Networks, Contexts, and the Process of Political Influence[*]

Robert Huckfeldt
Matthew T. Pietryka
John B. Ryan

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A significant body of evidence demonstrates that voters are politically interdependent. They talk, they quarrel, they display yard signs and bumper stickers, and at times they persuade one another to adopt new and different opinions regarding parties, issues, and candidates. The modern origins of this research date to the pre-survey era (Tingsten 1932; Key 1949), but the dawn of survey research led to some signal accomplishments in locating the behavior of voters within a variety of spatially defined social and political contexts.

The Columbia University sociologists (Lazarsfeld et al. 1948; Bereleson et al. 1954; McPhee 1963) provided compelling accounts of the importance of locally defined communities for political communication and choice. Butler and Stokes (1969) demonstrated the role of British constituencies as arenas for social influence and persuasion. While the Michigan voting studies have been criticized for an individualistic and atomized account of citizens in politics, Miller (1954), Converse (1964) and Miller and Stokes (1963) made substantial contributions to our understanding of the relationship between spatial location and the behavior of individual citizens. Finally, the intellectual origins of the literatures on context and politics owe a particularly significant debt to the path breaking work of influential European social scientists (e.g., Tingsten

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1932; Dogan and Rokkan 1974; Cox 1969; Johnston 1986; Pappi 2015; and others).

Scholars often attribute the importance of spatially defined contexts to only vaguely defined patterns of social interaction operating within these contexts, thus giving rise to skepticism regarding the actual underlying mechanisms of influence. Correctly or incorrectly, the modern age is frequently believed to liberate social interaction from spatial constraint. The automobile, the telephone, and the Internet are all given credit for removing spatially defined boundaries on association and communication. Thus the question naturally arises, how do counties, precincts, neighborhoods, municipalities, and constituencies produce these effects on social interaction?

Why Contexts Matter: The Implications for Social Networks

Specifying the mechanisms that translate social contexts into a source of influence for individual citizens has progressed over time. Some of the earliest work stipulated a political effect that was mediated through social loyalties. A particularly compelling example is found in Langton and Rapoport's (1974) work on support for Allende in Santiago, Chile. Santiago residents who lived among the working class were more likely to identify as working class and to support Allende. The question thus becomes, what are the mechanisms and processes through which social loyalties are affected? Indeed, the source of the effect on social loyalties is also likely to be the source for effects on political loyalties, opinions, preferences, and attitudes.

The research on mechanisms for translating political and social contexts into a source of individual influence took a new turn in the late 1970s as work emerged on the

role of social networks in affecting individual behavior (Laumann 1973; Granovetter 1973; Burt 1978; McPherson et al. 2001). The social network mechanism suggests that social contexts, conceived as the composition of various locally defined populations, have consequences for the political configuration of social networks (Fieldhouse et al., 2014). For example, individuals who reside in environments populated by supporters of Democratic candidates are likely to demonstrate enduring patterns of interaction with individuals who support Democrats. Moreover, it gave rise to a literature that tied together networks and contexts with individual level political behavior (Johnston 1986; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1994; Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004; Johnston 1999; Fieldhouse et al. 2016).

In contrast, an individualistic explanation for social homophily within networks is that birds of a feather do *indeed* flock together, and people typically select associates who, for example, share their own political inclinations. The logical implication is that politics would thus become a context free zone that is wholly dependent on *apriori* political preference. That is, political reference might dictate social interaction, rather than social interaction affecting politics (McPherson et al. 2001).

At the same time, the work of McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1987) also points to the importance of structurally induced homophily. That is, context and social structure impose the boundaries of supply on associational choice. You may be a Christian Democrat who prefers talking politics with other Christian Democrats, but if you move to a locale with few Christian Democrats, you may end up in political conversation with a friendly coworker who shares your passion for football but whose political preferences

tack toward the Social Democrats. Thus the arrows run both ways: people have associational preferences, but their preferences are multidimensional, and their social interaction choices are limited by locally defined availability (Huckfeldt 1983; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1988).

This is the underlying substantive logic of a model that places contextual constraints on process of network formation (Huckfeldt 1983; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1994). It is not that people do not have associational preferences based on politics, but rather that the opportunity to exercise these preferences is limited by the locally imposed constraints of work, neighborhood, and other contextual boundaries. Hence the relationships among networks, contexts, and associational preference are understood in terms of a stochastic process that is constrained by supply (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1994). Indeed, other research shows that there are even national level constraints on network formation. Supporters of minor parties and candidates in Germany, the United States, and Japan during the early 1990s were likely to be imbedded in political discussion networks with higher levels of political disagreement (Huckfeldt, Ikeda, and Pappi 2005).

Citizenship in Contexts and Networks

The importance of social networks and social contexts for the exercise of citizenship has produced an avalanche of important questions and issues with respect to democratic politics. Beginning perhaps with Rousseau's early lament (1994; 1762) that the success of democracy depends on fully informed citizens acting in social isolation, a cascade of research issues have arisen, many of which relate to underlying processes of

influence. Is Rousseau's concern warranted? Are we at the mercy of electorates with collective judgments that are undermined by interdependence -- by a process in which social contagion drives voters to embrace the cause or candidate of the moment, with little capacity for carefully reasoned individual scrutiny and judgment?

Serious concern regarding the civic capacity of modern democratic electorates is not a new development in the systematic study of political behavior (Michels 1911; Ortega y Gasset 1930; Schumpeter 1942), and contemporary reservations arose in the context of the first modern election studies. Both the Columbia and Michigan election studies revealed individual voters who were often poorly equipped to exercise political judgment (Berelson et al. 1954; Converse 1964). In contrast to the problem of the poorly informed, Lodge and Taber (2013) address the stubborn intransigence of the *well* informed. Rather than responding to new information in a thoughtful manner, the well informed are more likely to be emotionally committed to their viewpoints and judgments. Their preferences are non-negotiable as a consequence of their ability to rationalize in the face of new information that conflicts with previously held beliefs.

Issues such as these push the literature on contexts and networks toward a more complete specification of the political influence process as it occurs among individual citizens (Fieldhouse and Cutts 2012). Are democratic citizens the political dupes of their more knowledgeable peers? Are they capable of forming judgments that endure in time, regardless of socially communicated messages to the contrary? Questions such as these are best addressed with a second model of process – a model that takes into account deliberative judgment within the context of social communication among

citizens.

Experts and Activists in Everyday Life

Several streams of work focus on the social transmission of information from politically biased sources (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Huckfeldt, Johnson and Sprague, 2004). This work shows that individuals are likely to rely on others for guidance, and the individuals most likely to provide that guidance are the "experts" and "activists" who populate the corridors of everyday life (Ahn, Huckfeldt, and Ryan 2014) – individuals who are, in fact, more interested and more knowledgeable about politics. Indeed, we see that survey respondents are more likely to report conversation with their well informed and politically engaged associates, regardless of whether they hold agreeable political views (Huckfeldt 2001; Ryan 2010). Hence such a process can be seen as propagating the biased views of Lodge and Taber's highly motivated citizens.

We employ a model of Bayesian decision making to consider political communication among citizens within this particular context. Bayesian updating is typically translated to suggest that voters form an opinion based on their own devices, but then continue to revise and update their opinion in a more or less objective response to new incoming information (Bullock 2009; Green and Gerber 1998; Bartels 2002). The problem is that, to the extent citizens invoke the bias of their own prior beliefs as well as the biased beliefs of others within their social networks, one might question whether they are capable of updating to take account of new information that conflicts with their own pre-existent beliefs in any sort of objective way.

We begin by addressing the problem in the hypothetical context of a voter's

judgment regarding a candidate based on an informant's report regarding the candidate's trustworthiness. In formal terms, the Bayes theorem says that:

$$P(A|B) = \frac{P(B|A)\,P(A)}{P(B)} = P(B|A) \times \frac{P(A)}{P(B)} \quad (1)$$

where:

A= an individual believes that a particular candidate is honest

B= an informant alleges that the candidate is honest

P(A)= the base rate or the prior: the probability that the individual believes the candidate is honest, absent the informant's report

P(A|B)= the conditional probability that the individual believes the candidate is honest, given the informant's report

P(B) = the probability that the informant would report that the candidate is honest

P(B|A)= the likelihood function, or the probability that the informant's report would allege the candidate is honest, given that the candidate is honest

The likelihood function is particularly important, effectively indexing the individual's assessment regarding the informant's judgment -- a "best guess regarding the probability distribution from which the evidence is drawn" (Bullock 2009). In this context, the likelihood provides the expected probability that the informant's report converges with the individual's own prior belief, and for these purposes it is helpful to re-express the likelihood function in its definitional form as

$$P(B|A) = \frac{P(A \text{ and } B)}{P(A)} = \frac{P(A \cap B)}{P(A)}$$

Hence the likelihood simply indexes the probability of agreement between the individual's prior and the informant's report, relative to the individual's prior. If the

likelihood function is large, it suggests the individual will be more likely to trust the informant's report. In the context of Equation 1, a larger likelihood function weights the individual's prior judgment more heavily in estimating the posterior judgment.

In contrast, as the likelihood function approaches zero in Equation (1), the individual becomes more likely to reject the informant's report and the P(A|B) converges on zero. At one extreme, the new information simply confirms what the individual already believed. At the opposite extreme, when the likelihood approaches zero, the individual rejects the new information, and P(A|B) converges on zero.

Does Bayesian updating imply an objective analysis of incoming information? To the contrary, Equation 1 suggests that the key to the influence of new information is a function of whether the recipient trusts the message, where "trust" is anchored in an expectation that the individual and the informant share priors with the same or similar probability distributions. And this lack of trust in new information from a suspect source closely resembles Lodge and Taber's (2013) supremely self-confident rationalizing voter!

While the likelihood function hardly qualifies as an objective screening device, within this narrowly defined context it may make sense for individuals to take information from others who share their general preferences (see Downs 1957; Ahn et al. 2014). The important point is that the Bayes theorem does not require that individuals give equal weight to messages anchored in viewpoints that diverge from their own.

Other readers may question whether the report of an informant actually qualifies as information, inasmuch as it is mediated by another individual's subjective

viewpoint. The problem is that virtually all information is mediated. Even the most objective news reports are mediated by editors, writers and the current supply of newsworthy items (Boydstun 2013). The important point is that a Bayesian analysis of incoming information employs a credibility filter that is contingent on a shared probability distribution for the prior beliefs of the producers and recipients of political information. In short, the Bayesian model does not assume that voters base their updates on a random sample of the available data. To the contrary, the sample is weighted in favor of information that comes from a trusted source with shared preference distributions.

The Update as a Weighted Summation

In this context, the Bayes Theorem and its likelihood function do not theoretically presuppose a great deal, and it might even reasonably appear that Equation 1 and its rearrangement are simply accounting equations. As Bullock demonstrates, much of the value (and perhaps the controversy) of applying Bayes' theorem to the beliefs of voters and their response to new information arises if we are willing to assume that the probability distributions are normally distributed.

In the following discussion, we assume that a candidate's honesty is an inherent underlying characteristic of the particular candidate that is fixed in time (see Bullock 2009) -- once a crook always a crook! At the same time, we assume that the basic underlying characteristic will manifest itself in a range of behaviors and reports of such behaviors that demonstrate a normal distribution around a central tendency. That is, even the most crooked political boss sometimes *did* pass out turkeys and hods of coal at

Christmas, and even a President who stole his first Senate election might have possessed an honest and sincerely altruistic motive in supporting the 20th century's most significant civil rights legislation (Caro, 1982, 1990). On this basis it can be shown (Bullock 2009: 1111; Lee 2004: 34-37) that:

$$belief_1|x_1 = belief_0(\tau_0/(\tau_0+\tau_x)) + x_1(\tau_x/(\tau_0+\tau_x)) \quad (2)$$

where:

$belief_1|x_1$ = the individual's view regarding the candidate's honesty at time 1, given the informant's communicated view regarding the candidate's honesty at time 1

$belief_0$ = the individual's prior judgment, at time 0

τ_0 = the precision of the prior belief $=1/\sigma_0^2$, where σ_0^2 is the variance around the prior

τ_x = the precision of the news report $=1/\sigma_x^2$, where σ_x^2 is the variance around the news report

Thus the updated belief is simply a sum of the weighted prior belief plus the weighted new information -- in this instance the news report. And the weights are the relative precision of each component, with precision measured as the inverse of the variance.

This form of the Bayesian expectation is intuitively appealing. It says that people rely on their priors more heavily when these prior judgments are more precise -- less variant. And they depend on the incoming stream of information more heavily when it repeatedly confirms the same message, thereby converging on a common signal.

Some individuals, lacking well-anchored views, are likely to believe everything

they read or hear. If this is the case, it means the likelihood function is small, and the updated judgment will rely heavily on the news report. Alternatively, some individuals with particularly strong attitudes blame the messenger when a message contradicts their prior judgments. Indeed, hearing a message from a persistently adversarial news outlet (Fox News for some and MSNBC for others) may generate pre-conscious negative responses to the message.

At the same time, the Bayesian expectation leaves two questions unanswered regarding the implications for judgment and behavior. First, how do individuals arrive at these weights on prior judgments and new information? Second, how much political information is purposefully acquired and evaluated. And finally, how much information and guidance is an incidental byproduct of generalized patterns of social interaction. Much of the resistance to Bayesian reasoning in political science has been motivated by disbelief regarding the capacity of voters to incorporate Bayesian decision making strategies in a self-conscious manner. That is, do we ***really*** think that the same voters whom Converse (1964) discovered in his classic work -- the voters who hold inconsistent views, are incapable of thinking about politics in systematically ideological terms, and demonstrate low levels of knowledge and awareness -- are capable of employing the Bayesian logic of Equation 1? Perhaps not!

To the contrary, many voters might, in fact, be ***unintentional*** Bayesians. Without ever hearing of Bayes or wrapping their heads around conditional probabilities and likelihood functions, they arrive at decisions that ***appear*** to be Bayesian because they recognize, or at least form ***inherently subjective judgments*** regarding, the levels of

variance both in their own priors as well as in the stream of new information they confront. Several hypotheses arise, drawing on the form of the Bayesian logic portrayed in Equation 2 as well as studies in conformity theory, motivated reasoning, and social network effects on individual behavior.

Bayes, Asch, and Conformity

The Asch conformity experiments (1955, 1963) are frequently seen as compelling evidence regarding the malleability of individual perception, the strong pressures that produce conformity within social groups, and the incapacities of individuals to sustain their own independent judgments. In the Asch experiments, individual subjects participate as one of eight subjects in what they believe to be a group experiment. Unknown to the one true subject, the other seven participants are confederates in a hoax. The group is shown two cards -- the first has one straight line and the second has three straight lines of different lengths. Each individual is asked, in turn, to identify the line on the second card that is the same length as the line on the first card (Asch 1955).

In some instances all the bogus subjects identify the wrong line. And in this context, subjects conform to the incorrect judgment of the other subjects nearly one-third of the time. Approximately three-fourths of the subjects conformed at least once, and thus approximately one-fourth never conformed.

What are we to make of these results? A cognitive dissonance interpretation is that individuals form judgments to reduce dissonance. In the world of politics and political communication, one might expect that individuals adopt the political views of their surrounding associates in an effort to reduce the discrepancy between their own

beliefs and the beliefs of others. The experiments have often been seen as a powerful demonstration of conformity effects because, after all, if individuals can be persuaded to deny their own sensory perceptions, it would seem they might be persuaded to believe almost anything! Indeed, carried to its extreme, the logic suggests that one might be able to persuade almost anyone of almost anything, and hence we should not be surprised to see very high levels of political homogeneity within small social groups.

Ross and his colleagues (1976) call this interpretation into question. According to their account, the particular nature of the Asch experiments made conformity pressures especially compelling. When fellow "subjects" in the Asch experiments inexplicably and unexpectedly adopt a position that runs contrary to the true subject's perception of the obvious reality, the individual confronts a substantial quandary. Thus the power of the Asch experiments is anchored in an attribution effect -- there was no obvious way to attribute a cause for the mistaken consensus. What possible explanation could account for the other subjects' unanimous but mistaken judgments? Indeed, it is the lack of variance in the false subjects' judgments that is so particularly powerful. When just one of the seven bogus subjects diverged from the group's false judgment by consistently providing a correct report, majority opinion was effectively nullified. Can these results be interpreted within the Bayesian framework of Equation 2?

The true subjects' priors are based on their own sensory perceptions regarding the length of the lines. We would expect this prior to have low variance, assuming that individuals are generally able to trust their own judgments in discriminating something

as straightforward as the length of lines on a piece of paper. Thus, it requires unanimity in the incoming information stream, for a variance of zero, to overturn the prior, and even then the prior is not always overturned. In short, it is possible to understand the Asch experiment, with its dramatic example of group conformity effects, within the context of Bayesian updating. Hence it is possible to comprehend the power of conformity effects with reference to the variance attached to an incoming information stream, but what of the variance attached to prior judgments?

Bayes and Motivated Reasoning

In the context of politics and political information, motivated reasoning reflects the resistance and unwillingness of individuals to take political experience and political information at face value. People do not engage in an objective search for the truth when confronting new political events and new political information. To the contrary, they process new information and new experience within the context of their own political views, the most important of which are anchored in deeply held emotions and attitudes that have been reinforced over time. This tendency often means that they resist the information streams produced through print and electronic media, as well as through social communication, based on preconscious responses to political stimuli that they find repugnant or objectionable. Rather than being the objective evaluators of new information, they are the biased evaluators of the information streams they encounter based on their own particular preferences, and viewpoints (Kunda 1999).

Who are the most likely to engage in motivated reasoning? In general, motivated reasoning is more likely among the most sophisticated -- those who are more

attentive, better informed, and hence more committed to their own viewpoints (Lodge and Taber 2013). Indeed, we would expect that a reasonable updating process would consider new information in the context of old information. That is, indeed, the primary democratic value typically cited in support of a well-informed citizenry. One reason to educate the citizenry in a democratic political system is to ensure that voters are not swept along by fads, movements, and ephemeral causes. At the same time, carried to its extreme, motivated reasoning produces real problems for democratic politics.

Anti-democratic as well as democratic values carry the potential to generate motivated reasoning. Moreover, the sophisticated members of all tribes are susceptible: liberals and conservatives, radicals and reactionaries, Democrats and Republicans. All share the same human instinct -- the more they know, the more confident they become in their own judgment, and the less likely they are to entertain new information. Indeed, as they become truly confident, their response to contrary arguments is likely to be anchored in a physiological rather than a reasoned response -- patterns of association in long-term memory that might short circuit a deliberative response (Fazio 1995; Huckfeldt et al. 1998, 1999).

Is political polarization the ultimate result? We are persuaded by Bullock's argument that there is nothing in Bayes' theorem to suggest that either polarization or convergence is a necessary outcome of an updating process that reflects the weights placed on priors and new information. And indeed, our argument is that it is not the updating process or the priors that necessarily dictate the outcome of the process, but rather the nature of the individuals' subjective levels of confidence, both in their own

priors as well as in the incoming stream of new information to which they are exposed. The question remains: do subjective levels of confidence reflect the objective reality, which in this instance is the level of precision in priors and information streams?

In order for this to be a meaningful question, we must demonstrate that people do, in fact, have the opportunity to confront political stimuli that conflict with their own prior judgments. Indeed, many analysts have argued that people's judgments are never threatened by disagreeable information and viewpoints. In Bayesian terms, people never budge from their priors because they are located in political environments and exposed to information streams that simply reinforce whatever viewpoints they hold (Cho, Gimpel, and Hui 2013; Bishop 2008).

Voters and Social Communication in a National Election

Information streams come in a variety of forms with varying content conveyed through various channels: newspapers, television, and social communication through a wide variety of media -- personal conversations at work and over the dinner table; yard signs and bumper stickers on neighborhood lawns and cars; and even interactions with strangers wearing political lapel pins. The political content of these information streams is particularly important, and for illustrative purposes we focus our attention on the social communication that occurs through small groups.

Each respondent to the post-election survey of the 2000 National Election Study was asked the first names of the people with whom they discussed "government, elections, and politics." After providing these names, they were asked to make a judgment regarding the presidential candidates for whom each of these discussants

voted. Hence we have the opportunity to address the respondents' presidential candidate preferences within the context of their perceptions regarding the preferences of their primary political discussants.

Several concerns quite naturally arise regarding the capacity of individuals to make accurate judgments regarding the preferences of others. One possibility is that a false consensus effect might be produced (Fabrigar and Krosnick 1995) in which individuals assume or perceive that associates agree with their own preferences when, in fact, these associates hold divergent views regarding the presidential candidates. Other analyses, from elections in 1984, 1992, and 1996, using battery of questions very similar to that employed in the 2000 NES (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Huckfeldt, Beck, Dalton, and Levine 1995; Huckfeldt Johnson and Sprague 2004), show that a false consensus effect does in fact exist. Unlike the 2000 NES, these other studies included a snowball component in which the associates of the main respondent were identified as well, thereby making it possible to verify the respondents' perceptions regarding the political preferences of their discussants.

Several properties of the false consensus effect are important. First it is generated as much by the preferences held by others in the ego's environment as it is by the particular preference of the particular alter. In other words, there is a tendency for individuals to generalize based on their own preferences as well as the preferences of others when discerning the preferences held by a particular associate.

Second, this false consensus bias does not swamp the signal being transmitted, and individuals are generally quite accurate in perceiving the preferences held by others

in their political communication networks. Hence we can say that people are communicating real information in real relationships.

Based on the 2000 NES data, Table 1 shows the level of diversity within the respondents' political communication networks (Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004). First, there is a tendency toward homophily -- Bush voters are less likely to have Gore supporters in their networks, and Gore voters are less likely to have Bush supporters in their networks. At the same time, less than half of the Bush voters report being located in homogeneous Bush networks, and less then half of the Gore voters report being located in homogeneous Gore networks. Additionally, more than one-third of Gore voters had a Bush supporter in their network, and more than one-third of Bush voters had a Gore supporter in their network.

In short, many voters confront a significant level of variance in the political messages they encounter within communication networks, but others encounter a uniform stream of information. Indeed, by virtue of the fact that they are able to provide a generally accurate account regarding the preferences of their associates, they are by definition registering their own awareness regarding these levels of variance.

A question naturally arises: if information is influential, how does disagreement survive within these networks. First, it is important to establish that these networks are not typically constructed as hermeneutically sealed primary groups. To the contrary, some of our friends are not typically the friends of our other friends, and this fact carries important consequences in a number of contexts (Granovetter 1973).

In the current context it means that Andreas may be a Social Democrat and his

friend Bernd may be a Christian Democrat. At the same time, the other friends of Andreas may share his Social Democratic loyalties, and Bernd's other friends may be Christian Democrats. In short, disagreement and disagreeing associates are likely to be the manageable exception rather than the rule. At the same time, Table 1 and Huckfeldt, Johnson and Sprague (2004: chapter 5) show that it is not a rare exception, and it carries important consequences for the social flow of political information, as well as for "socially sustained disagreement" (pp. 117, ff.). People are imbedded in social environments that emit political signals, but the signals are not uniformly heterogeneous. Many individuals confront a non-constant stream of signals, and individuals tend to recognize the variance within their own social contexts.

Second, political scientists have employed the seven-point party identification battery in interviews with voters for nearly 70 years. And a primary virtue of this battery is that it captures the extremity (and implicitly the variance) of an individual's prior partisan judgment regarding candidates and issues. In short, the Equation 2 rendering of Bayesian updating would seem to be a reasonable match to the task that voters address in elections, based on the measures that political scientists have developed to address the problem.

Some of these voters are strong partisans in correspondingly strong partisan contexts -- their priors and the stream of information they experience have low levels of variance and point in similar directions. Others have weak priors and are located in networks that send conflicting political messages with high levels of variance. In short, one size does not fit all, but a theoretic construct based on Bayesian updating does not

necessarily constitute a dramatic departure from what political psychologists and political behavior scholars have been asserting for quite some time. And it is possible to introduce a similar Bayesian logic into a dynamic experimental framework for assessing communication and influence among individuals (Huckfeldt, Pietryka, and Reilly 2014).

Conclusion: Social Contexts and Unintentional Bayesians

Without ever intending to do so, people often act as Bayesian decision makers. They are likely to make explicit or implicit judgments relative to the precision of their own judgments, as well as to precision of the incoming information -- the quality and heterogeneity of the information being offered by newspapers, television, and radio, as well as by other individuals. At the same time, their judgments regarding precision are open to criticism. That is, there is potentially a great deal of variance and perhaps bias in their estimates regarding the quality of their own judgments as well in their estimates regarding the variance in the stream of information upon which they are relying to formulate priors and reach judgments regarding relevant information.

The discussion of citizens as Bayesian decision makers is too often contingent on a excessively self-conscious model of decision-making. People making everyday decisions -- such as their presidential election vote -- are unlikely to consider contingent probabilities and likelihoods in arriving at a course of action. They do, however, arrive at implicit assumptions and pre-conscious assessments regarding the reliability of their own subjective attitudes toward the candidates, as well as the pre-conscious judgments regarding the reliability of the new information they are obtaining from the media, from the candidates, and from other voters (Huckfeldt 2007). Indeed, we have seen that the

likelihood function is directly related to the ability and willingness of individuals to filter incoming messages based on their own opinions and expectations. In this context, these unintentional Bayesians employ many of the devices typically identified with rationalizing voters.

The same logic and analytic framework helps to explain the status and role of opinion leaders in democratic politics. Two qualities give rise to opinion leadership: the opinion leader's confidence in her own beliefs and opinions, as well as an increased frequency of communication with others about politics (Ahn, Huckfeldt, and Ryan 2014). This increased frequency of communication arises for two reasons. First, people are not only reassuringly accurate in recognizing the political viewpoints of their associates, but also in recognizing their associates' levels of political expertise (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Huckfeldt 2001). Second, those who invest more heavily in political information become more confident in their own opinions as well as becoming more likely to share their opinions with others. Indeed, this investment leads to a pre-conscious commitment to their own views, frequently making it difficult for them to stay quiet in the collective deliberations of democratic politics!

Finally, in terms of social communication in politics, the most influential new information often arrives via the backdoor through interactions predicated on purposes unrelated to politics. Daily encounters in the family, the workplace, and the neighborhood are unlikely to be carefully screened on the basis of political viewpoints. Thus politically heterogeneous views carry the potential to slip in under the radar with important consequences not only for an individual’s political views, but also for their

assessments regarding the distribution of opinions in their locally defined environments (Ahn et al. 2014; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995: chapter 8).

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Table 1. Level of diversity within political communication networks for the respondents to the 2000 National Election Study. Weighted data.

A. Percent of network voting for Gore by respondent's vote (unweighted N=1147).

	Gore	Neither	Bush
none (0%)	14.2%	58.2	64.3
some	44.3	29.3	28.5
all (100%)	41.5	12.5	7.2
Weighted N=	436	268	399

B. Percent of network voting for Bush by respondent's vote (unweighted N=1147).

	Gore	Neither	Bush
none (0%)	63.2%	46.7	12.6
some	32.3	36.2	39.9
all (100%)	4.5	17.0	47.5
Weighted N=	436	268	399

Source: 2000 National Election Study; unit of analysis is respondent; weighted data.