Orientations toward Conflict and the Conditional Effects of Political Disagreement

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We examine how differences in individual orientations toward conflict condition the effects of disagreement on political tolerance, knowledge, and participation. Past research, while recognizing the importance of individual-level moderators, has focused primarily on conflict aversion as an explanatory factor. Using three surveys, we show that individuals' possess distinct positive and negative orientations toward conflict both of which condition the effects of political disagreement. We find that people who are more positively disposed toward conflict experience more of the benefits and bear less of the costs of political disagreement than those with less positive and more negative dispositions. Possessing a positive orientation toward conflict appears to be a precondition for disagreement to produce higher levels of political tolerance and differences in both positive and negative orientations account for large gaps in both political knowledge and participation.

Everyday conversations about politics are an important source of information, persuasion, and motivation in democratic life.[1] Even if we never pick up a newspaper or turn on the television, our political discussions can alter our political actions, particularly when these discussions involve disagreement. Political disagreement brings us into contact with points of view that are different from our own, and increasing exposure to disagreement has been associated with higher levels of political knowledge and tolerance (Barabas 2004; Mutz 2002b). Yet, disagreement may also be detrimental. The same conversations that produce higher levels of knowledge and tolerance can generate ambivalence that leads citizens to withdraw from politics (Mutz 2002a, 2006).

In our efforts to understand how disagreement influences political behavior, we often focus on the social components of this interaction. Consequently, there is a rich literature demonstrating how the effects of disagreement vary based on the outcome of interest and the context of the interaction, but relatively little work has been done considering how the consequences of disagreement might depend upon attributes of the individuals involved in these discussions. This oversight is troubling because it leads us to ask questions about the role of disagreement in democratic life focused on how much disagreement is beneficial or necessary, while we fail to consider that the answer to this question depends on who is experiencing this disagreement.

The rare instances when individual differences have been considered demonstrate that citizens react differently to disagreement depending on their orientations toward conflict. In her pathbreaking work on political disagreement, Mutz (2002a, 2002b, 2006) shows how an aversion to conflict conditions the effects of exposure to disagreement. People with negative dispositions toward conflict fail to become more tolerant and are less likely to participate as their exposure to disagreement increased. More recently, Gerber et al. (2012) show how personality traits influence the willingness of individuals to disagree about potentially sensitive topics.

This past work is important, but it is also incomplete because it focuses only on conflict aversion. Drawing on literature in social psychology and conflict resolution, we present a theoretical conceptualization of political disagreement that accounts for both conflict aversion and conflict seeking. This framework

[1]An online appendix with supplementary material for this article is available at http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0022381614000255. Data and supporting materials necessary to reproduce the numerical results are available at https://sites.google.com/site/paultesta.

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provides a more psychologically and empirically realistic picture of how individuals deal with conflict in their social environment. Some people recoil from arguments while others actively seek out political debates. Our results, drawn from three surveys, confirm the superiority of our framework and demonstrate a number of important insights that past research has overlooked. We show that most individuals possess a mix of positive and negative orientations toward conflict, yet how much political disagreement a person actually experiences is only weakly related to their dispositions toward conflict. The consequences of exposure to disagreement for political behavior, however, are strongly conditioned by individuals' positive and negative orientations toward conflict. We find that exposure to disagreement increases political tolerance, but only for individuals disposed to find something positive about the disagreement experience. Orientations toward conflict also moderate the effects of disagreement on political knowledge and participation, but here the crucial difference is due to conflict orientations themselves, regardless of exposure to disagreement. Past research on political discussion, which has often ignored individual-level differences in conflict orientation, would be unable to detect these important effects. Even the most sophisticated previous work (Mutz 2002a; Ulbig and Funk 1999) could only tell half the story because it failed to account for positive conflict orientations.

Our results provide a more intuitive and complete account of the effects of disagreement on political behavior than previous research. People who are favorably disposed to conflict reap more benefits and bear fewer costs of disagreement than those who possess a more negative orientation toward conflict. These findings require us to reevaluate the consequences of disagreement. Because the effects of disagreement are heterogeneous, our normative prescriptions must be more sophisticated. More exposure to disagreement is not a panacea for low levels of political tolerance, but neither is it a universal deterrent of participation. It is only when we consider the interaction of orientations toward conflict and exposure to disagreement that we can explain who participates, becomes informed, or learns to tolerate the views of others.

Disagreement and Political Behavior

Scholars have long recognized that the information conveyed through social interactions can have important political consequences (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). Recent work has viewed the incidence and impact of disagreement in political discussion as a particularly important area of study. In general, exposure to disagreement in a person's social network is associated with higher levels of political knowledge and sophistication (Gastil and Dillard 1999; Scheufele et al. 2004). Exposure to cross cutting discourse is a source of new information as well as a motivation to acquire new facts and develop stronger arguments. Disagreement not only increases a person's understanding of her own position but also her understanding of the rationales for holding opposing views (Barabas 2004; Huckfeldt, Mendez, and Osborn 2004; Mutz 2002b). This knowledge of opposing rationales in turn leads to higher levels of political tolerance (Mutz 2002b) and persuasion (Levitan and Visser 2008).

Considering only the effects of exposure to disagreement on information and attitudes, disagreement appears to be a boon for democracy. Yet, Mutz (2002a, 2006) argues there is also a dark side to disagreement in terms of political participation. It appears the same mechanisms that lead to greater awareness and tolerance also create ambivalence. Increased ambivalence in turn lowers levels of political interest and participation. Exposure to disagreement, then, may lead the very people we want to engage in politics—the knowledgeable and tolerant citizen—to withdraw from politics altogether.

Subsequent work has highlighted the conditional nature of disagreement's effects on political behavior. Pattie and Johnston (2009) find that disagreement is only demotivating for some types of participation. Similarly, McClurg (2006a, 2006b) finds that the overall level of political sophistication in an individual's social network can increase participation and that disagreement reduces participation primarily among individuals in the political minority. Furthermore, a number of studies have explored the link between religion and political tolerance by examining the way religious affiliations and beliefs condition both the likelihood that individuals will encounter cross cutting discourse as well as how they will process such disagreement when they are exposed to it (Bloom and Arikan 2012; Djupe and Calfano 2012; Huckfeldt, Plutzer, and Sprague 1993; Robinson 2010).

Mutz's work also illustrates the conditional effects of disagreement. Possessing a civil orientation toward conflict (measured by retrospective evaluations of childhood experiences with conflict and compromise) increases the positive effects of exposure to disagreement on political tolerance (Mutz 2002b).

Consistent with the general finding of Ulbig and Funk (1999) that the conflict averse tend to participate less, Mutz (2002a) finds the consequences of disagreement for participation are largest for those with the highest levels of conflict aversion. In an experimental setting, Wojcieszak (2011) finds that those with more moderate opinions participate less when exposed to cross cutting views, while those with more extreme attitudes participate more.

One factor scholars have not considered is the extent to which people view disagreement as a positive or enjoyable experience. Past research has neglected this possibility because of a widely held assumption that disagreement is a primarily negative experience that people try to avoid. The logic for this assumption typically follows from some variation on Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance. Disagreement creates dissonance that individuals will act to reduce. As evidence for this assumption, researchers typically point to the high degree of similarity between views observed within an individual's discussion network (Marsden 1987). This phenomenon, known as homophily, would seem to indicate that citizens are extremely conflict averse. After all, if people liked disagreement wouldn't they engage in more political discussions with people who hold conflicting views? Most research on political disagreement has followed this logic (sometimes implicitly) in assuming that all individuals, to varying degrees, are conflict averse.

However, there is good reason to question this assumption. First, homophily alone does not establish that disagreement is a purely negative experience. Patterns of homophily can arise for a variety of reasons, many of which have nothing to do with individual-level preferences for agreeable discussion partners. For example, we know from past research that the supply of discussion partners in a particular social environment may limit the availability of disagreement, regardless of the preferences of an individual for a political sparring partner (Mutz and Mondak 2006; Huckfeldt, Mendez, and Osborn 2004). More generally, we contend that citizens frequently develop homogeneous discussion networks without any conscious consideration of political disagreement. To illustrate this point, consider a stylized example. Steve is a liberal. He lives in a major city where he works as a civil rights lawyer for a nonprofit organization. On the weekends, Steve plays in an ultimate frisbee league and spends time at his neighborhood's fair-trade coffee shop. Observing Steve's political discussion network, we see a lot of fellow liberals and very little exposure to cross cutting views. The traditional interpretation of this finding would focus on conflict aversion. Steve constructed his network to filter out dissenting views and avoid the cognitive dissonance that comes with disagreement. This interpretation is plausible, but it also seems terribly incomplete. A more realistic explanation would be that Steve talks to the people with whom he comes into contact. Most of these people are liberal and share his views because he lives in a liberal place, works in support of a liberal cause, and engages in activities that tend to attract other liberals. He would probably be happy to engage in a political disagreement if he encountered one (he is a lawyer after all), but that does not mean we should expect him to overhaul his life in search of those disagreements. Homophily in discussion networks is simply insufficient as evidence of widespread conflict aversion at the individual level.

Past work highlighting the moderating effects of conflict aversion, while important, is also incomplete because of its narrow conception of conflict orientations. Outside political science, scholars recognize a wider range of possible orientations toward conflict than have been considered in the study of political behavior (e.g., Rahim 1983) and often conceptualize the issue along dimensions of *conflict approach* and *conflict avoidance* (Bresnahan et al. 2009; Elliot and Thrash 2002; Goldstein 1999).[2] Some individuals find conflict particularly uncomfortable and seek to avoid it. Others are more tolerant of conflict and may even enjoy it. Most will possess a degree of both conflict aversion and approach. This simple, but important, distinction has not travelled well to the few studies that consider the impact of orientations toward conflict on political behavior (e.g., Mutz 2002a; Ulbig and Funk 1999). By focusing only on conflict aversion, past work ignores the possibility that positive orientations toward conflict may also condition the effects of disagreement.

Expectations

To illustrate the benefits of our framework, we first show that consistent with findings from psychology

[2]This literature often conceptualizes conflict orientations in terms of Rahim's five styles of conflict management, (competitive, cooperative, collaborative, compromising, and avoiding) which are functions of dispositional, environmental, and cultural factors. Elliot and Thrash (2002) show levels of conflict approach and avoidance are rooted in dispositional differences in personality traits, and we see this framework as more suitable for examining the conditional effects of disagreement. Considering conflict styles may yield further insights, but it also carries added challenges which we leave for future research.

and conflict resolution, individuals possess distinct positive and negative orientations toward conflict. Next, we show that while these dispositions have only a small effect on the amount of disagreement an individual is exposed to, they have a large effect on the consequences of that disagreement for political knowledge, tolerance, and participation. Our expectations for this analysis draw on past research demonstrating the moderating effects of conflict aversion and from more general theories explicating the role of emotion and cognition in political behavior. We know from Parsons (2010) that individuals respond affectively to disagreement, and we suspect that variations in conflict orientations govern the kinds of affective and cognitive processes individuals engage in when faced with disagreement. Our specific conceptualization of conflict orientations along distinct positive and negative dimensions fits within a broader literature in psychology which identifies distinct cognitive-affective systems regulating approach and avoidance behavior in response to stimuli, in our case political disagreement (Elliot, Eder, and Harmon-Jones 2013; Ito and Cacioppo 2001).

We expect that those with more positive orientations toward conflict to encounter more disagreement in their social network, but only up to a point. Past research demonstrates that the actual incidence of disagreement is constrained by a number of factors outside an individual's control (Mutz and Mondak 2006). A person who would generally prefer to avoid conflict may experience the same level of disagreement as someone who truly enjoys a good debate, simply because of the limited supply of discussion partners in the social environment (Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004). However, the effects of such disagreement should vary according to the dispositions of the individual involved.

With regard to political knowledge, we expect that exposure to disagreement should increase levels of knowledge for all citizens (Scheufele et al. 2004) but that these increases will be larger for those with a more positive orientation toward disagreement. We have two bases for this expectation. First, these individuals should be more likely to seek out disagreement and thus have more opportunities to learn new information from their discussions. Second, recognizing that exposure to disagreement is not simply a matter of personal choice, we expect that when people with a more positive view toward conflict encounter divergent views, they will be more likely to engage with this new information and incorporate it into their understanding of politics. In contrast, individuals with more negative orientations toward conflict should act to minimize the dissonance created from disagreement. When such people encounter disagreement, the experience will be more likely to lead to anger and a greater reliance on previously held convictions rather than generating enthusiasm and interest in the new information being encountered (MacKuen et al. 2010).

We expect disagreement to increase levels of tolerance (Mutz 2002b; Mutz and Mondak 2006), particularly for those with more positive orientations toward conflict. These individuals are most likely to come in contact with and learn the rationales for opposing viewpoints. Individuals without such dispositions should experience fewer benefits, and for those who find disagreement to be a generally negative experience, tolerance may decline as exposure to disagreement increases.

Finally, insofar as disagreement produces ambivalence, we should expect increases in disagreement to lead to lower levels of participation (Mutz 2002a, 2006). All else equal, since political participation creates the opportunities for disagreement to occur, we should expect those who like conflict to be more likely to participate than those who do not. People with positive dispositions may also be less likely to experience ambivalence as exposure to disagreement increases. We expect the conflict averse to avoid participation and the prospect of disagreement and to be less likely to participate as increased exposure leads to higher levels of ambivalence. However, Brader (2005) and Valentino et al. (2011) find that stimuli which generate anger can lead to higher levels of political participation. To the extent that a person with a particularly negative orientation toward conflict responds to disagreement with anger rather than ambivalence, they may actually participate *more* as exposure increases.

Positive and Negative Orientations toward Conflict

People who are conflict averse react differently to political disagreements than those who are not (Mutz 2002b; Ulbig and Funk 1999). Yet, individuals differ not only in the extent to which they avoid conflict and find it to be a negative experience, but also in the degree to which they may see disagreement as a positive experience (Bresnahan et al. 2009; Elliot and Thrash 2002; Goldstein 1999). Both positive and negative orientations toward conflict have been conceptualized as stable dispositions reflecting differences in individuals' personality traits (e.g., Bresnahan et al. 2009) and early childhood socialization (e.g., Mutz 2002b; Ulbig and Funk 1999). As such, these orientations can be treated as characteristics of

individuals that are causally prior to the experience of disagreement and are likely to condition the effects of disagreement on political behavior.[3]

Using two separate samples, we confirm that the individuals in our study possess distinct positive and negative orientations toward conflict. The absence of conflict aversion does not imply the presence of conflict seeking. Some people really dislike conflict, others truly enjoy it, but most fall somewhere in between, viewing disagreement as both a potentially positive and negative experience. This finding is important because if positive and negative orientations were just two sides of the same coin, adding a measure of positive orientations would simply provide a more refined measure of the same underlying concept. However, as we show, this is simply not the case, and considering variation in both positive and negative orientations is necessary for a more complete understanding of the effects of disagreement on political behavior.

Sample

The primary data for this study come from two waves of an online survey administered to undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university in the spring and fall of 2012. Students in introductory political science and geography courses were recruited to take the survey via email, and in total 697 students completed the survey. There are well-known limitations to using student samples (e.g., Sears 1986), and in the context of this study, we were concerned about the following issues. First, it was possible that our sample would possess an unrepresentative distribution of conflict orientations. Similarly, it seemed likely that student subjects in a diverse college environment might be exposed to higher levels of political disagreement than the general population. Finally, it also seemed likely that the students in our sample would be more politically tolerant, knowledgeable, and active than the general population. However, we are confident that these potential concerns do not bias our primary findings for the following reasons.

First, with regard to the distribution of conflict orientations, we see no theoretical reason to expect that stable dispositional traits, which have their roots in personality and early childhood socialization, will be dramatically different among college students relative to the general population. To reassure ourselves that this is the case, we collected a second sample obtained using Amazon's Mechanical Turk.[4] Although samples drawn from Mechanical Turk also differ from the general population in predictable ways (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012), both our student sample and the Mechanical Turk data tell essentially the same story: in each sample we find that positive and negative orientations are distinct dimensions with most people finding disagreement to be both a potentially positive and negative experience. Second, it certainly seems plausible that students in college may be exposed to higher levels of disagreement than the average citizen. Empirically, however, the incidence of disagreement in our sample does not deviate substantially from the findings of past work. Among respondents who listed at least one discussion partner, 66% experienced at least some disagreement with that discussant, a rate similar to those found by Huckfeldt, Mendez, and Osborn (2004) using American National Election Studies (ANES) data. Furthermore, consistent with the findings of Mutz (2006), levels of disagreement decrease as the size of a person's discussion network increases. Thus, while these students may be exposed to higher levels of disagreement than average, the empirical differences are modest at best and do not prevent us from assessing how conflict orientations moderate the effects of exposure to disagreement on political behavior. Third, the students in our sample do tend to be more well-informed and politically tolerant than the general population, creating a ceiling effect for some of the dependent variables in our analyses. Such truncated variation can actually work in our favor, suggesting the significant results in our analysis provide a conservative estimate of the moderating effects of conflict orientations on disagreement.

[3]In the appendix, we present a series of results that justify treating positive and negative orientations as stable dispositions that moderate the effects of disagreement. First, consistent with past work, we find expected relationships between our measures of conflict orientation and the Big Five personality traits (Gerber et al. 2012; McCrae and Costa 2008). The conflict averse tend to be more agreeable and conscientious and less open, extroverted, and emotionally stable. People high in openness are more likely to view political disagreement as positive experience, while the conscientious and, to a lesser extent, the agreeable are less likely to view disagreement in a positive light. Second, as a further test of the validity of our measures, we show how our measures of conflict orientation predict the extent to which individuals' said they tended to seek out and enjoy disagreement both in their everyday lives and discussions about politics in particular. As expected, people disposed to see disagreement as positive experience are more likely to say they seek out disagreement and enjoy it than individuals who are more conflict averse.

[4]Subjects for the Mechanical Turk survey were recruited in spring of 2013 through Amazon's Mechanical Turk and were paid $0.25 for completing a brief, five-minute survey about their political attitudes.

TABLE 1 Distribution of Positive and Negative Conflict Orientations

(a) Primary Sample							*(b) Mechanical Turk Sample*						
		Negative							Negative				
		0	1	2	3	Percent Positive			0	1	2	3	Percent Positive
Positive	0	19	27	26	8	11.5	Positive	0	1	10	17	16	10.9
	1	45	39	26	18	18.3		1	10	26	40	26	25.4
	2	86	55	45	11	28.2		2	16	29	43	21	27.1
	3	161	83	39	10	42.0		3	53	47	31	15	36.3
	Percent Negative	44.6	29.2	19.5	6.7	N=698		Percent Negative	20.0	27.9	32.7	19.5	N=401

Finally, we are able to replicate our main results from both samples for political knowledge and participation in a secondary analysis of nationally representative sample from the 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP).[5] Overall, we are confident that our samples provide appropriate tests of the relationships of interest.

Measuring Orientations toward Conflict

Our measures of conflict orientations are based on the conflict aversion scale used by Mutz (2002a, 2006). The measures of negative orientation were taken directly from Mutz's study, and the measures of positive orientation were designed to parallel these responses.[6] Answers to the three items for each orientation were summed together to create an index ranging from 0 to 3 for both positive and negative orientations toward disagreement. Table 1 presents the cross tabs of the two distributions. Rather than being either conflict averse or conflict seeking, most subjects in both samples tended to be "conflict ambivalent," finding disagreement both a potentially positive and negative experience.[7] By focusing only on levels of conflict aversion, past research fails to capture much of the variation in people's positive orientations toward conflict.

The Cronbach's α's for these scales are low by conventional standards although consistent with those found in past work (Mutz 2002b).[8] Cronbach's α is generally viewed as a lower bounds for the reliability of measure and is not appropriate for tests of dimensionality (Sijtsma 2009). For our analyses, what is most important is that these parsimonious measures do indeed reflect two distinct dimensions of conflict orientation predicted by work. The results from both a principal component analysis, exploratory, and confirmatory factor analysis reveal that they do. The principal component analysis produces two factors with eigenvalues greater than one in both our primary and Mechanical Turk samples, with the positive items loading onto the first component and negative items onto the second, and both exploratory and confirmatory factor

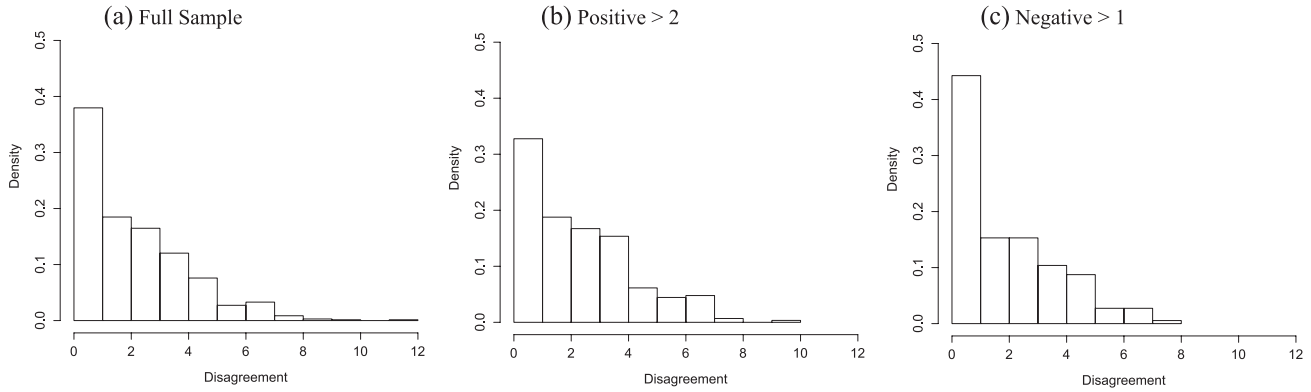
[5]Unfortunately, the 2008 CCAP did not contain a comparable measure of political tolerance. See Jackman and Vavreck (2009) for further details.

[6]The specific questions are as follows: "People choose to talk or not talk about politics for a variety of reasons. Please tell us which of the following statements apply to you (True/False): I am sometimes reluctant to talk about politics: (N1) Because I don't like arguments; (N2) Because it creates enemies; (N3) Because I worry about what people would think of me; When I talk about politics I do so: (P1) Because it is enjoyable or entertaining; (P2) Because I like to debate and argue about politics; (P3) Because I want to share my views and convince others."

[7]Chi-squared tests of homogeneity reject the null hypothesis that conflict orientations in these two samples come from the same underlying distribution. The student sample appears to be more conflict loving and less conflict averse than the respondents from Mechanical Turk. The same tests fail to reject the null of homogeneity between the spring and fall waves of our primary sample, suggesting that these distributions may differ across populations (e.g., Students vs. Mechanical Turkers) but are relatively stable within a given population.

[8]The negative orientation scale has a Cronbach's α of 0.48, and the positive orientation scale has a Cronbach's α of 0.57 in our primary sample (0.51 and 0.53, in the Mechanical Turk sample).

FIGURE 1 Distribution of Disagreement in Primary Sample



analysis support a two-factor model.[9] Thus, we are confident that our measures reflect distinct positive and negative orientations toward conflict. However, to assure ourselves that the results are not due to our particular measurement strategy, we present a number of robustness checks using alternative specifications of our models in the online appendix.[10] No matter how positive and negative orientations are measured in these models, our substantive conclusions remain unchanged.

Measures of Disagreement and Political Behavior

To measure people's exposure to political disagreement, the survey included a names generator in which respondents were asked to list up to three people with whom they discussed politics. For each named discussant, the respondents were asked about their frequency of political discussion, and a series of four items used by Mutz (2002a, 2002b) to measure the extent of disagreement between respondents and their named discussants. The scores were then weighted by the frequency of political discussion with each discussant and summed across all of the respondent's named discussants to create a summary measure of the respondent's exposure to disagreement.[11] The exposure scale ranges from 0 (no disagreement) to 12 (maximum disagreement) with average value of 2.15 and a standard deviation of 1.94. Figure 1 shows the distribution of disagreement in the full sample and for the subsets of respondents with conflict orientations above the positive and negative medians. Consistent with past research, overall levels of disagreement are low (the modal respondent is 0), yet, over 80% of respondents encounter at least some disagreement within their social networks (Mutz 2006; Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004). The correlations between exposure and conflict orientations in our two samples are in the expected direction but relatively small in size and, in the case of negative orientations, statistically insignificant. Whether someone is positively or negatively predisposed toward conflict seems to have only a small impact on the amount of disagreement to which they are exposed.

Political knowledge was measured using a standard five-item scale, asking respondents factual questions about U.S. politics. Correct answers were scored a 1, and the scale runs from 0 to 5, with a mean value of 4.08. We measure political tolerance using the least liked groups battery developed by Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1979). The scale runs from 0 (no tolerant responses) to 6 (all tolerant responses) with a mean score of 3.25 (a sample considerably more

[9]A minimal residual solution to the exploratory factor yields a MLE $\chi^2 = 4.69 p < 0.32$ and RMSEA index = 0.016 for a two factor-model in the primary sample and a MLE $\chi^2 = 5.81$ $p < 0.32$ and RMSEA index = 0.034 for a two factor-model in the Mechanical Turk sample. Similarly, confirmatory factor analysis yields RMSEA indices for of 0.058 and 0.065 and adjusted goodness of fit indices of 0.97 and 0.96 for the primary and Mechanical Turk samples, respectively. Further details of these analyses are available in the appendix.

[10]First, following Mutz (2002b), we estimate our models dichotomizing our conflict orientation scales at their respective medians. Next, we estimate the individual interactions of each positive and negative item. Across all these models, the substantive findings are the same, although in some cases less statistically precise.

[11]Our main findings are also unchanged if, like Mutz (2002a), we include controls for other characteristics of the respondent's network, such as the overall frequency of discussion and the total number of discussants. Our measure of disagreement also reflects variation in both network size and frequency of political discussion, and so we exclude these additional controls to create a more parsimonious model and avoid concerns of multicollinearity.

tolerant than the general population). Participation was measured using a six-item battery asking whether respondents had engaged in any of six nonvoting forms of participation within the past two years. The scale runs from 0 to 6 with the average respondent reporting having engaged in 1 act within the past two years.

Conflict Orientations and the Effects of Disagreement

People vary in both their positive and negative dispositions toward conflict. Our measures of these orientations produce two empirically distinct factors, each of which is likely to moderate the effects of disagreement on political behavior. We expect the gains in knowledge and tolerance as disagreement increases to be largest for individuals with more positive dispositions toward conflict. Similarly, we expect those with more positive orientations to generally participate at higher rates than those with more negative dispositions and for their patterns of participation to be less affected by increasing exposure to disagreement.

To test these expectations, we estimate three ordered logistic regressions from our primary sample, presented in Table 2, in which levels of political tolerance, knowledge, and participation are predicted by the triple interaction of exposure to disagreement with positive and negative orientations. The models also include controls for gender and race (coefficients not shown), and the substantive findings remain the same using different specifications or additional controls.[12] The marginal effect of disagreement in this triple interaction is always conditional on the values of conflict orientations at which it is evaluated (Berry, Golder, and Milton 2012; Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006).[13] A change in exposure to disagreement produces a different effect for someone with a purely positive orientation toward conflict compared to someone with a more mixed or purely negative disposition. As such, we cannot interpret the substantive and statistical significance of these effects by examining the coefficients from the models in Table 2 individually, since the magnitude and statistical precision of the effect of disagreement will vary based on the particular values of positive and negative conflict orientations at which it is evaluated.

TABLE 2 Conflict Orientations Moderate Effects of Exposure to Disagreement

	Dependent Variable:		
	Knowledge (1)	**Tolerance (2)**	**Participation (3)**
Disagreement	0.139	-0.153	0.090
	(0.133)	(0.120)	(0.124)
Negative	-0.032	-0.066	-0.156
	(0.209)	(0.206)	(0.228)
Positive	0.229	-0.025	0.518*
	(0.151)	(0.146)	(0.152)
Dis×Neg	-0.030	0.035	0.020
	(0.084)	(0.075)	(0.082)
Dis×Pos	0.008	0.100	-0.010
	(0.057)	(0.052)	(0.053)
Neg×Pos	0.024	0.040	0.023
	(0.103)	(0.100)	(0.108)
Dis×Neg×Pos	-0.003	-0.021	-0.008
	(0.039)	(0.035)	(0.038)
Observations	696	695	696
Log Likelihood	-854.766	-1,303.658	-1,018.533
AIC	1737.53	2637.32	2067.07

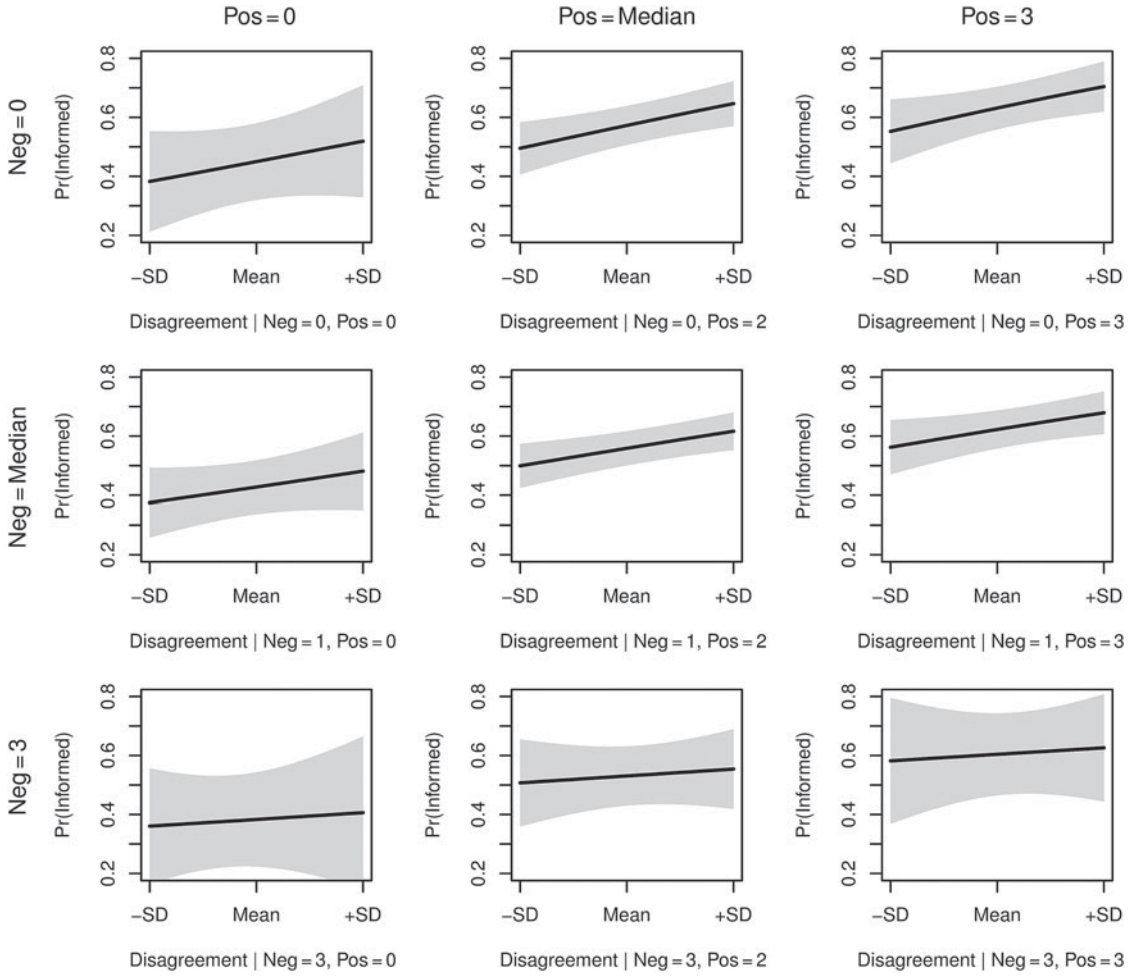
Note: Intercepts and controls for gender and race not shown. Standard errors in parentheses. $^*p < 0.05$.
Rows labeled "Dis×Neg," "Dis×Pos," "Neg×Pos," and "Dis×Neg×Pos" provide the coefficients for the constitutive interaction terms of exposure to disagreement and negative and positive conflict orientations.

Instead, to understand these relationships and test our predictions, we examine how the interaction of positive and negative conflict orientations conditions the marginal effect of a change in disagreement on the predicted probability of being fully informed (Figure 2), providing all tolerant responses (Figure 3), and engaging in any act of participation (Figure 4). Specifically, we plot the effect of moving from one standard deviation below mean level of disagreement to one standard deviation above the mean on the predicted probabilities from our models, when positive and negative orientations are at their minimum, median, and maximum values. Each figure contains nine panels, arranged in a 3×3 grid. The top-left panel shows the marginal effect of disagreement when both positive and negative orientations are at their minimums of zero. The top-right panel shows the marginal effect of disagreement for

[12]We also estimated models using ordinary least squares (OLS), ordered probits, negative binomial, and Poisson regressions. The substantive results of the triple interaction remain the same. Given the distribution of political knowledge, tolerance, and participation in our sample, ordered logistic regression provides us with a clearer way of illustrating how these interactions effect the ends of the distribution where there is the most variation to explain. Including controls for partisanship, ideology, interest, and internal and external efficacy do not appreciably alter the results and generally help tighten the confidence intervals of our predicted probabilities.

[13]F-tests comparing our models to those with only an interaction between disagreement and negative orientations all suggest our triple interaction provide a better fit to the data ($p < 0.05$).

FIGURE 2 Marginal Effect of Disagreement on Probability of Being Fully Informed



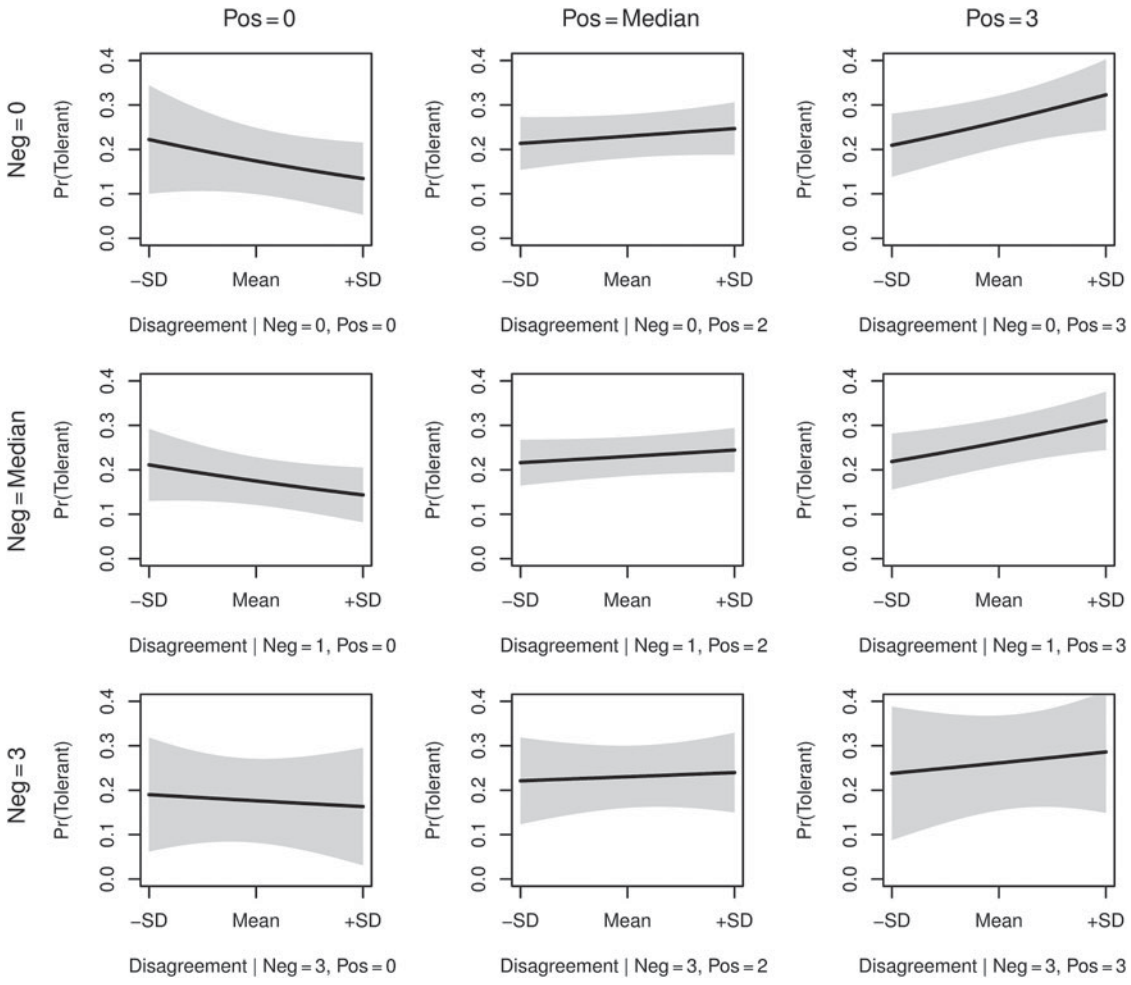
Note: "Neg" = Negative; "Pos" = Positive.

an individual with a purely positive orientation (positive = 3, negative = 0) while the bottom-left panel shows the effect for someone with a purely negative orientation (positive = 0, negative = 3). Moving horizontally in any row from left to right shows how the marginal effect of disagreement varies as individuals possess a more positive disposition toward conflict. Similarly moving vertically from top to bottom in any column shows how the marginal effects of disagreement changes as individuals possess a more negative orientation toward conflict. The dark lines in each panel show the predicted probabilities, and the grey bands provide corresponding 95% confidence intervals which take into account the contribution of all the variables of the interaction into the precision of the estimate.[14]

[14]All of the predicted probabilities are for a white male, the modal respondent in our sample.

Turning first to the effects of disagreement on political knowledge, Figure 2 illustrates several important results. First, consistent with our expectations, having a more positive orientation toward conflict is always associated with a higher probability of being fully informed. Second, while the marginal effect of increased exposure to disagreement is always positive, these effects diminish as an individual's degree of conflict aversion increases. For example, an individual with a purely positive orientation toward conflict (top-left panel) has a predicted probability of being fully informed that ranges from 55% at low levels of disagreement (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean) to 70% at high levels of disagreement (one standard deviation above the mean). The same change in disagreement for someone with a median degree of conflict aversion but no positive disposition toward conflict (left panel, middle row), also increases their predicted probability from 38 to 48%. The differences in predicted probabilities are both substantively

FIGURE 3 Marginal Effect of Disagreement on Probability of All Tolerant Responses



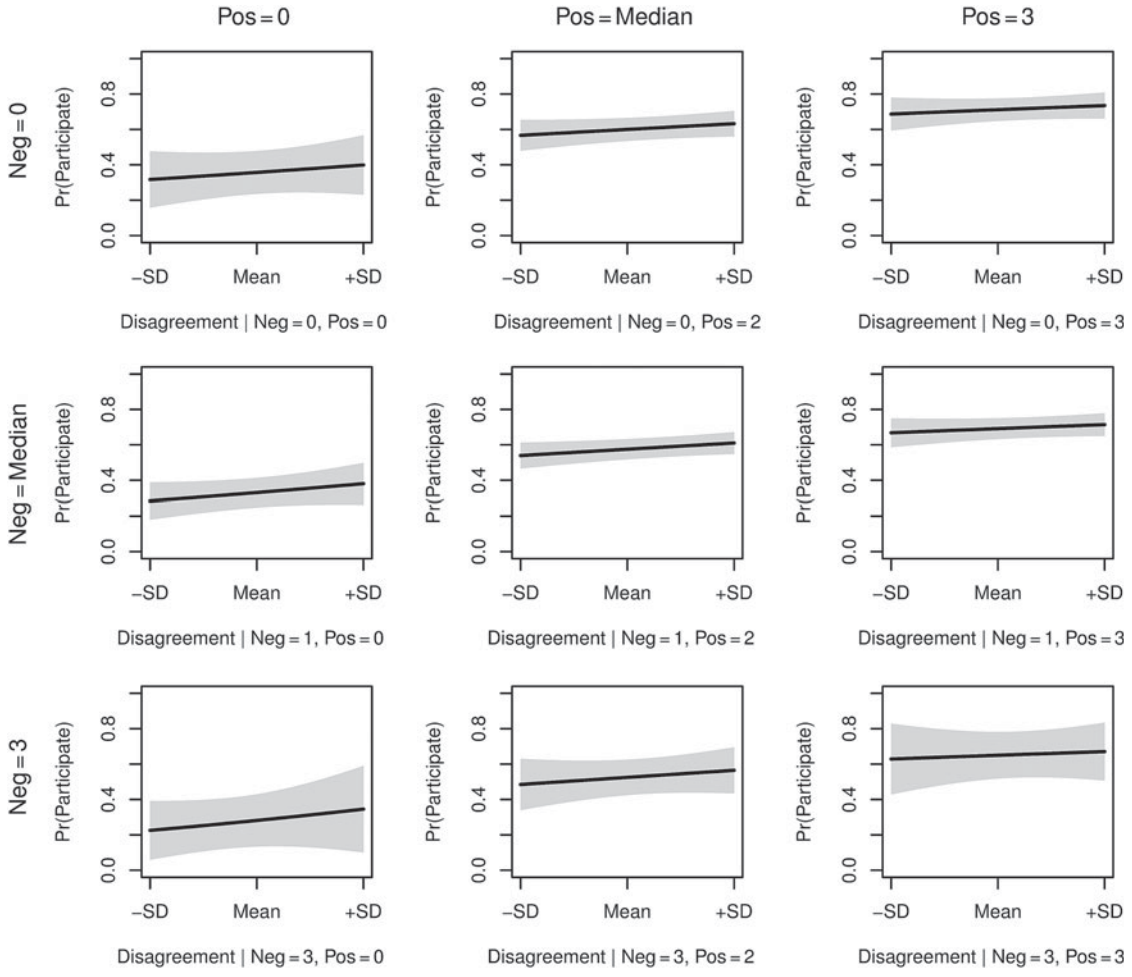
Note: "Neg" = Negative; "Pos" = Positive.

large and statistically significant at all but the lowest levels of exposure to disagreement. Finally, looking at individuals with the most negative orientation toward conflict, we see that increased exposure to disagreement has essentially no effect on the predicted probability of being fully informed.

Next, we consider the effects of disagreement on political tolerance.[15] The center and right columns of Figure 3 show that exposure to disagreement has a positive effect on the predicted probability of providing all tolerant responses to our measure of political tolerance and that this effect increases as an individual possesses a more positive orientation toward conflict. However, as the panels in the left column show, for someone without any positive orientation toward conflict, increases in disagreement are actually associated with lower probabilities of providing all tolerant responses. At low levels of exposure to disagreement, these differences are small and statistically insignificant. As exposure to disagreement increases, people with a positive orientation toward conflict become more tolerant. People without such a favorable disposition (left column) become less tolerant, at the minimum, median, and maximum levels of conflict aversion, and the gaps between those who enjoy conflict and those who find nothing beneficial about it become statically significant at above average levels of disagreement. Clearly, the link between disagreement

[15]As noted above, existing literature documents an important and complex connection between religion and political tolerance. Unfortunately, we lack measures of religious affiliation and religiosity in the two samples in which we have measures of political tolerance. However, in the CCAP sample, which contains coarser measures of positive and negative conflict orientations, we find no statistically significant relationship between these variables and measures of religiosity and born-again status, and including these variables as controls in our models for political participation and knowledge do not change the results. We suspect that individual dispositions like conflict orientations may serve as further moderators in the complex relationships between religion and political tolerance and believe this to be another important avenue for future research.

FIGURE 4 Marginal Effect of Disagreement on Probability of Any Participation



Note: "Neg" = Negative; "Pos" = Positive.

and political tolerance is conditional on people possessing at least some positive orientation toward conflict.

Figure 4 presents the effects of disagreement on political participation. As previously noted, there is contention among scholars about whether disagreement leads to more or less participation (e.g., Mutz 2002a; Pattie and Johnston 2009). In our own analysis, we find several interesting results that may help explain the persistence of this debate. First, consistent with Ulbig and Funk (1999), the more negative a person finds conflict the less likely they are to participate in politics. Second, after controlling for orientations toward conflict, exposure to disagreement has only a slight effect on the probability of participating. Both the conflict averse and conflict seeking appear to participate slightly more as disagreement increases, but these effects are substantively small when compared to the average differences observed between those with positive and negative orientations.[16]

Taken together, these results suggest that individuals with a more positive view of conflict tend to reap more of the benefits while experiencing less of the costs associated with disagreement. It is worth

[16]These results appear to be in conflict with the earlier findings of Mutz (2002a) although they are consistent with the work of Pattie and Johnston (2009) and Ulbig and Funk (1999). Under certain specifications, including additional controls and combining measures of conflict orientation, we are occasionally able to replicate Mutz's original findings, but these results are not robust and rely on somewhat arbitrary and tenuous modeling decisions. One possible explanation is that our models fail to accurately identify the individuals for whom disagreement generates the kind of ambivalence that leads them to participate less. We see this as an interesting and important avenue for future research, but we remain confident in the robustness of our own findings.

TABLE 3 Replication Results Using Mechanical Turk and CCAP Samples

	Mechanical Turk Sample			*CCAP Sample*	
	Knowledge (1)	**Tolerance (2)**	**Participation (3)**	**Knowledge (4)**	**Participation (5)**
Disagreement	0.401	0.649	0.879	0.065	0.029
	(1.857)	(1.638)	(1.949)	(0.069)	(0.073)
Negative	-0.127	-0.693	0.136	0.440	-1.510
	(0.597)	(0.523)	(0.628)	(0.804)	(0.850)
Positive	0.521	0.143	0.753	-0.317	-0.248
	(0.605)	(0.527)	(0.603)	(0.594)	(0.632)
Dis*Neg	0.397	0.470	-0.139	-0.165	0.007
	(0.867)	(0.767)	(0.902)	(0.117)	(0.118)
Dis*Pos	0.214	-0.035	-0.306	0.040	0.027
	(0.869)	(0.755)	(0.846)	(0.082)	(0.085)
Neg*Pos	0.205	0.217	-0.108	1.118	1.534
	(0.321)	(0.275)	(0.314)	(1.106)	(1.168)
Dis*Neg*Pos	-0.501	-0.120	0.067	-0.116	-0.164
	(0.456)	(0.392)	(0.443)	(0.154)	(0.158)
Observations	396	392	398	696	588
Log Likelihood	-445.778	-702.786	-550.053	-867.899	-690.400
AIC	917.56	1435.57	1130.11	1761.80	1406.80

Note: Intercepts and controls for gender and race not shown.
Standard errors in parentheses. $^{*}p < 0.05$.
Rows labeled "Dis×Neg," "Dis×Pos," "Neg×Pos," and "Dis×Neg×Pos" provide the coefficients for the constitutive interaction terms of exposure to disagreement and negative and positive conflict orientations.

considering whether the kind of people who engage with politics in search of the thrill of debate and conflict differ markedly from those who may do so in spite of the prospect for disagreement and conflict to occur. Our data suggest that they do. Among the individuals in our sample who report being interested or very interested in politics and are exposed to above-average levels of disagreement, people who possess the most positive view toward conflict (i.e., positive = 3 and negative = 0) exhibit higher average levels of political knowledge, tolerance, and participation compared to those with similar levels of interest but more ambivalent outlooks on conflict (positive < 3 and negative > 0).[17]Again these kinds of comparisons and insights arise only by considering how individual attributes like political interest and conflict orientations condition the effects of the broader social environment.

Replications

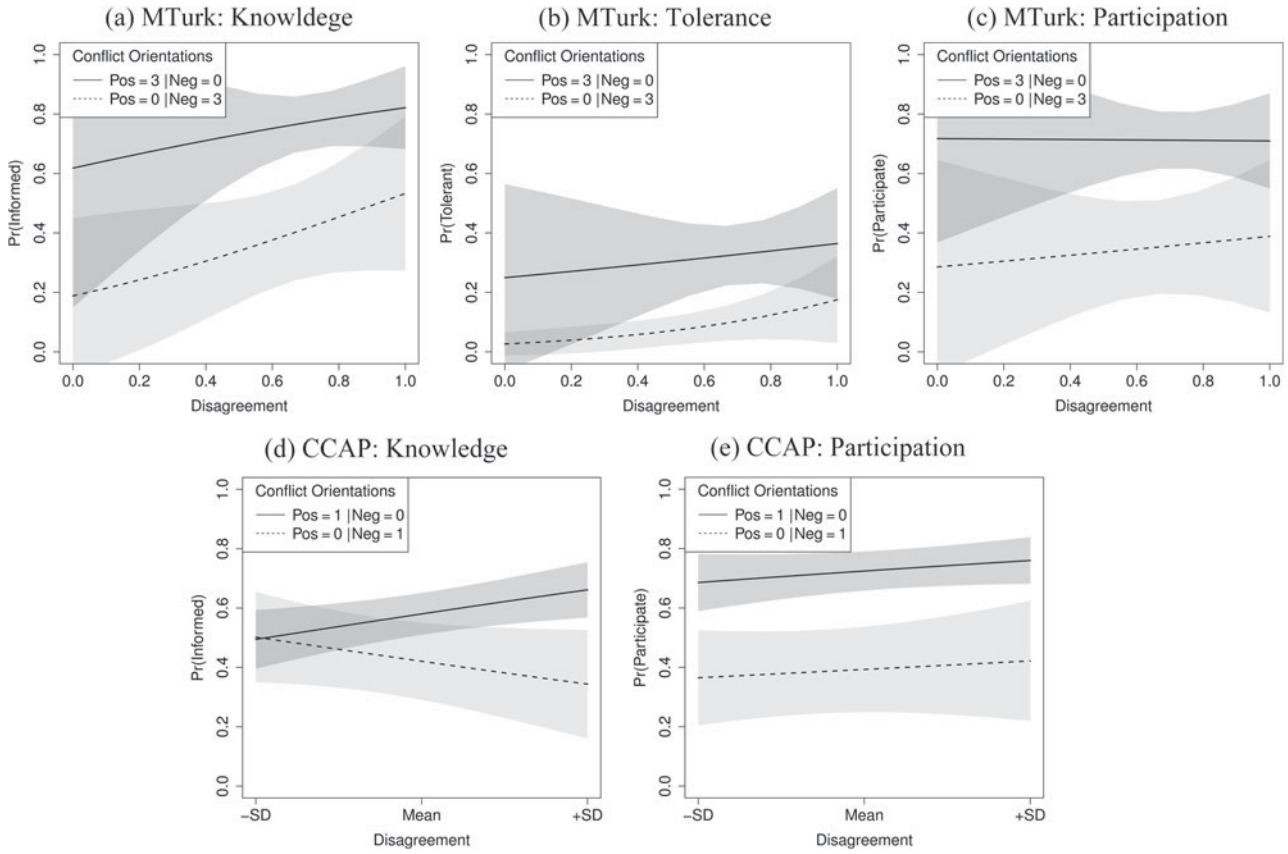
To test the robustness of our findings, we replicated our analyses with the data collected from Mechanical Turk, as well as data from the 2008 CCAP previously analyzed by Gerber, Huber, Doherty and Dowling (2011), Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, Raso et al. (2011), and Gerber et al. (2012).[18] Each dataset has its strengths and weaknesses. The Mechanical Turk data contain our preferred measures of conflict orientation and political knowledge, tolerance, and participation. On the other hand, the data are not a random national sample, and our measure of disagreement is less precise.[19] The CCAP data are from a nationally representative sample and contain more precise measures of disagreement than the Mechanical

[17]Among the politically interested with positive dispositions toward conflict, the average level of political knowledge was 4.44 compared to 4.11 among the interested but conflict ambivalent. Average levels of tolerance were 3.95 (compared to 3.20), and the average number of acts of participation was 1.85 (compared to 1.05). All differences are statistically significant with p-values < 0.05. We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this line of inquiry.

[18]See Jackman and Vavreck (2009) for further details about the CCAP sample. We thank the authors of these studies and the principal investigators of the CCAP for providing us with the data for this replication.

[19]Specifically, we measure disagreement by respondents' answers to the question "When you talk about politics, how often do you disagree?" with the four response options (never, rarely, sometimes, and often) recoded to range from 0 to 1.

FIGURE 5 Predicted Probabilities for Mechanical Turk Sample



Note: "Pos" = Positive; "Neg" = Negative.

Turk data. Unfortunately, this dataset does not contain a comparable measure of political tolerance, and the available measures of conflict orientation are more coarse.[20]

Table 3 presents the results from the ordered logistic regressions.[21] The top row of Figure 5 plots the predicted probabilities from our Mechanical Turk sample of offering tolerant responses, being fully informed and participating in politics for individuals with a purely positive (solid lines) and purely negative (dashed lines) orientation toward conflict. As before, we see that people who are positively disposed toward conflict are more likely to be politically informed, tolerant, and active compared to those with more negative orientations toward conflict, and these gaps increase as exposure to disagreement rises. Similarly, Figures 5d and 5e show the predicted probability of being fully informed and engaging in any act of political participation for the CCAP data. Again, those with more positive orientations are

[20]Disagreement in the CCAP models is the sum of two measures of political disagreement with a family and non-family discussion partner each of which is weighted by the frequency of political discussion and contact with that discussion partner. Positive conflict orientations are measured by dichotomous indicator that takes a value of 1 for respondents who claim that in poltiical discussions they either ''Enjoy when we agree or disagree'' or ''Enjoy when we disagree,'' and 0 otherwise. Negative orientations are captured by a 4-point scale that takes a maximum value of 1 for respondents who say it is ''better to avoid'' sensitive topics and a minimum of 0 for individuals that are ''glad to discuss'' such topics. We recognize that these are less than ideal measures of conflict orientations, but the items yield a distribution and negative correlation ($r = -0.17$) roughly similar to our primary and Mechanical Turk samples. As with our other samples, exposure to disagreement has a marginal positive correlation with positive orientations ($r = 0.16$) and statistically insignificant negative correlation with negative orientations ($r = -0.07$). Political knowledge and participation are measured by four- and five-item scales, respectively. Question wordings and descriptive statistics are provided in the appendix.

[21]Neither sample allows us to exactly replicate the analysis from Table 2. The Mechanical Turk data contain a different measure of disagreement. The CCAP data contain a more comparable measure of disagreement but much rougher measures of conflict orientations. Still, as shown below, predicted probabilities from these models, largely confirm the findings from our initial analysis.

more likely to become informed and participate as exposure to disagreement increases. The consistency of the findings across our student sample, the Mechanical Turk data, and the nationally representative CCAP data make us extremely confident in our substantive conclusions. Clearly, positive and negative orientations have distinct effects on political behavior, both directly, and in conditioning the influence of disagreement.

Conclusion

The consequences of political disagreement for political behavior are clearly conditional. In this article, we have demonstrated the value of considering both positive and negative orientations toward conflict as individual-level moderators of the effects of disagreement. These dispositional differences, while only weakly related to the incidence of cross cutting discourse, clearly condition the effects of disagreement on political knowledge, tolerance, and behavior. We find that while disagreement is an important source of information for all individuals, those with a positive orientation toward conflict benefit the most from increased exposure to cross cutting views. Similarly, our results suggest that possessing at least some positive disposition toward conflict seems to be a precondition for political disagreement to lead to higher levels of political tolerance. Finally, the effects of exposure to disagreement on political participation are dwarfed by the differences in positive and negative orientations. Citizens who are comfortable with conflict will be more likely to engage in the political process, while the conflict averse remain on the sidelines. Taken together, these findings suggest that Mutz's (2002a, 2006) concern about the dark side of cross cutting discussion may be misplaced. Disagreement increases knowledge for all citizens and tolerance for those who are comfortable with conflict. Political participation appears to be driven more by individual predispositions than by exposure to disagreement. From our data, there seems to be no tangible downside to encouraging greater levels of disagreement. However, it is important to note that most of the benefits of disagreement are enjoyed only by those with a positive orientation to conflict.

It is also worth reiterating that all of the findings discussed above only emerge when considering the combined effects of both positive and negative orientations toward conflict. Our results make clear that it is imperative for future research on political discussion to account for orientations to conflict. Past research on conflict aversion should be commended for taking individual conflict orientations into account, but by ignoring positive orientations, this work missed a major part of the story.

Assessing the effects of both positive and negative orientations toward conflict opens up several interesting avenues for future research. First, while we are confident in the ability of our 4-point scales to capture general variations in these concepts, clearly more extensive scales could provide more precise estimates of the magnitude of these relationships. Second, we believe our data likely provide conservative estimates of the true relationships between conflict orientations, disagreement, and political behavior. Future research that takes into account the importance of dispositional differences can not only provide more precise estimates of relationships found here but can also explore how such differences interact with other important factors such as religion and gender. Third, more work can be done to clarify the specific affective and/or cognitive mechanisms that produce these moderating relationships. Finally, the relationships that emerge in our cross-sectional data have many interesting dynamic implications that could be tested using either experimental or panel designs. For example, we might expect that when exposed to the same levels of disagreement over the course of a political campaign, individuals with more positive orientations toward conflict will learn more than their more negatively disposed peers. Alternatively, we might consider the extent to which orientations condition the effects of a specific interaction, and it seems likely that the incidence of persuasion will depend on both the positive and negative orientations of each participant. All of these possibilities flow from an acknowledgment that individuals will react differently to cross cutting discussion depending on their personal orientations toward conflict.

Who becomes politically informed, learns to tolerate a disliked group, or decides to participate matters for democracy and the study of political disagreement can provide important insights into each of these phenomena. Just as there are two sides to any argument, there are two sides to how individuals can respond to the experience of political disagreement. Both positive and negative orientations toward conflict help determine who is likely to reap the benefits or bear the costs of political disagreement.

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