

REVISITING DISAGREEMENT IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

RESULTS FROM A SERIES OF SURVEY EXPERIMENTS

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BACKGROUND/OVERVIEW

The concept of interpersonal political disagreement remains central to work on deliberation in mass publics, and to the broader study of social context. Indeed, the extent to which individuals are (not) exposed to challenging information, perspectives, and norms in their everyday lives is widely considered to play a fundamental role in democratic functioning. Using name generators embedded in surveys, some scholarship has emphasized the mostly agreeable nature of Americans' core social networks. Building on these techniques, we reconsider these – perhaps incomplete – portraits of disagreement by: 1) replicating standard political name generator prompts, and 2) randomly assigning respondents to additional ones that explicitly ask them to name individuals with whom they disagree. The manipulations on these items vary the depth of disagreement, as well as its subject-matter and experience. Our study advances debates over the conceptualization and operationalization of disagreement, and is particularly timely given contemporary narratives concerning division and affective polarization.

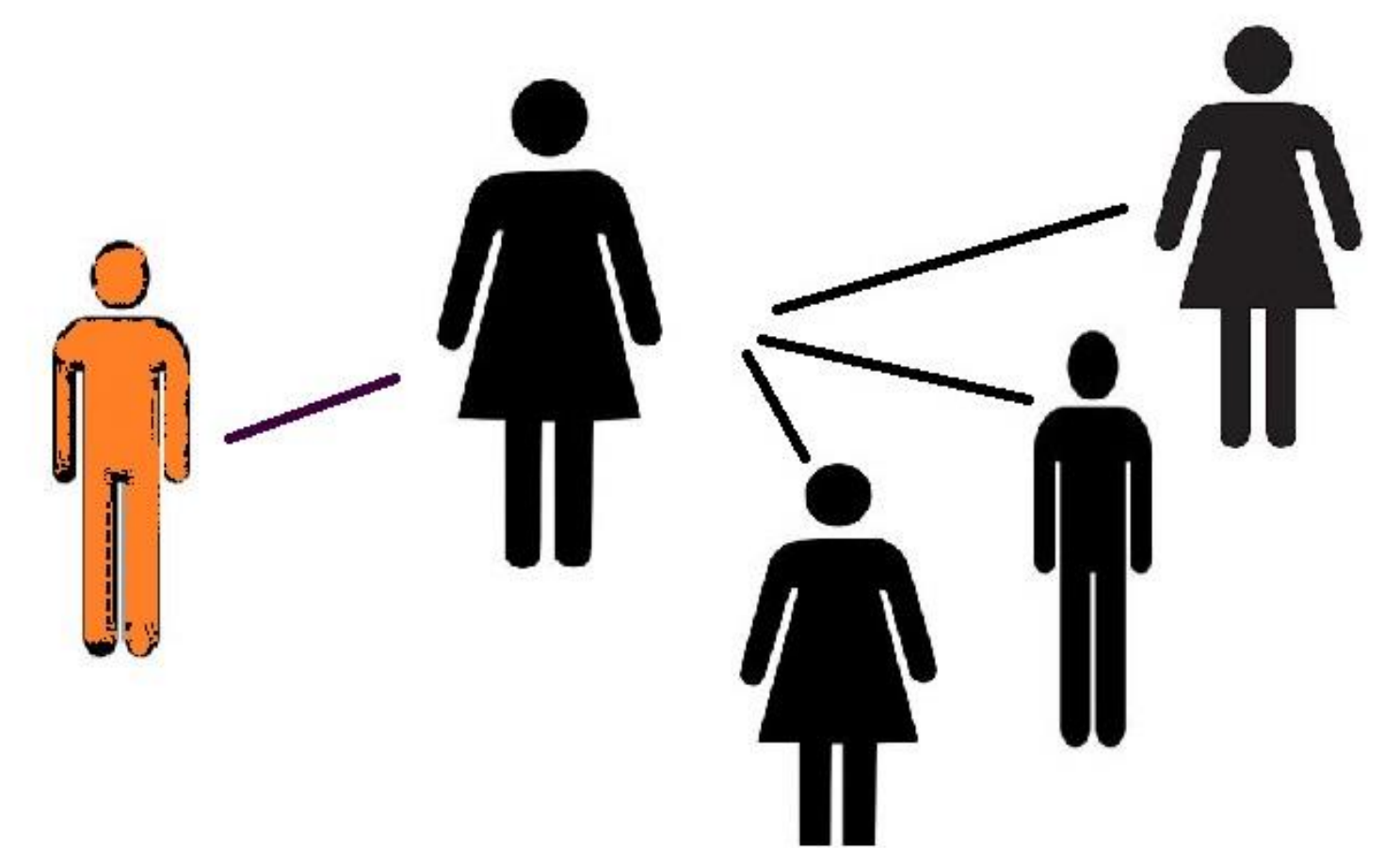
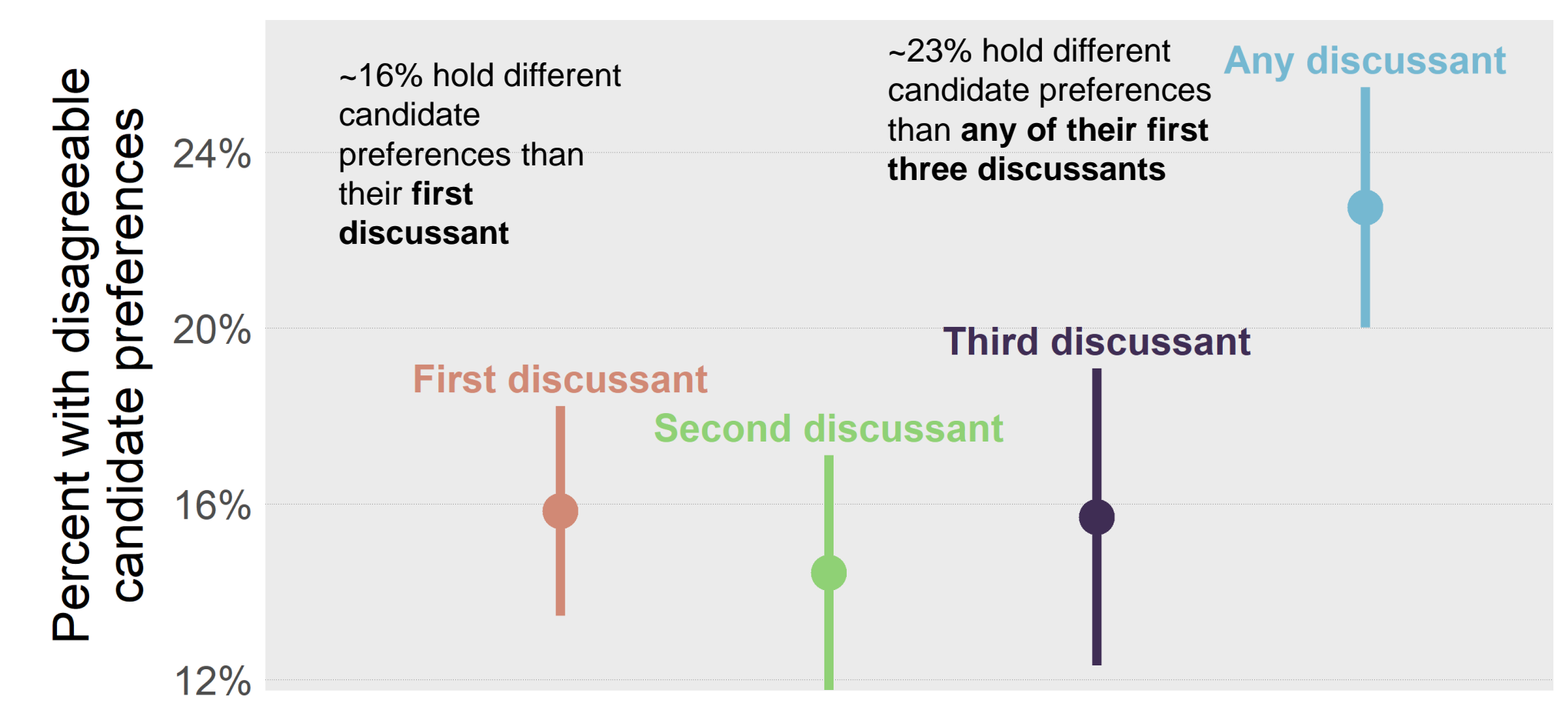
TAKEAWAYS

- People encounter more disagreement than standard network name generators would suggest
- Common strategies for measuring disagreement (e.g., vote choice) may be insufficient
- Depth, content, and interaction with disagreement should be considered
- If mixing generators, network averages should be interpreted with caution

1 The standard name generator...

"From time to time, people discuss government, elections, and politics with other people. I'd like to ask you about the people with whom you discuss these matters. These people might or might not be relatives. Can you think of anyone?"

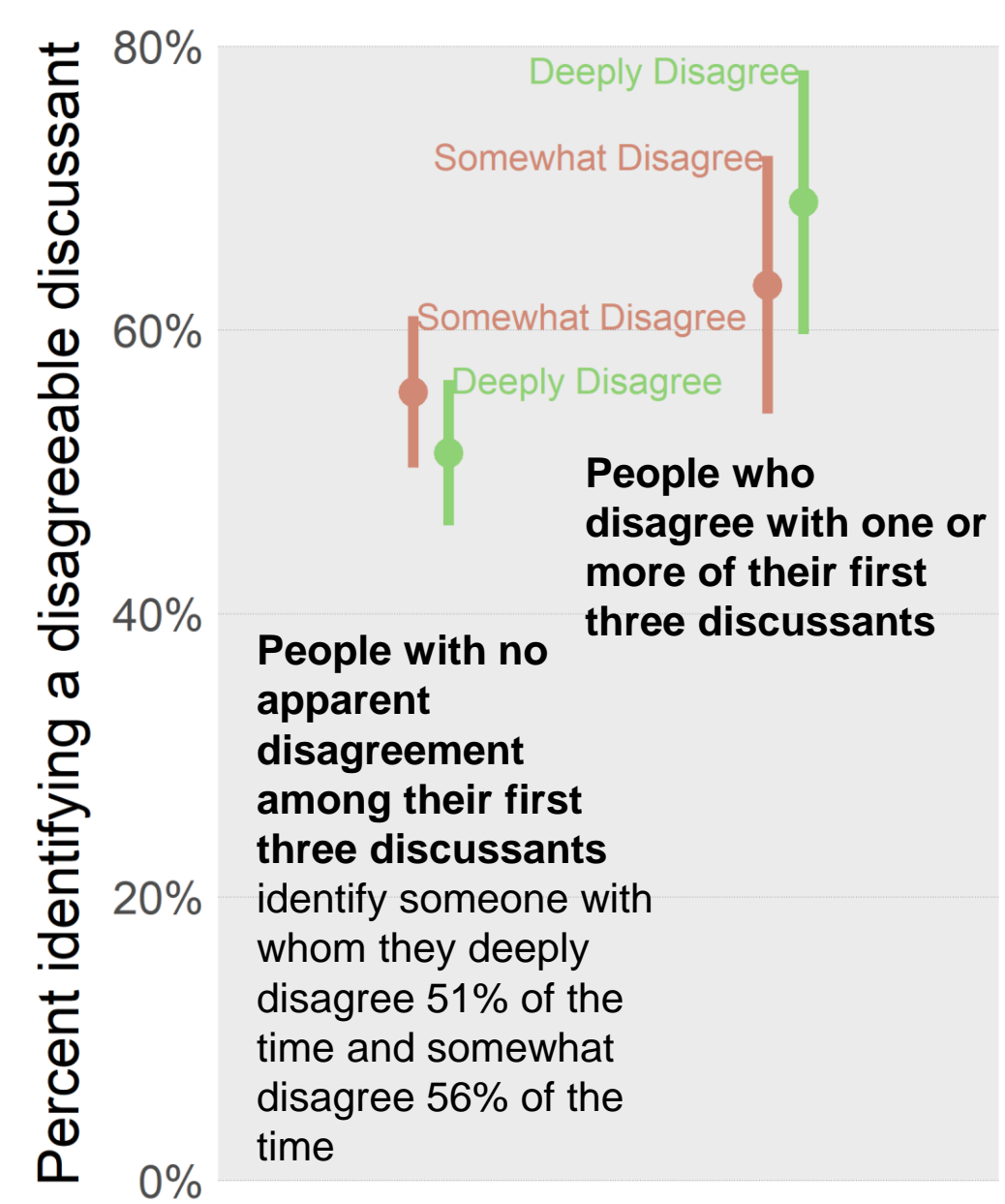
2 ...suggests few respondents encounter disagreement



3 ...but when asked explicitly, a majority of respondents identify someone with whom they disagree

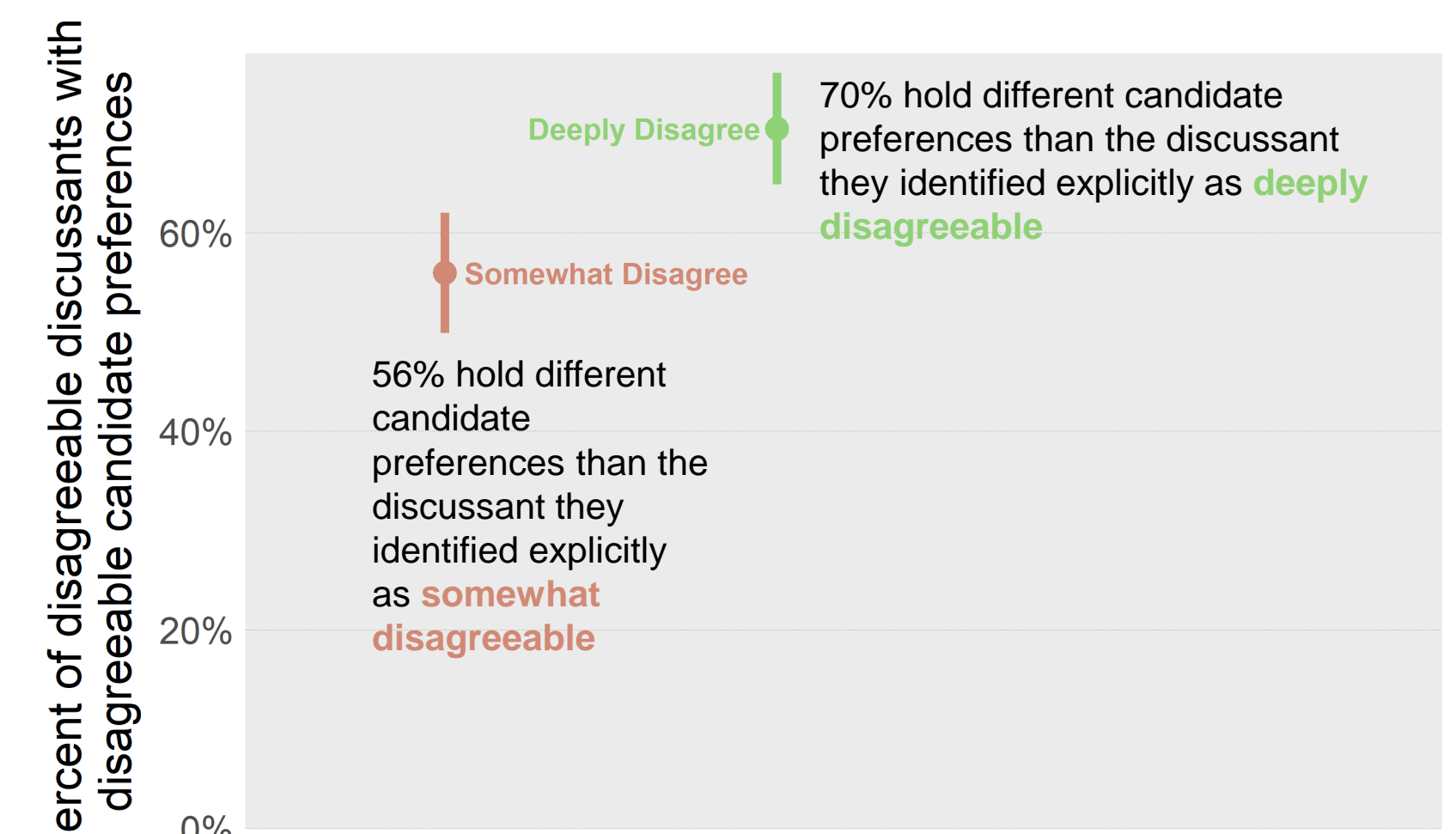
2016 CCES ITEMS

"Aside from anyone you may have named, can you think of anyone you know with whom you [deeply/somewhat] disagree about government, elections and politics?"



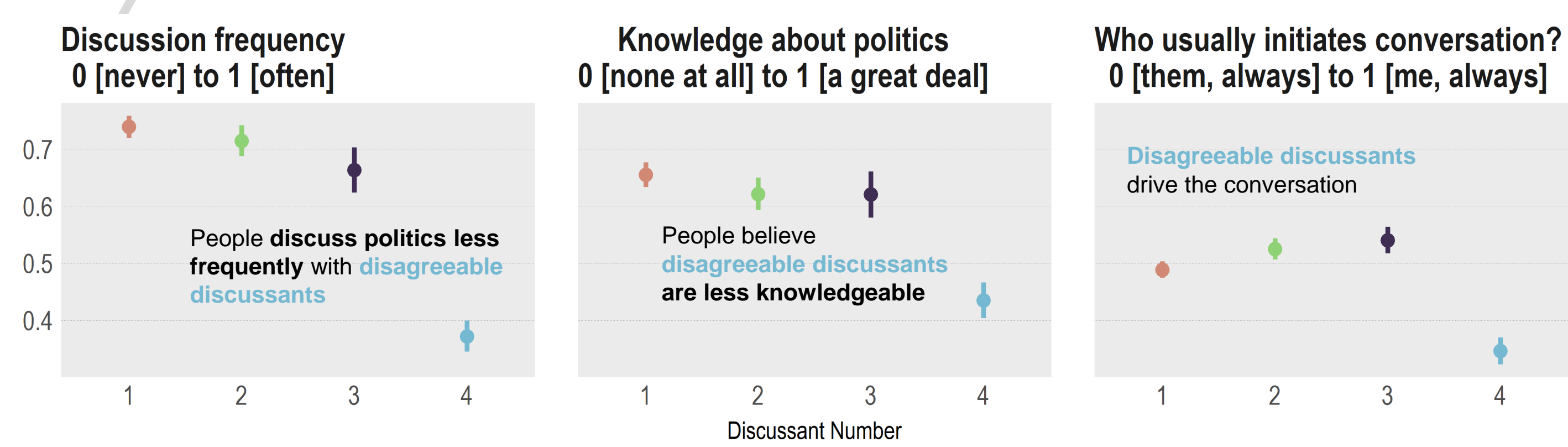
2017 CCES ITEMS

"Aside from anyone you may have named, can you think of anyone you [dislike talking with.../try to avoid talking to.../know with whom you disagree about President Trump's conduct?]



4 ...and disagreeable discussants often do not disagree with respondents' candidate preferences

6 ...and the first three discussants differ from the explicitly-disagreeable discussant



5 ...though interaction changes based on the nature of disagreement

