanding, political sophistication includes opinionation (or range of opinions on political issues), attitude consistency and level of conceptualization. A person is considered to be politically sophisticated if she has a wide range of opinions on political issues, consistent attitudes that are in accord with one another and are organized using general concepts, such as liberalism or conservatism, for instance. This definition was widely accepted and employed by scholars. Smith (1989), though, believed that factual information is an important element that was omitted from this definition of political sophistication. He legitimately asked how 'Can one be sophisticated and yet still not know much about politics?' (Smith 1989: 5). His examination of the validity of these four indicators of political sophistication led him to the conclusion that only two of them should be included in this definition, namely opinionation and factual knowledge. The validity of attitude consistency cannot be decided given the fact that different measures were used across times. With regard to the level of conceptualization, which assumes the existence of different levels of conceptual sophistication that individuals employ in the evaluation of parties and candidates, his analysis concludes that this dimension overlaps with knowledge. The assumption of this latter dimension was that the content of responses people gave to political questions would reveal their level of conceptualization, i.e. that the more sophisticated ones employ more abstract language in expressing their views. However, he found that 'the more informed, interested, active, and educated citizens are only slightly more likely than the less informed and interested citizens to say "sophisticated" things in response to party questions' (Smith 1989: 76). On the other hand, he found that the more informed and interested differ from those less informed and interested in the number of claims of all types they make about parties and candidates. In other words, the number

of things one has to say when asked about her opinion on a party, a candidate or a political issue is a valid indicator of her political sophistication (Smith 1989: 76).

Other scholars included political interest in their definition of political sophistication (McGraw and Pinney 1990, Fishke *et. al* 1983). In my study, the inclusion of political interest among the other measures of cognitive involvement with politics is aimed at understanding whether this mediates the relationship between political communication and opinionation/knowledge. Scholars of the 'Wisconsin school of political communication' (Scheufele *et al.* 2004: 318) proposed a model of political behavior in which political communication in micro social settings affects individuals' political behavior both directly and indirectly, through what they call subjective orientations toward political stimuli. These orientations are ways in which individuals respond to politically relevant stimuli, such as news provided by media or information coming through political discussion with peers. Examples of such orientations are hard news use, reflection on media content and political knowledge (Scheufele *et al.* 2004). Political interest can be also seen as a way to attend to stimuli provided by political discussions in the micro social settings in which people are embedded. As theories of uses and gratification suggest, people will be ready to adopt the norms of the groups to which they belong, in their search for social identity and approval. A micro social context in which politics is a frequent topic of conversation sends a signal with regard to the importance attributed to this topic. This might increase group members' appetite for getting informed on political issues. For this reason, I include individual political interest among the other forms of cognitive involvement or orientation toward politics. Together with political opinionation and knowledge, this gives a complex picture of an individual level of involvement with politics.

There are two approaches that I undertake in my examination. First, I hypothesize that political discussion with peers affects an individual's level of political knowledge and

opinionation, both directly and indirectly through changes in political interest. To test these propositions I define unidirectional or non-recursive models of influence, in which levels of political knowledge (opinionation and interest) at T2 are predicted by measures of political discussion at T1, controlling for prior values of political knowledge (opinionation and interest) at T1. These models rely on the traditional assumption of the previous studies that participation in political conversations with peers leads to an increase in forms of cognitive involvement with politics.

There are four dimensions of political communication that I expect to have effects on an individual's level of political opinionation, knowledge, and interest. These are frequency of political talk, political heterogeneity, expertise, and density of political discussion network. Frequency of political talk, political heterogeneity and expertise at network level are expected to have a positive effect on all three measures of cognitive involvement in politics, while density is hypothesized to have a negative effect on each of them, due to the potential redundancy of the information flowing in tightly connected networks. These models include among the explanatory variables measures that can affect both political communication and forms of cognitive involvement with politics. These are exposure to media and electoral campaigns, and respondents' age, gender, and level of education. Controlling for these measures takes care of potential sources of spurious relationships between political communication and forms of cognitive involvement with politics.

The second approach questions this conventional understanding of the order of influence between political communication and knowledge/opinionation and tests for alternative directions of the effects between them. To this end, I define and compare the fit of models that include unidirectional and reciprocal influences in the relationship between political communication and cognitive involvement with politics. These effects can operate over time and this is included in

cross-lagged models, or instantly, and this is included in contemporaneous or synchronous models. This amounts to six different models that can be described with regard to each pair of variables. The more complex one is a cross-lagged model with reciprocal effects. In this model, each of the two variables at T2 is estimated as a function of its lagged value (its measure at a prior point in time T1) and the measure of the other variable at T1. For instance, the model of cross-lagged reciprocal effects between political knowledge and frequency of political discussion include two equations that are estimated together. In the first one, political knowledge measured at T2 is expressed as a function of its value at T1 and the value of political discussion at T1. In the second equation, frequency of political talk at T2 is predicted by measures of political talk and political knowledge at T1. The second and third models that define possible relationships between these variables are the called cross-lagged models with unidirectional effects. Both models 2 and 3 are nested in model 1. In these models, the value of one variable at T2 is predicted by the other variable at T1 and its lagged value. For the pair political communication - knowledge, in model 2, knowledge at T2 is predicted by frequency of political talk at T1 and its lagged value, and in model 3, talk at T2 is predicted by knowledge at T2 and its own lag. The fourth model includes contemporaneous, reciprocal effects. In this model, each variable at T2 is predicted by the value of the other variable measured at the same time, T2. These equations also include a lagged paths between the outcome variable at T2 and it prior value at T1. For example, the two equations that are simultaneously estimated for the pair political communication – knowledge are as follows. In the first one, the measure of knowledge at T2 is predicted by frequency of political talk at T2 and value of knowledge at a prior point in time T1. In the second equation, frequency of political talk at T2 is predicted by the value of knowledge at T2 and the lagged measure of political talk. The fifth and sixth models are nested in the fourth as they include only one direction of influences. For the pair political communication – knowledge,

model five expresses political knowledge at T2 as a function of political talk at T2. Model 6 specifies a reversed order of effects between the two, namely from political knowledge at T2 to political communication at T2. These two models also include lagged values of the outcome. The model fit of the six models is compared using both chi-square test of significant differences for the nested models and other measures of model fit that are appropriate to compare non-nested models. The best fitted model is chosen as giving the best description of the relationships in the data. Similar structural models are estimated for the pairs political discussion – political knowledge and political discussion – political interest.

4.2.1. Data

Data was collected in the Japanese Election Study (JES III) and includes eight waves of surveys conducted during four national elections that took place in Japan between 2001 and 2005[49]. Specifically, these were the elections for the House of Councilors (the lower house of the National Diet of Japan) in 2001 and 2004 and the elections for the House of Representatives (the upper house of the National Diet) in 2003 and 2005. Members of the House of Councilors are elected for six-year terms and elections for half of the seats are held every three years. For these elections voters cast two ballots: one for the district seat (a form of single-nontransferable vote) and the other for the proportional seat (Ikeda 2010). Members of the House of Representatives are elected for four-year terms. For their elections, voters cast two ballots: one for the single-member district seat and one for the proportional representation seat (Ikeda 2010). The early terms elections of 2005 followed the dissolution of the House of Representatives by the Prime

[49] The principal investigator of this study is Ken'Ichi Ikeda, Professor at the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, The University of Tokyo. I am very grateful to him for granting me access to this data and for his assistance with regard to various issues related to this analysis.

Minister. This was the result of the failure to pass in bill in which he 'promised a smaller government and the restructuring of the national fiscal system.' (Ikeda 2010: 170)

An interesting feature of the Japanese political context that received scholars' attention is the dominance in power of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the failure of the opposition to challenge it. Except for the period between 1993 and 1994, LDP was the leading party in the government from its creation in 1955 until 2009. This dominance is more surprising in the context of the economic crises that hit Japan in the beginning of the 1990s and resulted in increased unemployment, closure or restructuring of some major firms, and a public sector debt that exceeded the gross national product (Scheiner 2006). In addition to these economic problems, news of corruption involving leading LDP politicians became widespread at about the same time. Starting from the late 1980s already, support for the LDP cabinets became very low (Scheiner 2006). In spite of all these factors that should have fueled the success of the opposition parties, LDP remained in power until 2009. Several explanations were proposed for this phenomenon, most of them pointing at the 'single non-transferable vote in a multimember district electoral system, public perceptions of opposition incompetence, longtime economic success, or cultural predisposition to support a particular party' (Scheiner 2006: 211). Scheiner's suggestion though, is that what explains LDP's success is Japan's clientelist system, financial centralization and a substantial institutional protectionism directed towards the clientelistic regions (Scheiner 2006: 211). Clientelism and fiscal centralization thus favored parties in power and made it very difficult for the opposition to gain local support. The importance of the clientelistic links between the party in power and the voters hindered the development of programmatic links between opposition parties and the electorate.

An important number of scholars of the Japanese political behavior emphasized the importance of social networks in election campaigns (Richardson 1991, Flanagan 1991). Social

networks appear to play an important role in electoral mobilization and vote choice. Richardson noted that 'Japan is very much a network or group society, in the sense that interpersonal and group attempts to affect the vote are a highly visible feature of electoral mobilization' (Richardson 1991: 366). Given the centrality of social networks in the Japanese elections, there is perhaps no surprise that an important part of the JES III panel data study was dedicated to collecting information about features of political communication within these social relationships.

The JES III panel study was aimed at understanding changes in the Japanese politics in the early 21st century by paying a special attention to the analysis of voting behavior (Ikeda *et al.* 2006)[50]. Data was collected in face-to-face interviews, with the exception of the 2001 post-election survey, which was conducted by phone. Some 523 respondents were interviewed in each of the seven waves in which surveys were conducted face-to-face. The number of respondents who were interviewed in the pre- and post-election surveys was 1253 in 2001 elections, 1769 in 2003 elections, 1810 in 2004, and 1416 in 2005 ones (Ikeda 2010).

The first wave of this study was conducted in July 2001 shortly prior to the House of Councilors Elections. 'A sample of 3000 (about 200 survey districts by an average of 15 individuals) was selected by layered two-stage random sampling out of resident registry or voter lists' (Ikeda *et al.* 2006). From the 3000 people selected, 2064 answered in individual interviews, which thus amounts to a response rate of 68.8% in the first wave. All selected people were residents of Japan who were at least 20 years old at the time of the interview. This was followed by a small-scale telephone survey conducted after the elections. To maintain an adequate sample size for the next panel waves, an additional sample of respondents was drawn out of the resident registry or voters list for the 2003 survey. This new sample included 939 people who were added

[50] http://ssjda.iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp/abstract/0530a.html

to the 2061 respondents of the 2001 survey. A mail questionnaire was sent to a total of 3000 respondents long before the start of the unified local elections campaign of 2003. For reasons that the authors discuss in their report, the response rate was relatively low (Ikeda *et al.* 2006). Only 1188 of the respondents (39.6%) did return the questionnaire, 915 of them from the 2001 respondents (44.4%) and 273 from the new sample (29.6%) (Ikeda *et al.* 2006).

The next two waves of the study were conducted before and after the House of Representatives elections of 2003. The pre-election study of 2003 (the 4th wave of the panel data) included 2258 individuals who were respondents of previous waves and a new sample of 742 people drawn out of resident registry or voters list. The 3000 respondents were surveyed in two waves of face-to-face interviews conducted before and after the national elections of that year. When the response rate within the sampling unit fell below 60%, an additional subsampling was conducted. The subsamples added in these two waves were 759 people for the 4th wave and 573 people for the 5th wave. The response rates were 58% for the pre-election survey (2160 from the 3759 interviewed) and 64% for the post-election one (2268 out of the 3573).

The 6th and 7th waves of the study were conducted in 2004 both before and after the elections for the House of Councilors. In the 6th wave a total of 3796 respondents were individually interviewed. Of them, 2614 were respondents from previous waves while 1121 were new. For the new respondents the younger people were oversampled to compensate for the loss of younger cohorts of respondents in the previous waves. The 7th wave included 2575 respondents (2337 panel sample from the 5th wave and 238 new entries from the 6th wave). The response rates for these two waves was 56.6% (60.7% for the panel sample and 47% for the new sample) for the survey conducted before the elections and 76.8% (82.1% for the panel sample and 24.8% for the new sample) for the post election wave.

Finally, the last two waves of the study were conducted in relation with the House of Representatives elections that were held in 2005. In the survey conducted before these elections (8^{th} wave), 2134 respondents were interviewed and of them 1517 (71.1%) did respond. For the survey conducted after these elections, (9^{th} wave) the rate of response was 87.1% (1511 respondents out of 1735).

As indicators of interest for my research were included in the waves 4 to 9, I employ in my study only data that was collected in these six waves. To distinguish among these studies, I will henceforth refer to them as **'Pre-2003'** and '**Post-2003'**, – for the surveys conducted before and after the House of Representatives elections in 2003 – '**Pre-2004'** and '**Post-2004'**, – for those conducted before and after the House of Councilors elections in 2004 – and '**Pre-2005'** and '**Post-2005'** – for the surveys conducted before and after the House of Representatives elections in 2005.

4.2.2. Measures

Dependent or response variables

The dependent variables are the three forms of cognitive involvement with politics. These are political opinionation – measured as range of opinions that people hold on political issues -, political knowledge – number of correct answers given to factual questions on political matters – and political interest – self declared level of interest in the events and issues of the most recent electoral campaign.

Different indicators of political opinionation were included in the six waves of the panel study. Similar measures were employed in the waves 'Post-2003' and 'Post-2004', 'Post-2003' and 'Post-2005', and 'Post-2004' and 'Post-2005'. Detailed information about the items that were

included in each of these waves is reported in Appendix 1. The measure from waves 'Post-2003' and 'Post-2004' records the number of times respondents answered questions about Government's expenditures in nine domains. I recoded 'don't know' and 'no answer' in response to these questions as 0 and each of the other three answers ('too much', 'adequate', and 'too little') as 1. Henceforth, I call this indicator '*opinionation on Government's spending'*. The variable takes values from 0 to 9 (in wave 'Post-2003' M=7.04 and SD= 2.86, in wave 'Post-2004' M=7.32 and SD=2.72). The indicator of opinionation from the waves 'Post-2004' and 'Post-2005' adds up the number of times respondents indicated their opinion on sixteen social and political issues. 'No answer' and 'don't know' is coded 0 and the other answers ('somewhat agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree', and 'somewhat disagree') is coded 1. Henceforth, the variable created by adding the answers to the 16 items is called '*opinionation on policy issues'*. The variable takes values from 0 to 16 (in wave 'Post-2004' M=14.78, SD=2.73 and in wave 'Post-2005' M=14.84, SD=2.82). The indicator of opinionation included in waves 'Post-2003' and 'Post-2005' records how many times respondents answered questions about parties' proposals in the most recent electoral campaign. These variables were recoded so that 'don't know' and 'not answered' are coded 0 and all the other answers are coded 1. Henceforth, I shall call this variable '*opinionation on parties' proposals'*. The variable takes values from 0 to 14 in wave 'Post-2003' (M=8.44, SD=5.92) and 0 to 15 in wave 'Post-2005' (M=9.8, SD=5.79).

Political knowledge adds up the number of correct answers given in response to factual questions. Such indicators were included in the 'Post-2003' and 'Post-2004' studies. In the survey that was conducted after the elections of 2003 ('Post-2003'), respondents were asked to list as many ministries as they knew, without being presented prompts (the number of ministries at that time was 14). Number of ministries in the Japanese national government is a 'standard, objective test of political knowledge in Japan' as suggested by Ikeda (2011), the main

investigator in this study. He points out that 'Japan has a large regulatory bureaucracy and many researchers say that, in practice, these ministries have been the main governing body of Japan. […] Thus, knowledge of this powerful branch of government is crucial to understanding Japanese politics' (Ikeda 2011: 107). The variables takes values from 0 to 14 (M=5.01, SD=3.22). In the study conducted after the elections of 2004 ('Post-2004'), respondents were asked a number of three questions on political issues and a sum of correct answers was computed. The variable takes values from 0 to 3 (M=.97, SD= .85). To employ these measures in the same analysis I recoded the two indicators of political knowledge as binary categories, where respondents who scored above the average value were coded 1 and those who scored below the average were coded 0.

Political interest in the electoral campaign was measured in all three post electoral waves, namely 'Post-2003', 'Post-2004', and 'Post-2005'. This measure goes from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating high interest for the events and issues of the most recent electoral campaign.

Independent or explanatory variables

The explanatory variables in my models are frequency of political discussion, network members' level of political expertise and heterogeneity, and the density of the political discussion network. These variables were included in each of the three pre-electoral waves of the study, namely 'Pre-2003', 'Pre-2004', and 'Pre-2005'.

Frequency of political discussion *('Frequency political talk'*) draws on information collected about respondents' political discussion partners. Respondents were asked to indicate a number of up to four people with whom they usually discuss 'the Prime Minister, politicians and elections'. Subsequent questions about the habits of engaging in political conversation, discussants' level of political expertise and preferences were asked. Frequency of political talk sums up the answers given to the questions of how often respondents have recently discussed

political issues and elections with each of these peers. The original variables take value from 0 to 3. The index that I computed takes values from 0 to 12, with higher values indicating more frequent political conversation. Given differences in the number of political discussants indicated by respondents, I standardized these measures by dividing them to 4, which is the maximum number of discussants one could've indicated. This measure can thus give a general impression of how 'politicized' a group is, irrespective of its size.

Political expertise at network level ('*Expertise network'*) is computed by asking respondents to assess their discussants' level of knowledge in political matters. The answers range from 0 to 3 and the final variable goes from 0 to 12, where bigger scores indicate that respondents think they are surrounded by highly politically knowledgeable others. As before, these measures were standardized by dividing them to 4 so that they become comparable across respondents.

The density of political network *('Network density')* is a measure that shows how connected their political discussants are. Respondents indicated whether their discussants knew each other and based on this information I computed a measure of density by dividing the actual number of relationships in the network by six, which is the total possible number of ties in an ego-centric network of five people. This standardization makes these measures comparable across respondents.

Control variables

The list of control variables includes measures that can influence both political communication and forms of cognitive involvement with politics. These are the lagged measures of the outcome variables, a set of socio-demographics - age, education, gender and employment

status, - and measures of partisanship, attentiveness to political news in media and exposure to various forms of electoral campaign.

Prior level of *opinionation* was measured in each of the three pre-electoral waves ('Pre-2003', 'Pre-2004', and 'Pre-2005') by adding the number of times respondents answered questions related to their position and each of the important parties' positions (five or six parties) on a number (six, eight, and nine, respectively) of questions pertaining to both national and international political issues. The list of questions that were asked in each of the waves is included in Appendix 2. I recoded each of these assessments as 1, while 'don't know' and 'not answered' as 0. Level of opinionation is the sum of these variables and takes values from 0 to 48 in wave 'Pre-2003' (M=28.42, SD=14.52, in wave 6), 0 to 56 in wave 'Pre-2004' (M=36.61, SD=16.38), and 0 to 64 in wave 'Pre-2005' (M=46.95, SD=16.69). To make these variables comparable across the waves I standardized them by dividing the number of items to which respondents gave an answer to the total number of questions asked. Thus, these variables become comparable and each of them takes values between 0 and 1. These variables are also included in the test of reciprocal effects between political discussion and opinionation.

To measure respondents' prior level of *political knowledge* I relied on a set of open-ended questions where respondents were asked to provide reasons for liking and disliking the Cabinet and each of the five important parties in Japan. The final variable is a count of words and I standardized them so that in each wave the measures take values from 0 to 21. A similar measure of political knowledge was used by Smith (1989) who showed shows that this is a valid and reliable indicator of political knowledge. Although he acknowledges potential problems with these measures, such as the absence of an objective standard against which to test the rightness of these claims or the intrusion of 'talkativeness' his analysis shows that such a measure is a valid indicator of political knowledge (Smith 1989: 163-64). One potential problem with this measure

though, is that it uses a different approach for eliciting an indicator of political knowledge. I discuss this issue in the interpretation of the results drawn from the test of unidirectional models of influence.

Prior level of *political interest* is measured as a 4-category variable indicating respondents' general interest in politics, elections aside. The question reads as follows: 'Regardless of whether or not there is an upcoming election, some people show continuous interests in politics and others don't. How regularly do you pay attention to the political situation?' The variable takes values from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating higher interest in politics.

The other control variables are socio demographics, namely age, gender, education, and employment status, consumption of political news in newspapers and on TV, partisanship, and exposure to electoral campaign. *Age* is a variable that records respondents' self-declared age. *Education* is a 4-category variable recording respondents' highest educational attainment. *Female* is a variable that distinguishes between women (coded 1) and men (coded 0). *Employment* is a variable that separates between those respondents who were either employed or self-employed (coded 1) and the rest (coded 0). Consumption of political news in newspapers ('*Newspaper'*) is a count of how many newspapers respondents usually use as sources of political news. Respondents were presented with a list of the twelve most important newspapers and they could choose as many as they use for political information purposes. Consumption of political news on TV *('TV'*) counts the number of TV programs on which respondents declare to have watched political news. Seventeen such programs were listed. *Partisanship* is a variable separating those who declared they have a partisan preference from those declaring they don't have such a preference. Exposure to electoral campaign ('*Campaign*') draws on a set of questions asking respondents whether they received cards, flyers, phone calls or attended rallies of eight parties

competing in the elections. Positive replies were coded 1 and negative ones 0. The final variable sums these answers.

4.3. Political communication and cognitive involvement with politics: a non-recursive model design

In this section I present the results of estimating the effects of political discussion that occurs during electoral campaigns on changes in individuals' cognitive involvement with politics. The analysis draws on three groups of pre- and post- electoral surveys conducted in Japan between 2003 and 2005. These are the election studies conducted before and after the House of Representatives elections in 2003 ('Pre-2003' and 'Post-2003'), the pre- and post-election studies conducted in relationship to the House of Councilors elections in 2004 ('Pre-2004' and 'Post-2004') and the surveys conducted before and after the House of Representatives elections in 2005 ('Pre-2005' and 'Post-2005').

To test for the influences exerted by political conversations during the electoral campaign on changes in the measures of cognitive involvement with politics and take advantage of the panel design, I employed a non-recursive, lagged dependent variable regression model. This is described by Finkel as a 'conditional change' model (Finkel 1995). In this research design the value of the dependent variable at T2 is predicted from its value at T1 and a set of independent variables measured either at the same time T2 or at T1 (Finkel 1995: 6). Significant effects of these predictors are interpreted as indicators of how much change in the dependent variable is accounted for by them, compared to what we would expect given earlier measures of the dependent variable (Finkel 1995). In my models, all predictors, except exposure to electoral campaign, are measured at T1.

Table 9 reports the results of estimating these effects for the three measures of opinionation, namely '*opinionation on Government's spending'*, '*opinionation on policy issues'*, and '*opinionation on parties' proposals'*. Each of the analysis draws on pooled data from four survey waves corresponding to two groups of pre- and post-election interviews. This is done to enlarge the sample size and thus increase the power of the tests that are conducted. Larger sample sizes lead to more accurate parameter estimates and thus a greater ability to find the relationships looked for. Moreover, combining the two groups of pre and post electoral data makes possible an inclusive understanding of the results as opposed to having two sets of results that cannot be strictly compared.

The analysis in which '*opinionation on Government's spending'* is the dependent variable draws on data from the waves 'Pre-2003', 'Pre-2004', 'Post-2003', and 'Post-2004'. The test that includes '*opinionation on policy issues'* as dependent variable employs data from waves 'Pre-2004', 'Pre-2005', 'Post-2004', and 'Post-2005'. Finally, the estimation of '*opinionation on parties' proposals'* as dependent variable relies on data from waves 'Pre-2003', 'Pre-2005', 'Post-2003', and 'Post-2005. In these analyses, political discussion measured before the elections predict political cognition measured after the elections, controlling for political cognition measured in pre-election times.

The statistical method employed for estimating the effect of political discussion on measures of political opinionation is ordinary least squares regression (OLS). Variance of the residuals is constrained to be the same in the two groups included in the each of the three analyses. Interaction terms calculated as products between each of the predictors and membership to the first group are also included in the analysis. Table 9 presents the results of these estimations. The first part of each column reports the general effects of explanatory variables on the three indicators of political opinionation. The second part presents the interaction terms

effects, which represent differences in the effects of explanatory variables between the two groups included in the analysis. Results are unstandardized coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses[51]. The program used for estimating these effects is STATA 11.

[51] I also estimated these models with feasible generalized least squares (FGLS) and results were similar. FGLS is a particular case of generalized least squares that operates with the assumption that the disturbances have different variances for each panel and are constant within panel. The other option for estimating these effects is OLS with clustered estimates of the variances. However, given the fact that clustered –robust estimator treats each cluster as an additional observation many clusters are needed for consistent estimations. This is not the case in my analysis where I have only two clusters in each analysis.

Table 9: Effects of political communication on opinionation, OLS estimates with robust SE

	Government spending	**Policy issues**	**Party proposals**
Age	-.02*** (.004)	-.01** (.004)	-.01 (.01)
Female	-.43*** (.13)	-.13 (.13)	-1.11*** (.36)
Education	-.09 (.07)	.06 (.05)	-.01 (.17)
Employment	.22 (.13)	.18 (.13)	-.26 (.36)
Partisanship	.36** (.16)	.01 (.15)	.99** (.47)
Political interest	.09 (.1)	.08 (.11)	.38 (.26)
Opinionation	3.35*** (.29)	3.25*** (.47)	10.12*** (.91)
Newspaper	.18 (.09)	.08 (.07)	.01 (.3)
TV	.01 (.03)	-.02 (.02)	.15** (.06)
Campaign	-.0002 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.13** (.06)
Frequency political talk	-.13 (.17)	.27 (.19)	.07 (.49)
Expertise network	.4** (.17)	-.13 (.14)	-.01 (.46)
Network density	.44 (.23)	-.18 (.36)	-.16 (.86)
Difference between groups	**2003 wave vs. 2004**	**2004 wave vs. 2005**	**2003 wave vs. 2005**
Age difference	.01 (.01)	-.02** (.01)	-.001 (.01)
Female difference	.15 (.19)	-.38** (.16)	-.55 (.46)
Education difference	.17 (.09)	.04 (.08)	.09 (.23)
Employment difference	-.03 (.2)	-.19 (.18)	.43 (.48)
Partisanship difference	-.15 (.24)	.15 (.2)	.02 (.63)
Political interest difference	.09 (.14)	.26 (.14)	.25 (.36)
Opinionation difference	-.91** (.41)	-.01 (.53)	-3.04** (1.1)
Newspaper difference	-.01 (.12)	.08 (.1)	.25 (.36)
TV difference	.02 (.04)	.05 (.03)	.01 (.08)
Campaign difference	-.01 (.04)	-.01 (.03)	-.1 (.09)
Talk difference	.47 (.29)	-.21 (.24)	1.12 (.67)
Expertise difference	-.62** (.28)	.17 (.2)	-.46 (.65)
Density difference	-.65 (.41)	.37 (.42)	.41 (1.11)
No of observations	2204	2049	1603
R-squared	.19	.26	.28
F-test	14.88	11.09	25.83
Prob > F	.000	.000	.000

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

Results indicate that after controlling for measures of political opinionation in pre-elections times, some features of political conversation recorded before elections have a significant effect on respondents' ability to express opinions on Government's spending, in the aftermath of the elections. For this specific indicator of political opinionation, there is evidence that political expertise at group level is positively and significantly affecting it. Respondents who discuss politics with more knowledgeable others appear to hold a higher number of opinions with regard to Governmental spending. Although the significant effect of the interaction term between expertise and group membership suggests that these influences are weaker in the first group (the 2003 wave) compared to the second (the 2004 study), there is a general significant effect of network members' political expertise in both groups. For the other two measures of opinionation though – views on various social and political issues and on parties' proposals in the electoral campaign – the effects of discussion do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

One explanation for these differences in the effects of political communication on various measures of opinionation is that discussion about Government's spending might have been more often a topic of conversation as compared to abstract issues, such as party manifestos or positions on policy issues. This interpretation is supported by Scheiner's (2006) argument, which indicates that the pervasive character of clientelistic links between parties in power (most often LDP) and voters hindered the development of programmatic appeals. A different interpretation of these results is that there is high level of stability in the pre- and post- electoral indicators of opinionation. This is possible given the short time lag between the waves and is illustrated especially in the case of the last measure, where opinionation measured before the elections is a very strong predictor of opinionation measured after the elections.

To test the effects of political homogeneity on opinionation I estimated similar equations where I included this measure. It was computed by pairing respondents' vote intention and their perception of discussants' vote intentions in the coming elections. Agreement between

respondent and discussant was coded 1 and disagreement was coded 0. I then added up the scores for the four pairs. The reason I omitted this measure before, is the small number of cases: only about half of the respondents could indicate their vote intentions and even less were able to report their discussants' partisan preferences. This leads to sample sizes of about a few hundreds and this decreases the power of the analysis. Not only does political homogeneity not reach conventional level of significance but also some other effects turn insignificant once I introduce this measure. Granted, this does not mean that homogeneity is not a relevant influence but it suggests that probably it has such a small effect that this will not become obvious in a small sample size.

Regarding the other predictors, age has a negative effect on all three measures of opinionation and reaches a conventional level of statistical significance when this is measured as assessment of Government spending and parties' proposals. Women appear to be significantly less opinionated, especially with regard to how concrete party proposals were. Unsurprisingly, those respondents who have a partisan preference are more likely to have opinions with regard to political issues. Finally, exposure to TV and electoral campaign increases individuals' levels of opinionation, especially with regard to opinions on parties' manifestos. Overall, all three models fit the data well and have quite high explanatory power.

Table 10 reports the results of estimating the effects of political conversation on factual political knowledge. As in the previous analysis, I pooled data for the two groups of pre- and post-electoral surveys to increase the power of the analysis and make possible the comparison of the estimates that are obtained in the two groups. The waves included in this analysis are 'Pre-2003', 'Post-2003', 'Pre-2004', and 'Post-2004'. The drawback of combining data though, is that political knowledge was measured differently in the two groups. In the first one, political knowledge draws on fourteen questions, whereas in the second group it draws on four factual questions. To be able to combine the data I dichotomized the two measures and some information

might be lost in this way. To check this, I conducted the same tests separately for the two groups, keeping the original variables. The results show that there are no differences in the effects of political discussion for the original and dichotomized measures of political knowledge. The only difference is that gender is significantly linked to lack of knowledge in group1, a finding which is though noticeable in group differences, as reported in Table 10.

The statistical method employed for estimating the effect of political discussion on knowledge is logistic regression. The variances in the two groups are constrained to be equal. As before, I computed interaction terms between each of the predictors and the group membership to test for possible differences in the effects of explanatory variables between the two groups. The reported estimates are logistic regression coefficients with robust standard errors.

Table 10: Effects of political communication on knowledge

	Logistic regression estimates with robust standard errors
Age	.98*** (.005)
Female	.82 (.12)
Education	1.33*** (.09)
Employment	.94 (.14)
Partisanship	.84 (.13)
Political interest	1.43*** (.15)
Knowledge	1.04** (.01)
Newspaper	1.07 (.12)
TV	1.01 (.03)
Campaign	.99 (.03)
Frequency political talk	1.09 (.21)
Expertise network	1.06 (.19)
Network density	.95 (.24)
Difference between groups	**2003 wave vs. 2004**
Age difference	1 (.01)
Female difference	.6** (.12)
Education difference	1.03 (.01)
Employment difference	.91 (.2)
Partisanship difference	.96 (.23)
Political interest difference	.99 (.15)
Knowledge difference	1.01 (.02)
Newspaper difference	.9 (.14)
TV difference	1.08** (.04)
Campaign difference	1.09** (.05)
Talk difference	1.38 (.42)
Expertise difference	.68 (.2)
Density difference	.56 (.25)
No of observations	1964
Pseudo R-squared	.09
Wald chi2	190.90
Prob > F	.000

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

Results indicate that after controlling for pre-election measures of political knowledge, participation in political discussions prior to elections does not seem to contribute to a significant increase in individuals' levels of political knowledge recorded in the aftermath of the elections. The strongest predictor of changes in political knowledge is individual self-declared general political interest. Age and education have strong, positive effects on political knowledge. Older, more educated and politically interested people seem to be more politically knowledgeable. A possible explanation for the lack of significant influences of political discussion is that the content of political conversations in the electoral campaigns was little related to the issues asked in the surveys. An alternative interpretation is that discussion has an indirect effect on knowledge and opinionation, by stimulating interest in politics which, depending on some other individual resources might lead to an increase in knowledge. Also, it is important to note that political measures of political knowledge have a high stability as it is visible from the very strong relationship between indicators of knowledge measured before and after the elections.

To test the effects of discussion on political interest, I estimated a lagged model in which self-declared interest in the events and issues of the most recent electoral campaign is defined as function of an earlier measure of self-declared interest in politics in general and political discussion with peers. This time, the two indicators of political interest are similar and, therefore, I can talk about a change in the predictors producing a change in the outcome, as opposed to previous cases where differences in the measures made such an interpretation impossible. For this analysis I put together data from three groups of pre- and post-electoral waves. These are the 'Pre-2003', 'Post-2003', 'Pre-2004', 'Post-2004', 'Pre-2005', and 'Post-2005' studies. The variances in the three groups were constrained to be equal. I computed interaction terms between each of the predictors and group membership. These interaction terms indicate differences in the effects of the independent variables across the three groups. The statistical method that I employed for these estimations is ordinary least squares regression (OLS). Table 11 reports the

unstandardized coefficients with robust standard errors. The first part of the results shows general effects in the three groups, the second part reports differences in these effects between the first group (the 2003 study) and the other two, and the last part gives differences in these effects between the second group (the 2004 wave) and the other two.

Table 11: Effects of political communication on interest

OLS estimates with robust standard errors	
Age	.01*** (.002)
Female	.03 (.06)
Education	.08** (.03)
Employment	-.03 (.07)
Partisanship	.13 (.08)
Political interest	.2*** (.05)
Opinionation	.29 (.16)
Knowledge	-.01 (.01)
Newspaper	-.01 (.05)
TV	.004 (.01)
Campaign	.04*** (.01)
Frequency political talk	.34*** (.08)
Expertise network	-.02 (.08)
Network density	-.45*** (.16)
Differences between groups	**2003 wave vs. 2004&2005**
Age difference	-.002 (.003)
Female difference	-.01 (.08)
Education difference	-.04 (.04)
Employment difference	.03 (.09)
Partisanship difference	.17 (.11)
Political interest difference	-.04 (.06)
Opinionation difference	.05 (.2)
Knowledge difference	.01 (.01)
Newspaper difference	.04 (.07)
TV difference	.01 (.02)
Campaign difference	-.01 (.02)
Talk difference	-.14 (.12)
Expertise difference	.01 (.12)
Density difference	.23 (.2)
Differences between groups	**2004 wave vs. 2003&2005**
Age difference	-.01** (.003)
Female difference	-.02 (.07)
Education difference	-.06 (.04)
Employment difference	-.08 (.08)
Partisanship difference	-.03 (.1)
Political interest difference	.1 (.06)
Opinionation difference	-.13 (.19)
Knowledge difference	.01 (.01)
Newspaper difference	.05 (.07)
TV difference	.02 (.02)
Campaign difference	-.01 (.02)
Talk difference	-.18 (.11)
Expertise difference	-.002 (.11)
Density difference	.29 (.18)
No of observations	2723
R-squared	.22
F	21.61
Prob > F	.000

Results show that after controlling for pre-election measures of general political interest, frequency of political discussion prior to elections has a positive effect on respondents' self-declared interest in the political issues and events of the electoral campaign, while the density of political discussion has a negative effect on political interest. Individuals who are engaged more often in political discussion and those who are part of less tightly connected networks appear to be more interested in politics at the electoral time. On the other hand, more tightly connected networks of political conversation appears to act as disincentives of political interest, most probably because they tend to be more homogeneous and thus more likely to provide redundant information. Age, education, and exposure to the electoral campaign are all positive predictors of interest in the political issues and events of the most recent electoral campaign. There are no significant differences in these effects across the three groups, except for age, which appears to have a weaker effect in the second group (2004 wave) as compared to the rest. The model fits well and has a relatively high explanatory power. As before, the inclusion of a measure of political homogeneity leads to a drop in the sample size to 800 respondents; most of the significant effects previously reported either shrink or become insignificant. I interpret the findings of this analysis as evidence that casual political conversations stirs up individuals' interest in politics. This in itself is not a guarantee that these people will become more knowledgeable although it can be seen as a precondition of enlightenment. As people become interested in politics they will seek out for more information and this may result in an increase in their levels of political knowledge.

Results of estimating unidirectional models of influences suggest that political communication has both a direct and an indirect effect on political opinionation and knowledge, albeit the indirect effect is more consistent and relevant. Regarding the direct effects, political discussion with those who are perceived to be politically knowledgeable has a positive influence

on respondents' level of political opinionation, measured as range of opinions people have on Government spending. The effects of political discussion on the other two measures of political opinionation and on factual political knowledge do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. As for the indirect effects, political interest appears to mediate the relationship between political discussion and knowledge. More frequent political discussion and membership in less tightly connected networks of political conversations stimulate individuals' interest for politics. In turn, political interest is among the strongest predictors of political knowledge.

4.4. Political communication and cognitive involvement with politics: a recursive model design

In this section I present the results of estimating statistical models that include different directions of the effects flowing between casual political communication and each of the three dimensions of cognitive involvement with politics, namely political opinionation, knowledge and interest. For each of these pairs I estimate cross-lagged and synchronous models, with both unidirectional and reciprocal effects. This amounts to six models estimated for each pair. I then compare the fit of these models and choose the one that best fit the data. The analyses draw on three pre-electoral waves of the panel data, namely 'Pre-2003', 'Pre-2004', and 'Pre-2005'. These waves include both measures of political communication and cognitive involvement with politics and, for this reason, are appropriate for estimating statistical models that include different directions of effects. They are particularly suitable for testing reciprocal effects between political discussion and cognitive involvement. One possible objection to this research design is that it explores effects that unfold across campaigns rather than looking at influences within one electoral campaign. Unfortunately, the lack of appropriate data makes impossible the latter approach. However, I believe that the cross-elections analysis that I conduct can give us relevant

insights into the relevance of political discussion for cognition. Specifically, the one year lag between these waves is not too long to capture influences of political discussions that took place before the elections on political knowledge, opinionation, and interest measured one year later. The changes in individual cognitive involvement with politics produced as a result of engagement in political conversations are not expected to disappear shortly. The effects of participation in political conversations with peers are expected to last. This expectation is tested against the one that hypothesize a contemporaneous effect of political discussion on cognition. To this end, in my analysis I explore both cross-lagged and contemporaneous effects. This makes possible a comparison of the long- and short-term effects produced by political discussion on cognitive involvement.

Figures 1-3 give a graphical representation of the cross-lagged models, with unidirectional and reciprocal effects. Figures 4-6 present synchronous models, with unidirectional and reciprocal influences. All these models test for marginal independence between variables, as described below for each of the six cases separately. The method that I employ for testing these models is maximum likelihood ratio. The program used is MPlus 5.1.

Figure 1 shows a cross-lagged model that describes relationships between political discussion and cognitive involvement with politics. In this model, each of the two variables is predicted by its lagged value and the value of the other variable measured at an earlier point in time. The lag corresponds to a period of approximately one year. The assumption of this model is that the influences of these variables operate continuously and effects build up over time.

Figure 1: Cross-lagged reciprocal effects between political discussion and cognitive involvement

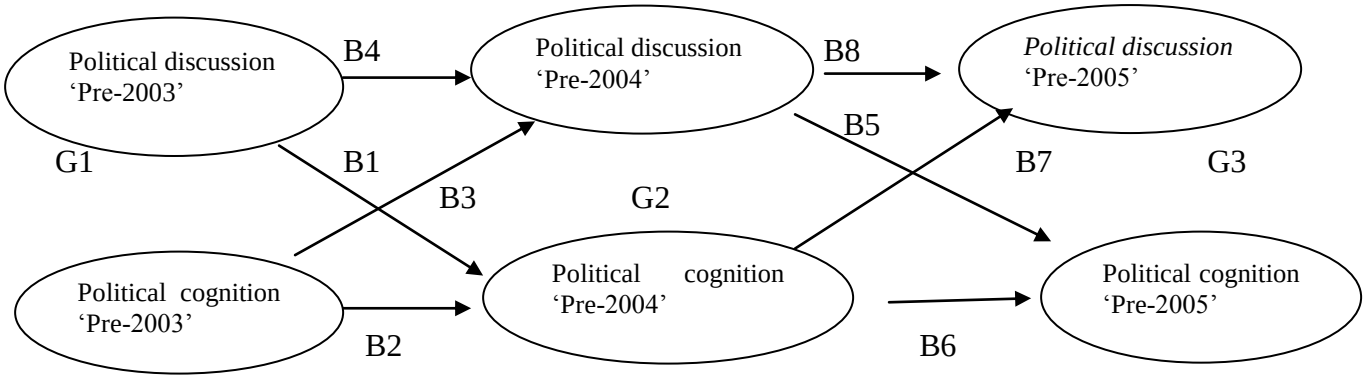


Figure 2 describes a cross-lagged model with unidirectional effects going from political discussion to cognitive involvement with politics. In this model, measures of cognitive involvement are predicted by their lagged values and indicators of political discussion at a previous point in time. Political discussion and cognitive involvement with politics in 'Pre-2003' are marginally independent, and so are political talk and cognitive involvement in 'Pre-2004'. The assumption of this model is that the influences flow exclusively from talk to cognitive involvement, but not the other way round.

Figure 2: Cross-lagged unidirectional effects from political discussion to cognitive involvement

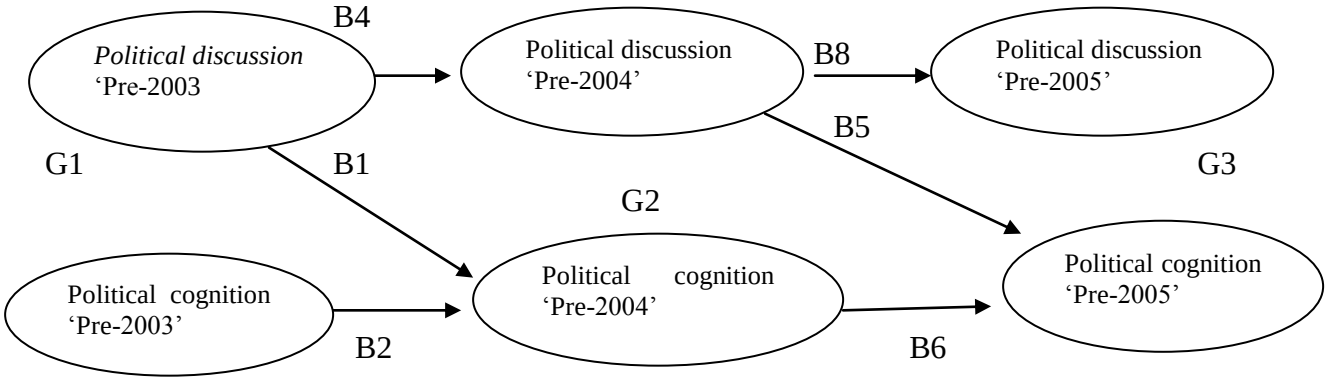


Figure 3 shows a cross-lagged model with unidirectional effects going from cognitive involvement with politics to political discussion. In these models, the three indicators of cognitive involvement are considered to affect individuals' level of participation in political talk. As in the previous model, political discussion and cognitive involvement with politics measured in 'Pre-2003' are marginally independent, and so are political talk and cognitive involvement with politics in 'Pre-2004'.

Figure 3: Cross-lagged unidirectional effects from cognitive involvement to political discussion

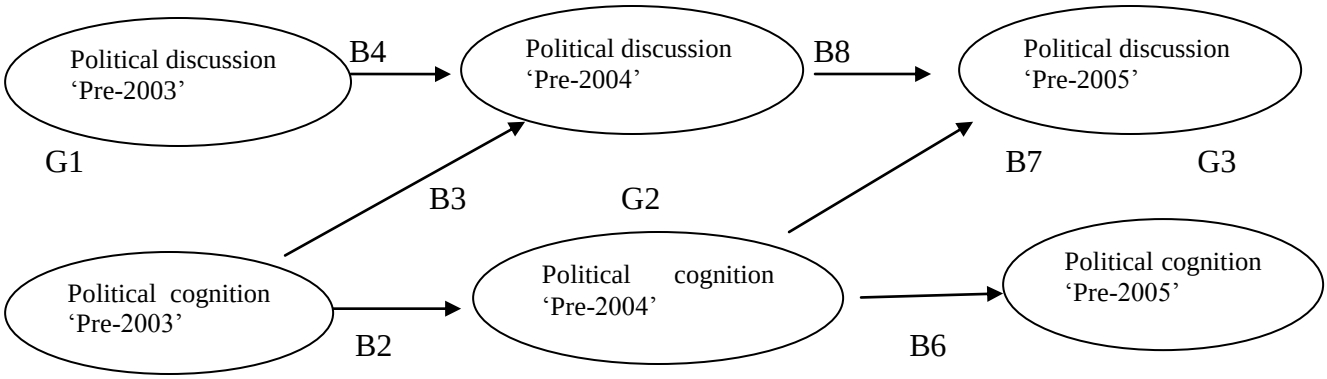


Figure 4 depicts a synchronous reciprocal effects model. It tests for the possibility that the reciprocal influences between the two variables operate simultaneously rather than over time. In this model, the value of each variable measured in 'Pre-2004' and 'Pre-2005' is predicted by its lagged measure and the value of the other variable measured at the same point in time as the outcome.

Figure 4: Synchronous reciprocal effects between political discussion and cognitive involvement

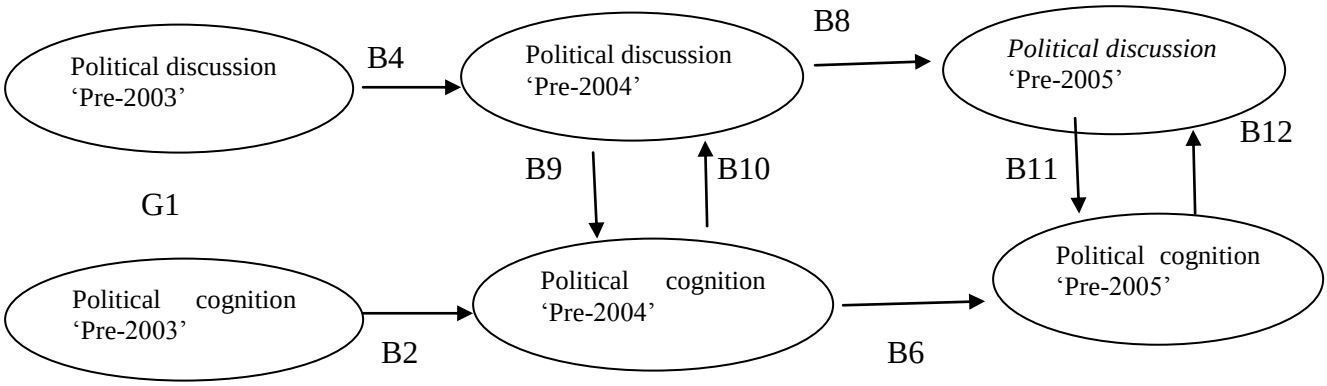


Figure 5 shows the graphical representation of a synchronous, unidirectional model of influence. In this model, political discussion measured in 'Pre-2004' and 'Pre-2005' is hypothesized to affect levels of cognitive involvement with politics measured at the same point in time, namely 'Pre-2004' and 'Pre-2005'. In these models cognitive involvement with politics in 'Pre-2003' and political talk in 'Pre-2004' are marginally independent, and so are cognitive involvement in 'Pre-2004' and political discussion in 'Pre-2005'.

Figure 5: Synchronous unidirectional effects from political discussion to cognitive involvement

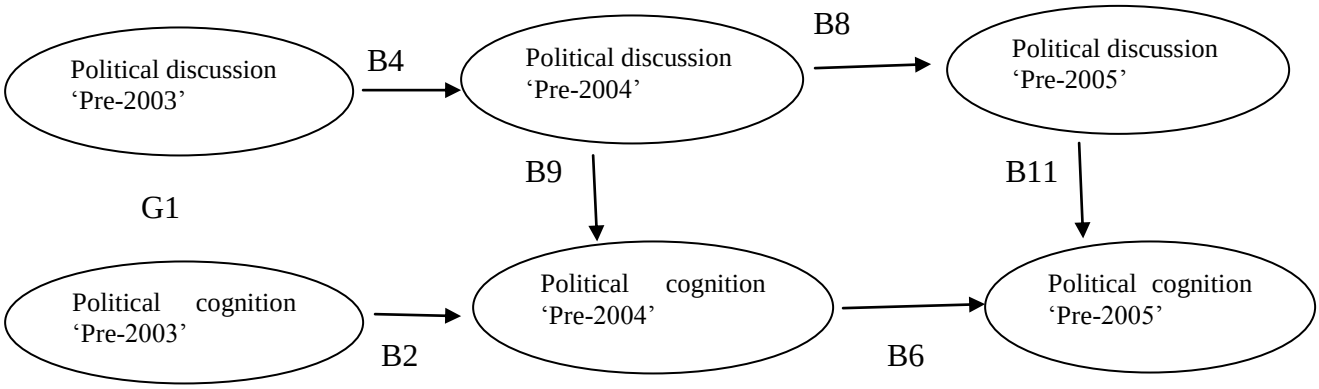
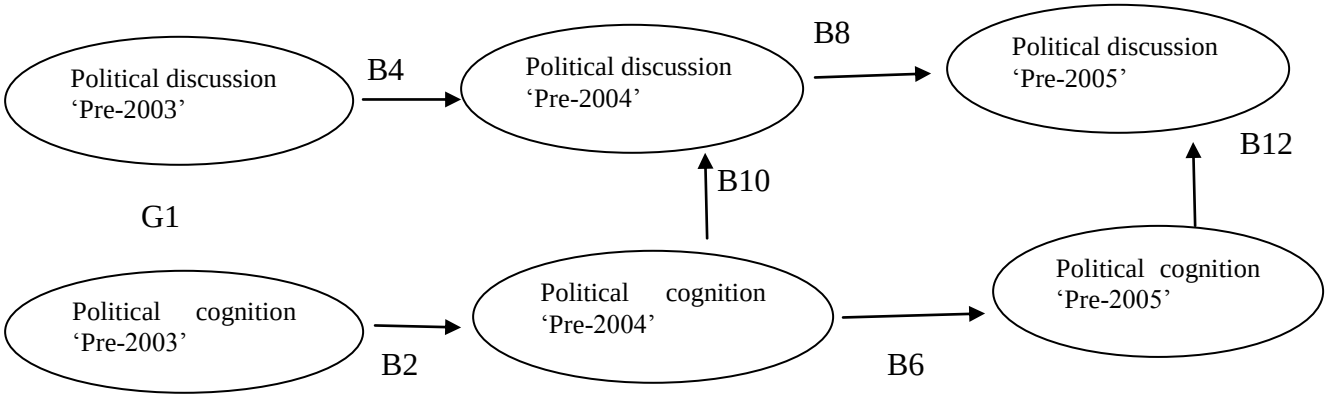


Figure 6 describes a model of synchronous, unidirectional effects flowing from cognitive involvement with politics to participation in casual political conversations. In this model the measures of political talk recorded in 'Pre-2004' and 'Pre-2005' are predicted by their lagged

values and contemporaneous measures of cognitive involvement. Political discussion in 'Pre-2003' and cognitive involvement in 'Pre-2004' are marginally independent, and so are political talk in 'Pre-2004' and cognitive involvement in 'Pre-2005'.

Figure 6: Synchronous unidirectional effects from cognitive involvement to political discussion



4.4.1. Casual political conversations and political opinionation: results

Table 12 reports measures of model fit for each of the six models estimated. The fit of the nested models can be compared employing a test of differences in the chi-square values. However, the values reported by Mplus cannot enter as such in testing these differences. This is due to the fact that the difference obtained is not distributed as a chi-square.

Linda Muthén and Bengt Muthén, the creators of the MPlus program, describe the series of transformations that are needed.[52] Following them, I first computed the difference test scaling correction cd, using the formula:

*cd = (d0 * c0 - d1*c1)/(d0 - d1)*

In this formula, d0 stands for the degrees of freedom in the nested model, c0 is the scaling correction factor for the nested model, d1 is the degrees of freedom in the comparison model, and c1 is the scaling correction factor for the comparison model.

[52] http://www.statmodel.com/chidiff.shtml

Then, I computed the Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square difference test (TRd) as follows: *TRd = (T0*c0 - T1*c1)/cd*.

In this equation T0 and T1 are the chi-square values for the nested and comparison model, respectively.

Table 12: Fit statistics for models of effects between political communication and opinionation

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**	**Model 6**
Model fit						
AIC	**4220**	4245	4234	4232	4243	4232
BIC	4330	4345	4335	4333	4333	**4323**
Sample-size adjusted BIC	**4257**	4279	4268	4266	4273	4262
RMSEA	.214	.198	.193	.189	.174	**.171**
SRMR	**.065**	.083	.078	.075	.084	.079
Chi-squared	165	195	203	195	222	213
DF	4	6	6	6	8	8
Correction factor	1.223	1.106	1.081	1.113	1.043	1.035

After the transformations described before, the chi-square difference test (TRd) between models 1 and 2 is 38 and between models 1 and 3 is 43. These differences are distributed with two degrees of freedom. This suggests that models 2 and 3 do not fit the data worse than model 1 and thus they might be preferred over it. In the case of synchronous models, the TRd between models 5 and 4 is 30 and between models 6 and 4 is 22, both distributed with 2 degrees of freedom. These results suggest that model 5 and 6 fits data equally well compared to model 4. However, the chi-square test cannot be employed for a more comprehensive comparison of the six models.

To compare the relative fit of the models I employ five measures that are appropriate for assessing the fit of non-nested models. These are the Akaiki Information Criteria (AIC), the Bayesian Information Criteria (BIC), the sample size adjusted BIC, the root means squared of approximation (RMSEA), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Both AIC and BIC are said '"to penalize" models that include more structural paths and thus are more complex and less parsimonious' (Eveland *et al.* 2005: 429). The best fitted model is the one with lowest values on these criteria.

If only the fit of the non-nested models are included in the comparison, the best fitted model is the one with synchronous, unidirectional effects from opinionation to talk (Model 6). This model fits better than the other three as suggested by four out of five criteria. However, if the fit of all six models is compared, the one that is preferred is model 1 that has the best fit in three out of five criteria. The criterion of parsimony would suggest the adoption of the model that has the smallest number of effects estimated, and this is model 6. It is interesting to see though, whether the effects of talk on opinionation are significant. Table 13 presents the coefficients of estimating models 1 and 6.

Table 13: Estimates of effects between political communication and opinionation

	Model 1	**Model 6**
Stability effects		
Political opinionation		
'Pre-2003'→'Pre-2004' (B2)	.52 (.03)	.54 (.03)
'Pre-2004'→ 'Pre-2005' (B6)	.51 (.03)	.53 (.03)
Political communication		
'Pre-2003' →'Pre-2004' (B4)	.4 (.03)	.4 (.03)
'Pre-2004' → 'Pre-2005' (B8)	.51 (.04)	.5 (.04)
Cross-lagged effects		
Political communication to opinionation		
'Pre-2003' →'Pre-2004' (B1)	.03 (.01)	
'Pre-2004' → 'Pre-2005' (B5)	.03 (.01)	
Political opinionation to communication		
'Pre-2003' →'Pre-2004' (B3)	.22 (.06)	
'Pre-2004' → 'Pre-2005' (B7)	.3 (.07)	
Synchronous effects		
Political opinionation to communication		
'Pre-2004' (B10)		.4 (.06)
'Pre-2005' (B12)		.5 (.07)
Error covariances		
'Pre-2003' (G1)	.05 (.01)	.05 (.01)
'Pre-2004' (G2)	.01 (.003)	
'Pre-2005' (G3)	.01 (.003)	

Results in column 1 show that the effects of political discussion on opinionation coexist with the reverse ones. However, the effects of opinionation on political discussion are much stronger than the ones pointing in the opposite direction. These two models thus suggest that in the relationship between talk and opinionation, contemporaneous effects flowing from opinionation to talk gives the best description. However, the second choice is a model where these effects build over time and coexist with weaker ones that flow from discussion to opinionation.

These findings contradict the theoretical expectations that political discussion creates a more opinionated citizenry. It shows that, on the contrary, it is mostly those who have opinions that would engage in more frequent political conversations with their peers. One possible explanation for this latter finding is that the measurement of opinionation employed in my analysis already captures an important amount of 'talkativeness' or 'verbosity' in addition to views on political issues. Specifically, those people who are more likely to discuss politics with their peers will be more inclined to express opinions on political issues asked in a survey and thus the two measures have an important overlap. This makes the effects of political discussion weaker than they are in reality. The test of the relationship between political discussion and knowledge can better tell apart the two.

4.4.2. Casual political conversation and knowledge: results

Table 14 reports the measures of model fit for the six models that describe possible directions of the effects flowing between frequency of political discussion and knowledge.

Table 14: Fit statistics for models of effects between political communication and knowledge

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Model fit						
AIC	16890	16896	16889	16888	16894	**16885**
BIC	16997	16994	16986	16985	16982	**16973**
Sample-size adjusted BIC	16924	16927	16919	16918	16922	**16913**
RMSEA	.215	.183	.181	.179	.160	**.157**
SRMR	**.067**	.075	.071	.069	.075	.071
Chi-squared	142	156	153	150	162	156
DF	4	6	6	6	8	8
Correction factor	1.194	1.150	1.129	1.141	1.119	1.105

The TRd between models 1 and 2 is 26 and between model 1 and 3 is 22, with 2 degrees of freedom. This suggest that models 2 and 3 fit as well as model 1 does and are more parsimonious than model 1. For the synchronous models, the difference between model 4 and 5 is 15 and the difference between model 4 and 6 is 16. This also suggests that models 5 and 6 fit better than model 4. When using the other measures of model fit, four out of five criteria suggest that the best fitted model is the one with synchronous, unidirectional effects from knowledge to political discussion (Model 6). In other words, those who are politically knowledgeable will be more likely to engage in more frequent political conversation with peers. Table 15 reports the specific effects estimated in model 6.

Table 15: Estimates of synchronous effects of political knowledge on communication

	Model 6
Stability effects	
Political knowledge	
'Pre-2003'→ 'Pre-2004' (B2)	.6 (.03)
'Pre-2004'→ 'Pre-2005' (B6)	.53 (.03)
Political communication	
'Pre-2003'→ 'Pre-2004' (B4)	.41 (.03)
'Pre-2004'→ 'Pre-2005' (B8)	.52 (.04)
Synchronous effects	
Political knowledge to communication	
'Pre-2004' (B10)	.01 (.004)
'Pre-2005' (B12)	.02 (.01)
Error covariance	
'Pre-2003' (G1)	.6 (.1)

These results show that besides the stability effects of knowledge, political talk has a very strong effect on knowledge. People who are more politically knowledgeable are more likely to engage in political discussions with their peers. This finding complements the previous one,

where more opinionated people were found to be more likely to engage in political conversation with their peers. Both findings contradict the expectations formulated by theory with regard to the possibility that political conversation can lead to an increase in individuals' level of political sophistication. It also contradicts the findings of previous empirical studies (Eveland *et al.* 2005).

One explanation for the findings of knowledge and opinionation driving political discussion can be found in the cultural features of the Japanese society. Traditionally, this society appreciates those who are knowledgeable due to its Confucian culture. As Ikeda shows in a very recent study on the role of social networks o political knowledge in Japan, 'Confucianism posits five basic virtues: Ren (benevolence), Yi (rightness), Li (property), Zhi (knowledge), and Xin (trust). Out of these five virtues, Knowledge is emphasized and supposed that superiors are required to be knowledgeable as they become self-disciplined' (Ikeda 2011: 105). Although much of the Confucianism was lost in recent decades, the influence of such a tradition probably remains; knowledgeable ones are more likely to be listened to and thus more likely to strike up or engage in political conversations.

4.4.3. Political discussion and interest: results

Table 16 presents the fist statistics of the models that describe possible direction of effects between frequency of political discussion and political interest.

Table 16: Fit statistics for models of effects between political communication and interest

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Model fit						
AIC	**9934**	9977	9968	9969	9981	9971
BIC	**10043**	10077	10068	10069	10071	10061
Sample-size adjusted BIC	**9970**	10010	10001	10003	10011	10001
RMSEA	.199	.192	.188	.187	.171	**.169**
SRMR	**.063**	.093	.086	.086	.097	.089
Chi-squared	142	199	190	188	212	206
DF	4	6	6	6	8	8
Correction factor	1.234	1.121	1.125	1.142	1.088	1.069

The TRd between models 1 and 2 is 60 and between models 1 and 3 is 52. This indicates that models 2 and 3 do not fit significantly worse than model 1 and thus they are preferred over model 1 because they are more parsimonious. For the synchronous models, the chi-square test difference between model 4 and 5 is 32 and between model 4 and 6 is 25, both with 2 degrees of freedom difference. The model 5 and 6 thus are preferred over model 4. However, when comparing the other measures of fit for the six models, model 1 is preferred as four out of five criteria suggest so. This happens in spite of AIC and BIC usually penalizing models with more structural paths as is the case with model 1. Table 17 reports the results of estimating this model.

Table 17: Estimates of reciprocal effects between political communication and interest

	Model 1
Stability effects	
Political interest	
'Pre-2003'→'Pre-2004' (B2)	.54 (.03)
'Pre-2004'→ 'Pre-2005' (B6)	.51 (.03)
Political commnication	
'Pre-2003'→'Pre-2004' (B4)	.38 (.03)
'Pre-2004'→ 'Pre-2005' (B8)	.49 (.04)
Cross-lagged effects	
Political communication to opinionation	
'Pre-2003'→'Pre-2004' (B1)	.13 (.03)
'Pre-2004'→ 'Pre-2005' (B5)	.18 (.04)
Political opinionation to communication	
'Pre-2003'→'Pre-2004' (B3)	.12 (.02)
'Pre-2004'→ 'Pre-2005' (B7)	.13 (.03)
Error covariance	
'Pre-2003' (G1)	.2 (.02)
'Pre-2004' (G2)	.05 (.01)
'Pre-2005' (G3)	.06 (.01)

Results show that the two types of effects coexist and are approximately equal in sizes. On the one hand, the influences of political talk in 'Pre-2004' on political interest in 'Pre-2005' are stronger than the reverse effects, flowing from political interest in 'Pre-2004' on talk in 'Pre-2005'. On the other hand, the effects of political interest in 'Pre-2003' on talk in 'Pre-2004' are outweighing the reverse ones that go from talk in 'Pre-2003' on interest in 'Pre-2004'. This suggests that political discussion and interest influences each other and these effects build over time.

4.5. Conclusions and limitations

In this chapter, I investigated directions of the effects flowing between political conversation that occurs in everyday social interactions and forms of cognitive involvement with politics. Previous research assumed that participation in political discussion contributes to an increase in levels of political opinionation and knowledge. In my research, I questioned this assumption and tested for alternative directions of influences in the relationships between political communication and knowledge/opinionation.

I first tested models that include unidirectional effects of political communication on political knowledge, opinionation and interest. In these models, political discussion measured before elections predict changes in cognitive involvement with politics that occur during one electoral campaign. The inclusion of prior values of the outcomes in these statistical models makes possible to attribute changes in the dependent variables to the effects exerted by the explanatory variables. The results of these estimations indicated that political communication influences individuals' levels of political opinionation and knowledge, albeit mostly in an indirect manner. More frequent political discussion and membership in loosely connected networks of

political conversation strongly affects individuals' interest in politics, which, in turn, influences their level of political knowledge. The finding of political interest mediating the relationship between political discussion and knowledge is consistent with results of my previous chapters. It suggests that exposure to more politically conversational micro social settings, for instance, contributes to an increase in people's subjective orientations towards politics. In this way, there is room for an influence of political conversation on knowledge and opinination. In the second part of this chapter I tested alternative directions of influences between political communication and forms of cognitive involvement with politics. Results suggest that, contrary to theoretical beliefs and previous empirical results, opinionation and knowledge drive political discussion, rather than the other way round. This finding contradicts conclusions drawn by previous research (Eveland *et al.* 2005) and suggests that, in some political contexts, the assumption that political discussion contributes to an increase in political knowledge might be untenable. It indicates that models that rely on this assumption might lead to biased estimates and erroneous conclusions. However, I believe that there is need for more studies, conducted in various political contexts, before being able to make a more confident claim with regard to the direction of effects flowing between political discussion and political opinionation/knowledge.

The conclusion suggested by my results in that political discussion has an indirect effect on knowledge, through an increase in levels of political interest. This happens especially in those micro social settings where there is frequent political conversation among members that are loosely connected. The resulting increase in political interest makes people seek for more political information either through media or political conversations, as suggested by the reciprocal effects found between political talk and interest.

Some features of the Japanese politics might have an effect on these results. As discussed before, one of the virtues extolled by Confucianism is knowledge. Although the influences of this

traditional culture are much weaker than they used to be, we can speculate that they still affect individuals' social behaviors. This specific value thus can explain why, in the Japanese context, those who are more opinionated and knowledgeable are more likely to engage in political conversations. Another feature of the Japanese context that might have an influence on my findings is the prevalence of clientelistic links between parties and voters in the detriment of programmatic links (Scheiner 2006). This might explain why political discussion has no influence on individuals' opinions with regard to parties' policies and manifestos. Such issues are perhaps less emphasized in media as well and, therefore, are less likely to be found in ordinary citizens' conversations. A last feature that should be considered when discussing about the role of political talk in Japan, is the low level of exposure to political conversations in intimate settings (Richardson and Beck 2007). This suggests that in spite of the oft-documented central role of social networks in electoral mobilization in Japan (Flanagan 1991, Richardson 1991), they are less likely to stimulate political debates that would bring about political cognition. In other words, social networks might function more as vehicles of mobilization rather than sources of political information and knowledge.

There are some limitations of this analysis. A first objection is that the measures of opinionation that I employ might partly overlap with indicators of political discussion. Therefore, a part of the correlations observed between these variables might be due to the fact that they are structurally linked. However, the results of estimating unidirectional and reciprocal effects seem to indicate that, although the two measures may partly overlap, they do measure what they are meant to. The effects of opinionation on talk are much stronger than the opposite ones. If the two were measuring the same concept, such results would have not been possible.

A second objection might be that in models of reciprocal effects, the one year lag between the waves is too long. In other words, one might question the claim that political discussion

measured at one point in time affects levels of political opinionation, knowledge and interest measured one year later. However, I assume that habits of political discussion with peers are not dramatically changing in a year. For this reason, one year lag should not be problematic. On the other hand, I agree that there is need for results coming from studies that employ different time lags. Ideally, such a study should be carried during an electoral campaign, and measures of the same variables should be recorded before and after the electoral campaign.

A third issue is that in the unidirectional models, the lagged indicators of opinionation and knowledge (the pre-election measures of opinionation and knowledge) are different from the ones employed for measuring their current values (the post-election indicators of opinionation and knowledge). Therefore, it is improper to talk about a change in the literal sense in this case. It is more appropriate to discuss about a variation from what is expected given previous indicators of the same concept (Eveland *et al.* 2005: 438). Similar concerns were expressed by scholars who used models of lagged dependent variables (Eveland *et al.* 2005). However, the alternative is equally problematic. Using similar questions in both pre- and post-election surveys increases the chances that respondents recognize easier the correct answer (Eveland *et al.* 2005: 440). On the other hand, the strongest correlations between the indicators of knowledge and opinionation measured prior to and after the elections suggest that the use of different measures might not be problematic.

Fourth, it is important to note that most of the recursive statistical models that I estimated do not have a good fit. Therefore, choosing one over the others does not necessarily mean that the one that I finally retain is the correct model. As Eveland and his colleagues point out in their study, models are simplification of a complex reality and, at the end of the day, they shouldn't be considered more than being 'the least wrong of the alternatives' taken into account (Eveland *et al.* 2005: 440). Following this suggestion, I see the models that I keep in my analysis as giving the

least wrong description of relationships between political discussion and cognitive involvement with politics in my data.

Last but not least, one should keep in mind that the research design that I employed here is only one way of analyzing directions of effects between political discussion and forms of cognitive involvement with politics. Moreover, no causal inferences could be drawn in this analysis. Causality can be discussed in properly designed experimental studies. In observational studies though, 'causal inferences […] will be reliable only when there is a good understanding of which factors determine the treatment allocation and which factors (apart from the putative cause under study affect the response' (Edwards 2000). In my study though, it is unclear and impossible to establish whether those people who report no political discussion, for instance, are similar in all other aspects but this with those who report higher levels of engagement in political discussion. Therefore, the conclusions of my study should be evaluated within these limitations. My analysis gives better insights into directions of effects compared with previous research on this topic that drew on cross-sectional data. However, it does not allow disentangling causality in these effects. In addition to the limitations imposed by the structure of my data, there are additional limitations stemming from the choice of specific statistical methods in exploring effects between political communication and cognitive involvement with politics. As I explained in the introductory part of my dissertation, throughout my research I opted for employing methods that were previously used in research concerned with similar issues. Although I acknowledge that some other statistical methods might be more appropriate for the study of these issues – and graphical modeling is one such option – employing methods that were previously used in exploring the role of political discussion makes possible a comparison between my results and the ones concluded in the previous literature on this topic. However, future research on the role of political discussion in producing political cognition should move to a different paradigm

of approaching these issues, in which the limited assumptions of linearity, for instance, is replaced by specifications that might be more appropriate for describing the existing relationships between variable. Graphical modeling and log-linear models suggest additional paths of exploration.

Having expressed all these caveats, the most important suggestion of this study is that previous assumptions about the relationship between political communication and knowledge might be untenable and should be reconsidered. In the Japanese political context, everyday political conversations with peers have no impact on an individual's level of political knowledge. On the contrary, those who are more politically knowledgeable and opinionated are those who participate more frequent in political conversations.

The next chapter continues the examination of directions of effects between political discussion and another component of political engagement, namely level of political participation. This analysis draws on a two-wave panel data survey conducted in Hungary in 2003 and 2006. It follows a similar research design as the one employed in this chapter and reaches conclusions that express a more optimistic view on the role of political discussion on engagement.

Chapter 5: Social networks and political participation: examining directions of effects in Hungary[53]

This chapter complements the examination conducted in the previous one with an analysis of directions of effects flowing between interpersonal communication in social networks and another component of political engagement, namely political participation. There is quite extensive empirical evidence that some features of the micro social settings in which individuals are embedded in their everyday lives are significantly related to their level of participation in political activities (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944, Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995, Bennett *et al.* 2000, Holbert *et al.* 2002, McClurg 2003, 2006a, Mutz 2002, 2006). Similar to the case of the relationship between political communication and knowledge, this was interpreted as an indication that some features of interpersonal communication contributes to an increase in levels of political participation.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, there are various other ways to interpret the significant relationships between interpersonal communication and political participation. The two can be the result of an external factor, influences can flow either from communication to participation or the other way round, and there can be reciprocal effects between them. In this chapter, I test statistical models that include unidirectional influences flowing from interpersonal

[53] This chapter includes some information that I used in my chapter 'The role of political discussion in developing democracies: Evidence from Hungary' published in 2010 in the edited volume 'Political Discussion in Modern Democracies: a comparative perspective', at Routledge. Specifically, the data sets that I employ here are the same on which I drew my analyses for the chapter published in the book. Also, one part of my analysis here – the cross-lagged model – is similar to the one conducted there. However, the analyses that I present in this chapter go beyond those that I undertook in the book chapter.

communication to political participation, models that comprise the opposite effects, (i.e. from political participation to interpersonal communication), and models that incorporate reciprocal effects between the two variables. To this end, I employ panel data collected in Hungary, in two survey studies conducted in 2003 and 2006. The results of testing models with unidirectional effects from interpersonal communication to political participation indicate that, after controlling for previous measures of participation, the amount of political discussion in one's personal social network has a significant effect on her political participation. In addition to this direct effect, political discussion has an indirect influence on participation, which operates through an increase in political interest. People who have more political discussants among their close others appear to be more interested in politics which, in turn, makes them more participative. This latter finding is consistent with results reported in the previous chapters of my dissertation, where I showed that political interest mediates the relationship between micro social embededness and individuals' political behavior and cognition. The test of the alternative models of influence shows mixed evidence with regard to directions of the effects between social interactions and political participation. The statistical model that best describes the data includes unidirectional effects flowing from political discussion to participation. This confirms the expectations formulated by theory and previous empirical studies with regard to the beneficial effects of participation in casual political conversations with peers. In addition to these effects, social interactions appear to boost political participation, even in the absence of an explicit exchange of political opinions. People who are part of larger and more diverse personal social networks appear to be more likely to participate in political activities. Their political participation, in turn, leads to an increase in the magnitude of their social interactions.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The first part briefly introduces the research design. The second part presents the results of estimating statistical models that include unidirectional and

reciprocal effects between features of interpersonal communication and individual political participation. The last part discusses the findings of these analyses and their relevance for existing scholarship on the role of interpersonal communication for political participation. It also reflects on the differences in the effects of social networks on various aspects of individual political engagement.

5.1. Research design, data and measures

In spite of a large number of studies concerned with the role of political discussion on political participation, only a few undertook an examination of directions of the effects between them (Shah *et al.* 2005, Toka 2010). This is due to the fact that the majority of the studies drew on cross-sectional data, in which direction of effects is more difficult to assess. The results of studies that explored directions of effects showed that, after controlling for previous values of the outcome, casual political conversation with peers is a significant predictor of an individual's level of civic engagement (Shah *et al.* 2005) and electoral participation (Toka 2010). Shah and his colleagues, though, reflected on the possibility of reverse effects flowing from civic engagement to political communication but saw it as being less plausible than their model that starts with an individual seeking information through political conversations (Shah *et al.* 2005: 553). In the case of electoral participation, the reverse order of influences is less plausible; the mere act of voting is not expected to lead to a change in individuals' habits of engaging in political conversations with their peers.

However, if a broad range of political activities is considered, participation in a demonstration or a party campaign, for instance, can lead to an increase in individuals' levels of political communication due to their exposure to more politicized social settings. To test for

various possible directions of the influences between interpersonal communication and political participation, I employ a research design similar to the one that I used in the previous chapter for the study of the relationship between political communication and cognitive involvement with politics. The features of the micro social settings that I expect to have an effect on political participation are size of social networks, amount of political discussions, and level of political agreement in these conversations.

I first define and test unidirectional models of influence, in which political participation at T2 is predicted by its lagged value and measures of social networks and political communication at T2. These statistical models also include variables that can affect both features of interpersonal communication and political participation. These variables are socio demographics, namely age, gender, education, employment status, political interest, and frequency of following politics news in various media. To test for indirect effects of interpersonal communication on political participation, I define unidirectional models, in which political interest at T2 is predicted by its lagged value and measures of interpersonal communication at T2. Second, I test models that describe alternative directions of influences between interpersonal communication and political participation. These are unidirectional and reciprocal models, with both contemporaneous and lagged effects.

5.1.1. Data

Data comes from two national survey studies conducted in Hungary in 2003 and 2006. The 2003 set included 1516 respondents, of which 452 were subsequently re-interviewed in 2006. This resulted in a two-wave panel data. The method of selection for the study of 2003 is stratified random sampling from the electoral lists. The study was conducted by TARKI, a research

institute and polling company in Hungary.[54] The interviews were conducted face-to-face. The study of 2003 was conducted one year after the national elections and the second wave of the interviews took place a bit before the national elections of 2006.

5.1.2. Measures

Dependent or response variables

Political participation is 'based on information about respondents' self-declared participation in thirteen activities that are generally seen as indicators of mainstream forms of political and civic participation, such as participating in rallies, donating money to a party or contacting politicians.' (Lup 2010: 190). A complete list of these activities is included in Appendix 3. To compute this measure, I added up the number of activities in which respondents declared they have participated. This variable takes values from 0 to 13. The Cronbach's alpha of the resulting scale is 0.74. This measure suggests that there are strong relationships between these items and they measure the same concept (Lup 2010).

Political interest is a variable that records respondents' self-declared interest in politics. It takes values between 1 and 4, with high values indicating high interest in politics.

Independent or explanatory variables

The independent variables are the size of the social networks in which individuals are embedded, the proportion of political discussion in their close networks, and the level of political agreement in these close groups.

[54] http://www.tarki.hu/en/

Social network is a count of the number of people with whom respondents reported to have regular interactions. To obtain this information, respondents were asked to nominate up to five people for each of the following relationships: discussing important matters, spending free time together and getting help in household activities. These measures indicate the size and diversity of social interactions people have in their everyday lives. They take values from 0 to 15 (Lup 2010).

Political discussion is a variable that indicate the proportion of political discussants in one's core network. Core networks generally include close, intimate relationships, such as family members or friends (Marsden 1990). Subsequent to the questions about the three types of relationships, respondents were asked to indicate up to five people they considered to be the most important for them, from among the people already mentioned. They were followed-up by additional questions about the habit of discussing politics with core network members and about their political preferences. To create the measure of political discussion, I first computed the number of people with whom respondents declared to discuss politics. Then I divided it by the number of close others, i.e. the number of people in one's core network. The resulting measure is a scale from 0 to 1 that indicates the proportion of political discussants in one's core network (Lup 2010).

Political homogeneity is 'computed by matching respondents' party preferences, based on intention to vote in the eventuality of close elections, and the partisanship of members in the core network, as reported by the respondents.' (Lup 2010: 191) Whenever both the respondent and the discussant have the same political orientation, the variable takes value 1 and 0 otherwise. I divided the resulting measure by the number of persons in the core network, to make it comparable across respondents. The variable takes values between 0 and 1, where 1 indicates a

higher proportion of similar political views and smaller values indicate greater political heterogeneity (Lup 2010).

Control variables

Control variables include the lagged values of political participation and interest, socio-demographics, namely age, gender, education, and employment status, and frequency of following politics in various media.

The lagged measure of political participation (‘*participation 2003’*) is a count of the number of political and civic activities in which respondents reported participation. The Cronbach’s alpha of the resulting scale is .73, which indicates a strong relationship between these items (Lup 2010). The lagged measure of political interest (‘*political interest 2003’*) records respondents’ self-declared interest in politics, as a 4-point variable.

Age records respondents’ age in years. Gender (‘*female*’) distinguishes between women, coded 1 and men, coded 0. *Employment* separates between respondents who have a full or part-time employment, coded 1, and those who are unemployed, coded 0. *Media* is a variable that draws on questions that asked about respondents’ habits of following politics in newspapers, magazines, on radio, and TV. Each of these variables takes values between 1 and 5, where 1 indicates that respondents never or almost never follow politics in each of these media and 5 shows that she does so every day or almost every day. I added up these values and divided the result to 5. The final variable takes values between 1 and 5.

5.2. Interpersonal communication and political participation: a non-recursive research design

Table 18 presents the results of estimating models with unidirectional effects flowing from interpersonal communication to political participation and interest. In these models, political participation and interest at T2 are predicted by their lagged measures, the size of social and political discussion networks and the political homogeneity of these conversations, measured at T2. Finkel recommends this model in those cases where 'the time lag necessary for X to influence Y is […] shorter than the time between panel waves' (Finkel 1995: 13). He shows that 'If X is highly stable over time, then the choice of specifications makes little difference because estimating a causal effect either from X_{t-1} or X_t on Y_t will produce similar results' (Finkel 1995:13). In my analysis, the lag between the two waves is three years and for this reason I include indicators of the explanatory variables measured at the same time as the outcome. On the other hand, social interactions and political discussion in close, intimate environments is relatively stable over time. To test for influences occurring over time I include the lagged measure of interpersonal communication in models of reciprocal effects, which are discussed in the next section of this chapter. Here, I test for the presence of 'synchronous' or 'cotemporal' (Finkel 1995) effects of interpersonal communication on political participation.

The first two columns of table 18 report the results of testing statistical models with participation as dependent variable, with and without measures of political homogeneity. The last two columns of table 18 include the estimates of models that have political interest as outcome, again with and without measures of political homogeneity among the explanatory variables. I decided to test separately for models with and without measures of political homogeneity because the inclusion of this variable leads to a substantial drop in the number of cases. This is due to the fact that not all respondents answered questions about their political preferences and even less

were able to assess their discussants' party preferences. The statistical method employed for estimating the effect of political discussion on measures of political participation and interest is ordinary least squares (OLS). The program used for estimating these effects is STATA 11.

Table 18: Effects of political communication on political participation and interest, OLS estimates with robust standard errors

	Political participation	**Political participation**	**Political interest**	**Political interest**
Age	-.003 (.004)	-.003 (.005)	.003 (.002)	.002 (.003)
Female	-.8 (.11)	-.08 (.17)	-.17** (.07)	-.16 (.09)
Education	.03 (.03)	.04 (.04)	.03 (.02)	.02 (.02)
Employment	-.08 (.13)	-.002 (.19)	-.08 (.08)	-.12 (.1)
Political interest	.27*** (.08)	.4*** (.11)		
Media	-.02 (.07)	.08 (.11)	-.25*** (.04)	-.2*** (.06)
Social network	.01 (.01)	.01 (.02)	-.002 (.01	-.0002 (.01)
Political discussion	.55*** (.19)	.25 (.3)	.6*** (.11)	.42** (.16)
Participation 2003	.4*** (.05)	.51*** (.06)		
Political interest 2003			.36*** (.04)	.38*** (.05)
Political homogeneity		.37 (.32)		.3 (.17)
Constant	-.28 (.46)	-1.09 (.66)	1.8*** (.27)	1.78*** (.34)
No of cases	402	242	402	242
R-squared	.33	.37	.46	.4
F-test	22.85	15.39	42.99	18.61
Prob > F	.000	.000	.000	.000

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

Results in the first column shows that, after controlling for levels of political participation recorded in 2003, the variables that have a significant effect on participation measured in 2006 are political interest and the amount of political talk in respondents' core networks. Those who declare a higher interest in politics and those who have a higher proportion of people with whom they discuss politics are more likely to have participated in political and civic activities. When political homogeneity is included among the predictors, the number of cases is greatly reduced and the effect of political discussion does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. The only variable that retains a significant effect is political interest. Political homogeneity, although not reaching conventional levels of significance, has a positive effect on participation. This latter finding is in line with results of previous research, especially by Mutz, who showed that political homogeneity encourages participation in political activities (Mutz 2006).

To test for indirect effects of political discussion on participation, I estimated unidirectional models of influence in which political interest measured in 2006 is predicted by its measure in 2003 and measures of micro social embeddedness and everyday political talk in 2006. Results show that, after controlling for measures of political interest in 2003, the variables that have a significant effect on political interest in 2006 are exposure to political news in various media and proportion of political discussants in one's core network. Surprisingly, those who follow political news more frequently appear to be less likely to participate. This might be an indicator of the malaise that media consumption produces in Hungary. The other variable that has a significant effect on political interest is political discussion. Those respondents who have a higher proportion of political discussants among the members of their core network are more interested in politics. These effects remain significant even after introducing homogeneity among the explanatory variables, which leads to a decrease in the number of cases. As in the case of political participation, political homogeneity has a positive effect on political interest, though it

does not reach a conventional level of significance. This might be due to the small size of the sample. All models fit well and have a high explanatory power.

5.3. Interpersonal communication and political participation: a recursive research design

This section presents the results of estimating statistical models that include different directions of effects that might occur between features of interpersonal communication and political participation. Figures 7 to 12 give a graphical representation of these possible relationships in the case of political discussion and participation. The method that I employ for testing these models is maximum likelihood ratio. The program used is MPlus 5.1.

Figures 7 to 9 show cross-lagged models, with both unidirectional and reciprocal effects between political discussion and participation. Figure 7 shows a model with reciprocal, cross-lagged effects between political discussion and participation. In this model, each of the two variables is predicted by its lagged value and the value of the other variable measured at an earlier point in time. Figure 8 depicts a model in which indicators of political discussion and participation measured in 2003 are marginally independent and predict level of political participation recorded in 2006. In figure 9, indicators of political discussion and participation measured again in 2003 are marginally independent and predict levels of political discussion recorded in 2006. All these three models work with the assumption that effects occur over time. This assumption might be difficult to test with data collected with a lag of three years. However, given the fact that respondents were asked about their participation in political activities in general, rather than at a specific point in time, changes in reports about participation from 2003 to

2006 are expected to be indicative, within the constraints of memory and measurement errors, of the activities undertaken in between.

Figure 7: Cross-lagged reciprocal effects between political discussion and participation

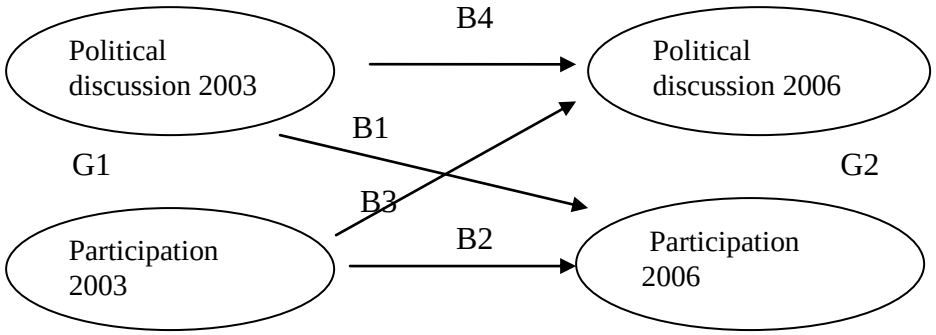


Figure 8: Cross-lagged, unidirectional effects from political discussion to participation

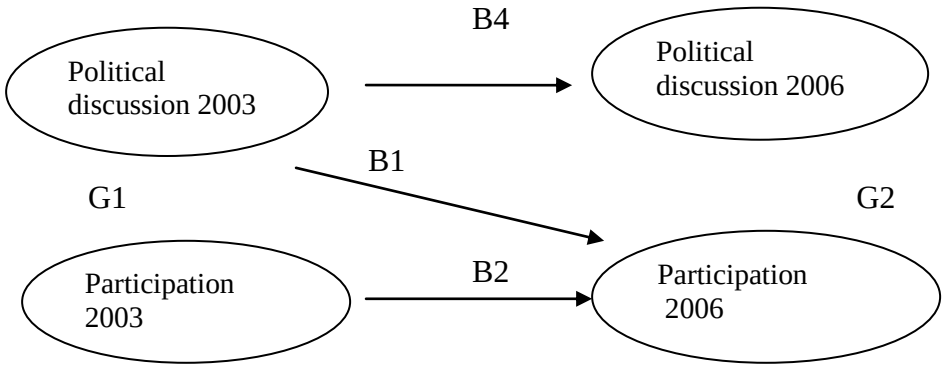
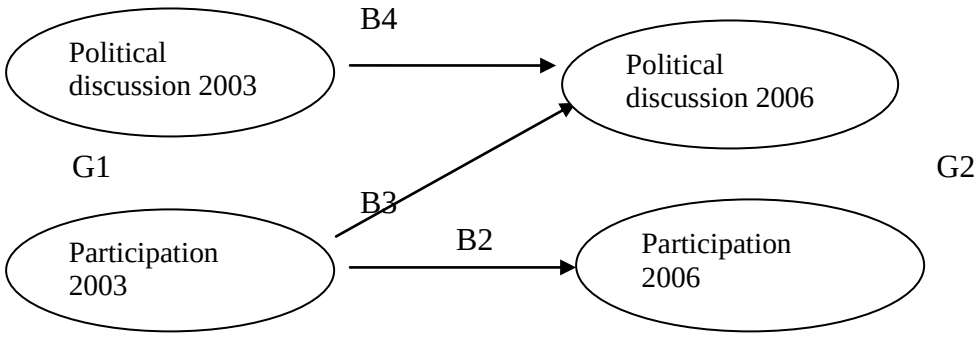


Figure 9: Cross-lagged, unidirectional effects from political participation to discussion



Figures 10 to 12 show contemporaneous models, with both unidirectional and reciprocal effects between political discussion and participation. Figure 10 shows a model with

contemporaneous, reciprocal effects. In this model, the value of each variable measured in 2006 is predicted by its lagged measure and the value of the other variable measured at the same point in time as the outcome, i.e. in 2006. Figure 11 shows a model in which political discussion measured in 2006 affects participation measured at the same point in time, i.e. in 2006. Figure 12 depicts a model in which political participation measured in 2006 predicts political discussion measured at the same point in time. These three models work with the assumption that the effects need less time than the lag between the waves to manifest. This might be a more tenable assumption given the three year lag between the two waves of my data.

Figure 10: Synchronous, reciprocal effects between political discussion and participation

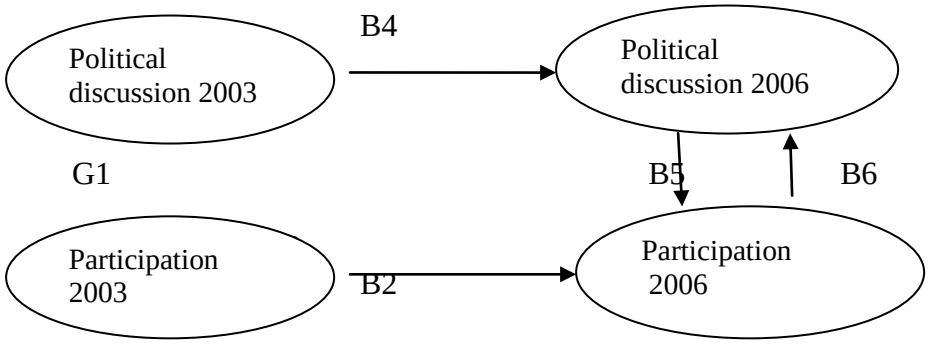


Figure 11: Synchronous, unidirectional effects from political discussion to participation

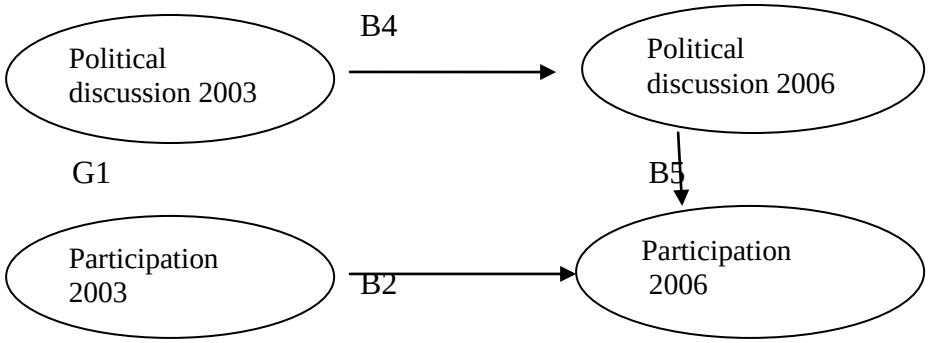


Figure 12: Synchronous, unidirectional effects from political participation to discussion

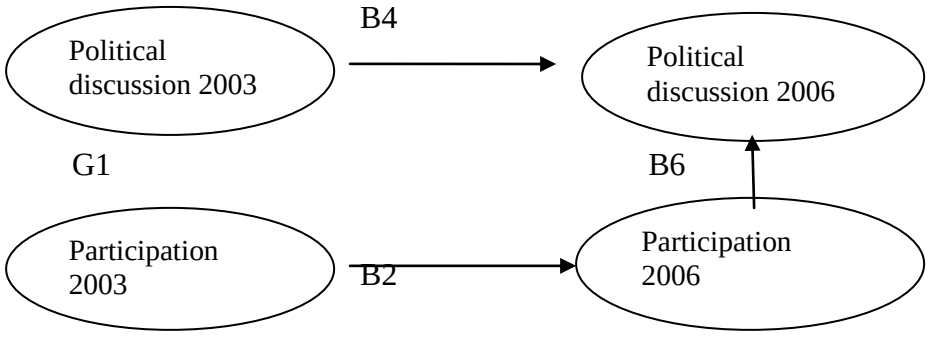


Table 19 presents the fit of these models. Some models are nested in others, and for these cases a test of differences in the chi-square values is computed to assess whether restricted models fit better than more complex ones. As discussed in the previous chapter, the chi-square values reported by MPlus cannot enter as such into this calculation. Some transformations are needed so that the final difference is distributed as a chi-square.

Table 19: Fit statistics for models of effects between political discussion and participation

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Model fit						
AIC	**2933**	2934	2936	2935	2935	2935
BIC	2988	2986	2988	2986	**2982**	**2982**
Sample-size adjusted BIC	**2944**	**2944**	2946	2945	**2944**	**2944**
RMSEA	**0.000**	.073	.143	.109	.077	.088
SRMR	**.000**	.027	.028	.023	.032	.028
Chi-squared	0	0	8	5	6	7
DF	0	1	1	1	2	2
Correction factor	1	1.196	.627	.759	.940	.627

The chi-square difference (TRd) between models 1 and 2 is 3, with 1 degree of freedom (df). This suggests that model 2 does not fit significantly worse than model 1 and, given that it is more parsimonious, it is preferred to model 1. The TRd for models 1 and 3 is 8, with 1 df. This shows that model 1 fits better than model 3. The TRd between models 4 and 5 is .43 and the one between model 4 and 6 is -.093. As suggested by MPlus support page, obtaining a negative value when using the Satorra-Bentler Chi-Square Difference Test is normal. These values show that models 5 and 6 fit equally well as model 4 does. When the other criteria for comparing the model fit are considered, results suggest that model 1 fits better than the rest in three measures out of five and fits equally well as models 2, 5, and 6 with regard to one measure. Thus, model 1 is preferred overall.

Table 20 shows the coefficients of estimating this statistical model. Results show that besides the effects of the lagged values on the outcomes, the only significant effects are those of political discussion measured in 2003 on political participation in 2006. The opposite effects, i.e. from political participation to discussion do not reach conventional levels of significance. Political conversation at core network level leads to an increase in levels of political participation, whereas participation in political activities does not result in an increase in levels of political talk. These results are consistent with the expectations formulated by theory and previous empirical research about the positive effects of political discussion.

Table 20: Estimates of reciprocal effects between political discussion and participation

	Model 1
Stability effects	
Participation	
2003→ 2006 (B2)	.46 (.09)
Political discussion	
2003→ 2006 (B4)	.17 (.06)
Cross-lagged effects	
Political discussion to participation	
2003→ 2006 (B1)	.42 (.16)
Political participation to discussion	
2003→ 2006 (B3)	.03 (.02)
Error covariance	
2003 (G1)	.14 (.03)
2006 (G2)	.1 (.02)

To test whether interpersonal communication alone can contribute to an increase in levels of political participation, I define and test models that include reciprocal effects between the size of the social networks to which individuals belong in their everyday lives and their levels of political participation. Some studies found that larger and more diverse social networks are significantly linked to an increase in individuals' likelihood to participate in political and civic activities (Snow *et al.* 1980, McAdam 1988). This might be due either to the fact that these interactions create opportunities for receiving diverse, non-redundant political information that would reduce the costs of participation, or to direct requests for participation coming through these social interactions. Table 21 presents the fit of the models describing possible directions of the effects between the size of the social networks to which individuals belong and their level of political participation.

Table 21: Fit statistics for models of effects between social networks and political participation

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**	**Model 6**
Model fit						
AIC	7535	7533	7533	7533	**7531**	7532
BIC	7593	7587	7586	7587	**7581**	**7581**
Sample-size adjusted BIC	7548	7545	7545	7545	**7543**	**7543**
RMSEA	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
SRMR	**.000**	.007	.001	.002	.008	.008
Chi-squared	0	.191	.009	.023	.297	.471
DF	0	1	1	1	2	2
Correction factor	1	1.267	1.491	1.701	1.317	1.317

The TRd between models 1 and 2 is .19 and between models 1 and 3 is .01. This suggests that models 2 and 3 do not fit the data significantly worse than model 1. The difference between the models 4 and 5 is -.32 and between the models 4 and 6 is -.03. Model 5 and 6 fit the data equally well as model 4 does. When all measures of fit are considered, results show that models 5 and 6 are very close, though model 5 is preferred. This includes synchronous effects flowing from the size of the social interactions to political participation. Given the very close scores of the two models, in table 22 I report the estimates of testing both models 5 and 6.

Table 22: Estimates of reciprocal effects between social networks and political participation

	Model 5	**Model 6**
Stability effects		
Political participation		
2003→ 2006 (B2)	.51 (.09)	.52 (.09)
Social network		
2003→ 2006 (B4)	.45 (.09)	.42 (.09)
Contemporaneous effects		
Social network to participation		
2006 (B5)	.03 (.01)	
Political participation to social network		
2006 (B6)		.33 (.16)
Error covariance		
2003 (G1)	.7 (.2)	.72 (.2)

The results of estimating model 5 show that people who are embedded in larger social networks are more likely to take part in political activities. The results of model 6 show significant effects operating in the opposite direction, namely from participation in political and civic activities to diversity of social interactions. Given the fact that the two models fit approximately equally well, this is an indication that in the relationship between social networks

and participation there are probably reciprocal effects. Those people who belong to larger and potentially more diverse social networks are more politically active. In turn, their participation in political activities leads to an increase in the magnitude of their social interactions.

5.4. Conclusions and discussion

This chapter complemented the previous one and analyzed directions of effects between structural features of the micro social embeddedness and political communication, on the one side, and participation in political activities, on the other side. Previous research assumed that embeddedness in larger, more diverse, politicized and politically homogenous micro social milieus has a positive effect on levels of political participation. To test these assumptions, I estimated models that include different directions of effects between these variables.

I first tested statistical models that included unidirectional effects of micro social embeddedness and political communication on participation. In these models, political participation measured in 2006 was predicted by the size of social networks in which individuals are embedded, the proportion of political discussants among their core network members, and the level of political agreement in these conversations, all measured in 2006. I also tested for indirect effects of political discussion, which operate through an increase in political interest. Results indicated that the proportion of political discussants in one's close group has both a direct and an indirect effect on her level of participation in civic and political activities. Engagement in political discussion with peers increases political participation and political interest which, in turn, positively affects participation.

I also tested for alternative directions of the effects linking micro social embeddedness and political communication, on the one hand, and participation, on the other hand. Results

indicated that the models that best fit the data are the one with unidirectional effects flowing from political discussion to participation and the one that includes reciprocal effects between social networks and political participation. Those people who are part of larger social networks participate in more political activities and this participation in turn increases the size of their social networks. On the other hand, political discussion brings about mobilization, whereas participation is not followed by an increase in levels of political discussion. In general, these findings are in line with expectations formulated by theory and previous empirical studies. They make us more confident in claiming that the embeddedness in larger social networks, higher amount of political discussion and more politically homogeneous conversations with close others contribute to an increase in levels of participation, both directly and indirectly, through an increase in levels of political interest. Although reciprocal effects between the size of the social networks and political participation exist, the influences of social interactions on participation outweigh the ones flowing in the opposite direction.

Part of the limitations discussed in relation to the analysis conducted in the previous chapter applies here, too. Specifically, in models of reciprocal effects, the three year lag between the waves in my analysis might be considered too long for examining effects that occur over time. In addition to this, one might ponder on the influence that the electoral campaign occurring during this time might have had on the studied relationships. As noted before, the 2003 wave of the survey was conducted one year after the elections, whereas the 2006 data was collected shortly before the elections. For this reason, both levels of political discussion and participation recorded in 2006 might be higher than the ones in 2003. This is due to the fact that discussions are expected to become more politicized during election times and the supply of political events to increase. Therefore, part of the variation in political participation between the two waves might be due to the dynamic of the electoral campaign in 2006. One way to disentangle the effects of

networks from the influences exerted by electoral campaigns is to create two measures of participation – one including campaign-specific activities and the other including more generic political and civic activities – and to estimate the effects of interpersonal communication on each of them separately. This might be an avenue for future investigations in the relationships between political communication and participation in Hungary.

Having established that in the Hungarian context at least, political discussion positively affects participation – both directly and indirectly, via political interest – a legitimate question is why there is so weak empirical evidence with regard to direct effects of political discussion on forms of political cognition, such as political opinionation and knowledge. Some possible answers are worth reflecting on, as they might give us leads for future research into this area. One possibility is that the effects that I found are context specific. In other words, political conversations have a mobilizing role in Hungary, while playing no role for individual political cognition in Japan. Unfortunately, the lack of data about political participation in Japan and political cognition in Hungary precludes an investigation of similar propositions in both countries. However, a comparison with results of previous research on these relationships indicates that the findings from Hungary are in line with previous scholarship (Shah *et al.* 2005, Toka 2010, Klofstad 2011), whereas the results obtained in the Japanese context contradicts finding of the previous literature (Eveland *et al*. 2005, Eveland and Thomson 2006).

In a comparative assessment, Japanese were found to engage in political talk with their partners and close others significantly less than their counterparts from the other countries analyzed (Richardson and Beck 2007). This suggests that informal political conversation might not be a common practice in the Japanese society. Therefore, people's chances of being exposed to political disagreement as well as their abilities to debate and reflect on their own political views might be affected by this low level of exposure to political conversations. Japanese culture

also places great value on ‘social conformity’ and ‘group consensus’ (Richardson 1991). This suggests that people might refrain from engaging in political debates out of fear that revealing preferences might lead to political disagreement. Granted, social pressure was found to operate in other contexts, too (Mutz 2002b). However, political disagreement might be a stronger destabilizing force in the Japanese context. Overall, these are some possible explanations as to why we see such a low effect of political conversations on cognition. Therefore, an important avenue for future research is to test the effects of political discussion on various forms of political engagement in diverse macro contexts, i.e. countries. This would advance our understanding with regard to the general vs. contextual character of these influences. It is important to note that in both contexts though, I found strong evidence of political discussion affecting individual interest for politics and this mediated relationships between political talk and engagement is an equally relevant path of future investigation.

Another possible explanation for differences between the effects that political discussion has on the two forms of political engagement, i.e. participation and cognition, might be that political talk is better suited for transmitting participatory norms/mobilization rather than information and cognition. Also, the effect of political discussion on cognition might be moderated by some individual resources, such as level of education. One avenue for future research, therefore, is to explore the effects of political discussion on individuals who differ in their level of education and other forms of human capital. This is also relevant for answering the question whether social networks provide informational cues that can help those who are less politically knowledgeable to make choices that are more in line with their political interests.

Last but not least, one may reflect on the possibility that the Hungarian study has a design that is better suited for capturing effects of political discussion than the Japanese one. On the one hand, this might be true; as noted before, the content of the questions about political opinionation

in Japan might have been too abstract and therefore, less likely to have been discussed by ordinary people. On the other hand, possible influences of the electoral campaign in Hungary might have led to an overestimation of the effects that political discussion has on participation.

One suggestion that came both in these conclusions and those of the previous chapters is that the influence of interpersonal/political communication might be a function of macro contextual factors, such as the norms of social interaction and political communication at society level. This proposition constitutes the topic of the next chapter, in which I examine the 'supply' side of those features of interpersonal communication that were found to affect political engagement. I also explore their individual level determinants and test the relevance of authoritarian legacies on norms of social connectedness and political discussion. Results indicate that past authoritarian experiences still affect the way individuals connect and discuss politics.

Chapter 6: (Small) Talk that Matters: a comparative examination of social networks and political communication[55]

The results of the analysis reported in the previous chapters indicated that individuals' level of political engagement is significantly related to some features of the micro social environments in which they are embedded. The diversity of social interactions, their degree of politicization and level of political agreement/disagreement were found to be related to individual political interest, participation and cognition. In addition, some macro contextual features, such as length of democratic experience of a country, were found to moderate the relationship between micro social embeddedness and political engagement.

This chapter complements that analysis with an examination of the supply side of these politically relevant micro social features across societies that differ in their democratic experiences and political cultures. It seeks to find out to what extent the micro social milieus of people living in societies with different democratic traditions expose them to social interactions with potential for political influences. The analysis is not limited to a mere description of these patterns, though. It also tests whether past non-democratic experiences are significantly related to specific forms of social connectivity and political communication. This test is conducted both between new and old democracies and, within new democracies, between people who were socialized under authoritarian regimes and those who came of age under democratic regimes.

[55] This chapter includes some information that I used in my chapter 'The role of political discussion in developing democracies: Evidence from Hungary' published in 2010 in the edited volume 'Political Discussion in Modern Democracies: a comparative perspective', at Routledge. Specifically, the results based on the ISSP data and the method employed for testing differences between social networks usage patterns in new and old democracies were previously presented in this chapter.

Scientific and anecdotal accounts about life under authoritarian and totalitarian regimes speak about social and political experiences that might have affected individuals' social and political understanding and behavior. In spite of differences within these regime types, what they have in common is the experience of various amounts of limitations in the personal, civic, economic and political rights and liberties: limited political pluralism and an encouragement of citizens' political apathy in the authoritarian regimes and the control exerted by the state apparatus over all aspects of the society, including the repressive character of the security police, in the totalitarian systems (Linz 2000). These experiences might have led to the development of specific patterns of social interaction and political communication. Studies on post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, for instance, described them as societies dominated by fear, social distrust, atomization and withdrawal from the public sphere (Howard 2003, Badescu 2003, Flap and Volker 2003, Iglic 2003). Political issues were discussed only within the intimate networks, among close, trusted peers (Volker and Flap 2001). Similarly, research on post-authoritarian regimes indicates people's 'reluctance to engage in discussion with those with whom they disagree', especially in countries 'that had experienced polarizing and traumatizing partisan conflict during and after a civil war', such as Spain (Beck and Gunther 2010). In general, past experiences of authoritarian institutions, political information censorship and infringement of the freedom of speech might have made people from newly democratized countries with a totalitarian and authoritarian past less trustful, less accustomed to freely expressing their views on political issues, and less likely to engage in political debates with their peers.

To exemplify how micro and macro social structures interact, one element of everyday interpersonal communication that was found in previous literature to be significantly linked to political participation is frequency of political talk with peers. Participation in political discussion

though, is a function of both individual choice – demand side – and macro socio-contextual factors – supply side. At the extreme, in a society where people do not feel at ease sparking a conversation on political issues with their peers, the chances of an individual experiencing frequent political talk are seriously diminished. Granted, higher rates of casual political conversation in a society are necessary but not sufficient conditions either for the occurrence of political talk in some specific micro social contexts or for the materialization of political influences potentially flowing from these conversations.

This analysis draws on three cross-country survey data sets that include a large number of new and old democracies. Among the new democracies there are cases of both former authoritarian and totalitarian countries of Europe. The results of my analysis indicate that there are significant differences in the micro social settings in which people from new and old democracies reside. These differences are more evident for the diversity of social interactions and frequency of political conversation. On average, people from newly democratized countries appear to be part of smaller, less diverse and less politicized micro social settings. These apply to both post-communist countries of the Central and Eastern Europe (henceforth CEE countries) and post-authoritarian countries of Southern Europe. Results are less conclusive, though, with regard to the level of political agreement in these social interactions. This is due to the lack of data that would allow an appropriate test of these differences. However, in most of the European democracies with an authoritarian and totalitarian past, political discussion tends to be more agreeable than in the United States, although this difference disappears for the United States in the electoral year of 2004. The test of generational effects indicate that, within the group of newly democratized countries of CEE, there are differences in patterns of political discussion between those respondents who grew up under authoritarian regimes and those who were socialized in

democracies. Contrary to my expectations, young generations in these countries appear to be less engaged in informal political talk. On the other hand, young generations in newly democratized countries display similar patterns of social network usage as their counterparts from old democracies.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The first part lays out the theoretical and empirical background of this analysis. The second part introduces my hypotheses, the research design, and the data sets that I employ. In the third part, I present descriptive statistics for the three dimensions of social and political networks. I test whether the democratic experience of a country is a significant predictor of individuals' embeddedness in social and political discussion networks. In addition, I investigate possible differences in social network usage and political discussion patterns between people who were socialized under authoritarian regimes and those who came of age in democracies. The final part summarizes the findings and discusses them in relation to the results of the previous chapters.

6.1. Determinants of social networks and political discussion: state of the art

In spite of an extensive literature on the political relevance of some features of the micro social settings in which people are embedded in their everyday lives, little research focused on comparing them and their determinants, across societies that differ in their democratic experiences and political cultures. The few studies that investigated the antecedents of individuals' appetite for social interactions (Iglic and Fabregas 2007), participation in political conversations (Beck 1991, Schmitt-Beck 1994, Beck and Gunther 2010, Iglic and Fabregas 2007, Anderson and Paskeviciute 2005, Noelle-Neumann 1993), and exposure to political disagreement (Beck 1991, Schmitt-Beck 1994, Huckfeldt *et al.* 2004) found that it is both personal attributes,

such as age, education, political interest, and partisan preferences and macro contextual factors, such as level of social trust and the distribution of the political preferences at the country level that contribute to one's endowment with social capital and embeddedness in more politically conversational or homogeneous settings.

Among these studies, the one that speaks directly to the issues that I raise in this chapter is a comparative analysis of social networks and their determinants conducted by Iglic and Fabregas (2007). The results of their analysis indicate that people from some South and East European countries are, on average, part of smaller, less diverse, and stronger social networks than their counterparts from West European countries. In general, people from the former countries also appear to discuss politics less often and mostly among close, trusted others, in comparison to their fellows from West European societies (Iglic and Fabregas 2007). The strongest determinants of network multiplicity are individuals' education and employment and levels of general social trust at the country level (Iglic and Fabregas 2007: 199). Participation in political discussion appears to be the result of interest in politics and political socialization during the childhood, albeit with differences in the strength of these influences across groups of countries characterized by different patterns of social interactions.

> […] social networks matter for the frequency with which people engage in political discussion. Their impact is strong, significant, and largely independent from other variables. Both aspects of social networks, network composition and strength of ties, are crucial in their respect. People are more likely to discuss politics when they are in the company of other people with (sic!) who share the same political interests. Here, political discussion takes place regardless of the strength of ties, and discussing politics might be considered a constitutive element of their relationships. On the other hand, where political discussion develops as a by-product of otherwise 'non-political' social relationships, stronger social ties help. (Iglic and Fabregas 2007: 213)

Their conclusion suggests that countries should be seen as 'relevant contexts, which shape the level as well as the relationship between causal factors and social networks' (Iglic and Fabregas 2007: 215).

With regard to countries as 'relevant contexts', some studies discussed the way people's mentalities and forms of social interactions were shaped by particular historical events that contributed to the development of specific political structures and institutions (Flap and Volker 2003, Iglic 2003, Howard 2003). Specifically, these authors look at the impact that communist regimes have had on people's social networks and the way these micro social structures served as forms of politically relevant social capital during the transition to democratic regimes of these countries (Flap and Volker 2003, Howard 2003, Iglic 2003, Opp and Gern 1993). In the communist countries, the control exerted by the Party-state apparatus over all aspects of those societies and the surveillance of people's everyday lives organized by the secret police made fear, distrust and self-censorship the attributes of people's social personality. In response to these circumstances people developed a set of adaptive mechanisms and practices of social interactions. They invested in small, private and strong social networks and withdrew from larger, generic forms of social interactions that presented more risks, such as the one of being reported in case of addressing slight critiques to the current political system (Flap and Volker 2003, Howard 2003, Iglic 2003, Opp and Gern 1993).

Another reflection on the role that political regimes play on individuals' social behaviors comes from MacKuen (1990). His argument regards individuals' exposure to and tolerance of political disagreement in old and new democracies. Specifically, he hypothesized that citizens of newly democratized countries will be less likely to accept political disagreement in their private conversations with peers. This is due to the lack of coherent and unanimously accepted visions of

what are the main goals to be achieved in those societies. In the absence of a deep seated agreement on the basic principles that will govern those polities, disagreement will be avoided and perceived as having a destabilizing potential. On the contrary, in countries with a long democratic tradition disagreement with regard to preferences on policies, for instance, would be a rather neutral aspect of life, as people agree on the important principles governing their polities and thus will admit minor divergences with regard to specific political issues. They understand that disagreement is about how to reach the goals on which almost everybody agrees and not about the goals themselves. Therefore, in these societies people do not find it uneasy to be located in contexts that provide them with dissonant political views MacKuen (1990).

The results of some empirical studies substantiate MacKuen's claims. The micro-social settings in which people from some post-authoritarian regimes reside were found to have a high degree of political homogeneity (Morales 2010, Beck and Gunther 2010). Morales (2010) showed that in Spain and Greece people live in very homogeneous micro social milieus, which expose them to one-sided political messages and views. In a comparative perspective, people from these two countries 'are almost twice more likely than Americans and Germans to have concordant political views with all their discussion partners' (Morales 2010: 208). The explanation was sought for in the past political experiences of these countries. '[...] the similar degree of homogeneity in the Spanish and the Greek cases is interesting, not just because they are both new democracies, but also because their common experience of a bloody civil war prior to the authoritarian regime is likely to have shaped in similar ways how citizens relate to political disagreement in everyday life' (Morales 2010: 208). Similar arguments were brought by Beck and Gunther (2010). On the other hand, the results of a comparative study of patterns of political communication in East and West Germany indicated that, during the electoral campaign of 1990,

East Germans were exposed to more political disagreement in their social networks compared to their counterparts from West Germany (Schmitt-Beck 1994). An explanation of this finding is that these were the first free elections conducted in the unified Germany and 'the German party system had only just been transferred to East German voters' (Schmitt-Beck 1994: 394). As a result, the 'social structuration of party loyalties in East Germany appeared to be less clear-cut, and conflicting political affinities between communication partners were more numerous (Schmitt-Beck 1994: 394).

Granted, the preference for politically like-minded partners of discussion is not a peculiarity of new democracies alone. Psychologists show that individuals prefer to interact more frequently with those who share their views. When facing disagreement they will adopt several mechanisms, from withdrawal to adjusting their views so that agreement is finally reached (see Heider's balance theory). Some scholars, though, warned against the consequences that increased levels of political homogeneity might have both at individual and society levels. At the micro social level, embeddedness in politically homogeneous network reduces the chances for deliberation and, consequently, individuals' opportunities for increasing their political knowledge either by exposure to non-redundant informational sources or by reflecting over their own views. Also, lack of exposure to diverse political views and arguments might have detrimental consequences for individuals' levels of social and political tolerance. At the society level, it might lead to the occurrence of polarized electorates and party competition. '[…] greater polarisation encapsulates voters into relatively rigid voting blocks and reduces electoral availability and volatility, with the corresponding implications on politicians' accountability and responsiveness' (Morales 2010: 205).

With regard to frequency of political talk, Spanish people were found to discuss very little politics in their personal social networks (Iglic and Fabregas 2007, Richardson and Beck 2007, Morales 2010). The same reluctance of engaging in political conversations was found in other countries with a non-democratic past, namely Portugal, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania (Iglic and Fabregas 2007, Richardson and Beck 2007). On the other hand, in the challenging context of the first free elections of the unified Germany in 1990, East Germans were reporting more frequent political conversations in their social networks compared to West Germans (Schmitt-Beck 1994).

The results of these studies seem to indicate that past experiences of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes might have contributed to the development of specific patterns of social interactions and political communication. However, in the absence of a systematic empirical examination, we can only speculate about the development and survival of such patterns in the new democracies of South and Eastern Europe. It is to these hypotheses and their empirical test that I look at in the next sections of this chapter.

6.2. Hypotheses, research design, and data

The three politically relevant features of the micro social settings that I expect to have been shaped by past experiences of authoritarian institutions are size, degree of politicization and political agreement/disagreement. Based on the results and arguments formulated by the studies reviewed in the previous section of this chapter, I formulate the following hypotheses.

H1: People who live in societies with a more recent democratic tradition are, on average, part of smaller social networks than people living in countries with longer democratic experiences.

H2: People from newly democratized countries are, in general, less likely to discuss politics with their peers compared to people from consolidated democracies.

H3: People from newly democratized countries are, in general, part of more politically homogeneous micro social settings than their counterparts from consolidated democracies.

To test these hypotheses I employ quantitative methods of analysis and rely on cross-country survey data that include information about social and political discussion networks in old and new democracies. I first present descriptive measures of the three features of the micro social contexts. Each of the survey studies used different indicators of the size, degree of politicization and political homogeneity of the micro social settings. This makes possible to 'triangulate' the results, by getting to them from various measurement perspectives and, therefore, being able to test their consistency. This would be indicative of the validity of the findings. Additionally, these indicators complement each other and this gives the opportunity to compare them across countries that differ in their democratic experience and political cultures. The second method that I employ is a test of how significant length of democratic experience is in predicting individuals' styles of sociability and political communication.

The three survey data that I use are the Social Network Module of the 'International Social Survey Program' (ISSP), the 'Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy' (CID), and the Comparative National Election Project (CNEP). These studies include a large sample of countries and range over several decades. They used different instruments for eliciting

information about respondents' social networks, habits of discussing politics with their peers and the political homogeneity of these micro social settings.

In the Social Network Module of the ISSP, respondents were asked about three types of personal relationships, namely the number of friends from their workplace, from their neighbourhood, and the number of their close friends who are neither part of the family nor workmates and neighbors. In the CID study information about respondents' size and diversity of social interactions were obtained through various questions about their participation in semi-formalized social networks and voluntary organizations. In the same study, information about respondents' habits of discussing politics was obtained through questions about the frequency of engaging in political conversations as a by-product of interacting with various social groups, namely family, groups of friends, workmates, neighbors, and members of formal associations to which they belong. The CNEP study includes information about respondents' habits of discussing politics with four social groups, namely family, groups of friends, co-workers and neighbors, and the level of political agreement between respondents and each of these groups. In addition to this information about the politicization of the generic micro social milieus, this study includes a battery of questions about respondents' habits of discussing politics within more intimate social settings. This information was elicited by asking respondents how often they discuss politics with their spouse and two important people who were previously nominated without any hint at the political content of their interactions. Questions about agreement in the political views of respondents and each of these three people were subsequently asked.

Some of these measures of personal and political discussion networks are usually found in surveys concerned with these topics, whereas others are new. As stated before, the advantage of such a variety of measures is that the descriptive statistics for these indicators can be compared.

This is especially relevant when we have different indicators of the same concept, i.e. sociability, provided either by the same study or studies that include different countries. This makes possible the 'triangulation' or cross-examination of the results obtained by using different measures. Their consistency would be a proof of the validity of the findings. On the other hand, their inconsistency would suggest that the mixed and inconclusive results of previous research on the relationship between micro social embeddedness and political engagement might be due to differences in the way similar concepts were operationalized across various studies.

The Social Network Module of the ISSP study was conducted in two waves, one in 1986 and the other in 2001. The 1986 wave includes seven countries, namely Australia, the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, the United States, Great Britain, Hungary, and Italy. Data was collected using both mail and face-to-face interviews. Various sampling procedures were employed. These are multistage stratified random sample in the FRG, Hungary, Austria, Great Britain, and the US, simple random sample in Italy, and follow up survey of those persons who participated in the 1985 module of the ISSP study in Australia. The presence of Hungary, a communist country at that time, makes possible a comparative examination of people's social networks in non-democratic regimes and old democracies. However, the sole presence of Hungary imposes limitations in the comparative conclusions that can be drawn. The other wave of the ISSP survey was conducted in 2001 and included twenty-seven countries, with separate samples for East and West Germany, Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In my analysis I retain the group of European countries that are relevant for my research questions and the samples from the US and Canada, as representatives of consolidated democracies that are often discussed together with West European countries. From these countries, eight have either an authoritarian or totalitarian past and are part of the third wave of democratization (East Germany, Hungary,

Czech Republic, Slovenia, Poland, Russia, Spain and Latvia) and thirteen are countries with old democratic regimes (West Germany, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, US, Austria, Norway, Canada, Japan, France, Denmark, Switzerland, and Finland). The sampling procedures included simple and multi-stage stratified random sample of respondents who were older than eighteen. Data was collected through both face-to-face and mail interviews, with standardized questionnaire.

The CID project was conducted between 1999 and 2002 in twelve countries, with separate samples collected for East and West Germany. Out of the other eleven countries there are six with a more recent democratic experience (Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, Russia, Spain and Portugal) and five with a longer democratic past (Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland). Data was collected in face-to-face interviews in most of the countries, with the exception of Norway that had mail data collection and Switzerland, where data was collected by phone and mail. Various sampling procedures were employed in these countries. They include simple random sample in Sweden; stratified simple random sample in Norway; multistage, simple random sample in Switzerland; multistage, stratified simple random sample in Moldova and Romania; multistage stratified probability proportional to size in East and West Germany, Russia and Slovenia; disproportionally, stratified simple random sample in Denmark; multistage, disproportionally stratified in the Netherlands and Spain. The response rates vary from the lowest of 30% in the Netherlands to the highest of 78% in Romania, with an average figure of 55% across the thirteen national samples collected. The available number of cases goes from 990 in Slovenia to 4252 in Spain (Westholm *et al.* 2007: 26-31).

The CNEP study includes three waves. The first two were conducted in the beginning of the 1990s and the third one after 2000. Since not all of the national surveys included relevant data

for my study, the list of countries that I retain in my analysis are the UK and the US in 1992, Spain and Chile in 1993, Uruguay in 1994, Bulgaria, Greece and Italy in 1996, Hong Kong in 1998, South Africa, Spain, Uruguay, Greece, Mozambique, Taiwan, and the US in 2004, Mexico and Hungary in 2006, Argentina in 2007, and China in 2008. The sampling procedures were different and includes simple and multi-stage stratified random sample. Data was collected through either face-to-face or mail interviews, with the exception of the 2004 US study that was conducted on the internet. The CNEP study includes a wide range of countries that vary in their histories, cultures and institutions. While a few of them have a long democratic history most of them have a more recent democratic tradition or are not yet fully democratized.

6.3. Personal and political discussion networks: a comparative assessment

This section presents comparative measures of the size, degree of politicization and political agreement of the micro social settings in which individuals reside across countries that differ in their democratic experiences and political cultures. Various indicators of the same concept are reported whenever available data allows it. The section also includes the results of testing the three hypotheses about the effects that length of democratic experience has on forms of social interactions and political communication.

6.3.1. Size and diversity of social networks

Prior research on the political relevance of the micro social settings in which individuals are embedded indicated that the size and diversity of social interactions are significant antecedents of individuals' political mobilization. Being part of larger and more diverse social

networks increases the chances of receiving politically relevant information or being asked to participate in political activities. It is, therefore, important to understand whether the contexts in which people from different countries reside expose them to large and diverse social networks. Living in a country where, in general, people tend to have larger and more diverse networks is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for an individual to participate in many social interactions or be more politically engaged, as a result.

The first set of measures of the size and diversity of social networks draw on data from the two waves of the ISSP survey. In these studies, respondents were asked about the number of three types of personal connections, namely number of close friends, number of friends from the workplace and from the same neighbourhood. The exact questions are described in Appendix 4.

Table 23 presents the average and median[56] number of the three categories of friends on which respondents furnished information in the 1986 study. The results indicate that Hungary, a communist country at that time, displays the highest mean number of friends from the workplace and the lowest average number of choice-based close friends. The lack of information about other communist countries at that time precludes a firmer conclusion with regard to the effect that political culture has on individual social personality. 'The workplace appears to be the main venue of socializing for Hungarians, who otherwise display a low number of choice-based close friends. These findings confirm conclusions drawn in other studies where the small size and instrumental character of Hungarian networks was described (Angelusz and Tardos 2001; Utasi 1996). In a comparative perspective, Hungary prior to the 1990s appears to be a society characterized by a low level of social connectedness.' (Lup 2010: 187)

[56] 'The inclusion of median in addition to the customary measure of average is due to the fact that these variables are not normally distributed and therefore average alone might not be an informative descriptor of the data. Median offers information on the direction in which the data is skewed' (Lup 2010: 200).

Table 23: Average number of three types of friends (ISSP 1986)

Country	Workplace		Neighborhood		Other close	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Austria	.7	0	1	0	7.1	5
Great Britain	.8	0	1	0	4.1	4
The US	.9	0	1.5	0	7.1	5
West Germany	.5	0	.5	0	4.6	3
Hungary	1.4	1	.7	0	3.6	2
Australia	.7	0	.8	0	3.6	3
Italy	.1	0	1.1	0	3.9	3

Source: Lup 2010, p. 187

'The small size of social networks is not a particularity of the Hungarian society alone', though (Lup 2010). The 2001 module of the ISSP study includes a larger number of countries and therefore makes possible a comparative assessment of the average range of social ties in newly democratized countries and old democracies. Table 24 presents the mean and median values of the three types of relationships for each of the nineteen countries of the ISSP 2001 set. Separate data was collected from East and West Germany, Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Results indicate that this time it is Slovenia that displays the highest number of friends from the workplace. All the other countries show quite similar figures, with the exception of Spain and France where the average number of friends from the workplace is the lowest. For the category 'other close friends', which is more of a choice-based category of personal relations than the other two types, there is a number of countries that fit together. These are Hungary, Italy, Russia, Spain and Latvia where people have on average a smaller number of choice-based friends. The average number of close friends calculated for all countries in this wave is 5.8 and, with the exception of Italy, Northern Ireland, Austria and Finland, new democracies of CEE and Southern Europe display values below the mean. The only exception from this pattern is Slovenia, where

people report having on average about eight friends, which definitely places Slovenia among West European countries.

Table 24: Average number of three types of friends (ISSP 2001)

	Workplace		Neighbourhood		Other close	
Country	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
W. Germany	1.9	1	3	2	6.5	4
E. Germany	2.1	1	3	2	4.6	3
Great Britain	2	1	4	2	7.8	4
Northern Ireland	2.2	1	2.8	2	4.9	3
US	2.8	2	3.2	2	7.9	5
Austria	3	2	3.1	2	5.7	3
Hungary	1.9	1	1.5	0	2.8	1
Italy	2.2	2	1.7	1	3.6	2
Norway	2.9	2	4.1	3	10	7
Czech Republic	2	1	2.9	2	4.7	3
Slovenia	4.4.	3	5	3	7.9	5
Poland	2.2	1	2.5	1	5.4	3
Russia	2.2	1	2.3	1	3	1
Canada	2.9	1	4	3	6.7	4
Spain	.8	0	2.9	2	3.3	2
Latvia	1.3	1	1.3	1	2.3	2
France	.9	0	2.1	1	6.5	4
Denmark	1.2	0	2.4	1	8	6
Switzerland	2.5	1	3	2	10.3	4
Finland	2.4	2	2.4	2	4.6	4

To answer whether there are significant differences in the magnitude of social interactions between people from old and new democracies I conducted a test of countries' differentials in predicting one's magnitude of social interactions. [57] To this end, I define and test a statistical model in which the variable recording the number of close friends is expressed as a function of a set of demographics that are expected to be significant antecedents of one's endowment with

[57] This analysis based on ISSP data is part of my chapter 'The role of political discussion in developing democracies: Evidence from Hungary' published in 2010 in the edited volume 'Political Discussion in Modern Democracies: a comparative perspective', at Routledge. I thank Levente Littvay who suggested this method of analysis.

social capital. These are gender, age, education, marital and employment status, and residence. To account for country level influences, I include among the explanatory factors fourteen dichotomous variables corresponding to the countries introduced in the analysis, excluding the reference category, which is Finland.[58] 'Given the distribution of the dependent variable a zero-inflated Poisson model was defined. Two equations were simultaneously estimated, one where the dependent variable is the actual count and the other where the dependent variable was dichotomized to 0 if the respondent has no friends and 1 if she has at least one friend' (Lup 2010: 200). The program used for estimating these equations is Mplus 5.1. The estimates obtained at this step were subsequently used to compute two average sums of intercepts, one for the group of newly democratized countries (Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Poland, Russia, Spain, and Latvia) and the other for the old democracies (Great Britain, Italy, the US, Norway, Canada, Denmark, Switzerland).

Table 25: Test of significance of countries' differential effect on number of close friends

	Estimate	SE	P-value
Average intercept difference for dependent variable as count	-.484	.024	.000
Average intercept difference for dependent variable as dichotomous	.590[59]	.041	.000

Table 25 shows the results of the significance test of the differences between the average sums of intercepts calculated for the groups of newly democratized countries and older

[58] Only fourteen out of the nineteen country cases have information on all the predictors that I include in my statistical models.
[59] This estimate indicates the probability that the dependent variable is unable to assume any value except 0 (Lup 2010: 188).

democracies. The differences appear to be significant for both measures of the dependent variable. Respondents from new democracies appear to be more likely to have a smaller number of close friends.[60] This suggests that the macro social environment of countries with a more recent democratic experience might be less conducive to the development of extensive social networks. One can speculate that this is due to relatively recent experiences of authoritarian institutions but also to historical legacies of societies characterized by less developed public spheres.

A complementary explanation for the small size of social ties in new democracies is that personal networks might have preserved their functional centrality in people's everyday lives and continued to insulate them from broader social interactions. This argument was developed by Howard (2003). He believes that the persistence of friendship networks in the post-communist countries prevents people from joining voluntary organizations. Old habits of solving problems with the help of 'instrumental' social relations make people from post-communist countries less likely to invest in generic forms of social interactions. In addition, in the challenging context of transition to political and economic pluralism, close, intimate networks might have functioned as providers of social identity, support and trust. However, these results indicate that the same pattern of small social ties is specific to countries with a recent authoritarian past, too. The interpretation that I propose is path-dependency. Countries of East and Southern Europe have a limited or imposed experience of large political mobilization at the society level. These are societies that were predominantly rural until late, had a low or short penetration of mass parties, and limited historical experiences with free electoral competition under general franchise. Their

[60] I estimated same models with and without intra country and inter countries weights and the results are similar.

more recent experience of authoritarian and totalitarian institutions thus came as a continuation of historical legacies of parochial cultures.

A different set of measures of the size and diversity of social interactions come from the CID survey data. This study includes four such measures, namely membership in semi-formal groups of friends, support networks, voluntary associations and average number of friends in these associations. The countries included in the CID set are different from those that were part of the ISSP studies, especially with regard to the group of CEE countries. Table 26 reports the values of the four measures of embeddedness in formal groups and informal social networks.

The first column gives the percentages of respondents who declared to be part of a group of friends with whom they meet on a regular basis. The question reads as follows: '[…] do you belong to any group or network of friends or acquaintances with whom you have contact on a regular basis?' This indicator is a hybrid measure of membership in formal and informal social networks. The second column reports percentages of respondents who declared being part of a support network. To elicit this information, respondents were asked the following question: 'Do you actively provide any support for ill people, elderly neighbours, acquaintances or other people without doing it through an organization or club?' Column three includes information about the average number of voluntary associations in which people are involved. Three types of involvement were considered, namely being an active member, participating in activities, and donating money or doing work for these associations. Respondents were presented a list of twenty-eight types of organizations and associations and participation was considered if they declared doing at least one of the above mentioned activities – being an active member, participating in activities, and donating money or doing work - in relation to an association. The last column of table 26 gives information on the average number of associations in which people

have friends. Further to declaring that they are involved in any of the twenty-eight organizations, respondents were asked whether they have friends in each of them. An average measure of organizations in which respondents have friends was calculated for each country. Having friends in a larger number of organizations is seen as a measure of diversity of social interactions.

Table 26: Measures of social networks (CID)

	Group of friends (%)	**Support networks (%)**	**Involved in associations**	**Average friends in associations**
Switzerland 2000	55.7	53.2	5.03 (3.76)	2.48 (1.9)
Russia 2000	51.4	NA	.45 (.86)	1.38 (.86)
Portugal 2001	16.7	41.3	1.24 (1.52)	1.63 (1.14)
Denmark 1999	43.3	46.3	3.37(2.33)	1.87 (1.27)
West Germany 2001	24.7	30.8	1.59 (1.6)	1.83 (1.11)
East Germany 2001	15.5	24.9	1.05 (1.31)	1.62 (1.04)
Netherlands 2001	40	49.8	4.15 (3.21)	1.97 (1.67)
Slovenia 2001	54.6	74.4	1.7 (2.03)	2.04 (1.63)
Norway 2001	44	56.2	4.96 (3.64)	2.35 (1.86)
Romania 2001	6.8	80.1	.3 (.77)	1.41 (.89)
Moldova 2001	12.4	65.9	.37 (1.5)	1.39 (.84)
Spain 2002	31.9	16.9	1.04 (1.56)	1.65 (1.17)
Sweden 2002	25.3	35.4	3.61 (2.54)	2.49 (1.84)

While two out of these four measures – ‘groups of friends’ and ‘friends in associations’ – easily fit into the social network concept, the inclusion of the other two is more debatable. Beck and Gunther (2010), for instance, treat associational involvement as a very different kind of intermediary from social networks (with media being the third type along them). Moreover, ‘support networks’ might be indicative of economic conditions in a country rather than of social connectivity. On the other hand, ‘support networks’ can be seen as a proxy of ‘strong ties’, whereas associational involvement can give an indication about embeddedness in social settings that might function as suppliers of ‘weak ties’. Therefore, in spite of the fact that ‘support networks’ and ‘involvement in associations’ are less straightforward indicators of social

networks, I see them as measures of a broad concept of social connectivity. Moreover, they make possible the triangulation of my results from the perspective of a larger understanding of social connectedness.

The results from Table 26 show that the smallest percentage of people declaring that they are part of a group of friends with whom they meet on a regular basis is recorded in countries of East Europe – East Germany, Romania, and Moldova – and Southern Europe – Portugal. These are all countries with a recent democratic experience and an authoritarian or totalitarian past. In the case of support networks, the ranking observed before is reversed: the highest percentages of people declaring that they belong to such groups are recorded in East European countries – Romania, Slovenia and Moldova, whereas most of the West European countries display relatively low proportions of people involved in support groups. Social networks thus appear to be an important provider of social assistance in the CEE countries. This could be a behavior acquired during the communist times when social networks had multiple functions and provided various goods and services that were in short supply. An alternative explanation is that the high participation in support groups of the type described here in an effect of these countries going through economic hardships due to transition to a de-centralized economy.

The average figures of membership in voluntary associations clearly separates between CEE and South European countries on one side, and West European ones on the other side. Although this measure could be seen as an indicator of political and civic activism it also gives an indication about the level of social embeddedness in these countries. Participation in an extensive number of organizations gives people more opportunities for social connections. Three East European countries – Russia, Romania and Moldova – display the lowest level of membership in associations. They are closely followed by two East European – East Germany and Slovenia –

and two South European countries – Portugal and Spain. All these seven countries have a relatively recent democratic experience. West Germany though seems to be closer to this group of countries than to West European ones, where the average figures of associational membership are significantly higher. Results in the last column of table 26 shows that respondents from Russia, Romania and Moldova have friends in fewer associations than respondents in other countries do. They are relatively closely followed by Portugal, East Germany and Spain.

There are some patterns of social interactions that these results reveal. Two East European countries – Romania and Moldova – stand apart with regard to the smallest percentage of people who belong to a group of friends who meet on a regular basis, smallest average of associational membership and smallest average of friends from voluntary associations. On the other hand, these countries record the highest percentage of respondents being part of support networks, which are groups that provide help to ill or old people. People from Portugal and East Germany also have a very low presence in the semiformal groups of friends. At the other end of the scale, Switzerland, Russia, Slovenia and Norway record the highest percentage of people who belong to a group of friends with whom they meet on a regular basis. In short, people from some of the newly democratized countries are, in general, part of smaller and less diverse social networks.

These results partly match the findings of the analysis based on the ISSP data. There as well, some of the newly democratized countries of East and Southern Europe – Hungary, Russia, Latvia, and Spain – display the lowest average number of choice-based relationships. However, there is no straightforward conclusion that can be drawn based on these figures. Although for a few measures, such as associational membership, there is a clear separation between the groups of new and old democracies, no clear cut demarcation is visible for the other measures of social connectivity. For each of these measures there are a few outliers. Slovenia displays a much higher

figure than other newly democratized countries of Eastern Europe for three of these measures, namely the number of close friends, the percentage of people being part of a group of friends, and the average number of associations in which people have friends. Russia is another outlier when it comes to membership to semiformal groups of friends. On the other hand, West Germany is more similar to East Germany than to other countries with a longer democratic experience when it comes to membership in groups of friends and involvement in associations.

However, the mere eyeballing of these results tells us nothing about the significance of the differences in the measures of social connections in new and old democracies. Table 27 presents the results of testing the significance of the differences between levels of social connectivity in the two groups of countries. The research design follows the one employed for testing significance of differences based on the ISSP figures. Each of the four dependent variables – membership in groups of friends, membership in support groups, associational membership, and average number of associations in which respondents have friends – was regressed on a set of demographics that are expected to be significant antecedents of one's endowment with social capital, namely gender, age, education, marital and employment status, and residence. To account for macro contextual determinants of individuals' propensity for engaging in social interactions, I included among the explanatory variables twelve dichotomous variables corresponding to the countries introduced in the analysis, excluding the reference category, which is Slovenia. The estimates obtained from this model were subsequently used to compute two average sums of intercepts, one for the group of newly democratized countries (Russia, Portugal, East Germany, Romania, Moldova, and Spain) and the other one for the old democracies (Switzerland, Denmark, West Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden). The reference group is Slovenia. The program that I used for estimating these statistical models is MPlus 5.1. When the dependent

variable is dichotomous I employ logistic regression and when dependent variable is scale I use ordinary least squares regression (OLS).

Table 27: Test of significance of countries' differential effect on measures of social networks

	Estimate	SE	P-value
Group of friends	-.164	.009	.000
Support group	.192	.009	.000
Involvement in associations	-2.445	.089	.000
Friends in associations	-.159	.052	.002

Results in Table 27 indicate that all differences between the contribution of country-specific factors in explaining social interactions in new and old democracies are significant. People from new democracies are in general less likely to be part of semi-formal groups of friends, voluntary associations and less likely to have friends within the associations in which they participate. They are significantly more likely though to belong to a support group.[61]

We can see that after controlling for individual level determinants of the propensity to engage in social interactions, living in countries with more recent democratic experience has a significant effect on individuals' size and diversity of social networks. However, we should not forget that when looking at individual cases there are a few outliers. First of all, there is a clear cut distinction in the associational membership between East and South European countries on one side, and Nordic and West European countries on the other side. The percentage of people who declare to be involved in any way with a diverse range of organizations is the smallest in three of the post-communist countries previously characterized by the toughest totalitarian regimes, namely Russia, Romania and Moldova, closely followed by the post-authoritarian Spain

[61] I estimated the same models with and without intra country and inter countries weights and the results are similar.

and Portugal, and by East Germany. Slovenia also displays a lower figure, but so does West Germany. Secondly, membership in an organized group of friends is again the smallest in Romania, followed closely by Moldova, East Germany and Portugal. However, none of the other post communist or post-authoritarian countries follow this pattern. For a different measure of social relationships – number of choice-based friends – post-communist countries such as Hungary, Russia and Latvia show the smallest figures although Italy and Finland are also below the average. Thirdly, with regard to membership in support networks, it is mostly the former communist countries that display the highest percentages of people who declared being part of such groups. Finally, when looking at the number of ties emerging from associational participation, Russia, Romania, Moldova, Spain and Portugal display the lowest numbers. Slovenia is an outlier with higher figures than all other East European countries, whereas West Germany is the outlier from the group of Western democracies as it displays the relatively lowest figure for this measure. It is also important to that at the time of the interview both Moldova and Russia were considered to be only 'partly free' by Freedom House.

Hypothesis one is thus partly confirmed as, in general, people from newly democratized countries seem to be embedded in smaller and less diverse networks compared to their counterparts from older democracies. However, the presence of the outliers in both groups suggests that perhaps a single dimension that has at the one end newly democratized countries that emerged from communist and authoritarian regimes and at the other end countries with a longer democratic tradition is not enough for predicting patterns of sociability.

6.3.2. Politicization of networks

Structural features of the micro social contexts in which individuals reside give indirect information about their political relevance. Embeddedness in larger and more diverse social

networks provides opportunities for political deliberation and mobilization. However, the political content of these interactions is a more specific indicator of their potential for political influence. Everyday conversations on political issues might bring to surface, clarify, filter and aggregate private opinions. Some scholars see 'everyday talk' as part of the 'deliberative system' of a society, in which 'people come to understand better what they want and need, individually as well as collectively' (Mansbridge 1999: 211). 'Everyday talk anchors one end of a spectrum at whose other end lies the public decision-making assembly.' (Mansbridge 1999: 212) On the other hand, decisions reached at the other end of the deliberative system, which is in public decision-making assemblies, are interpreted and integrated in ordinary people's system of understandings by the means of everyday talk. Thus, everyday talk generates, transmits, and reintegrates political opinions and meanings.

The measures of political discussion reported in this section draw on CID data, which includes information from thirteen countries, out of which five are newer and eight are older democracies. Respondents were asked how often they discuss politics in general and when they get together with family, friends, workmates, neighbors, and people from the voluntary organizations in which they are involved. The possible answers range from 1, which means that they rarely engage in political conversations with the above mentioned groups to 4, which indicates that they often discuss politics with these group members.

Table 28 shows the average frequency of engaging in political discussions in general and within each of the five social settings, namely family, groups of friends, workmates, neighbors, and voluntary associations. Based on reports about the habits of discussing politics with each of these five relationships, I computed an average measure of the frequency of political talk. I see this as a better indicator for respondents' habits to engage in political talks as a by-product of

various social interactions that occur during everyday activities. This is due to the fact that respondents could reflect and give information about each of these settings separately as opposed to being asked about generic habits of political talk. I opted though for reporting both measures of general political talk, namely the one generated through the question : ‘How often do you generally talk about politics’ and the one I computed based on separate reports about habits of political discussion with different types of relationships.

Table 28: Average measures of political talk in various social settings (standard errors in parentheses)

	Generally	**With friends**	**With family**	**With neighbors**	**With workmates**	**With members of associations**	**Average measure**
Switzerland 2000	2.9 (.94)	2.72 (.82)	2.77 (.87)	1.85 (.79)	2.42 (.93)	2.2 (.93)	2.2 (.68)
Russia 2000	2.65 (1.07)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Portugal 2001	1.9 (.88)	1.92 (.87)	1.88 (.87)	1.42 (.65)	1.66 (.83)	1.33 (.66)	1.63 (.63)
Denmark 1999	2.78 (.9)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
W. Germany 2001	2.39 (.83)	2.44 (.81)	2.46 (.84)	1.72 (.75)	2.06 (.9)	2.07 (.82)	1.92 (.66)
E. Germany 2001	2.46 (.91)	2.48 (.87)	2.58 (.89)	1.81 (.8)	2.17 (.89)	1.98 (.93)	1.86 (.68)
Netherlands 2001	2.69 (.93)	2.53 (.94)	2.42 (.99)	1.59 (.81)	2.26 (1.08)	1.72 (.91)	2 (.66)
Slovenia 2001	2.28 (1)	2.35 (.89)	2.35 (.93)	1.66 (.85)	2.19 (.95)	1.68 (.89)	1.72 (.61)
Norway 2001	2.83 (.76)	2.75 (.74)	2.71 (.79)	1.87 (.8)	2.7 (.83)	2 (.87)	2.2 (.67)
Romania 2001	2.03 (1.03)	1.95 (1.02)	1.92 (1.02)	1.63 (.87)	1.76 (1.02)	1.22 (.63)	1.55 (.66)
Moldova 2001	2.42 (.97)	2.4 (1)	2.37 (1.04)	2.09 (.98)	2.16 (1.07)	1.59 (.92)	1.96 (.76)
Spain 2002	2.09 (.98)	2.02 (.96)	2.03 (.96)	1.33 (.61)	1.9 (.94)	1.59 (.87)	1.55 (.69)
Sweden 2002	2.57 (.88)	2.36 (.9)	2.48 (.92)	1.65 (.74)	2.39 (.9)	1.76 (.86)	2.01 (.67)

Results show that Romania and Portugal display the lowest figures of frequency of political talk with all the nominated groups. This result is more evident for the average measure of political talk across the five social settings (last column of table 28). Spain follows quite closely and, for the measure reported in the last column, Romania and Spain have the same score. Some countries from the CEE group of new democracies, though – East Germany, Moldova and Slovenia –, show values that are closer to the ones recorded by older democracies of the Western Europe. In general, the figures of the average measure of political talk across the five social settings (in the last column) are smaller than those based on respondents' self-declared frequency of generic political talk (in the first column).

However, it is important to see whether there are significant differences in the frequency of engaging in political talk between people from old and new democracies. To this end, I tested the significance of these differences for two measures of political discussion, namely the frequency of discussing politics in general and the average frequency of political discussion across the five reported micro social settings. Each of these two measures were modeled as a function of a set of socio-demographics, namely age, education, gender, marital and employment status, residence, self-reported measures of political interest and partisanship, and an index of frequency of following political news in four media. When the dependent variable is the average measure of talk across the five micro social settings, a measure of political socialization – frequency of political discussion in the family at the time of respondents' childhood – was added to the list of explanatory variables. In addition, I included twelve dichotomous variables (respectively ten for the case of average political talk across the five settings) corresponding to the countries included in the analysis, minus the control category, which is Sweden, in both equations. The estimates that I obtained were subsequently used to compute two average sums of

intercepts, one for the group of countries that have a more recent democratic experience (Russia, Portugal, East-Germany, Romania, Moldova, and Spain) and one for the countries with older democratic regimes (Switzerland, Denmark, West Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden). [62] The equations were estimated using MPlus 5.1. The statistical method employed for these tests is ordinary least squares regression (OLS).

Table 29: Test of significance of countries' differential effects on frequency of political talk

	Estimate	SE	P-value
Political talk generally	-.330	.012	.000
Average measure of political talk across five micro social settings	-.797	.032	.000

Table 29 presents the results of testing the differences in the habits of casual political talk of people living in old and new democracies. Results of both analyses indicate that people from countries with a more recent democratic experience are, in general, less likely to discuss politics than their counterparts from older democracies. This is even more evident when instead of using respondents' self-declared frequency of discussing politics in general I employed an average measure of respondents' frequency of political discussion with four social groups, namely family, groups of friends, colleagues, neighbors and people from the voluntary associations. Past experiences of censorship and lack of freedom of speech present throughout the CEE countries, although at different degrees, and the general political demobilization of the authoritarian regimes appear to have long lasting consequences on people's reluctance to engage in political conversations with their peers. The depoliticization of the mass public appears to be the outcome of both types of non-democratic regimes that characterized these countries at some point in time.

[62] I estimated the same equation with and without intra-country and inter-country weights and results were similar.

It is important though to keep in mind that in spite of sizeable differences that can be observed when grouping countries, there are outliers in both groups. This suggests that perhaps past experiences of authoritarian regimes do not provide sufficient macro level explanations for the differences we see across countries with regard to individuals' appetite for engaging in political conversation. An additional caveat is that the use of cross-sectional data offers information on patterns of political discussion at one point in time. This might coincide with specific events that increase people's interest in politics and levels of engagement in political discussions. Such an example is Moldova where data was collected in the electoral year of 2001. This might explain why we see so high figures for political talk in this country.

The results of this section confirm the second hypothesis: people from countries with a more recent democratic experience are less likely to participate in political conversations in their micro social settings. The explanation that I propose is that this is due to past experiences with authoritarian institutions that were either not encouraging any form of political mobilization or, even worse, were suppressing any form of political engagement that did not comply with the official state line. Moreover, even before the authoritarian episode these were countries with much less developed civic and political engagement than West European ones.

6.3.3. Political agreement

The other politically relevant feature of the micro social contexts is the extent to which they expose people to similar political views. Embeddedness in politically homogeneous micro social settings was shown to keep stable partisan preferences and work as a vehicle of political mobilization. The downside of exposure to politically one-sided settings, though, is that it locks people in environments that do not provide incentives for an increase in their levels of political

interest, opinionation and knowledge (but see Huckfeldt *et al.* 2004 for evidence that exposure to politically diverse at the network level depresses interest in politics). At the society level, too much political homogeneity might result into polarized electorates, social and political intolerance. The presence of diverse political views and opinions in one's social network is a minimum condition for deliberation to take place. It might lead to reflection on own political views and their reasons and, consequently, advance individuals' political knowledge.

However, political disagreement might be differently tolerated across various cultures. To investigate the levels of exposure to politically homogeneous micro social settings I draw on the CNEP data. The study gives information about congruence in the political views of respondents and their peers from two types of social networks, namely intimate, which include spouse and two very close relationships, and generic ones, which include four types of social relationships, namely family, friends, workmates and neighbours.

Table 30: Political agreement within intimate micro social settings

Country	With spouse	With 1st person	With 2nd person	Average agreement
Argentina 2007	1.94 (.86)	1.75 (.91)	1.66 (.91)	3.96 (2.17)
Bulgaria 1996	2.51 (.73)	2.41(.78)	2.42(.85)	4.31 (2.27)
Greece 1996	2.45 (.76)	2.25 (.74)	2.2 (.76)	4.33 (2.09)
Hungary 2006	2.68 (.72)	2.46 (.83)	2.36 (.86)	4.52 (2.32)
Italy 1996	2.27 (.82)	2.12 (1.02)	2.09 (1.05)	4.22 (2.2)
Spain 1993	2.39 (.77)	2.2 (.78)	2.16 (.76)	4 (2.04)
Spain 2004	2.39 (.72)	2.22 (.71)	NA	NA
Chile 1993	2.43 (.82)	2.42 (.85)	2.36 (.8)	4.62 (2.34)
Greece 2004	2.59 (.74)	2.4 (.83)	NA	NA
US 1992	1.54 (.76)	1.57 (.8)	1.58 (.81)	3.38 (1.84)
US 2004	2.61 (.61)	2.5 (.69)	2.4 (.75)	5.33 (2.13)
UK 1992	NA	1.37 (.81)	1.34 (.81)	NA
China 2008	2.47 (.76)	1.46 (1.08)	1.35 (1.01)	3.29 (2.32)
Hong Kong 1998	2.1 (.89)	1.96 (.79)	2 (.78)	3.15 (1.81)
Mexico 2006	2.04 (.94)	1.96 (1)	2.05 (.98)	2.81 (1.76)
Mozambique 2004	2.27 (.87)	2.1 (.91)	1.98 (.94)	4.54 (2.47)
South Africa 2004	2.21 (.75)	1.66 (1.1)	1.97 (1)	2.8 (2.08)
Taiwan 2004	2.24 (.65)	1.78 (.95)	1.74 (.92)	3.91 (2.17)
Uruguay 1994	NA	2.27 (.84)	2.2 (.8)	NA
Uruguay 2004	2.48 (.71)	2.35 (.76)	NA	NA

Table 30 reports the results of political homogeneity at dyadic level – between respondents and each of the three members of the intimate social settings – and an average measure of political agreement at group level. Information about political agreement was obtained by asking those respondents who declared discussing politics with each of the three relationships how often they agreed. These variables take values from 0 to 3, where 0 indicates that respondents and their discussants agree often and 3 shows that they never agree.

Average measures of agreement with spouse shows relatively similar values across countries, with the exception of the US in 1992, closely followed by Argentina in 2007, where agreement seems to be lower than in the other countries. For political similarity between respondents and the first and second persons, the countries that display higher figures are

Argentina in 2007, Greece, Bulgaria and Italy in 1996, Hungary in 2006, Spain both in 1993 and 2004, Chile in 1993, Mozambique and the US in 2004, Uruguay both in 1994 and 2004. With regard to the average level of political agreement within small, intimate networks the countries displaying the highest values are Chile and Spain in 1993, Mozambique and the US in 2004, and Hungary in 2006. With the exception of the US in 2004 the countries with high levels of political homogeneity are new democracies. In the case of the US, political conversations in the micro social settings appear to mirror the highly polarized political competition of the recent years. Specifically, 2004 was an electoral year and this might explain the high level of agreement between respondents and their very close others. Beck and Gunther (2010) employed the same CNEP data to analyze the level of politicization of the micro social settings. They found that 'the United States and Mozambique are perhaps generally high in discussion of politics within interpersonal networks as a result of a longer-term polarization of politics' (Beck and Gunther 2010: 28). In Mozambique, the 'relatively recent civil war […] (1977-1992) between the two sides that provide the bases of the two major parties today appears to have culminated in an intense politicization of discussion within all kinds of social networks […]' (Beck and Gunther 2010: 28).

Intimate settings though are in general more likely to be homogeneous. This is due to the fact that people select their spouses and close friends based on commonly shared values and preferences. Although similarity of political views might not be among the strongest criteria for choosing one's partner or close friends it is highly probable that it is part of a more general system of beliefs that makes similar people more likely to engage in close relationships. Moreover, frequent interactions increase the chances that close relationships' views will adjust one to the other.

Therefore, even more relevant for understanding how much political disagreement is tolerated in a society is to look at the more generic social environments in which individuals are embedded in their everyday lives. To obtain this information, respondents were asked whether, when discussing politics, they usually agree or disagree with three types of relationships, namely friends, colleagues and neighbors. Table 31 presents the percentages of people who declared agreeing with each of these three groups. The last column is an average measure of general agreement within the three settings. This gives a good approximation of the level of political homogeneity in the everyday social settings in which individuals reside. Unfortunately data about agreement in these more generic micro social settings was collected only in seven countries.

Results in Table 31 indicate that the highest percentages of political agreement with friends are recorded in Hong Kong in 1998, Spain in 1993, and Uruguay in 1994. In the other countries, respondents appear to experience a lot of political disagreement when discussing politics with their friends. Especially Greece in 1996 and Chile in 2000 seem to be the two countries where most of the respondents declare that they disagree with their friends on political issues. This contradicts the findings of some other studies (see Morales 2010) where Greece was shown to be characterized by highly homogeneous networks of political discussion. Also, it is important to note the decrease in political homogeneity in Chile, a country with a past authoritarian regime. It suggests that the experience of political pluralism in this country might be responsible for an increased tolerance to political disagreement in everyday life. High levels of agreement with workmates and neighbors are recorded in Hong Kong in 1998, Chile and Spain in 1993, and Uruguay in 1994. Also, Bulgaria in 1996 displays a high percentage of people who declare agreeing with their neighbors. With regard to the average levels of agreement with the three groups, the countries that show the highest figures are Spain in 1993 closely followed by

Hong Kong in 1998, Uruguay in 1994, Chile in 1993 and Bulgaria in 1996. Some of them had a relatively recent democratic experience at the time of the study (Spain and Uruguay), whereas others were not fully democratic regimes (Hong Kong). Two of them, namely Chile in 1993 and Bulgaria in 1996, were in the process of transition from authoritarian regimes.

Table 31: Level of political agreement within various generic groups

Country	**With friends (%)**	**With workmates (%)**	**With neighbors (%)**	**Average agreement**
Bulgaria 1996	57	35	42	.31 (.3)
Greece 1996	29	24	25	.17 (.24)
Spain 1993	65	54	49	.36 (.31)
Uruguay 1994	56	51	46	.33 (.31)
Chile 1993	48	53	51	.32 (.3)
Chile 2000	39	39	41	.24 (.27)
Hong Kong 1998	71	66	77	.34 (.26)

The sole presence of the US from the group of countries with a long democratic experience prevents a more systematic assessment of the differences in the political homogeneity of generic micro settings in new and old democracies. Hypothesis three is partly confirmed, as we see that an important number of newly democratized countries – some of them even in their years of transition to democratic regimes – are among the polities with highest levels of political homogeneity. However, a few outliers from the group of new democracies suggest that some other explanations should be sought for when exploring macro level determinants of political homogeneity.

6.3.4. Generational differences in social connectivity and political discussion patterns

Having established that people from countries with a more recent democratic experience have different social network usage patterns than people who live in older democracies, an additional question is whether the legacies of authoritarian regimes are more pregnant for people who were socialized under those regimes as opposed to the younger generations who grew up in democratic times. These expectations build on theories of socialization, which show that individuals are particularly open to influences exerted by their social environment during adolescence (Jenings 1987). Following this argument, I expect that people who experienced limitations in their personal and political rights and liberties in their formative years will have different patterns of attending to interpersonal communication than those who came of age during democratization. Specifically, the latter category is expected to be part of larger social networks and discuss politics more often with peers. On the other hand, the role of the family as an agent of socialization with long-lasting effects on one's political behavior (especially partisanship) was emphasized by research of political socialization (Beck 1974, Jenings and Niemi quoted in Knoke 1990). More recent studies showed that political behavior is strongly shaped by family (Zuckerman *et al.* 2007). Following this argument, the legacies of authoritarian regimes might be transmitted from older to younger generations.

The effects of these legacies on nowadays network usage patterns might be moderated by the former regime type. There are differences in how repressive these regimes were and this might have had consequences for their citizens' social behavior and political understanding. With regard to the past communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe, for instance, Kitschelt and his colleagues (Kitschelt *et al.* 1999) distinguish three types, namely 'national accommodative', 'bureaucratic authoritarian', and 'patrimonial communism'. The 'national accommodative' type

relied on a compromise with citizens, who were granted some civil and economic rights and liberties in exchange to their lack of manifest opposition to the single party rule. The 'bureaucratic-authoritarian communism' was based on higher repression toward the opponents of the regime and functioned as a totalitarian model of a party state. Finally, the 'patrimonial communism' was the most repressive regime type, extremely corrupt and with political power concentrated around one leader or small group (Kitschelt *et al.* 1999).

To test the hypothesis of a difference in networks usage patterns between people who were socialized under authoritarian regimes and those who became adults in democracies, I draw on the CID data. I test generational differences in two forms of social interactions and political communication. One pertains to patterns of sociability – whether the person belong to a groups of friends who meet on a regular basis – and one measures people's habits of engaging in informal political conversations – frequency of general political talk. Following Kitschelt and his colleagues' classification (Kitschelt *et al.* 1999), three of the countries included in the CID study belonged to the 'patrimonial communism' – Russia, Moldova, and Romania –, one to the 'bureaucratic-authoritarian' type – German Democratic Republic-, and one to the 'national-accommodative' type – Slovenia.

To capture generational effects, I computed a variable that separates between those who were socialized prior to and after the democratic era. The cutting point is age 18, which is seen as the time when a person enters adulthood and is first eligible to vote in these countries. A major problem of these analyses, though, is that generational effects might overlap with life cycle influences. Specifically, younger people might have, in general, more extensive social networks and talk politics more often. If this is the case, the finding that people who became of age under democracies are more sociable and discuss politics more often than the generations socialized

under authoritarian regimes reflects differences in lifestyles between younger and older generations, in general, rather than effects of past legacies. One way to control for this is to conduct similar tests both in countries with an authoritarian past and with an uninterrupted democratic experience. Observed differences in networks usage patterns between people from the two groups of countries can inform conclusions on the role of socialization under different regime types. However, this is an imperfect and limited attempt to disentangle the two types of effects and, therefore, it calls for great care in interpreting the results of these tests.

Table 32 reports the results of testing generational effects on participation in informal political discussion. These effects are tested separately in the group of CEE countries that democratized in the beginning of the 1990s – Russia, Romania, Moldova, Slovenia and the Democratic Republic of Germany – and in the two South European countries that democratized in the 1970s – Spain and Portugal. As a sort of control, same effects are tested in the group of countries with longer democratic experience. Political discussion is estimated as a function of age groups, education, gender, marital and employment status, and urban residence. The method of estimation is ordinary least squares regression (OLS). In each of these tests I introduce dichotomous variables corresponding to the countries included in the analysis, minus the reference category.

Table 32: Determinants of frequency of general political discussion; OLS estimates

Country	**CEE**[63]	**South**[64]	**West** [65]
Age group	-.01 (.03)	.05* (.02)	.05**(.02)
Female	-.04 (.02)	-.04 (.02)	.02 (.01)
Education	.05*** (.01)	.03*** (.004)	.02*** (.003)
Employed	.09*** (.02)	.04 (.02)	.09***(.01)
Married	.04 (.02)	.06** (.02)	.03 (.02)
Urban	.04 (.02)	.04 (.03)	.01 (.01)
Media	.05*** (.004)	.05*** (.004)	.05*** (.003)
Political interest	.54*** (.02)	.57*** (.01)	.51*** (.01)
Partisanship	.08*** (.03)	.09*** (.02)	.04** (.02)
Russia	.02 (.04)		
East-Germany	-.11*** (.04)		
Romania	-.12*** (.04)		
Moldova	.03 (.04)		
Spain		.19*** (.03)	
Switzerland			.42*** (.02)
Denmark			.25*** (.02)
Netherlands			.18*** (.02)
Norway			.27*** (.02)
Sweden			.05 (.02)
Constant	.32*** (.05)	.17*** (.05)	.33*** (.04)
No. observations	6172	5262	10993
R-squared	.44	.47	.46
F-test	320.53	449.89	588.53
Prob > F	.000	.000	.000

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

The results indicate that in the group of CEE countries with democratization starting in the early 1990s, people who were socialized during democratic times tend to participate less in political conversations with their peers. Although this effect does not reach a conventional level of statistical significance, the sign of the relationship between age groups and political discussion indicates that this finding contradicts my expectation. In the case of the two South European countries that democratized in the 1970s, results show that the generation who came of age in

[63] Reference category is Slovenia.
[64] Reference category is Portugal.
[65] Reference category is West Germany.

democratic times reports more frequent engagement in informal political talk. This finding confirms my hypothesis. However, as stated before, generational and life cycle effects can be easily confounded. A partial control for this is to conduct a similar test in countries with longer democratic experience. Results show that in this latter group of countries, young people are more likely to discuss politics.[66] In a comparison of the results across the three groups of countries, the findings from the CEE countries come as a puzzle. Contrary to my expectations, people who came of age in democratic times do not discuss politics more often than those who were socialized under authoritarian regimes.

To have a better understanding of individual cases, I conducted similar tests in each of the countries, separately. The results of this investigation are reported in Table 33.

[66] For this group of countries, I employ the same cutting point for computing the two age groups as in the case of the CEE countries. I also tested the same models with age categories corresponding to those in the South European group and I obtained similar results.

Table 33: Determinants of general political discussion; OLS estimates

Country	**Russia**	**Moldova**	**Romania**	**Slovenia**	**E. Germany**	**Spain**	**Portugal**
Age group	.04 (.06)	-.03 (.07)	-.03 (.07)	-.06 (.06)	.04 (.07)	.09*** (.03)	-.12** (.05)
Female	.08 (.05)	-.16*** (.05)	-.004 (.05)	-.06 (.05)	-.13** (.05)	-.03 (.02)	-.08 (.04)
Education	.04***(.01)	.03**(.01)	.04*** (.01)	.04 (.02)	.05*** (.01)	.03*** (.01)	.05*** (.02)
Employed	.17*** (.05)	-.03 (.06)	.24*** (.06)	.05 (.05)	-.004 (.05)	.04 (.03)	.05 (.05)
Married	.12** (.05)	.01 (.06)	-.01 (.06)	.06 (.06)	-.03 (.05)	.06** (.02)	.06 (.05)
Urban	.12** (.05)	.05 (.05)	.06 (.05)	.03 (.05)	-.09 (.05)	.08** (.03)	-.06 (.04)
Media	.07*** (.01)	.04*** (.01)	.05*** (.01)	.06*** (.01)	.05*** (.01)	.05*** (.004)	.03*** (.01)
Political interest	.52*** (.03)	.66*** (.04)	.61*** (.04)	.62*** (.04)	.41*** (.04)	.56*** (.02)	.59*** (.03)
Partisanship	.17*** (.05)	-.05 (.06)	.11 (.06)	.08 (.06)	.05 (.06)	.1*** (.03)	.08 (.05)
Constant	.06 (.1)	.44*** (.11)	.05 (.1)	.21 (.11)	.77*** (.11)	.28*** (.05)	.4*** (.1)
No. observations	1733	1219	1217	983	1013	4243	1010
R-squared	.39	.43	.49	.32	.39	.47	.47
F-test	117.13	67.66	105.7	54.41	68.28	396.88	96.16
Prob > F	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Continued on next page

Table 33: Determinants of general political discussion; OLS estimates

Country	**W. Germany**	**Netherlands**	**Switzerland**	**Denmark**	**Norway**	**Sweden**
Age	14*** (.05)	-.01 (.06)	.03 (.05)	.01 (.05)	-.03 (.04)	.14** (.05)
Female	-.02 (.03)	.03 (.04)	.08** (.04)	-.04 (.03)	.03 (.03)	.06 (.04)
Education	.04*** (.01)	.04** (.01)	.02*** (.01)	.02** (.01)	.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Employed	.1*** (.03)	.1** (.04)	.08** (.04)	.05 (.04)	.09*** (.03)	.1** (.04)
Married	.09** (.03)	-.03 (.04)	.03 (.04)	.07 (.04)	-.03 (.03)	.02 (.04)
Urban	.01 (.04)	.02 (.04)	-.02 (.04)	.04 (.03)	.00 (.03)	.04 (.04)
Media	.05*** (.01)	.06*** (.01)	.05*** (.01)	.06*** (.01)	.06*** (.01)	.07*** (.01)
Political interest	.37*** (.02)	.57*** (.03)	.58*** (.02)	.55*** (.02)	.5*** (.02)	.48*** (.03)
Partisanship	.02 (.04)	.11** (.04)	.09** (.05)	-.06 (.03)	.05 (.03)	.02 (.04)
Constant	.64*** (.08)	.22*** (.1)	.64*** (.09)	.4*** (.09)	.72*** (.07)	.3*** (.1)
No. observations	1991	1649	2145	1640	2297	1271
R-squared	.34	.51	.46	.48	.41	.41
F-test	107.9	156.11	150.18	163.6	157.32	94.31
Prob > F	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

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

Results reveal mixed evidence on generational effects in countries with an authoritarian past. In two countries that democratized in the beginning of the 1990s, namely Russia and the former Democratic Republic of Germany, people who were socialized in democratic times appear to discuss more often politics. Although the effects of age groups on political discussion do not reach a conventional level of statistical significance, they are in the expected direction. However, for the other countries with a more recent democratic experience, namely Moldova, Romania and Slovenia, the group of people who came of age under democracy appears to discuss politics less. However, the effects of age groups on political communication do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. In the case of Spain and Portugal, there is mixed evidence on my hypothesis. While in Spain people who were socialized in democratic times appear to be more often engaged in political conversations, the opposite is true for Portugal.

The results from Russia are in the same direction with the findings of a recent study by Sokhey and Sokhey (2011), whereas those from Romania and Moldova partly contradict their findings. However, given the focus of their research, i.e. different former communist regime types within CEE countries, there is limited scope for a comparison between their results and those reached in my analysis. In their study, the authors explored generational effects and former regime type influences on political discussion in the new democracies of CEE. They found that 'individuals in countries with more authoritarian legacies are significantly less likely to report an absence of discussion […] with respect to both national and European political matters […] (Sokhey and Sokhey 2011: 14). However, when generational differences are tested, their results indicated that the 'negative effect of authoritarian legacy "flattens" out among individuals in older cohorts – or put differently, older respondents in countries with more authoritarian legacies are more likely to report the absence of political discussion […] (Sokhey and Sokhey 2011: 14).

This latter finding is consistent with my results from Russia but not with those from Romania and Moldova, two countries that experienced more repressive regime types.

The question is to what extent these results are indicative of life cycles rather than past legacies effects. The results of testing the influences of the same age groups in countries with long democratic experiences show that in most of these countries, with the exception of the Netherlands and Norway, younger generations are more likely to be part of political conversations. The departure from this trend in some CEE countries invites for further reflection. Although this is beyond the scope of my current investigation, I see the regime type and the openness of the post-communist political competition as two possible leads worth of further investigation.

Next, I tested the effects of generational differences in network usage patterns. The measure of membership in groups of friends who meet on a regular basis was regressed on age groups, education, gender, employment and marital status and urban residence. The results of estimating these effects in the three groups of countries are reported in table 34. The estimation method is logistic regression.

Table 34: Determinants of membership to a group of friends; logistic regression estimates

Country	**CEE**[67]	**South**[68]	**West**[69]
Age	.23** (.08)	.2** (.07)	.25*** (.06)
Female	-.03 (.07)	-.29*** (.06)	.24*** (.04)
Education	.13*** (.02)	.09*** (.01)	.09*** (.01)
Employed	.08 (.07)	.2*** (.07)	.19*** (.04)
Married	-.11 (.07)	-.39*** (.07)	-.01 (.05)
Urban	-.02 (.07)	-.1 (.08)	-.03 (.05)
Russia	-.38*** (.09)		
East-Germany	-2*** (.12)		
Romania	-2.87*** (.14)		
Moldova	-2.43*** (.13)		
Spain		1.02*** (.1)	
Switzerland			1.24*** (.07)
Denmark			.93*** (.08)
Netherlands			.81*** (.08)
Norway			.94*** (.07)
Sweden			-.03 (.09)
Constant	-.29** (.11)	-1.73*** (.13)	-1.75*** (.08)
No. observations	5699	5107	10368
Nagelkerke R-squared	.29	.1	.1
-2LL	5743.81	6045.17	13205.75
Chi-square	12.55 (.13)	13.56 (.09)	23.8 (.002)

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

The results show that, across all countries, young people are more likely to be part of a group of friends who meet on a regular basis. On this specific indicator of social connectivity, young generations from countries with a more recent democratic experience appear to be similar to their counterparts from old democracies. This confirms my expectation about generation effects on social network usage. However, we should keep in mind that with the data I have there are no possible ways to separate between generational and life cycle effects. Therefore, they should be seen as results of a preliminary inquiry into generational effects on social network

[67] Reference category is Slovenia.
[68] Reference category is Portugal.
[69] Reference category is West Germany.

usage patterns between people who were socialized under authoritarian regimes and those who came of age in democracies.

6.4. Conclusions

This chapter mapped those features of the micro social settings that were previously found to be politically relevant. Size and diversity, levels of politicization and political homogeneity of the social interactions were comparatively looked at. Their variance was hypothesized to be a function of both individual characteristics and macro contextual variables related to length of democratic experience in the countries surveyed. Past experiences of limited political pluralism, political apathy or exclusive mobilization by the unique party in the communist countries, lack of freedom of speech and censorship were expected to influence social and political behaviors of individuals living in societies with short or interrupted democratic experiences. Specifically, people from newly democratized countries were expected to be part of smaller, less diverse and politicized and more politically homogeneous micro social settings.

Results confirmed these expectations in general, albeit outliers were found in both groups of countries. People from countries with a more recent democratic experience appear to be part of smaller and less diverse social networks. They are also less likely to discuss politics with their peers compared to people from countries with longer democratic experiences. Moreover, they seem to have little opportunities for political deliberation as most of the settings in which they are embedded include politically like-minded others. There are exceptions though from these patterns and this suggests that some other macro level variables are responsible for differences in individuals' exposure to large, diverse, politicized and unbiased micro social settings. It is important to note that these analyses drew on various data sets, which included diverse indicators

of networks size, politicization and homogeneity. This made possible to 'triangulate' the results. The consistency of the findings that I obtained is an indicator of their validity.

The results of testing generational effects on social networks usage and political discussion patterns indicate differences between people who grew up under authoritarian regimes and those who were socialized in democracies. Contrary to my expectations, young generations in newly democratized countries are less likely to engage in political conversations with peers. A comparison with young people's behaviors in old democracies indicates that this also runs against the trend in these countries. Possible explanations of this form of political demobilization should be sought out for in the type of past authoritarian regimes of these countries and the degree of openness of political competition in the aftermath of democratization. On the other hand, results of testing generational effects on social network usage indicate that people who were socialized under democratic regimes are more likely to report membership in a group of friends. Although this finding confirms my hypothesis, there is an important caveat stemming from the impossibility to separate between generational and life cycle effects in my analysis.

How do these findings complement my previous results? This analysis included a larger number of countries than the ones I could consider in the study of the relationship between micro social embeddedness and political engagement. In that study, some features of the micro social environments were found to be significant antecedents of individuals' political engagement. Specifically, frequent political discussion with peers appeared to be significantly linked to increased levels of political interest, which in turn is the most significant predictor of both political participation and knowledge. Political similarity was found to contribute to an increase in electoral participation but to decrease incentives for getting more political information from media sources. Micro social settings in newly democratized countries are less politicized and

more homogenous. This might act as an obstacle for individuals' political engagement in these countries.

Conclusions

In my dissertation I explored the role played by the micro social contexts in which individuals are embedded on their political engagement. This examination included a comparative analysis of the relationships between individual micro social embeddedness and political engagement, an investigation of the direction of effects flowing between the two, and a look at the supply of the politically relevant features of micro social contexts and their determinants across countries with different democratic experiences.

In chapter one I introduced the main concepts employed in my dissertation, namely social networks, political talk and homogeneity/heterogeneity. I discussed the usage of these concepts in the previous literature and emphasized terminological inconsistencies in the way they were employed. I presented the main findings of extant literature on social influences in politics and I highlighted their inconsistencies and limitations. This led me to introducing my research questions and information on the data employed for answering them.

In chapter two and three I examined the effects that intimate and generic social networks have on individual political participation and knowledge, across countries diverse in their histories and political cultures, including dissimilar democratic experiences. The effects of the two types of social settings were explored in conjunction with influences of macro contextual factors, namely length of democratic experience, economic development and the degree of politicization and agreement characterizing informal conversations at country level. Results indicated that there are both similarities and differences in the effects of the two types of social settings. Moreover, they were shown to operate both directly and indirectly, through an increase in attentiveness to politics. Specifically, frequency of political talk in intimate settings was found

to increase political cognition in those countries characterized by extensive political talk in micro social settings. Political agreement with intimates appeared to encourage electoral participation, especially in newly democratized countries. It also appeared to contribute to an increase in individual political knowledge in older democracies, more economically developed countries, and societies that have higher averages of political agreement. On the other hand, frequent political talk within generic social settings was found to generate an increase in political knowledge in less developed countries. 'Weak ties' thus appeared to function as an alternative channel of political information in those environments in which media access is limited for economic reasons. With regard to the indirect effects, my results indicated that participation in political discussion leads to an increase in individuals' attention to political news in media and general political interest. Political interest and media attentiveness are, in turn, the most significant antecedents of individual turnout and political knowledge. Macro level variables were found to moderate some of these effects. Political talk in intimate settings, for instance, ceases to have a stimulating effect on media attentiveness in those societies characterized by extensive political talk in informal settings. Additionally, political agreement with intimates acts as a disincentive for getting information via various media; this effect appeared to be stronger in older democracies and more economically developed countries. Overall, these findings indicated that the influences stemming from micro social interactions are related to contextual characteristics at the macro, i.e. country level.

In chapters four and five, the assumption that effects flow from political discussion to political engagement is questioned and alternative directions of influence between political communication, participation and cognition were tested. These investigations drew on panel data collected in national survey studies conducted in Japan and Hungary. Results showed that the

assumption present in the previous literature might not be always tenable. In the context of Japan, participation in informal political conversations is not accompanied by an increase in levels of political knowledge and opinionation. On the contrary, my results suggested that those who are more politically knowledgeable and opinionated will be more likely to engage in political conversations with their peers. On the other hand, there is evidence of reciprocal effects between political talk and interest, in the Japanese context. Participation in frequent political talk with members of less tightly connected social networks is associated with higher rates of political interest which, in turn, feeds into an increased appetite for political communication. With regard to the relationship between political discussion and participation, results confirmed the expectations formulated by the previous literature; in the context of Hungary, frequent political conversations with peers was found to stimulate participation in political and civic activities.

In chapter six I examined the supply side of those features of the micro social settings that were found to be politically relevant. Specifically, I looked at differences in average social networks size, level of politicization and political agreement across countries that differ in their democratic experiences. The results indicated that people from countries with a more recent democratic experience are, in general, part of smaller, less diverse, less politicized and more politically homogeneous social networks compared to their counterparts from older democracies. Within the group of newly democratized countries, people growing up during a democratic period displayed different social networks usage and political discussion patterns compared to those who became adults under authoritarian regimes. They were found to be more similar to young generations from consolidated democracies. However, contrary to my expectations, individuals who were socialized in democracy appeared to participate in political conversations less frequent than members of the generation that grew up under authoritarian regimes. This finding may

suggest that the legacies of authoritarian regimes might be transmitted from older to younger generations, especially through family socialization. Alternatively, this finding may be linked with differences in the type of authoritarian regime, the openness of political competition and more generally the nature of politics during and following the process of democratization in these countries.

There are three major contributions that my research brought to debates on the role of social influences in politics. First, my investigation has enlarged the scope of the previous research through a comparative examination of the relationships between micro social embeddednes, political participation and cognition in countries with dissimilar political cultures. This examination revealed that although we can talk about general effects of political discussion that hold across countries that differ in their social makeup and political traditions, country level characteristics moderate some of these effects. This indicates that failure to include features of social networks and political discussion in models of political behavior and cognition will lead to erroneous conclusions on the determinants of individual political engagement. From a practical perspective, these findings urge for more attention given to macro contextual variables in designing policies aimed at increasing levels of political engagement. My research brought the first empirical confirmation of the fact that political agreement is more beneficial for members of newly democratized countries.

My second contribution stems from questioning the classical direction of effects between political discussion, participation and cognition. To my knowledge, this is the first time when the results of an empirical examination have indicated that the assumption that political discussion brings about an increase in political cognition might not be tenable in all contexts. Granted, there

is need for further investigation to understand whether this is due to some peculiarities of the political context in which these results were found.

Finally, my research indicated that those politically relevant micro social features might not be available in great supply especially in those contexts where they are mostly needed, namely in societies with a recent democratic experience. Previous literature showed that in newly democratized countries people are less politically engaged. My findings suggested that the micro social environments in which people from these countries reside are not conducive to political mobilization either. Specifically, people from new democracies have small social networks, less exposure to political conversations in their everyday social interactions and less opportunities to encounter political disagreement in their conversations. An additional problem, especially in some CEE countries, is that this political apathy is widespread even among those who were socialized in democracy.

In methodological terms, as highlighted in the last part of each individual chapter, there are limitations imposed by the use of specific methods as well as by the nature of the data available. I use a range of methods but their choice was constrained by the desire to provide results comparable with those in the literature to which my analysis is meant to be complementary. Yet, the study of micro social contexts in politics would benefit from research being conducted in the area of graphical modeling, for instance, which could be an interesting future path of research.

Scholars of deliberative democracy agree on the benefits of political debates among individuals who hold divergent political views and seek out to reach consensual decisions. Some of them are inclined to see casual political conversations as a form of public deliberation. These political conversational settings link the private and public spheres and prepare individuals for

making decisions that might have far reaching consequences for them and their peers. However, there is also skepticism voiced on the quality of these informal political conversations and their ability to produce valuable outcomes. In this view, political talk is nothing more than an amusing way of spending spare time or an occasion to vent grievances; in short, small talk that is aimed at nothing and leads nowhere. The results of my research on political talk that occurs as a by-product of everyday social interactions give reasons for moderated optimism and highlight some problems that call for policymakers' attention. Naturally occurring political conversation might not universally contribute to an increase in political cognition, although it does so under specific circumstances, but it generally stimulates political interest and keep people connected to the public sphere. This, in turn, is a precondition of political mobilization and increase in political information and knowledge. On the other hand, in countries with a more recent democratic experience the social network dynamic is still dominated by legacies of an authoritarian past and this is an obstacle to their functioning as channels of political mobilization and suppliers of informational cues.

List of References

Abrams, S., T. Iversen, and D. Soskice. 2010. Informal Social Networks and Rational Voting. *British Journal of Political Science* 41: 229-57.

Anand Edward Sokhey and Sarah Wilson Sokhey. Regime Legacy & Political Behavior in the Post-Communist Countries. Paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the Western Political Science Association, April 21-23, 2011, in San Antonia, TX.

Anderson, Christopher J., and Aida Paskeviciute. 2005. Macro-Politics and Micro-Behavior Mainstream Politics and the Frequency of Political Discussion in Contemporary Democracies. In *The Social Logic of Politics*, ed. Alan Zuckerman. Temple University Press.

Angelusz, Robert and Robert Tardos. 2001. Change and Stability in Social Network Resources: The Case of Hungary under Transformation. In *Social Capital: Theory and Research,* ed. Lin, Cook, Burt. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Badescu, Gabriel. 2003. Social trust and democratization in the post-communist societies. In *Social Capital and Transition to Democracy,* ed. Gabriel Badescu and Eric Uslaner. London: Routledge.

Bartels, Larry M. 1996. Uninformed Votes: Information Effects in Presidential Elections. *American Journal of Political Science* 40: 194-230.

Beck, P. A. and R. Gunther. 2010. Global Patterns of Political Intermediation, Paper presented at the conference of the Comparative National Election Project, Shanghai, China, July 22-24, 2010.

Beck, P. A., R. J. Dalton, S. Greene, and R. Huckfeldt. 2002. The Social Calculus of Voting: Interpersonal, Media, and Organizational Influences on Presidential Choices. *American Political Science Review* 96: 57-73.

Beck, Paul Allen. 1991. Voters' Intermediation Environment in the 1988 Presidential Contest. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 55: 371-394.

Beck, Paul Allen. 1974. A Socialization Theory of Partisan Realignment. In *The politics of future citizens,* ed. Richard Niemi. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bennett, S. E., R. S. Flickinger, and S. L. Rhine. 2000. Political talk over here, over there, overtime. *British Journal of Political Science* 30: 99–119.

Berelson, B. R., P. F. Lazarsfeld, and W. McPhee. 1954. *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bryk, A. S., and S. W. Raudenbush. 1992. *Hierarchical linear models*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Burt, R. S., R. M. Hogarth, and C. Michaud. 2000. The social capital of French and American managers. *Organization Science* 11: 123 – 147.

Burt, Ronald. 1987. Social Contagion and Innovation: Cohesion Versus Structural Equivalence. *The American Journal of Sociology* 92: 1287-1335.

Christakis, A., and J. H. Fowler. 2009. *Connected: The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Coleman, James S. 1988. Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *The American Journal of Sociology* 94: S95 – S120.

Coleman, James S., Elihu Katz, and Herbert Menzel. 1966. *Medical innovation: A diffusion study.* Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co.

Converse, Philip E. 1964. The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics. In *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter. Free Press.

Cutler, F. 2002. The Simplest Shortcut of All: Sociodemographic Characteristics and Electoral Choice. *Journal of Politics* 64: 466-490.

Delli Caprini, M., and S. Keeter. 1996. *What Americans know about politics and why it matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Dhavan V. Shah, Jaeho Cho, William P. Eveland JR., Nojin Kwak. 2005. Information and Expression in a Digital AgeModeling Internet Effects on Civic Participation. *Communication Research 32: 531-565.*

Downs, A. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy.* New York: Harper & Row.

Edwards, David. 2000. *Introduction to Graphical Modeling*. Springer

Eliasoph, Nina. 1998. *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life.* Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

Eveland, W. P., Jr., A. C. Morey, and, M. J. Hutchens. Beyond deliberation: New directions for the study of informal political conversation from a communication perspective. *Journal of Communication* forthcoming.

Eveland, W. P., Jr. and M. H. Hivley. 2009. Political discussion frequency, network size, and „heterogeneity" of discussion as predictors of political knowledge and participation. *Journal of Communication* 59: 205-224.

Eveland, W. P. and T. Thomson. 2006. Is It Talking, Thinking, or Both? A Lagged Dependent Variable Model of Discussion Effects on Political Knowledge. *Journal of*

Communication, 56: 523-42.

Eveland, W. P. Jr., A. F. Hayes, D. V. Shah, and N. Kwak. 2005. Understanding the Relationship Between Communication and Political Knowledge: A Model Comparison Approach Using Panel Data. *Political Communication*, 22: 423-46.

Eveland, W. P., Jr. 2004. The effect of political discussion in producing informed citizens: The roles of information, motivation, and elaboration. *Political Communication* 21: 177–193.

Eveland, W. P., Jr. and D. V. Shah. 2003. The impact of individual and interpersonal factors on perceived news media bias. *Political Psychology* 24: 101-117.

Eveland, W. P. Jr. and D. A. Scheufele. 2000. Connecting news media use with gaps in knowledge and participation. *Political Communication, 17*: 215–37.

Festinger, L. 1957. *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Festinger, L. 1954. A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations* 7:117-40.

Finkel, S. E. 1995. *Causal analysis with panel data* (Sage University Paper series on Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences, 07–105). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fishkin, J. 1991. *Democracy and Deliberation: New directions for democratic reform*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Fiske, Susan T., Donald R. Kinder, and W. Michael Larter. 1983. The novice and the expert: Knowledge-based strategies in political cognition. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 19: 381-400.

Flangan, Scott C. 1991. Mechanisms of Social Network Influence in Japanese Voting Behavior. In *The Japanese Voter*, ed. Scott C. Flanagan, Shinsaku Kohei, Ichiro Miyake, and Bradley M. Richardson. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Flap, Henk and Beate Volker. 2003. Communist Societies, the velvet revolution, and weak ties: The case of East Germany. In *Social Capital and Transition to Democracy*, ed. Gabriel Badescu and Eric Uslaner. London: Routledge.

Fowler, J. 2005. Turnout in a Small World. In *The Social Logic of Politics: Personal Networks as Contexts for Political Behavior*, ed. Alan Zuckerman, 269-287. Temple University Press.

Giugni, Marco, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly. 1998. *From Contention to Democracy*. Lanham, Maryland and Oxford, England: Rowman and Littlefield.

Granovetter, Mark. 1973. The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology* 78: 1360-1380.

Heider, F. 1958. *The Psychology of interpersonal relations*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Hofstede, G. 2001. *Culture's Consequences: comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.

Holbert, R. L., W. L. Benoit, G. J. Hansen, and W.-C. Wen. 2002. The role of communication in the formation of an issue-based citizenry. *Communication Monographs* 69: 296–310.

Horan, Patrick. 1971. Social Positions and Political Cross-Pressures: A Re-Examination. *American Sociological Review* 36: 650-660.

Howard, Marc Morjé. 2003. *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Huckfeldt, Robery, and Jeanette Morehouse Mendez. 2008. Moths, Flames, and Political Engagement: Managing Disagreement within Communication Network. *The Journal of Politics* 70: 83-96.

Huckfeldt, Robert, Ikeda, Ken'Ichi and Pappi, Franz Urban. 2005. Patterns of Disagreement in Democratic Politics: Comparing Germany, Japan, and the United States, *American Journal of Political Science*, 49, 3: 497-514.

Huckfeldt,Robert, P.E. Johnson and J. Sprague. 2005. Individuals, Dyads and Networks: Autoregressive Patterns of Political Influence. *The Social Logic of Politics: Personal Networks as Contexts for Political Behavior*, ed. Alan Zuckerman, 269-287. Temple University Press.

Huckfeldt, R., J. Morehouse, and T. Osborn. 2004. Disagreement, Ambivalence, and Engagement: The Political Consequences of Heterogeneous Networks. *Political Psychology* 26: 65-96.

Huckfeldt, Robert, P. Johnson, and J. Sprague. 2004. *Political Disagreement: The Survival of Diverse Opinions within Communication Networks*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Huckfeldt, Robert, P.E. Johnson, and J. Sprague. 2002. Political Environments, Political Dynamics, and the Survival of Disagreement. *Journal of Politics* 64: 1-21.

Huckfeldt, R., and J. Sprague. 1995. *Citizens, Politics and Social Communication: Information and influence in an election campaign*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Huckfeldt, R. and J. Sprague. 1991. Discussant Effects on Vote Choice: Intimacy, Structure and Interdependence. *Journal of Politics* 53: 122-58.

Huckfeldt, Robert and John Sprague. 1987. Networks in Context: The Social Flow of Political

Information. *American Political Science Review* 81: 1197-1216.

Iglic, Hajdeja, and Joan Font Fabregas. 2007. Social networks. In *Citizenship and Involvement in European Democracies: a comparative analysis*, ed. Anders Westholm, Jose Ramon Montero, and Jan W. van Deth . London: Routledge.

Iglic, Hajdeja. 2003. Trust networks and democratic transition: Yugoslavia in the mid-1980s. In *Social Capital and Transition to Democracy*, ed. Gabriel Badescu and Eric Uslaner. London: Routledge.

Ikeda, Ken'Ichi. 2011 (forthcoming). Social Sources of Political Knowledge. In *Social Networks and Japanese Democracy: The Beneficial Impact of Interpersonal Communication in East Asia*, ed. Ken'ichi Ikeda and Sean Richey. London: Routledge

Ikeda, Ken'ichi, and Sean Richey. 2011. *Social Networks and Democracy: The Beneficial Impact of Interpersonal Communication.* London: Routledge Press. Forthcoming.

Ikeda, K. 2010. Social networks, voting and campaign participation in Japan: the interpersonal political environment and the autonomous dimension of social networks. In *Political Discussion in Modern Democracies: a comparative perspective*, ed. Wolf, Michael R., Morales, Laura and Ken'ichi Ikeda, 162-182. London: Routledge.

Ikeda, K. and S. Richey. 2009. The Impact of Diversity in Informal Social Networks on Tolerance in Japan. *British Journal of Political Science* 39: 655-68.

Jennings, M. Kent. 1987. Residues of a Movement: the Aging of the American Protest Generation. *American Political Science Review* 81: 367-382.

Kenny, Cristopher. 1998. The Behavioral Consequences of Political Discussion: Another Look at Discussant Effects on Vote Choice. *The Journal of Politics* 60: 231-44.

Kim, J., R. O. Wyatt, and E. Katz. 1999. News, talk, opinion, participation: The part played by conversation in deliberative democracy. *Political Communication* 16: 361–385.

Kim, Joohan, Robert O. Wyatt, and Elihu Katz. 1999. News, Talk, Opinion, Participation: The Part Played by Conversation in Deliberative Democracy. *Political Communication*, 16:361-385

Kitschelt, H. P., Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslav Markowski and Gabor Toka. 1999. *Post-Communist Party Systems, Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Klofstad, Casey A. 2011. *Civic Talk: Peers, Politics and the Future of Democracy*. Philadelphia, PA:Temple University Press.

Knoke, David. 1990. *Political Networks. The Structural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press.

Kwak, N., A. E. Williams, X. Wang, and H. Lee. 2005.Talking Politics and Engaging Politics: An Examination of the Interactive Relationships Between Structural Features of Political Talk and Discussion Engagement. *Communication Research* 32: 87-111.

Lake, R. and R. Huckfeldt. 1998. Social Networks, Social Capital, and Political Participation. *Political Psychology* 19: 567-84.

Lau, Richard R. and David P. Redlawsk. 1997. Voting Correctly. *American Political Science Review* 91: 585-98.

Lazarsfeld, P., B. Berelson, and H. Gaudet. 1944. *The People's Choice: How The Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign*. New York: Columbia University Press

Leighley, Jan E. 1990. Social Interaction and Contextual Influences on Political Participation. *American Politics Quarterly* 18: 459-75.

Linz, Juan J. 2000. *Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Lup, Oana. 2010. The Role of Political Discussion in Developing Democracies: Evidence from Hungary. In *Political Discussion in Modern Democracies: a comparative perspective*, ed. Michael R. Wolf**,** Laura Morales**,** Ken'ichi Ikeda**.** Routledge: London.

Lupia, Arthur, and Mathew D. McCubbins. 1998. *The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need to Know?*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lupia, Arthur. 1994. Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections. *American Political Science Review* 88:63-76.

Luskin, R. S. 1990. Explaining Political Sophistication. *Political Behavior* 12: 331-61.

MacKuen, Michael B. 1990. Speaking of Politics: Individual Conversational Choice, Public Opinion, and the Prospects for Deliberative Democracy. In *Information and Democratic Processes*, ed. John A. Ferejohn and James H. Kuklinski, 55-59. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. Everyday Talk in the Deliberative System. In *Deliberative Politics. Essays on Democracy and Disagreement*, ed. S. Macedo. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marsden, Peter. 1990. Network Data and Measurement. *Annual Revue of Sociology* 16: 435-63.

McAdam, Doug and Ronnelle Paulsen. 1993. Social Ties and Recruitment: Toward a Specification of the Relationship. *American Journal of Sociology* 99: 640-667.

McAdam, Doug and Ronnelle Paulsen. 1993. Specifying the Relationship between Social Ties and Activism. *American Journal of Sociology* 3: 640-667.

McAdam, Doug. 1988. *Freedom Summer*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McAdam, Doug.1988. Micro-mobilization Contexts and Recruitment to Activism. In *From Structure to Action: Social Movement Participation Across Cultures*, ed. Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi and Sidney Tarrow. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

McCarthy, John D. and Mayer N. Zald. 1977. Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory. *American Journal of Sociology* 82: 1212-1241.

McClurg, S. D. 2006a. The Electoral Relevance of Political Talk: Examining Disagreement and Expertise Effects in Social Networks on Political Participation. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50: 737-54.

McClurg, S.D. 2006b. Political Disagreement in Context: The Conditional Effect of Neighborhood Context, Discussion, and Disagreement on Electoral Participation. *Political Behavior* 28: 349-66.

McClurg, S. D. 2003. Social Networks and Political Participation: The Role of Social Interaction in Explaining Political Participation. *Political Research Quarterly* 56: 449-64.

McGraw, Kathleen and Neil Pinney. 1990. The Effects of General and Domain-Specific Expertise on Political Memory and Judgement. *Social Cognition* 8: 9-30.

McLeod, J. M., D. A. Scheufele, P. Moy, E. M. Horowitz, R. L. Holbert, W. Zhang, S. Zubric, and J. Zubric. 1999. Understanding deliberation: The effects of discussion networks on participation in a public forum. *Communication Research* 26: 623-54.

Milgram, S. 1974. *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*. Harpercollins.

Morales, Laura. 2010. Getting a single message? The impact of homogeneous political communication contexts in Spain in a comparative perspective. In *Political Discussion in Modern Democracies: a comparative perspective*, ed. Wolf, Michael R., Morales, Laura and Ken'ichi Ikeda, London: Routledge.

Mutz, D. C. 2006. *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative Versus Participatory Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mutz, Diana. 2002a. Cross-Cutting Social Networks: Testing Democratic Theory in Practice. *American Political Science Review* 96: 111-26.

Mutz, Diana. 2002b. The Consequences of Cross-Cutting Networks for Political Participation. *American Journal of Political Science* 46: 838-855

Mutz, Diana C. and P.M. Martin. 2001. Facilitating Communication across Lines of Political Difference: The Role of Mass Media. *American Political Science Review* 95: 97-114.

Nir, L. 2005. Ambivalent Social Networks and Their Consequences for Participation. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 17: 423-42.

Noelle-Neumann, E. 1993. *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion - Our Social Skin*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Norris, Pippa. 2000. *A virtuous circle in post-industrial democracies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Opp, Karl-Diether and Christiane Gern. 1993. Dissident groups, personal networks, and spontaneous cooperation: the East German revolution of 1989. *American Sociological Review* 58: 659-80.

Popkin, S. L. 1991. *The reasoning voter: Communication and persuasion in presidential Campaigns*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Putnam, R. D. 2000 *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Putnam, R. D. 1995. Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital. *The Journal of Democracy* 6: 65-78.

Putnam, R. D. 1993 *Making Democracy Work*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Raudenbush, S. W., and A.S. Bryk. 2002. *Hierarchical linear models: Applications and data analysis methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Richardson, Bradley, and Paul Allen Beck. 2007. The Flow of Political Information: Personal Discussants, the Media, and Parties. In *Democracy, Intermediation, and Voting on Four Continents*, ed. Richard Gunther, Hans-Jürgen Puhle and José Ramón Montero, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Richardson, Bradley M. 1991. Social networks, Influence Communications, and the Vote. In *The Japanese Voter*, ed. Scott C. Flanagan, Shinsaku Kohei, Ichiro Miyake, and Bradley M. Richardson. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Rosenstone, Steven, J.M. Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. Macmillan Press.

Scheiner, Ethan. 2006. *Democracy Without Competition in Japan: Opposition Failure in a One-Party Dominant State*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Scheufele, D. A., B. Hardy, D. Brossard, I. S. Waismel-Manor, and E. Nisbet. 2006. Democracy based on difference: Examining the links between structural heterogeneity, heterogeneity of discussion networks, and democratic citizenship. *Journal of Communication* 56: 728-753.

Scheufele, D. A., M.C. Nisbet, D. Brossard, and E. Nisbet. 2004. Social Structure and Citizenship: Examining the Impacts of Social Setting, Network Heterogeneity, and Informational Variables on Political Participation. *Political Communication* 21: 315-38.

Scheufele, D. A., M. C. Nisbet, and D. Brossard. 2003. Pathways to participation? Religion, communication contexts, and mass media. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 15: 300–24.

Scheufele, D. A. and M. C. Nisbet. 2002. Democracy online: New opportunities and dead ends. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 7: 55–75.

Scheufele, D. A, and D. V. Shah. 2000. Personality strength and social capital: The role of dispositional and informational variables in the production of civic participation. *Communication Research* 27: 107-131.

Schmitt-Beck, Rüdiger. 2004. Political Communication Effects: The Impact of Mass Media and Personal Conversations on Voting. In *Comparing Political Communication, Theories, Cases, and Challenges*, ed. Frank Esser and Barbara Pfetsch, 293-322. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge/Mass.

Smith, Eric R. A. N. 1989. The unchanging American voter. *Berkeley: University of California Press.*

Sniderman, P. M., R.A. Brody, and P. E. Tetlock. 1991. *Reasoning and Choice: Explorations in Political Psychology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Snow, David A., Louis A. Zurcher, Jr., and Sheldon Ekland-Olson. 1980. Social Networks and Social Movements: a Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment. *American Sociological Review* 45: 787-801.

Steenbergen, Marco and Bradford S. Jones. 2002. Modeling Multilevel Data Structures. *American Journal of Political Science* 46: 218-237.

Toka, Gabor. 2010. The impact of everyday political talk on involvement, knowledge and informed voting. In *Political Discussion in Modern Democracies: a comparative perspective*, ed. Wolf, Michael R., Morales, Laura and Ken'ichi Ikeda, 162-182. London: Routledge.

Utasi, Agnes, Pathy, Adam and Hari, Peter. 2006. International trends of relationships in the last fifteen years. In *Working Papers*. Budapest: Institute for Political Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Utasi, Agnes. 2006. Social Solidarity and integration in Hungary: Aspects of confidential relationships. In *Working Papers*. Budapest: Institute for Political Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Utasi, Agnes. 1996. A Few Hungarian Peculiarities of Interpersonal Relations. In *Working Papers*. Budapest: Institute for Political Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Verba, S., K. L. Schlozman, and H. E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and equality: civic voluntarism in American politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Pres.

Volker, Beate and Henk Flap. 2001. Weak ties as a liability: the case of East Germany. *Rationality and Society* 13: 397-428.

Walsh, Katherine Cramer. 2004. *Talking about Politics: Informal Groups and Social Identity in American Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Westholm, A., Montero, J.R., and van Deth, J. W. 2007. Citizenship, involvement, and democracy in Europe. Introduction to *Citizenship and Involvement in European Democracies: a comparative analysis*, ed. Westholm, Anders, Montero, Jose Ramon, and Jan W. van Deth, 26-31. London: Routledge.

Zuckerman, Alan, Josep Dasović, and Jennifer Fitzgerald. 2007. *Partisan Families: The Social Logic of Bounded Partisanship in Germany and Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zuckerman, Alan. 2005. Returning to the Social Logic of Politics. Introduction to *The Social Logic of Politics*, ed. Alan Zuckerman. Temple University Press.

Datasets

Comparative National Elections Project. http://www.cnep.ics.ul.pt/index1.asp. Accessed:

Democracy Crossnational Data, Release 3.0. Spring 2009. http://www.pippanorris.com/. Accessed:

European Science Foundation Network on Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy. http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/cid/, Accessed:

JES III Project Team (Ken'ichi Ikeda, Yoshiaki Kobayashi, Hiroshi Hirano). Nation-wide Longitudinal Survey Study on Voting Behavior in the Early 21st Century, 2001-2005. http://ssjda.iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp/abstract/0530a.html. Accessed:

http://www.tarki.hu/en/

Appendices

Appendix 1.

Questions used to compute the three indicators of political opinionation

A. Questions used to compute the indicator '*opinionation on Government's spending'*
(Included in surveys conducted after the elections of 2003 and 2004, waves 'Post-2003' and 'Post-2004')

Q: What do you think about the government expenditures on the following matters? Choose one that best reflects your attitude toward each item: 1= too much; 2=adequate; 3=too little; 4=DK; 5=NA

1. Environmental issues; 2. Crime control; 3. Education; 4. Defense; 5. Foreign aid; 6. Public utilities such as roads; 7. Social security, welfare; 8. Employment and countermeasures against unemployment; 9. Subsidies for agriculture, forestry and fishery.

B. Questions used to compute the indicator '*opinionation on policy issues'*
(Included in surveys conducted after the elections of 2004 and 2005, waves 'Post-2004' and 'Post-2005')

Q: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements and/or opinions: 1=agree; 2=somewhat agree; 3=neither agree nor disagree; 4=somewhat disagree; 5=disagree; 6=DK; 7=NA.

(1) Japan should strengthen its military defensive capacities;
(2) Even if Japan has to make concessions, it should quickly resolve any trade disputes with other countries;
(3) Social welfare such as pensions and medical care for the elderly should be fulfilled as much as possible even when the public finance is suffering;
(4) Even if the government's service worsens, I'd prefer a small government that does not spend a lot of money;
(5) Japan has not fully atoned for the crimes that it has committed in the past against other Asian countries;
(6) The Emperor should have a larger voice in government than is currently allowed;
(7) Japan should never have nuclear weapons;
(8) The US-Japan security alliance should be strengthened;
(9) Labor workers should have a larger voice in important decisions;
(10) Civil servants and labor workers in public corporations should be allowed to go on strike;
(11) In order to increase the number of women in higher levels and careers, the government should set up a special system;
(12) Aside from the elderly and handicapped, everyone else should live without relying on social welfare;
(13) Japan's bureaucracy does not operate efficiently and should be therefore completely reformed;

(14) Money in politics and political corruption should be completely straightened out from now on;
(15) Even though Japan gave up its northern region, it should still be on good terms with Russia;
(16) Until the abduction problems are solved, we should not give economic aid to North Korea.

C. Questions used to compute the indicator '*opinionation on parties' proposals'*
(Included in surveys conducted after the elections of 2003 and 2005, waves 'Post-2003' and 'Post-2005')

In wave 'Post-2003' Q: Political parties advocated *manifestos* in this election campaign and the policies stated became political issues. Which parties had the most concrete policies for each of the issues stated? Choose one party that best reflects your attitude.
1=LDP; 2=DPJ; 3=NFP; 4=SDP; 5=JCP; 6=NCP; 8=other; 9=No particular party, they are all about the same; 10=DK; 11=NA.

(1) Economic reforms and countermeasures for unemployment;
(2) Reform of financial market and industries;
(3) Reform of budget;
(4) Reform of pension system;
(5) Reform of Diet;
(6) Welfare system;
(7) Reform of bureaucracy;
(8) Reform of Public Road Administration;
(9) Reform of the three enterprises of postal service;
(10) Discussion of the rate of consumption tax;
(11) Discussion of issues of the Constitution;
(12) Recovering public safety of the country;
(13) Promotion of diplomacy in accord to national interest;
(14) Reform of education system.

In wave 'Post-2005'

(15) Combating population decrease.

Appendix 2

Questions used to compute the lagged values of political opinionation (included in the surveys that were conducted before the elections of 2003, 2004, and 2005, which are 'Pre-2003', 'Pre-2004', and 'Pre-2005')

In wave 'Pre-2003'
Q1: (we would like to know your thoughts on recently expressed opinions regarding several national issues) First, statements A and B address the issues of the financial reconstruction and the contra-cyclical policy.

A. When the economic climate as is bad as it is now, the government should put (the) priority on the contra-cyclical policy, even though it may delay the financial reconstruction.
B. When the country is in so much debt as it is now, the government should put (the) priority on the financial reconstruction, even though it may delay the contra-cyclical policy.

Which statement do you agree with? Choose one that is closest to your opinion.
1=agree with A; 2=somewhat agree with A; 3=somewhat agree with B; 4=agree with B; 5=DK; 6=NA.
Which opinion do you think the following political parties agree with concerning this issue?
1. LDP; 2. DPJ; 3. CGP; 4. SDP; 5. JCP; 6. NCP.

Q2: Statements A and B address the issue of public welfare and (the) public burden.
A. Even if the taxes have to be increased, public services such as welfare should be improved.
B. Even if (the) public services such as welfare have to be weakened, the tax burden should be made lighter.
Which statement do you agree with? Choose one that is closest to your opinion.
1=agree with A; 2=somewhat agree with A; 3=somewhat agree with B; 4=agree with B; 5=DK; 6=NA.
Which opinion do you think the following political parties agree with concerning this issue?
1. LDP; 2. DPJ; 3. CGP; 4. SDP; 5. JCP; 6. NCP.

Q3: Statements A and B address the relationship between the government and the local autonomous bodies.
A. In order to support local autonomous bodies that are not competitive, it is legitimate to distribute government subsidies.
B. In order to realize a vital society, local areas should participate in free competition and receive less government subsidies.

Which statement do you agree with? Choose one that is closest to your opinion.
1=agree with A; 2=somewhat agree with A; 3=somewhat agree with B; 4=agree with B; 5=DK; 6=NA.
Which opinion do you think the following political parties agree with concerning this issue?
1. LDP; 2. DPJ; 3. CGP; 4. SDP; 5. JCP; 6. NCP.

Q4: Statements A and B address the issue of constitutional amendment.

A. The Constitution of Japan is becoming out of date, and should be amended in the near future.
B. The Constitution of Japan is good and respectable overall, and should not be amended at this point in time.

Which statement do you agree with? Choose one that is closest to your opinion.
1=agree with A; 2=somewhat agree with A; 3=somewhat agree with B; 4=agree with B; 5=DK; 6=NA.
Which opinion do you think the following political parties agree with concerning this issue?
1. LDP; 2. DPJ; 3. CGP; 4. SDP; 5. JCP; 6. NCP.

Q5: Statements A and B address the issue of the right to collective self-defense.
A. In order to strengthen the Japan-US security regime, the use of the right to collective self-defense should be approved.
B. Because Japan might be involved in international conflicts, the use of the right to collective self-defense should not be approved.

Which statement do you agree with? Choose one that is closest to your opinion.
1=agree with A; 2=somewhat agree with A; 3=somewhat agree with B; 4=agree with B; 5=DK; 6=NA.
Which opinion do you think the following political parties agree with concerning this issue?
1. LDP; 2. DPJ; 3. CGP; 4. SDP; 5. JCP; 6. NCP.

Q6: Statements A and B address the issue of Prime Minister's official visit to Yasukuni Shrine.
A. In order to console the souls of the war dead, the Prime Minister should pay an official visit to Yasukuni Shrine.
B. To be in accord with the principle of separation of politics and religion, the Prime Minister should not pay an official visit to Yasukuni Shrine.

Which statement do you agree with? Choose one that is closest to your opinion.
1=agree with A; 2=somewhat agree with A; 3=somewhat agree with B; 4=agree with B; 5=DK; 6=NA.
Which opinion do you think the following political parties agree with concerning this issue?
1. LDP; 2. DPJ; 3. CGP; 4. SDP; 5. JCP; 6. NCP.

In wave 'Pre-2004', some additional questions were asked

Q7: Regarding the participation of the Self-Defense Forces in the Multinational Security Force, there are two opinions,
A: In order to make an international contribution, the SDF should join the Multinational Security Force in Iraq.
B: Under the current Constitution, the SDF should not be a part of the Multinational Security Force in Iraq.

Which statement do you agree with? Choose one that is closest to your opinion.

1=agree with A; 2=somewhat agree with A; 3=somewhat agree with B; 4=agree with B; 5=DK; 6=NA.
Which opinion do you think the following political parties agree with concerning this issue?
1. LDP; 2. DPJ; 3. CGP; 4. SDP; 5. JCP.

Q8: Statements A and B address the relationship between the government and the local autonomous bodies.
A. In order to support local autonomous bodies that are not competitive, it is legitimate to distribute government subsidies.
B. In order to realize a vital society, local areas should participate in free competition and receive less government subsidies.

Which statement do you agree with? Choose one that is closest to your opinion.
1=agree with A; 2=somewhat agree with A; 3=somewhat agree with B; 4=agree with B; 5=DK; 6=NA.
Which opinion do you think the following political parties agree with concerning this issue?
1. LDP; 2. DPJ; 3. CGP; 4. SDP; 5. JCP.

Q9: Regarding the maintenance of the public pension program, there are two opinions,
A: In order to have stable resources in the future, the premiums should be increased.
B: Because all of the generations should suffer together, the taxes should be increased.

Which statement do you agree with? Choose one that is closest to your opinion.
1=agree with A; 2=somewhat agree with A; 3=somewhat agree with B; 4=agree with B; 5=DK; 6=NA.
Which opinion do you think the following political parties agree with concerning this issue?
1. LDP; 2. DPJ; 3. CGP; 4. SDP; 5. JCP.

Q10: Regarding the issue of Japan's handling of problems in Iraq, there are two opinions,
A: Japan should seek to be actively involved in the operations that the U.S. and other countries are involved in Iraq.
B: Japan should not seek to be actively involved in the operations that the U.S. and other countries are involved in Iraq.

Which statement do you agree with? Choose one that is closest to your opinion.
1=agree with A; 2=somewhat agree with A; 3=somewhat agree with B; 4=agree with B; 5=DK; 6=NA.
Which opinion do you think the following political parties agree with concerning this issue?
1. LDP; 2. DPJ; 3. CGP; 4. SDP; 5. JCP.

In wave 'Pre-2005', some additional questions were asked

Q11: Regarding Koizumi's snap general election (Sep. 11th 2005) for the main, lower house two years ahead of schedule, there are two opinions
A. That the general election was necessary in order for reforms such as the postal privatization to take place.

B. The reform plan was denied in the lower house – therefore, the general election for the lower house should not have been allowed.

Which statement do you agree with? Choose one that is closest to your opinion.
1=agree with A; 2=somewhat agree with A; 3=somewhat agree with B; 4=agree with B; 5=DK; 6=NA.
Which opinion do you think the following political parties agree with concerning this issue?

1. LDP; 2. DPJ; 3. CGP; 4. SDP; 5. JCP.

Appendix 3

List of political activities[70]

Q: Did you participate in any of the following activities?
(1 = yes, 0 = no)

(1) contact politicians or other representatives;
(2) work for a political party;
(3) help with organizational issues in a party;
(4) wear signs or display party bumper stickers;
(5) sign protest letters or petitions;
(6) take part in legal protest demonstrations or marches;
(7) refuse to buy certain products as a form of protest;
(8) refuse to buy products for moral reasons;
(9) donate money for a party;
(10) participate in unauthorized demonstrations or meetings;
(11) send articles with your opinion to newspapers;
(12) express your opinion in a radio show;
(13) vote sending a text in a TV program

[70] 'The items 11, 12 and 13 from this list may not be exclusively related with political participation, but sometimes they are. As I would like to see political actions more widely, I included these items among other more traditional forms of political participation' (Lup 2010: 199).

Appendix 4

ISSP questions about three types of friends

Q: Now we would like to ask you about people you know, other than your family and relatives. The first question is about people at your work place.
Thinking about people at your work place, how many of them are close friends of yours?
Thinking now of people who live near you - in your neighbourhood or district: How many of these people are close friends of yours?
How many other close friends do you have apart from those at work, in your neighbourhood, or family members? Think, for instance, of friends at clubs, church, or the like.