ORIGINAL PAPER

Personality and Political Discussion

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Abstract   Political discussion matters for a wide array of political phenomena such as attitude formation, electoral choice, other forms of participation, levels of political expertise, and tolerance. Thus far, research on the underpinnings of political discussion has focused on political, social, and contextual forces. We expand upon this existing research by examining how individual personality traits influence patterns of political discussion. Drawing on data from two surveys we investigate how personality traits influence the context in which citizens discuss politics, the nature of the relationship between individuals and their discussion partners, and the influence discussion partners have on respondents' views. We find a number of personality effects and our results highlight the importance of accounting for individual predispositions in the study of political discussion.

Keywords   Personality · Big Five · Political discussion · Social influence

Most forms of political participation require a conscious decision to break from the routine of our everyday life to engage with the political world. We choose to stop off at our polling place after work to cast a vote. We go outside to pound a candidate's sign into our yard. Or, we miss spending a Saturday afternoon at home to attend a political rally. Most participation then can be seen as a series of deliberate choices about how much time to devote to political matters, operating within a clearly defined context. Consequently, most studies of political

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participation focus on the role played by the individual citizen in choosing whether to participate and how much time to spend on political matters.

One important form of political participation does not seem to fit neatly into this view of atomized individual citizens making deliberate choices: political discussion. People's political views are constrained by the information and ideas to which they are exposed through discussion with individuals in their social networks. It is through political discourse that our political beliefs, values, and identities are molded and our ideas about current events are influenced. These conversations are held with our families, neighbors, co-workers, friends, and even loose acquaintances and occur in the everyday settings of our lives. Political discussion can reaffirm our original beliefs or cause us to question what we thought we knew. Either way, talking politics with those in our social networks affects our ideas and behavior. Scholarship in this area has shown that social communication matters for a wide array of other political phenomena such as attitude formation, electoral choice, other forms of participation, levels of political expertise, and tolerance. Thus far, research on the underpinnings of political discussion has focused on political factors (e.g., Huckfeldt et al. 2000; Lake and Huckfeldt 1998; McClurg 2006; Straits 1991; Zaller 1992) as well as social and contextual forces such as the nature and origin of the relationship between conversation partners (e.g., Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Mutz 2006; Walsh 2004) and features of the national context (e.g., Anderson and Paskeviciute 2005; Gibson 2003; Iglic 2003; Mondak and Gearing 2003).

Despite this clear evidence of contextual influences on patterns of discussion, we believe that too little attention has been devoted to individual-level factors beyond basic demographic considerations such as sex, age, education levels, income, and the like. Where and with whom we discuss politics influences how we think and what we do, but perhaps a more fundamental question is whether peoples' introduction into these contextual situations and their responses to them differs based on the individual. Specifically, we contend that psychological predispositions captured by individual personality traits play an important role in shaping the kinds of conversations citizens engage in, the setting for those conversations, and the influence discussion may or may not have on the individual. It is our belief that many of the social and contextual factors listed above are the result of the interplay between individual predispositions and the social context. Individuals may be constrained by their social settings, but they can choose how to behave in the situations presented to them. When a co-worker tries to start a political conversation over a current hot-button issue, one type of person might jump headlong into a heated argument; another might politely downplay any disagreement; while another might simply refuse to discuss controversial political matters. Individuals can differ in their reactions to political discussions based on their own personalities.

Establishing the connection between psychological predispositions and political discussion is important for several reasons. First, given all of the important consequences of discussion, it is crucial that we develop a strong understanding of the antecedents political conversations. If personality traits affect where and with whom people talk about politics and the consequences of those discussions, we

cannot simply think of the effects of discussion being universally accessed across the entire population. Some people could be absorbing more from discussion than others, and this variation might be politically consequential. Second, because political discussion is a social activity, and one constrained by other social influences, we see it as an especially rigorous test case for research on the political consequences of personality. If micro-level psychological differences are shown to matter for patterns in the most social of political activities, we believe this should be viewed as highly promising regarding the prospects for personality to influence more individualistic phenomena such as attitude formation, information acquisition, and the like. Third, by applying the Big Five personality framework in research on political discussion, we will generate evidence regarding the framework's breadth. Much of the early work on five-factor personality models sought to explore the content of the factors themselves and to provide evidence on reliability and validity in measurement. Only recently have scholars begun conducting widespread assessments of the impact of the Big Five traits on human behavior. Hence, our effort may shed new light on the tangible value of five-factor approaches.

In this paper we build on recent research demonstrating the importance of personality traits for various aspects of political behavior. This work has made use of the Big Five trait taxonomy (described further below) and we follow a similar approach. Political discussion has not been a particular focus of this research, but several findings are of direct relevance to our examination of personality and political discussion. In the next section we will highlight those findings, and discuss some literature from outside of political science which has examined the role played by personality traits and other predispositions on social (but not necessarily political) interaction. Next we will outline our empirical tests, present our expectations based on trait theory and the existing research that touches on traits and political discussion, and present the results of our analyses. Finally, we will discuss the implications of these findings for research on political discussion.

Psychological Predispositions and Social Interaction

As the concept is utilized here, "personality" refers to a multi-faceted and enduring internal, or psychological, structure that influences behavior. This view of personality is informed by current perspectives in trait psychology. In that research stream, it is widely accepted that "a trait is essentially a relatively stable tendency or feature characteristic of an individual" (Kreitler and Kreitler 1990, p. 4). Further, trait psychologists generally concur that "traits represent basic categories of individual differences in functioning," and that "traits are useful as the basic units of personality" (Pervin 2003, p. 38).

Again, the particular perspective adopted in this study is the "Big Five" framework. Research on the Big Five holds that five traits collectively provide a highly comprehensive, hierarchical model of trait structure. Following convention, the broad traits, or dimensions, are labeled here as *openness to experience*,

conscientiousness, *extraversion*, *agreeableness* and *emotional stability*.[1] Goldberg (e.g., 1990, 1992, 1993) and McCrae and Costa (e.g., 1987, 1997, 2003) have been leading proponents of five-factor approaches. Goldberg has championed lexical depictions of the Big Five while McCrae and Costa have pursued their closely-related five-factor theory. An appealing feature of both approaches is the potential for measuring personality in a parsimonious fashion. Several studies have demonstrated that the Big Five can be effectively measured using a handful of items for each of the five traits (Gosling et al. 2003; Rammstedt and John 2007; Woods and Hampson 2005). Such brief measures are ideally suited to telephone surveys such as the one we make use of in this paper. In light of these properties, we view the Big Five framework as an excellent vehicle for use in exploring possible links between personality and political discussion.

As discussed earlier, political science research on political discussion and persuasion has generally focused on contextual factors. This does not mean individual factors have not been considered at all. There is a substantial body of research on political influences such as direction of partisanship (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995), strength of partisanship (Huckfeldt et al. 2000), political awareness (Zaller 1992), political interest (Straits 1991), and political knowledge (McClurg 2006). Beyond such political attributes, research on the individual-level factors that influence patterns in social communication mostly have centered on demographic attributes, not psychological properties such as personality. Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) discuss the ways that individuals tend to discuss politics with people who resemble themselves, and how men and women differ in the kinds of discussion networks they create. Lake and Huckfeldt (1998) demonstrate that income, education, age, and race are all significant predictors of the size of a respondent's political discussion network, and that wealthier and more educated individuals are more likely to have higher levels of political expertise within their networks. There is also a substantial body of research on the influence of demographic variables on network characteristics outside of political science (see Roberts et al. 2009). These studies demonstrate that scholars of social influence recognize the importance of individual factors. However, this research has not generally accounted for psychological predispositions such as personality traits. This is understandable considering that personality traits have only made their way into political behavior research more generally within the last 3 or 4 years.

Outside of political science, research on social influence has taken personality traits and other psychological predispositions into account more often, but certainly not with regularity. Mehra et al. (2001) note that social networks research rarely includes psychological factors, and then proceed to analyze the role of self-monitoring (a psychological construct relating to how much people respond to social cues) in network behavior in the workplace. They find that high self-monitors are more likely to build relationships that cross group lines. Swickert et al. (2002) find that among a sample of undergraduates, extraverts are more likely to have

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[1] It is also common in trait psychology to substitute the term "neuroticism" for its opposite state, "emotional stability," thus creating the acronym OCEAN: (O)penness to experience, (C)onscientiousness, (E)xtraversion, (A)greeableness, (N)euroticism.

larger social networks and more contact with those networks. Kalish and Robins (2006) find effects for both extraversion and emotional stability on the structure and closeness of networks. Klein et al. (2004) examine how personality traits influence the role people play in their social networks. They find that individuals who are high in emotional stability are more likely to occupy a central role in their networks. Finally, Roberts et al. (2008) find that extraversion is positively related to the size of an individual's most intimate social contacts (the support clique in their terminology), but they find that this effect disappears when respondent age is taken into account.

Within the last few years, political science studies have started to incorporate personality traits into the study of political behavior. These studies have included variables that are pertinent to the study of political discussion, but they have generally not been explicitly focused on discussion. The one exception is a study by Klofstad (2009) which seeks to determine if political discussion leads to civic engagement or if it is just a bi-product of that engagement. Using a quasi-experimental design, Klofstad is able to show that political discussion does have a positive effect on civic engagement in his undergraduate sample. Most importantly for our purposes, Klofstad attempts to account for psychological predisposition to participate as measured by political interest prior to arrival at college. This is obviously not a personality measure, but it represents an attempt to incorporate psychological predispositions into a model of political discussion. Not surprisingly, Klofstad found that the positive effect of political discussion on participation was weaker among those individuals who were predisposed against civic engagement.

We turn now to the recent research that directly examines the influence of Big Five traits on political discussion. Mondak and Halperin (2008) examine the possible effects of personality traits on a host of political attitudes and behaviors. Included in this broad examination were variables on the number of days in the past week the respondent had discussed politics (measured across two different surveys) and measures of national and local political discussion frequency (measured on a four-point scale from $0 =$ never to $3 =$ very often). Their results show that openness to experience and extraversion are both positively related to political discussion for three of the four survey indicators. Conscientiousness also seems to be related to political discussion with a significant positive effect for two of the four indicators. Both agreeableness and emotional stability have consistently negative coefficients for all four discussion indicators, but only one reaches significance for each, so conclusions for those two traits should be made with caution.

Mondak et al. (2010) test for the possibility that Big Five traits influence social network size using a survey which includes a discussant name generator that allows respondents to name up to four people with whom they discuss politics. They find that openness to experience and extraversion are both associated with larger networks, and that conscientiousness and emotional stability are negatively associated with network size. Mondak et al. also examine the influence of personality traits on exposure to disagreement within a discussion network. They find that larger networks are associated with greater exposure to disagreement, but that this effect is contingent on personality traits. Extraverts are much more likely to be exposed to disagreement as their network increases in size from one to four

people, while introverts show a much more modest increase in exposure. This indicates that introverts are working to maintain some degree of homogeneity in their discussion networks while extraverts are more open to discussing politics with anyone, regardless of whether they agree. A similar effect is identified for agreeableness. Individuals high in agreeableness show almost no increase in exposure to disagreement as their networks grow, while people low in agreeableness are exposed to much more disagreement as their networks increase in size. Aside from conscientiousness, which is positive for discussion frequency but negative for network size, the combination of these two studies appears to demonstrate some fairly clear trait effects. Openness and extraversion seem to be positively related to discussion while emotional stability would seem to be negatively associated with talking politics. Agreeableness may be associated with less discussion, and it seems to be associated with less exposure to disagreement. In all, there is ample early evidence that personality traits play an important role in shaping general patterns of political discussion.

In this paper we build upon this burgeoning literature with three distinct contributions. First, we will examine the role played by personality traits on frequency of political discussion broken down by the setting for that discussion. Specifically, we examine how much people talk about local politics with their families, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and members of their clubs and churches. Past research demonstrates that social interaction at church can play an important role in shaping the political attitudes of church members (Wald et al. 1988; Huckfeldt et al. 1993), that neighborhood conversations can be an important source of information (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Grober and Schram 2006; Walsh 2004), and that workplaces are unique in their potential for exposing citizens to disagreement (Mutz and Mondak 2006). Clearly, the setting in which discussion occurs can be important for the kinds of behavioral outcomes discussion can engender. We investigate whether personality traits influence the kinds of settings where citizens choose to engage in political discussions.

Our second contribution is to examine the influence of personality on nature of citizens' relationships with their discussion partners. The nature of this relationship has been found to have a significant impact on the type of information that is transmitted by discussion. In classifying individuals' interpersonal contacts, a common tactic in the literature entails distinction between close friends or relatives and more casual acquaintances. Discussions with more casual acquaintances are thought to be more beneficial because they are associated with such interrelated phenomena as the improved diffusion of information (Granovetter 1973), the presence of bridging forms of social capital (Putnam 2000), and exposure to disagreement in social communication (Mutz 2006; Mutz and Mondak 2006). The closer and more insulated a person's discussion network is, the less likely they are to be exposed to novel information (Huckfeldt et al. 1995). Little is known regarding any possible systematic tendencies of the individual to seek to confine political discussion to close ties, a situation that prompts us to consider whether the nature of the relationships between respondents and their discussion partners vary with personality.

Finally, our third contribution is to examine the influence discussion partners have on respondents and to see whether this influence could be enhanced or inhibited by the personality traits of the respondent. There is ample evidence to suggest that citizens are influenced by the people with whom they discuss politics. These tangible consequences of discussion represent one of the major reasons why the study of political discussion has flourished so much over the last 30 years. Huckfeldt and Sprague (1991) found that the political preferences of discussants influenced respondent vote choice, even when partisanship and demographic characteristics of the respondent were accounted for. When this finding is combined with the inherent heterogeneity of most political contexts (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987) it makes a powerful case for the persuasive power of political discussion. We test to see whether personality traits play a role in determining how influential discussion can be.

Data and Personality Measures

In the present study, we draw primarily on data from a community survey fielded in 2004. The survey was conducted within a single medium-sized metropolitan area in late 2004. Interviews were completed by 822 respondents. Most of the items on the survey concerned the topic of sense of community along with corresponding measures of respondents' levels of involvement in various social and political settings in the local area. A number of general questions regarding patterns of political discussion were included along with a battery regarding the one individual with whom each respondent most often discusses local political matters. We make use of both types of discussion items below.

The survey also included ten bipolar personality items (two per trait). Interviewers read this introduction to respondents:

> The following section contains pairs of words. On a scale of zero to ten, which word best describes you. For example, the number zero means "confident," the number ten means "unconfident," and the number five is exactly in the middle—neither confident nor unconfident. On this scale, what number best represents you? You can use any number from zero to ten.

Subsequent items were asked in quick succession, with interviewers saying, for example, "next, zero is kind and ten is unkind."

In the absence of logistical concerns, psychologists often make use of much more extensive batteries of items[2] than the ten-item measures reported here. However, because we needed to measure personality as part of larger political surveys administered by telephone we placed a greater emphasis on parsimony. Fortunately, as we discussed earlier, in recent years psychologists have worked to develop five and ten item personality surveys that perfectly suit our needs (Gosling et al. 2003; Rammstedt and John 2007; Woods and Hampson 2005). Though not as effective as

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[2] For example, one widely used personality instrument, the NEO-PI-R (McCrae and Costa 2003) consists of 240 items.

long instruments, these short batteries fare quite well in terms of reliability and validity. Previous applied work on personality and political behavior has scrutinized these measurement issues more closely and has shown brief measures to perform satisfactorily (see Mondak et al. 2010).

Because some trait items are susceptible to social desirable biases, with people tending to view themselves as kind, responsible, open-minded, etc., we erred on the side of caution and used a logarithmic transformation in the construction of all final scales as a means to minimize the possible impact of skewed distributions on individual items, and to maximize comparability across the trait measures. Specifically, each item initially was recoded so that a value of one represents the highest possible value on the trait in question. These recoded variables then were logged. Final trait scales were constructed by averaging the logged indicators for the two items asked for each trait, and then recoding the resulting values to range from zero (lowest observed value) to one (highest observed value). Data on the item pairs and resulting Big Five measures are depicted in the top half of Table 1.[3] Correlations range from 0.39 for agreeableness to 0.57 for extraversion and emotional stability.

The Context of Discussion

Our first empirical contribution focuses on the influence of personality traits on the setting for discussion. The survey includes items asking respondents to assess the frequency of their discussions of local politics in six different settings. These settings are: at church, in their neighborhood, in the workplace, with family, with friends, and with members of clubs or other associations. For each item, respondents answer on a four point scale ranging from zero, indicating that they never discuss local politics in that setting, to 3 if they discuss local politics in that setting "very often." Past research demonstrates that political discussions in these contexts differ in several ways, including their propensity to expose citizens to disagreement. The workplace is particularly notable for fostering disagreement in conversation (Mutz and Mondak 2006) with friends and neighbors and is also more likely to expose people to disagreement than discussions in places of worship, clubs or within families (Mutz 2006, p. 28). These features help to guide our expectations regarding

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[3] Note that the number of cases on the community survey always equals 822, which is the number of respondents on this survey. In working on the present study, we discovered that due to a combination of coding and software errors on the part of the company contracted to conduct this survey, we are not able to identify and exclude missing cases on the Big Five items. Interviewers used specific key strokes to indicate "don't know" and "refuse" responses, but these responses were coded to have values of 8 and 9, respectively, which also are valid values on the 0 to 10 personality scales. The survey company was able to report to us how many "don't know" and "refuse" responses there were for each item, but, despite repeated attempts, it was not able to recode these cases so that they could be differentiated from cases with substantive responses of 8 or 9. For the ten individual personality items, there are between four and eighteen "don't know" and "refuse" responses, with a mean of 9.9, among the 822 respondents. Thus, we know the actual average "don't know" and "refuse" rate to be 1.2%. We have no definitive means to identify and remove these cases, and thus our analyses are hampered by the slight decreases in reliability that accompany treating all answers of "8" and "9" as genuine substantive replies.

Table 1 Indicators of the Big Five

Personality factor	Component terms	Scale mean (SD)	Pearson's R	Number of cases
A. 2004 Community survey				
Openness to experience	Confident–unconfident	0.62 (0.27)	0.41	822
	Intelligent–unintelligent			
Conscientiousness	Organized–disorganized	0.54 (0.29)	0.52	822
	Neat–sloppy			
Extraversion	Extraverted–introverted	0.46 (0.28)	0.57	822
	Outgoing–reserved			
Agreeableness	Kind–unkind	0.68 (0.27)	0.39	822
	Sympathetic–unsympathetic			
Emotional stability	Calm–tense	0.52 (0.28)	0.57	822
	Relaxed–nervous			
B. 2006 National survey				
Openness to experience	An intellectual–not an intellectual	0.46 (0.22)	0.28	737
	Philosophical–unreflective			
Conscientiousness	Sloppy–neat	0.57 (0.25)	0.26	761
	Hard working–lazy			
Extraversion	Outgoing–shy	0.41 (0.26)	0.57	737
	Introverted–extraverted			
Agreeableness	Sympathetic–unsympathetic	0.63 (0.25)	0.50	759
	Unkind–kind			
Emotional stability	Relaxed–tense	0.38 (0.21)	0.39	763
	Nervous–calm			

Note: Scales are constructed using logged data and scale values range from 0 (lowest observed value on the trait) to 1 (highest observed value)

personality traits and frequency of discussion across contexts. First, we know from past research (Mondak and Halperin 2008; Mondak et al. 2010) that extraversion and openness to experience are generally associated with larger discussion networks and more frequent political talk. We do not have strong expectations that these traits will predispose citizens to strongly favor one discussion context over another. It seems likely that extraversion could predispose individuals to be particularly active in more formal settings where their natural sociability helps them to overcome institutional constraints. As a consequence we expect extraversion to be associated with discussion at work, at church, and in clubs and associations. Openness to experience has been linked to both incidental information exposure and the expenditure of effort in information seeking (Heinstrom 2003). Therefore, we expect openness to be particularly important for discussions in contexts that foster disagreement such as the workplace and among friends.

Predictions regarding conscientiousness are complicated by the somewhat mixed empirical record. On the one hand, it has been found to be generally associated with lower levels of political participation (Mondak and Halperin 2008; Mondak et al.

2010). However, these effects have generally not been significant when considering political discussion, and there is some evidence to suggest that conscientiousness may be positively associated with frequency of local political discussion (Mondak and Halperin 2008). Consequently, we expect conscientiousness to be positively linked with discussion of local politics in those contexts that are most likely to be directly affected by local issues. Specifically, we expect more conscientious individuals to discuss local politics more frequently with their neighbors, in church, and with members of their clubs and associations. Finally, we have fewer expectations for the remaining traits, emotional stability and agreeableness. There is little in the empirical record to lead us to any strong conclusions, although we might intuitively expect agreeableness to be negatively associated with discussion in contexts that foster disagreement such as among friends and in the workplace.

Table 2 presents ordered logistic regression models for each of the six contexts. As discussed above, the dependent variable in each of these models is a four point scale measuring how frequently the respondent discusses local politics in that context. For each context Table 2 contains two models, and we begin our discussion of these results with a focus on the odd-numbered columns. In addition to the Big Five, controls are included for respondent age (mean = 46.09, SD = 17.37), education (measured on a seven-point scale; mean = 3.69, SD = 1.89), sex (1 = female), and race (1 = black). Age is associated with more frequent discussion with family, in the neighborhood, and at work. African Americans discuss local politics more frequently in their clubs and associations, at work, and especially in their churches and places of worship. There does not appear to be a relationship between gender and discussion context except for the marginally significant ($p < 0.07$) finding that women discuss politics less frequently at work than do men. And perhaps surprisingly, education is not consistently related to more frequent political discussion. More educated individuals discuss politics more frequently only at work and in their clubs and associations.

Turning our attention to the Big Five, we find that conscientiousness affects frequency of discussion in the expected manner. Conscientious individuals discuss politics more frequently in their neighborhoods and clubs. We also find that higher conscientiousness is associated with more frequent discussion with family members. Though this was not one of our hypotheses, it is not difficult to imagine that conscientious people would be more inclined to discuss issues of local importance with their families. Extraversion also influences discussion patterns in the manner we expected, with all positive coefficients and significant effects for the most formal settings: clubs, churches, and the workplace. In these contexts, the outgoing nature of the extravert helps overcome institutional constraints that might discourage political discussion. Openness to experience is significantly related to discussing politics with friends, but not with any other contexts. We expected this relationship, but we also thought openness might be related to workplace discussion because those conversations are most likely to foster disagreement. Our weakest expectations were for agreeableness and emotional stability, and not surprisingly, those two traits are not significantly related to any of the six contexts we examine.

One potential concern with these results is that personality traits might be influencing a general tendency to discuss politics regardless of context. We already

Table 2 Personality and the context of discussion

Variables	Family		Friends		Neighborhood		Clubs		Church		Work	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Openness	0.00	−0.20	0.92**	0.48	0.50	0.33	0.57	0.14	0.04	−0.010	0.40	−0.05
	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.35)	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.35)	(0.36)	(0.35)	(0.35)	(0.34)	(0.35)
Conscientiousness	0.63*	0.66*	0.37	0.43	0.56*	0.58*	0.58#	0.62*	0.54	0.55#	0.19	0.20
	(0.28)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.30)	(0.31)	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.30)
Extraversion	0.33	0.17	0.51#	0.19	0.14	0.01	1.05***	0.84**	0.62*	0.54#	0.57*	0.27
	(0.27)	(0.28)	(0.27)	(0.28)	(0.26)	(0.27)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)
Agreeableness	0.10	0.05	−0.05	−0.19	−0.23	−0.29	−0.14	−0.20	−0.07	−0.11	0.09	0.00
	(0.32)	(0.32)	(0.32)	(0.33)	(0.31)	(0.32)	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.33)	(0.34)
Emotional stability	0.20	0.28	−0.02	0.14	−0.23	−0.18	−0.36	−0.21	0.08	0.11	−0.17	0.03
	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.31)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.31)	(0.32)	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.31)
Age	0.03***	0.02***	0.01	0.00	0.02***	0.02***	0.00	−0.00	0.00	0.00	−0.02***	−0.03***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Race	0.21	0.21	0.23	0.24	0.20	0.23	0.55**	0.58**	0.73***	0.72***	0.38#	0.37#
	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.21)
Sex	0.11	0.15	−0.07	−0.00	−0.17	−0.14	−0.21	−0.18	−0.10	−0.07	−0.29#	−0.22
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
Education	0.03	0.00	0.03	−0.04	−0.06	−0.08*	0.11*	0.07	−0.02	−0.04	0.10*	0.05
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Frequency of discussion		0.49***		1.16***		0.37***		0.74***		0.32**		0.88***
		(0.10)		(0.11)		(0.10)		(0.11)		(0.10)		(0.11)
Model χ²	47.30	72.18	27.40	149.33	33.20	48.28	41.41	90.32	31.82	41.75	44.81	114.18
Number of cases	649	649	649	649	650	650	563	563	574	574	577	577

Note: Cell entries are ordered logistic regression coefficients. The dependent variable in each model is the response on a four-point scale (high scores indicate more frequent discussion) to a question asking respondents to assess how often they discuss local politics in the particular context (with family, in church, etc.). The baseline models are found in the odd-numbered columns, while even numbered models include the respondents' general tendency to discuss local politics independent of context. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, # $p < 0.10$. *Source*: 2004 Community survey

know from past research that openness to experience, conscientiousness, and extraversion have been found to positively influence general patterns of discussion. While some may argue that there is no reason to examine discussion on a context by context basis, we contend the opposite is the case. We argue that it is important to establish that trait effects matter over and above a general tendency to talk politics and that individuals approach contexts differently, thus the extent to which trait effects matter will be influenced by the context. To do so, we replicate the six context models, but this time including a variable that captures how frequently the respondent discusses politics generally (coded on the same four-point scale as the dependent variables). These models are the even numbered columns of Table 2. The first thing to notice when examining these models is that general frequency of political discussion is a large and highly significant predictor of discussion within each distinct context. This makes sense given that, regardless of context we would expect a general tendency to talk about politics to be important. For our purposes, the most important thing to note is that, for the most part, the personality effects remain even when general discussion is included as a control. This is particularly true for conscientiousness which is again positively related to discussion with family and neighbors. The conscientiousness effect for discussion with club members is strengthened, and with general discussion included, we see evidence of a marginally significant ($p < 0.07$) positive effect for discussions in church. In contrast with conscientiousness, when general discussion is included the effect of openness to experience on discussion with friends vanishes and the extraversion effects are all diminished. The significant links between extraversion and discussions at work and with friends drop to insignificance. However, it should be noted that even with the diminishing of the effects, significant relationships remain for discussion in clubs ($p < 0.005$) and church ($p < 0.06$).

Taken together, these results make sense. Openness to experience and extraversion are both strongly related to a general tendency to discuss politics (Mondak and Halperin 2008). Naturally, the context-specific effects will diminish when general discussion is included. Even accounting for general discussion, extraversion has significant positive effects on frequency of discussion in formal settings such as in clubs and at church, and conscientiousness is a significant predictor of discussion in four of the six contexts.

In order to provide a sense of the magnitude of these personality effects, we calculate predicted probabilities for the conscientiousness and extraversion effects on frequency of discussion in clubs and other associations (model 8 in Table 2). We do this by varying each trait from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean while holding all other values constant (non-black female of average age and education). The predicted probability of a respondent discussing politics either somewhat or very often (the top two values on the dependent variable) rises ten points, from 0.47 ($CI_{0.95} = 0.39, 0.57$) to 0.57 ($CI_{0.95} = 0.47, 0.66$), as conscientiousness goes from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean. The probability rises 12 points, 0.46 ($CI_{0.95} = 0.37, 0.55$) to 0.58 ($CI_{0.95} = 0.49, 0.68$), when comparing an introvert to an extravert. Clearly, these results demonstrate that variation in

personality traits can have a substantial impact on frequency of discussion across a range of contexts.

The Respondent-Discussant Relationship

Up to this point, our analysis has been centered on respondents' general discussion habits. For the remaining investigations we will focus on the individual with whom the respondent most commonly discusses politics. The survey we utilize prompts consideration of this person by stating the following:

> Of all the people you discuss these local issues with, think about the one whom you have discussed these with the most. We are going to refer to this person as your discussion partner for the set of questions that follow.

After this prompt, the respondent answers a series of questions on the nature of their relationship with their discussion partner and their discussants political views. These questions are the basis for the analyses that follow.

Our survey asks respondents to characterize the nature of their relationship with their discussion partner. For our purposes, those respondents who talk politics most frequently with a family member or a "close friend" are classified as having an intimate tie. Approximately 68% of respondents named an intimate tie as their discussion partner. Those respondents who characterized their discussion partner as "just a friend," or "just someone they came in contact with" were classified as discussing politics with a casual tie. Approximately 21% of respondents have a casual tie, with the remaining 11% not naming a discussion partner at all. In examining these data, we retain all three categories by estimating a model via multinomial logit, with "casual tie" functioning as the contrast category. Plausible effects can be foreseen for several of the Big Five traits. First, individuals with low scores on emotional stability typically have a heightened psychological need for social reassurance, and thus they should be relatively likely to seek out conversations with close relations who are unlikely to challenge their views. Respondents scoring high in agreeableness and conscientiousness are predicted to avoid political discussion with casual acquaintances.

Coefficient estimates for the full multinomial logit model are displayed in the first two columns of Table 3. The first column contrasts having no discussant versus discussing politics with a casual acquaintance. Here, we see that none of the personality variables are significant, although agreeableness comes the closest ($p < 0.12$) as expected. Educated individuals and African Americans are more likely to discuss politics with a casual tie. The second column, contrasting discussing politics with a casual tie versus an intimate one, provides support for one of our hypotheses. Emotionally stable people are more likely to name a casual acquaintance as their discussion partner. Once again, we speculate that this finding is driven by emotionally stable individuals' self-confidence. Political discussions with casual ties are likely to lead to disagreement, but respondents scoring high in emotional stability appear to be comfortable enough with their own views to have such conversations.

Table 3 Personality and the nature of ties and differing political views among political discussants

Variable	No discussant	Close tie	Discussant holds different views
	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)
Openness to experience	−0.49 (0.60)	−0.11 (0.43)	−0.66[#] (0.37)
Conscientiousness	0.06 (0.52)	0.46 (0.37)	0.20 (0.31)
Extraversion	0.45 (0.49)	0.43 (0.35)	−0.17 (0.30)
Agreeableness	0.96 (0.61)	0.48 (0.42)	−0.44 (0.36)
Emotional stability	−0.07 (0.54)	−0.81* (0.38)	0.86* (0.33)
Age	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Race	−0.59[#] (0.33)	−0.80** (0.23)	−0.09 (0.22)
Sex	0.19 (0.29)	0.21 (0.20)	−0.21 (0.17)
Education	−0.29*** (0.08)	0.03 (0.05)	−0.05 (0.05)
Constant	−0.29 (0.65)	0.53 (0.45)	
Model χ^2	60.86		15.34
Number of cases	732		643

Note: Cell entries for column 1 and column 2 are multinomial logistic regression coefficients, with "distant/casual tie" as the contrast category. In column 1 the dependent variable is a dummy variable with positive scores indicating a greater likelihood of having no discussion partner. In column 2 the dependent variable is a dummy variable with positive scores indicating that the respondents' discussion partner is a close tie (family member or close friend). Cell entries for column 3 are ordered logistic regression coefficients. The dependent variable in column 3 is an item asking respondents to assess the degree to which their discussion partner holds views that differ from their own (three-point scale, higher scores indicate greater disagreement). *Source*: 2004 Community survey

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, [#] $p < 0.10$

To test this line of thinking further, we carry out a follow-up analysis. Our survey asks respondents to estimate the level of congruence between their own views and those of their discussion partner on a three-point scale ranging from zero (respondent and discussant's views are "much the same") to two (respondent and discussant hold "very different" views). An ordered logit model with this dependent variable is presented in the third column of Table 3. If our view of emotional stability is correct, high scores for that trait should be associated with a larger disparity between respondents' views and the views of their discussion partners. Examining the results, this is exactly what we see. The strong positive emotional stability effect indicates that respondents with higher emotional stability scores were more likely to have a discussion partner with different political views. To demonstrate the substantive significance of this effect we calculated the predicted probability that a respondent would have a discussion partner with views that were either "somewhat different" from the respondent or "very different" (62% of respondents discuss politics with someone whose views are "much the same"). With all other variables held constant as before, the probability of discussing politics with someone who holds different views rises from 0.30 ($CI_{0.95} = 0.24$, 0.38) to 0.42 ($CI_{0.95} = 0.33$, 0.51) as emotional stability goes from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean. There is also a moderately significant ($p < 0.08$) negative relationship between openness to

experience and discussant disagreement, suggesting that individuals high in openness are good at self-selecting into discussions with likeminded individuals. Contrary to expectations, agreeableness and conscientiousness had no influence on choice of discussion partner. The real story from these results is the sizable emotional stability effect. The natural tendency of most people is to discuss politics with close friends and relatives who generally agree with them. Emotional stability plays an important role in overcoming this tendency and exposing those individuals who possess the trait to novel and divergent views.

The Influence of Discussion Partners

Thus far, we have established that personality traits play a role in influencing where people discuss politics and with whom they converse. For our final empirical step, we consider the possibility that the influence of political discussion is contingent on personality traits. If traits can affect the kinds of political discussions we have, it is reasonable to expect that traits might also help to determine who is most responsive to information and argumentation provided by a discussion partner. The hypothesis for which we expect the strongest results posits that individuals high in openness to experience will be more influenced by political discussion. People who are very open to experience are more receptive to new information and ideas (Heinstrom 2003) and would therefore be more likely to reassess their own original political ideas in the face of divergent views. Extraverts value social interaction and have been described as "loyal followers" (Winter 2003). Because of these characteristics we expect those who score high on extraversion to be more likely to be influenced by political discussion. We have a similar expectation for agreeableness. Agreeable individuals are uncomfortable with conflict and therefore might feel compelled to bring their views into alignment with those of their discussion partner. Finally, we expect that individuals who are high in emotional stability will be resistant to the influence of political discussion. We have already seen that emotionally stable people are comfortable discussing politics with people who hold different views, and it seems plausible to imagine that they would be similarly comfortable maintaining their views in face of disagreement.

To test these hypotheses we model respondents' approval of President Bush (recall that the survey is from 2004). The dependent variables is a four-point scale ranging from zero ("strongly disapprove") to three ("strongly approve"), so once again we use ordered logit. We first present a baseline model which excludes personality traits. This model includes the four control variables used in our earlier models (age, sex, race, and education) as well as the respondents' partisanship, ideology, and trust in others. The baseline model also includes a dummy variable for whether the respondent names a discussion partner ($1 =$ no named discussant) and a summary of the respondents' assessment of the political preferences of their discussion partner constructed from two items, discussant partisanship and discussant Bush approval. This variable is coded -2 (discussant is a Democrat who disapproves of Bush) to 2 (discussant is a Republican who approves of Bush). The results of this model are displayed in the first column of Table 4. Not

Table 4 Personality and discussant influence

Variable	2004 Community survey		2006 National survey	
	Baseline model (1) Coefficient (SE)	Full model (2) Coefficient (SE)	Baseline model (3) Coefficient (SE)	Full model (4) Coefficient (SE)
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)	−0.01* (0.00)	−0.01# (0.01)
Race	−0.35# (0.21)	−0.33 (0.23)	−0.60 (0.42)	−0.92# (0.49)
Sex	−0.15 (0.15)	−0.22 (0.17)	0.02 (0.14)	0.11 (0.15)
Education	−0.10* (0.04)	−0.09# (0.05)	−0.08* (0.04)	−0.07# (0.04)
Party identification	0.57*** (0.05)	0.58*** (0.05)	0.56*** (0.04)	0.55*** (0.05)
Ideology	0.72*** (0.09)	0.75*** (0.10)	0.42*** (0.05)	0.42*** (0.05)
Trust in others	0.12# (0.07)	0.13# (0.07)		
No discussant	−0.00 (0.23)	−0.04 (0.24)	−0.11* (0.05)	−0.09* (0.05)
Discussant political view	0.47*** (0.06)	0.19 (0.17)	0.28*** (0.05)	−0.16 (0.18)
Openness to experience		−0.19 (0.35)		−0.23 (0.39)
Conscientiousness		0.31 (0.31)		0.17 (0.32)
Extraversion		−0.07 (0.30)		−0.27 (0.32)
Agreeableness		0.31 (0.36)		−0.20 (0.34)
Emotional stability		−0.09 (0.33)		−0.25 (0.34)
Influence–openness interaction		0.45* (0.23)		0.66* (0.28)
Influence–conscientiousness interaction		0.29 (0.19)		0.27 (0.20)
Influence–extraversion interaction		0.06 (0.19)		−0.22 (0.20)
Influence–agreeableness interaction		−0.28 (0.22)		−0.06 (0.21)
Influence–emotional stability interaction		−0.02 (0.20)		0.36 (0.24)
Model χ^2	618.101	568.57	842.67	813.77
Number of cases	768	705	1056	1003

Note: Cell entries are ordered logistic regression coefficients. The dependent variable is a four-point scale measuring respondents' approval of President Bush with higher values indicating greater approval. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, # $p < 0.10$. *Source*: 2004 Community survey and 2006 national survey

surprisingly, the respondents' party identification is the most important predictor of approval of President Bush, with ideology also serving as an important influence. The political views of the discussant are comparable to ideology in their influence on respondent approval of President Bush. Social influence does seem to be at work in our data.

Next we expand our baseline model by including personality traits. We include the five traits, as well as interactions between each of the traits and the discussant-views variable. If an interaction term is significant it indicates that the influence of a discussant is contingent on the respondent possessing that particular personality trait.

The results make up the second column of Table 4. Contrary to our expectations, we find no evidence that discussant influence is conditional on extraversion, agreeableness, or emotional stability. However, we do find a substantial effect the hypothesis which states that openness to experience is significantly related to discussant influence. To illustrate the effect, we use the model to predict respondents' approval of President Bush as a function of their openness and the views of their discussion partner. The results are presented in the first panel of Fig. 1. The dependent variable (respondents' approval of President Bush) is represented along the y-axis. The x-axis
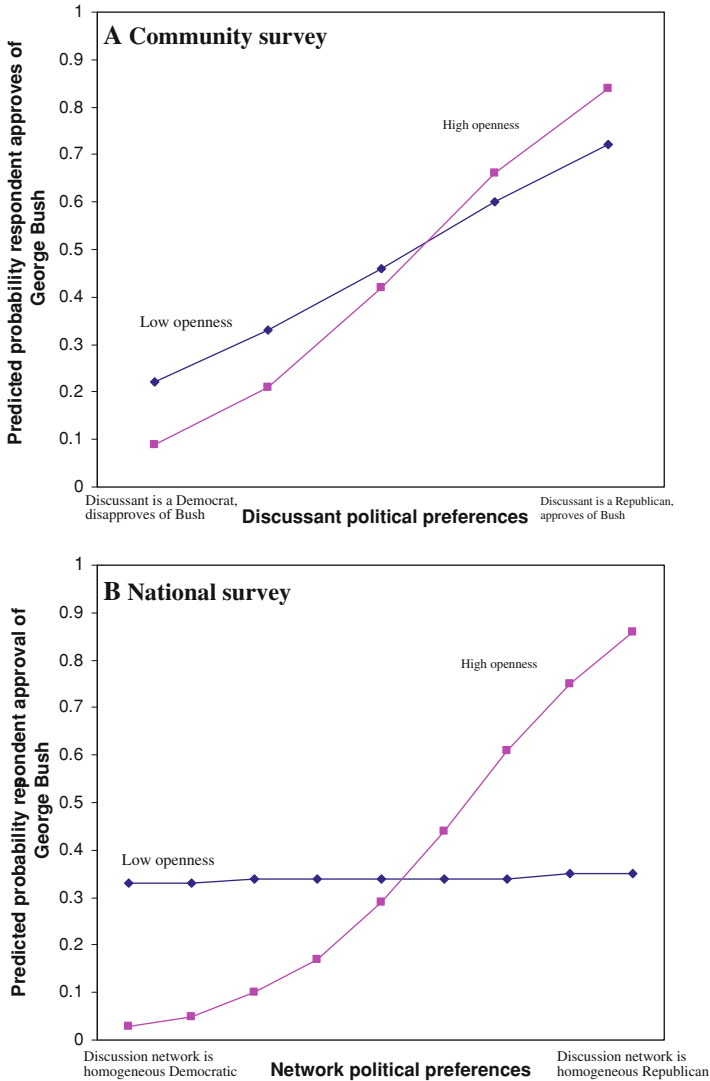

Fig. 1 Discussant political preferences, openness to experience, and approval of George Bush as president

represents the discussants' political views with higher scores indicating greater sympathy for President Bush (discussant as more Republican and more approving of President Bush). The two lines represent the maximum and minimum levels of openness to experience. All other variables, including the respondents' party identification, are held constant. As discussant favorability toward President Bush rises, a low-openness individual's Bush approval rises 50 points, from 0.22 to 0.72. Conversely, Bush approval rises 50% more steeply, from 0.09 to 0.84, for respondents receiving the maximum score on openness to experience.

As a final piece of analysis, we seek to replicate the finding described above with data from a 2006 national election survey. If we find a similar effect of openness to experience on susceptibility to discussant influence in a second data set, drawn from a national sample, we can be quite confident that we have identified a genuine and robust effect. Data are drawn from the 2006 Congressional Elections Study (CES), a national survey administered at Indiana University (for further discussion of these data, see Mitchell and Mondak 2009). The 2006 CES was a panel survey with 1,023 pre-election interviews and 766 respondents re-interviewed after the election. A supplemental survey was asked of an additional 400 respondents who only were contacted after the election.[4] For panel respondents, some of the control variables we use are drawn from the pre-election wave, but the political discussion variables were on the post-election wave, so our analysis will be conducted on the 766 post-election respondents along with all available respondents from the supplemental post-election survey. The instrument includes a discussant generator that asked respondents to identify up to four political discussion partners, along with information regarding how each discussant voted in the 2006 House election. Compared to the community survey, the advantage of the national data is that respondents could name up to four discussion partners instead of the single discussant asked for on the community survey. This provides us with a richer picture of the respondents' discussion networks. On the other hand, the community survey obtained more information on the discussion partner than the national survey did for each discussant named. In this way the two data sets complement each other nicely.

For our analysis of the national survey we utilize an identical four-point measure of presidential approval. Our measure of discussant views is constructed by using the respondents' belief about the partisanship of his or her discussion partners. Each Republican discussant added one point to a respondent's score, while a Democratic partner subtracted a point. For example, if a respondent said she had two Democratic discussants and two Republican discussants she would receive a score of zero. The possible combined score ranges from negative four to positive four. In our analysis we also control for the overall size of the network. Personality traits are measured in an almost identical manner and details of the measures for the national survey can be found in the bottom half of Table 1.

As before, we begin with a baseline ordered logit model of discussant influence that does not include personality traits. The results for this model can be found in the third column of Table 4. Predictably, we find large effects for respondent

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[4] The 2006 CES included oversampling of competitive districts. In the analyses reported below, data are weighted so that the data set constitutes a national probability sample.

partisanship and ideology on their approval of President Bush. We also find that the partisanship of the respondents' discussion network has a substantial influence on presidential approval. In the fourth column of Table 4 we add personality traits to the mix as well as interactions between the five traits and the partisanship of the discussion network. Once again, we find a significant effect for the interaction between openness to experience and discussion influence. Individuals with high scores on openness to experience are more influenced by the partisan makeup of their network. Once again, we calculate predicted levels of respondent Bush approval as a function of openness to experience and discussion influence (this time network partisan composition). The results here are more pronounced than they were for the community survey. As a discussion network shifts from overwhelmingly Democrat to overwhelmingly Republican, an individual with the lowest score on openness becomes only 2 points more positive in their assessment of President Bush, shifting from 0.33 to 0.35. For an individual with maximum openness, they shift a staggering 83 points, from 0.03 to 0.86, as their network changes from totally Democrat to totally Republican. The influence of discussion networks clearly hinges on the openness of the individual at the center of the network.

Conclusions

At the outset of the paper, we outlined three reasons why it is important for research on political discussion to account for personality traits. The first reason is that use of trait frameworks like the Big Five could help us develop a stronger understanding of the antecedents of political discussion. Second, we believed the social nature of discussion makes it an especially rigorous test for the Big Five model. And third, an analysis of the Big Five as it relates to political discussion helps to further the understanding of the breadth of the Big Five influence.

Our examination of the antecedents of political discussion demonstrates that personality traits consistently influence the nature of political discussions. Perhaps more importantly, the way personality shapes discussion follows logically from our theoretical understanding of both the traits and political discussion. Extraversion encourages more frequent discussion, particularly in more formal contexts. Conscientiousness, though not associated with a greater general tendency towards discussion, does lead citizens to more actively talk about local issues with the people who share those concerns such as family members, neighbors, and members of their church and local associations. Emotional stability helps individuals overcome a natural tendency towards discussing politics with likeminded people and leads to more conversations with casual acquaintances and people holding differing viewpoints. And openness to experience leads people to be more influenced by the people with whom they discuss politics. The only trait for which we identified no effects was agreeableness, and agreeableness has already been identified by past research as a moderator of exposure to disagreement within networks (Mondak et al. 2010). It seems clear to us that personality traits play an important role in shaping patterns of political discussion. Moreover, we contend that the social nature of discussion made it an especially rigorous test for the Big Five.

Our strong results should provide reassurance that personality traits are likely to influence most facets of political behavior, even those such as discussion, which are also constrained by contextual forces. The results presented here also demonstrate that the Big Five play an important role in political discussion behavior, thus furthering our understanding of the breadth of the Big Five's influence and the tangible value of five-factor approaches. The question is no longer whether personality matters but how exactly it matters. Our results suggest that the role played by traits in political behavior is complex and conditional. Such relationships are more difficult to study, but ultimately more rewarding because they bring us closer to a rich and full explanation of why people do what they do politically. Not all of our hypotheses were supported, but for personality to truly enrich our understanding of political behavior we must know much more about how these traits operate in political situations. In that respect, the hypotheses that missed are just as informative as those that were corroborated by the data. For example, we speculated that openness to experience would be positively related to political discussion in the workplace. Our reasoning was that individuals scoring high on openness would be more comfortable discussing politics with people who hold differing opinions. However, we found no evidence of an openness effect. This could be a sign that the institutional constraints of the workplace provide such a limitation that there is little discretion left to be explained by personality traits. Alternatively, our conception of the workplace may be in error. It could be that people are able to construct friendship groups at work that insulate them from disagreement (Finifter 1974). In our investigation of the relationship between individuals and their discussion partners we found a small effect suggesting that individuals higher in openness were less likely to discuss politics with someone who disagreed with them. On the one hand, we might expect individuals high in openness to be willing to have disagreements because of the information those discussions can provide. On the other hand, individuals high in openness may be better at self-selecting into agreeable discussions. Future work should seek to empirically untangle the theoretical confusion surrounding openness to experience and exposure to disagreement.

Social communication and political discourse play a significant role in American politics; the social contexts in which individuals interact influence the extent to which political discourse takes place. But why should this interaction matter and why is it worthy of examination? Coleman's (1988) ground-breaking analysis on social capital suggests one simple answer: social interaction provides information. Typically the acquisition of this information stems from casual conversations. Indeed, this claim is not controversial, research on social capital and social communication are premised on the assumption that these sorts of effects do occur. For example Walsh's (2004) observation of individuals in Ann Arbor, Michigan suggests that a by-product of social interaction is political discussion. "Much political interaction occurs not among people who make a point to specifically talk about politics but emerges instead from the social processes of people chatting with one another" (Walsh 2004, p. 35). However, as we suggested early on, the reaction of individuals to political conversation can vary based on personality. While one individual may thrive on a heated debate about a current event, another might shy

away from discussion altogether. Thus, it is our belief, that the next logical step to follow in this stream of research is an examination of the effect of personality and how personality contributes to political discussion. In this paper we sought to address three key questions with regard to personality and political discussion. One, what is the role of personality on the frequency of political discussion and is it influenced by the context in which the discussion is taking place? Two, what is the influence of personality on the relationship between discussion partners? In other words, does personality influence with whom individuals engage in political discussions (i.e. an intimate versus a casual tie)? And, third, what is the influence of discussion partners on respondents?

The analyses we conducted highlight the following findings. First, variation in personality traits can have substantial impact on the frequency of discussion across a range of contexts; indeed our analysis (presented in Table 2) demonstrates that personality traits influence discussion across all the contexts examined here, even when controlling for general discussion, personality traits remain significant in four of the six contexts. Second, we found that personality does influence the type of individual with whom respondents engage in this type of discussion. We found that emotional stability helps to overcome the natural tendency of most people to discuss politics with close, intimate ties such as family and friends. And third, we demonstrate that political discussion is conditional on personality traits. The analysis presented in Table 4 highlights that those individuals high in openness to experience are more influenced by political discussion than those low in openness to experience. Taken together these findings provide evidence for our key claim that psychological predispositions captured by individual personality traits play an important role in shaping the kinds of conversations citizens engage in, the setting for those conversations, and the influence discussion has on the individual.

These findings in no way diminish the consequences of political explanations for political discussion and influence. To the contrary, we expect that it is an interactive relationship between political factors and personality which gives rise to patterns of political discussion and behavior. As noted above, a number of studies have explored the consequences of political attitudes, awareness, interest, knowledge, and engagement for political discussion. Questions that are in need of further exploration, however, involve how these political characteristics may be mediated by and developed through psychological predispositions. There is great potential for further examination of how personality interacts with political attitudes and behavior to affect political discussion and influence.

We hope that these results will help to spur greater interest in individual-level predispositions among scholars of political discussion and social influence in particular. Work in this area has done an excellent job of demonstrating the limitations of an atomized and isolated view of the average citizen. People do not exist in isolation until the moment they are called for a randomized national survey. Every day citizens mingle together, influencing and being influenced by their friends at work, their neighbors, or by family members. It does not undermine the importance of context if we also acknowledge that people will try to influence their context in whatever way they can. Accounting for personality traits allows us to push our understanding beyond where we can go with demographics. With a

sophisticated understanding of individual predispositions we can begin to untangle the complicated interconnection between context and individual.

Moving forward, we see at least two areas in which subsequent research should be encouraged. First, we believe that effects between personality and various aspects of political behavior should be examined using multiple constructions of personality variables. As noted earlier, psychologists often measure the Big Five using expansive batteries, ones that sometimes include dozens of items for each trait dimension. Such an approach simply is not possible in most applied work on political behavior. The appropriate alternate, in our view, is that scholars reexamine identified relationships using different measurement strategies. This already has occurred in research on the Big Five and ideology, where numerous scholars using multiple measures of the Big Five consistently have found the same basic patterns (e.g. Alford and Hibbing 2007; Carney et al. 2008; Gerber et al. 2010; Mondak 2010). Similar replications on other facets of political behavior, including the present study's findings regarding political discussion, are to be encouraged.

Second, as research on personality and political behavior proceeds, it will be important for scholars to attend to the possible political implications, nnot just the psychological implications, of their findings. The Big Five traits have been shown to matter for patterns in civic engagement, included, as noted in this paper, for patterns in political discussion. But other research has demonstrated that these same traits influence ideological orientation, partisan affiliation, core political values, and a host of other political judgments. Thus far, these two research streams have not spoken squarely to one another. In contemplating their interrelationship, the possibility that we see is that personality effects on discussion and other forms of political activity may carry with them political content. For example, in this study, we found that individuals high in conscientiousness are especially likely to discuss local politics in a variety of contexts. Other research consistently has found that this same trait dimension is strongly linked with ideological conservatism. Taken together, the possibility arises that personality in this case has the effect of infusing local political discourse with a particular ideological bent. The broader and more important point is that personality effects on political behavior are complex and multifaceted. As research on personality and political behavior proceeds, it will be essential that scholars strive to develop theory-based based accounts that capture this nuance and complexity.

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