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**The Role of Political Talk in Developing Democracies: Evidence from Hungary <sup>1</sup>**  
**Work in progress; please do not quote without the author's permission**

**Introduction**

The paper proposes an investigation of the effect that political discussion as it occurs in everyday interpersonal communication has on the way people make sense of and participate in political activities. This examination is motivated by the fact that although there seems to be agreement at theoretical level regarding the relevance of political talk (especially among people holding different political views) (see Mutz, 2006) for generating a more sympathetic, tolerant and active citizenry, empirical evidence has fallen short in showing that these beneficial effects do always and uniformly hold across different socio-political contexts and individual characteristics. The gap between the theoretical and empirical accounts of the importance of political discussion for the quality of democratic processes is mainly due to the fact that political debate as defined by the deliberative models of contemporary democratic theories prescribes standards of social interaction that are rarely encountered in everyday life (Mutz 2006). This paper follows the suggestion made by the authors who advocate the inclusion of everyday political talk among other forms of public deliberation, such as citizen juries or deliberative polls (Mansbridge, 1999; Mutz, 2006) and explores the effects produced by this type of political interaction on people's participation in political activities and their ability to make considerate political decisions.

Political discussion networks were argued to be important for democratic processes on the ground that they could help people to solve collective action problems, such as participation in political activities, based on their potential to disseminate participatory norms and information or shortcuts that ease the process of decision

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making. However, the cumulated evidence from previous empirical studies is partly contradictory, and even when the evidence seems to be strong enough it remains open to different interpretations regarding the mechanisms that make these networks exercise the type of influence that they were (some times and in some contexts) observed to have. The effects produced by political discussion were shown to vary as a function of the partisan composition of the network, the level of political expertise hold by network members and the relationships between those involved in a voluntary or involuntary exchange of political opinions. Whereas in some electoral studies the effect of politically heterogeneous networks was found to be detrimental for political participation (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948, 1956; Mutz, 2002b, 2006), other empirical accounts evidenced the neutral or even beneficial character of this influence (Horan, 1971; Nir, 2005). Network members' political expertise was sometimes found to further the effect that political discussion has on individual electoral behavior (Kenny, 1998) and in other studies to be insignificant (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1991, 1995). Perhaps one of the most intriguing claims regarding the effects produced by political talk is that the type of interpersonal communication promoting a highly interested and active citizenry (among politically like-minded people) and the one generating an enlightened, tolerant and opinionated community (with people holding dissimilar political views) might be at odds (Mutz, 2002b, 2006). The ideal of participation and the one of deliberation appear to be served by opposite types of social interactions, a finding that challenges the common view about deliberation as the source of all goods.

It is therefore far from clear whether political talk as occurring in everyday social settings always create more interested, opinionated, sympathetic and active citizens and if so what are the mechanisms responsible for these effects. This paper seeks to explore the contribution of political talk to generating participation and practical knowledge in contemporary Hungary, a context considerably different from the settings where similar research has been previously conducted (mainly Anglo-Saxon area). My investigation takes into consideration the peculiarities of the social structure (social networks, patterns and rules of interpersonal communication) generally existing in Central and East European societies as an effect of their communist history and the central role attributed to personal social networks as a result of the strict separation between the public sphere,

marred by fear and distrust, and the safe space of private communication with close, trusted others.

The paper addresses two questions. Firstly, do political discussion networks encourage participation in political activities, be they electoral or not? Given the documented importance attributed to personal social networks during communist times I expect political conversation with network members to continue influencing individuals' political acts. I hypothesize that this effect is stronger for those who have been mainly socialized prior to the 1990s and thus more likely to be influenced by their social surroundings. Given the private and supposedly agreeable character of political talk within primary groups during communist times, politically homogeneous networks are expected to have stronger influence while heterogeneous networks would presumably be neutral due to the initial fuzziness of the profile of political parties after the regime change. Secondly, does political debate facilitate the spread of informational cues that help people making political choices that better represent their interests? In approaching this issue the paper draws on the concept of low information rationality and the results of electoral studies showing that the use of informational cues help people to overcome their low level of information in political sphere and 'vote correctly', i.e. make decisions similar to the ones they would have made if they were fully informed (Bartels, 1996; Cutler, 2002; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997; Lupia, 1994; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998; Popkin, 1991). Based on these concepts the paper investigates whether political talk increases individuals' level of practical political knowledge, i.e. correct use of left-right as heuristic devices.

To approach these issues the paper proceeds through the following steps. The next section presents the main conclusions formulated by previous empirical research on the role of political discussion and points out their variation and at times contradictory character. Section two starts with an overview of the peculiarities of the personal and political discussion networks in the communist and post-communist Hungary. It formulates hypotheses, introduces the survey data and discusses the research design. Section three presents the results of the investigation and their interpretation. Section four draws attention to the advantages of this analysis that although limited to one country and

thus undeniably context-bound is relevant in assessing the benefits that political debate is assumed to have for democratic processes.

### **1. Political talk, participation and knowledge: contradictory evidence**

Democratic theories of different types seem to agree on the benefits of deliberation for democratic citizens. In contemporary deliberative theories political debate assumes a central place in the normative understanding of how democracy ought to function. By and large, political discussion is seen as an indicator of an active and interested citizenry and a guarantee that democratic processes are functioning well. Nevertheless, when these statements come under the scrutiny of empirical tests the results are diverse and at times contradictory. Sometimes they challenge what theoretical accounts deem true.

The most extensive contribution to research on the effect of political discussion networks comes from election studies, notably by Lazarsfeld et al. (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954) and later on by Huckfeldt and Sprague (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1987, 1991, 1995). Studying the effects of personal social networks in an electoral campaign, Lazarsfeld and his collaborators showed that voters do not make choices in isolation, their decisions being influenced by their social surroundings. Despite the appealing character of these findings, the line of research inaugurated by the so-called Columbia school in election studies (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954) shortly became obsolete as a result of the change in the research paradigm advanced by the Michigan school of public opinion research. The interest for political discussion networks as a significant antecedent of individual electoral behavior was resurrected almost fifty years later by Huckfeldt and Sprague (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1987, 1991, 1995). Starting from the 1990s the interest for political discussion networks has constantly grown and led to the accumulation of contradictory findings as regards their influence on political acts (Beck 1991; Lake and Huckfeldt, 1998; Straits, 1991; Kenny, 1998; Huckfeldt et al., 2002; Holbert et al. 2002; McClurg, 2002; Mutz 2002, 2006; Schmitt-Beck, 2003; Huckfeldt et al., 2004; Eveland et. al, 2005; Nir, 2005; Zuckerman, 2005; Eveland and Thomson, 2006; Bradley and Beck, 2007).

### **1.1. Political talk and participation**

The conclusions formulated by the Columbia school indicate the substantial role played by primary groups in moulding partisanship and promoting participation. Frequent and intimate interactions appear to further political influence. In a later study on the mechanisms of interpersonal influence Burt (1937) refers to this process as the social cohesion model. He shows that when confronted with the necessity to make a decision, people turn to their close others and solve the problem through debate at group level until reaching agreement. Thus, very often, the result is similarity of attitudes, beliefs and behaviors among network members. The same mechanism operates at network level where political discussion with close, like-minded peers plays a significant role in preserving partisanship and triggering political involvement. On the other hand, embeddedness in heterogeneous groups was found to delay the formation of voting preferences in the electoral campaign and ultimately depress participation overall (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954). Unstable voters and defectors were shown to come mainly from the group of those that either could not recall any political discussion in their groups or were exposed to conflicting political views (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954).

Further research found little if any support for the theory of cross pressure. A replication of the analysis conducted by Lazarsfeld and his collaborators using similar data sets found no support for the cross pressure thesis (Horan, 1971). This was explained as the result of a conceptual confusion between cross pressure resulting from membership to different social categories and cross pressure resulting from exposure to conflicting political views at group level. Cross pressure stemming from conflicting membership appeared to be responsible for depressing turnout in Lazarsfeld et al.'s study (Horan, 1971). In recent research cross-pressure was defined as amount of opposing political views (Mutz, 2002 b) or ambivalence of political opinions (Nir, 2005) people meet in their everyday social networks. People embedded in politically heterogeneous social networks appeared to be more likely to refrain from political activity mainly to avoid putting their relationship at risk (Mutz, 2002b: 851; 2006). In studies where cross-pressure was operationalized as balance of pros and cons, politically ambivalent settings

appeared to have no effect on participation, vote choice and crystallization of vote decision (Nir, 2005). Exposure to politically ambivalent settings can even help individuals who are less ambivalent internally to develop their vote options earlier than individuals who are not facing external cross-pressure (Nir, 2005).

It seems to matter a lot whether and to what extent people encounter divergent political views in their everyday interactions (for an elaborated discussion on this issue see Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995; Huckfeldt, Johnson and Sprague, 2002; Huckfeldt, Johnson and Sprague, 2004; Mutz, 2002a, 2006). However, homogeneous networks appear to be the norm of social communication as people prefer the company of like-minded others and do their best in preserving the agreeable character of discussion through mechanisms such as selective exposure, avoidance of disagreement and, ultimately, shifts in their preferences and views (Heider, 1958; Festinger, 1957). Same propositions seem to hold true as regards political discussion networks (Bennett et. al, 2000; Mutz, 2002a, 2006). On the other hand, there are studies claiming that since people cannot have an exclusive control over their social interactions, political disagreement is a quite frequent occurrence of their everyday contacts (Huckfeldt, Johnson and Sprague, 2002; 2004). This is even more the case for those who are highly interested in politics and therefore less likely to avoid this topic of conversation (Huckfeldt and Mendez, 2006).

Perhaps in reality pure homogenous or heterogeneous networks are inexistent. Most of the times people belong to different groups and they are inevitably exposed to diverse political views. Exposure to like-minded others give a sense of belonging, reinforce beliefs and therefore stimulate participation in collective activities. The main danger is that people might turn a deaf ear to the opposing views and lock-up in their partisan convictions. Exposure to different views encourages reflection over own and other's views and consequently leads to a more tolerant citizenry (Mutz, 2006). This issue is of vital importance as it signals the tension between two ideals prescribed by democratic theories, namely the ideal of participation and the ideal of deliberation (Mutz, 2006).

## 1.2. Political talk and knowledge

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

When partisan composition of political discussion networks is added to the analysis results indicate that homogenous networks are less likely to promote political knowledge (Mutz, 2006). This may be due to the fact that the company of like-minded others reinforce people's vies and give them few incentives for learning new facts. Interestingly enough some studies showed that those who are more politically knowledgeable would do a better job in isolating themselves from divergent political views (Mutz, 2006). Yet, other studies describe the relationship between interest in politics and exposure to divergent views as the dance of the moth attracted by the light and rejected by its heat (Huckfeldt and Mendez, 2006). Overall, there seems to be convincing evidence on the significant effect exerted by political discussion on political knowledge, although the scope of this effect appears to be a function of various factors, such as partisan composition of discussion group, level of political interest or opportunities of engaging in political talk.

Social interaction might bring cognitive benefits different from the increase in factual political knowledge or information. Political talk can spread the use of informational cues or shortcuts that may assist people in the process of decision making.

Research on politically relevant informational cues has emerged as a reaction to the pessimistic conclusion of voters' low level of political knowledge. Acknowledging the political ignorance of the average voter, several scholars claim that, in fact, the limited information people possess in political sphere does not incapacitate them in making reasonable decisions (Bartels, 1996; Cutler, 2002; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997; Lupia, 1994; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998; Popkin, 1991). Their claim is that the use of informational cues helps people to 'vote correctly', i.e. make decisions similar to the ones they would have made if they were fully informed. Even if political discussion networks were seen as potential providers of such informational cues, little research has been done to single them out and investigate their effect among other heuristics people use in the process of decision making. Overall, there is a lack of investigation regarding the possibility that under certain circumstances political discussion networks can provide beneficial informational cues.

Research on the effects of political discussion networks on political behaviour and knowledge was mainly conducted in the Anglo-Saxon area. The findings presented above belong exclusively to investigation conducted in these areas, although the significant effect of political talk on participation, political preferences and level of political knowledge was also concluded in some Japanese studies (Flanagan et al., 1991; Ikeda, 2006) and in comparative studies conducted in West-European countries (see Zuckerman ed., 2005). Research conducted in post-communist countries is scarce (Iglic, 2003; Toka and Lup, 2007). Do these societies conform to the patterns of influence observed in old democracies? The next section describes the social structure existing during communist times and point out that little has been changed in the pattern of interpersonal relationships of post-communist Hungary. Based on this knowledge the paper formulates expectations as regards the influence of political talk on participation and practical political knowledge.

## **2. Social networks before and after the regime change; hypotheses about the role of political talk**

As scholars have documented (Badescu, 2003; Flap and Volker, 2003; Howard, 2003), communist societies used to be characterized, to various degrees, by a generalized level of fear and distrust. This was the result of the continuous surveillance organized by the state apparatus over its citizens' lives and the repressive nature of the security police. Next to this, command economy led to shortages in basic goods and services (Flap and Volker; 2003, Howard, 2003). Therefore, to various degrees depending on the magnitude of the control exerted by the state and party on both private sphere and market, people in communist societies had to find alternative means to solve the problems of whom to trust talking with and whom to call on to obtain the scarce basics. The solution found for overcoming these problems was to invest in private networks that mainly included family members or close friends, and what some authors called 'provision networks', instrumental relationships that helped people to obtain goods that were scarce (Flap and Volker, 2003; Gibson, 2003). Although the two types of relationships were almost equally vital, literature indicates that they did not perfectly overlap. Whereas 'provision networks' (Flap and Volker, 2003: 30) can be seen as an example of 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973), private networks developed as strong ties, with the role of shielding people's privacy.

Communication was governed by a double standard of functioning: on the one hand, impersonal interactions, where political discussion was considered taboo, on the other, private relations, basically comprising close, personal contacts that could be trusted and thus allowed for political discussions. Under these circumstances we can assume that the networks of political discussion were mostly homogeneous as people would not have dared to engage openly in confrontational views. Most probably they were characterized by high agreement and a consensual pattern of communication. Thus, political communication was not a real exchange of opinions and did not work as a vehicle of larger social integration but one that created and maintained an atomized and fragmented society (of course, this statement admits nuances if we look across all Central and East European countries but the core argument stays valid though).

To what extent does the Hungarian social structure fit the pattern presented above and what changes have the Hungarian social networks undergone since the 1990s? Unfortunately, research has been scarce in this field. The results of some sociological analyses conducted both before and after the regime change furnish some information, though.

### **2.1. Social networks before the regime change**

Information about the social structure before the regime change comes from a cross-country study conducted in 1986<sup>2</sup> (Utasi, 1996) and a survey of social-network resources conducted in Hungary in 1987 (Angelusz and Tardos, 2001). To start with, Hungarians appeared to have much smaller personal networks than their counterparts in the Western countries investigated and most of the time they comprised family members (Utasi, 1996, 2006). The strongest family cohesion was observed in Hungary (Utasi, 1996, 2006; Angelusz and Tardos, 2001: 300). In a cross-country perspective, Hungary also stood apart as regards the smallest number of friends as part of the average personal network and the highest percentage of respondents indicating no friend. Some 35.6 percents of the people who participated in the 1986 study declared that they did not have a single friend (Utasi, 1996: 11). Another detail revealed by both studies was the high instrumentalization of the social contacts in Hungary (Utasi, 1996, 2006; Angelusz and Tardos, 2001). The process of creating and maintaining social relationships appeared to be drawn by instrumental motivations rather than emotional considerations. The instrumentalization of relationships under the communist regime has been concluded in other studies, too and attributed to the shortage in most of the commodities. The so-called 'provision networks' (Flap and Volker, 2003) were a common feature of communist societies, a means of getting scarce goods and services (Gibson, 2003).

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<sup>2</sup> Research conducted in the frame of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), Social Network and Support Systems, 1986. The Hungarian national sample contains 10746 persons and data can be found in the archives of Tarki Institute. The other countries investigated are Australia, Austria, the FRG, Great Britain, Italy and the US.

Another interesting feature of networks in Hungary is that, different to common wisdom, political involvement appears to be an important antecedent of one's endowment with network resources (Angelusz and Tardos, 2001). Although in most studies network resources are explored as antecedents of political involvement (this being the approach of my paper too), in the research of 1987 this expectation is reversed, as political involvement was expected to bear upon one's endowment with network resources, which is embeddedness in large and diverse networks. This signals the importance attributed to political sphere and the permeability of private spheres of life to political issues.

## **2.2. Social networks after the 1990s**

To what extent has this social structure been preserved after the regime change? Evidence from investigations conducted after the 1990s revealed that little has been changed in the pattern of social interactions and network structure (Angelusz and Tardos, 2001; Utasi, 2006). These findings coincide with the stability found across Central and East European societies as regards the structure and role assumed by personal social networks (Howard, 2002; Gibson, 2003; Igluc, 2003, 2007). This phenomenon was considered responsible for the observed malaise dominating public sphere in these countries (Howard, 2002).

One of the most enduring features of the post-communist societies is their low level of social trust, interest and participation in public life relative to West European countries. After the regime change East Europeans did not become more politically active, as low figures of turnout, participation in political activities, membership in voluntary associations and low interest for public life overall revealed (Howard, 2002; Badescu, 2003; Dowley and Silver, 2003; Fidrmuc and Gerxhani, 2005). Also, in a comparative assessment, East Europeans tend to trust much less both their fellow citizens and public institutions (Badescu, 2003; Dowley and Silver, 2003; Gibson, 2003; Uslaner, 2003). A plausible explanation is the preservation of social networks and overall patterns and norms of social interactions developed under the communism. One reason for which people do not get involved in public life is the persistence of private networks developed under the communist regime as a means for solving multiplex problems, from getting

scarce goods to furnishing a space where important issues can be discussed (Howard, 2002).

Studies conducted in Hungary after the regime change evidenced little change as regards the features of social interaction (Angelusz and Tardos, 2001; Utasi, 2006). Similar to the pre-1990s case, the wealth of trust was mainly directed towards kin-ties and less towards friends or other relationships, whereas mistrust for those outside one's close circle appeared to be higher than in other surveyed countries (Angelusz and Tardos, 2001; Utasi, 2006). Some two thirds of the Hungarians interviewed in 2000 thought that one cannot or can hardly trust others (Utasi, 2006: 9). The results of the same study showed Hungarians to have the lowest number of friends and the highest ratio of those who did not have or claimed not to have a single friend (Utasi, 2006: 37). Strong family cohesion remained a characteristic of Hungarian society after the regime change (Angelusz and Tardos, 2001; Utasi, 2006) and kin-ties continued to represent the biggest share in one's network. Due to economic hardships accompanying transition, instrumental considerations remained stronger than emotions in establishing relationships (Utasi, 2006). Political resources remained one of the strongest predictors of one's endowment with network resources (Angelusz and Tardos, 2001). The persistence of a strong interdependence between the social and political capital after the regime change is acknowledged as a problematic feature of the transition (Angelusz and Tardos, 2001: 318).

To summarize, there are three notable elements of the development of social networks and overall forms of social interaction after the regime change. First, social networks preserved those features that made them noteworthy before the regime change, namely closeness, predominance of kin ties relative to non-kin ones and strong instrumentalization of relationships overall. Second, trust remained directed mainly towards one's inner group and did not become an attribute of common social interactions. Third, the strong interdependence between social and political capital persisted after the regime change.

These findings suggest that networks have preserved their centrality in people's everyday lives and continued to insulate them from broader interactions. Personal networks seem to have remained what they used to be, namely alternative channels to

solve individual problems out of the public sphere. Although the restrictions imposed by communist regimes disappeared, it is nonetheless true that behaviour do not change overnight, especially in the absence of strong enough incentives. Therefore, networks developed under communism did not dismantle overnight. Their content was perhaps replaced with issues generated by transition to multi-party system in politics and market economy. Although we miss solid evidence on this point it is plausible that people turned again to their close others to make sense of the newly emerging realities.

### **2.3. Data and hypotheses**

To analyze the role of political discussion in post-communist societies this paper employs longitudinal data collected in Hungary in national surveys, at four points in time, 1997, 1998, 2003 and 2006. The design of the four surveys was similar thus making the data comparable. Some 452 respondents from the 2003 survey were subsequently re-interviewed in 2006. The sample size for the other data sets is as follows: 995 respondents interviewed in 1997, 798 in 1998 and 1516 in 2003. Respondents' personal social networks were generated through three questions. Respondents were asked to nominate up to five alters for each of the following relationships: discussing important things, spending free time together, getting help for household. Batteries of questions about network members' socio-demographics as well as the type of relationship between respondents and them were subsequently asked for each of the persons indicated. Further on, respondents were asked to indicate up to five people whom they considered to be the most important for them (the question reads as follows: 'Could you please indicate up to five persons whom you considered to be the most important for you?'). Batteries of questions about the top five persons' demographics and their relationships with respondents were subsequently collected. Respondents were also asked whether they discuss politics with the five most important people and whether they know their party preferences.

The paper formulates three hypotheses. Firstly, people who have more political discussants among their private network members will be more likely to participate in political activities, both electoral and non-electoral. Secondly, politically homogeneous groups significantly and positively affect turnout and their effect is higher for those who

have been mainly socialized prior to the 1990s. Thirdly, being part of more politicized networks increases people's level of practical political knowledge (use of left-right heuristic devices).

The next section presents and discusses the results of testing the hypotheses. The dependent variables included in the analyses are turnout (measured as self-reported participation in last national elections), participation in political activities (index created by adding participation in thirteen political activities, such as donating money for a party, helping in a party campaign, participating in rallies and so on), and practical knowledge (measured as ability to 'correctly' place six parties on the left-right scale). Additional details about the dependent and independent variables are included in the section reporting the results.

#### **4. Results**

The results of the analysis based on survey data collected in Hungary before 1997 and 2006 confirm the conclusions drawn by previous studies as regards the stability of patterns of social interactions after the regime change. Tables 1 to 3 give an overview of the structure of personal, core and political discussion networks between 1997 and 2006. Personal networks comprise regular contacts people encountered in their everyday lives. Personal networks were generated through three name generators, asking people about people with whom they discuss important things, people with whom they spend their free time and people who help in household activities. As respondents could nominate up to five persons for each type of activity the size of personal networks ranges from 0 to 15, although all respondents indicated at least one person for each relationship. Core networks include close, intimate contacts. To generate their core networks respondents were asked to indicate up to five people whom they considered the most important for them. What is called throughout the text political network, politically relevant network or political discussion network was computed by summing the number of core members with whom respondents use to discuss politics. Therefore, political discussion network is a group of the core network.

Table 1 indicates that whereas the average personal network size increased between 1997 and 2006, small and non-significant changes occur in core and political

discussion networks. This seems to indicate that the core networks stayed as relevant and politicized as before, whereas a tendency towards increasing the number of weak ties was also recorded.

*Table 1. The size of networks over time about here*

Regarding the composition of core networks, my results confirm previous observations with regard to the prevalence of kin-ties relative to non-kin ones in the Hungarian social networks. Table 2 shows the changes in the composition of core networks over the nine-year period. The table reports only the percents of family members or relatives among the top five people nominated by the respondents. The finding of kin-ties remained as the most prominent presence at networks level does not constitute a surprise given the criterion for eliciting what literature calls core networks (see Marsden, 1990). However, a slight decrease in the proportion of close family members and relatives and a corresponding increase in the proportion of the other categories are observable over time. This seems to indicate a ‘de-privatizing’ tendency of communication, possibly as a result of an increase in the level of general trust.

*Table 2. The composition of core networks over time about here*

As regards political communication, a look at the partisan composition of core networks indicates that they became more homogeneous over time. As seen before, homogeneity is a frequent occurrence of social interactions. People find communication with like-minded others more rewarding and reassuring than exposure to disagreeing views. Nevertheless, the results from Hungary present an interesting twist. As results in Table 3 indicate, patterns of political discussion appeared to be quite heterogeneous up to 2003 when the pattern is reversed. This turn roughly corresponds to the time when the main parties started to make extensive and very deliberate use of their supporters’ social networks for electoral mobilization.

*Table 3 Homogeneity of political discussion networks about here*

Table 3 gives the percentages of the pairs (respondent-important alter) discussing politics break down by the political homogeneity/heterogeneity of the pairs. Firstly, the results show a clear increase in the percentage of people discussing politics as of 2003. However, the results from the 2006 panel data should be interpreted with caution. Panel attrition might bias the sample towards more politically active people as suggested by the high figures for political discussion and homogeneity recorded for this year. Secondly, the results of 2003 indicate an obvious change in the pattern of engaging in political discussion. Whereas in 1997 and 1998 people appear to discuss politics with both similar and dissimilar others, although the heterogeneous pairs are predominant, as of 2003 this pattern is reversed and networks of political discussion became significantly more homogeneous.

This increase in homogeneity indicates the emergence of a strong division at the electorate level as a result of the polarization of the main political parties and the intensification of reliance on formal and informal networks as means of political mobilization in the electoral campaign of 2002 (see Enyedi, 2005; Enyedi and Toka, 2006, Mihalyffy, 2005). That social networks were considered important milieus of political mobilization is also proved by how often they were invoked in the electoral discourses of the right wing party Fidesz. An analysis of the content of speeches delivered by the Prime Minister Victor Orban (the leader of Fidesz, the party in government at the time of 2002 elections) showed that the most frequent message aimed at general mobilization by the means of the everyday social networks (Mihalyffy, 2005: 15). In the end of each rally participants were urged to vote and do their best in convincing members of their networks, be they family members, friends, neighbours or simple acquaintances, to turn out to vote (Mihalyffy, 2005)<sup>3</sup>. In this context people seem to have become impermeable to the arguments of the other camp and lock-up in their partisan positions.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 'Bring one more person with you in the elections day and get her convinced to vote for us' was the message addressed in each and every rally in the Fidesz whistle-stop campaign.

<sup>4</sup> When the pairs that not discuss politics are break down by the homogeneity/heterogeneity the results of my analysis show that the major reason for avoiding political discussion is the perceived dissimilarity in the political views (results available upon request).

These findings indicate that networks retain the structure they acquired prior to the 1990s and perhaps also their importance for people's lives. As of 2003 they became highly partisan and politicized. Did they also become effective in mobilizing people and spreading informational cues?

#### **4.1. Political discussion and participation: results**

##### **4.1.1. Political discussion and voter turnout**

The hypothesis that more political talk contributes to an increase in political participation is investigated using data from post-electoral surveys conducted in 1997, 1998 and 2003. I opted for excluding the 2006 pre-electoral survey from this analysis as the closest elections that respondents could recall were the elections in 2002. The decision to include the 1997 data in spite of a similar problem (the closest elections that could be recalled were in 1994) was motivated by the proximity to the regime change, thus making possible a better comparison of changes in network effect over time. Interestingly enough, the comparison of the results from the three years show little differences in the significant variables, their size and magnitude over time. This indicates that there are quite the same factors that account for voter turnout over time.

I tested first whether political discussion with network members contributes to an increase in people's likelihood to vote in national elections. Table 4 presents the results of logistic regression with recalled participation in last elections as dependent variable and measures of core network and political network sizes as independent variables. The equations control for socio-demographics and other indicators that presumably affect voter turnout while also being correlated with involvement in political discussion (i.e. political interest and being member of former Communist Party). The results show that neither the number of close others that respondents are able to recollect and willing to provide in the interviews, nor the number of important others as political discussants have an effect on individuals' likelihood to participate in elections. Membership in larger personal networks or more politicized ones do not make a significant difference in turnout once most important part of social interaction is controlled for (see single and employed)<sup>5</sup>. In all three equations people who are single appeared to be less likely to

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<sup>5</sup> When the two indicators that grasp two important sources of social interaction are excluded from the

vote. This finding suggests that, perhaps, mechanisms of social influence operate through the closest relationships.

Table 4. The effect of networks on self-reported turnout in last elections about here

To understand the mechanism of influence, I tested the hypothesis that political discussion produces mobilization by instilling a sense of efficacy in the potential voters. Given the fact that the 2003 data includes better measures and more indicators that can be used as controls in the equations I tested the following propositions only with this set. People who belong to more politicized networks presumably feel themselves part of a community that can make a difference. It is this sort of micro-level coordination that helps them solving the paradox of voting (see Rolfe). To test this assumption I proceeded in two steps. First, I tested the proposition that people's likelihood to turn out to vote depends on their commitment to a series of participatory norms. In the second step I looked at the possibility that people would follow these norms as long as the partisan composition of their everyday networks and the politicization of social communication gave them signals that their action (vote) can make a difference.

Table 5 presents the results of logistic regression with recalled voter turnout in last elections as dependent variable and a series of participatory norms together with network measures and a measure of self-reported political interest as independents. Besides education, marital status and political interest, all three variables measuring participatory norms have a significant and positive effect on likelihood to vote. People who consider that a vote does matter, that elections are an interesting and exciting event and that one should vote to prevent the victory of the opposing party are more likely to turn out to vote.

Table 5. The influence of participatory norms on electoral participation about here

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equations both network size and political network size become significantly associated with turnout.

Given the paradox of voting how can people come to believe that their vote would make a difference or that they should vote to prevent the victory of the opposing party? Further on, I tested the hypothesis that being part of networks where political discussion occurs more often can mitigate collective action problems such as participation in elections.

Table 6 reports the results of the OLS equation with a measure of agreement with the affirmation ‘one should vote to prevent the victory of the opposing party’ as dependent variable. This is a 7-point scale variable running from 1, indicating total disagreement to 7, indicating total agreement. People who have more political discussants are expected to hold stronger beliefs about their capacity to influence the course of political actions. The results confirm this expectation, as respondents who are more interested in politics and more engaged in political discussion appear to be more likely to trust their capacity to make a difference.

Table 6. The effect of networks on attitudes towards vote about here

#### 4.1.2. **Political discussion and participation in political activities**

Further on, the paper tests the effect of political discussion networks on individual participation in political activities different than vote. The dependent variable is a scale measuring participation in thirteen political activities, generally included in surveys (e.g. donating money for a party, participating in marches, rallies, working for a party and so on). Table 7 presents the results of testing three OLS models. The first column shows the results of regressing participation on core network size. The equation controls for individual level of political interest (following politics in various media and self-declared interest in politics) and socio-demographics. The results indicate a significant and positive relationship between the size of core networks and participation. People who have larger networks (I do not exclude the possibility that these respondents might be also more open and willing to provide more answers to the survey question asking about their important others) are more likely to participate in political activities. In the second model I added the size of political discussion network. Results indicate a significant and

positive relationship between both networks size and political network, on the one hand and participation, on the other. More political discussion seems to yield more participation. The third model replaces the size of political discussion network with its partisan composition. Respondents embedded in homogeneous networks appeared to be more likely to engage in political activities.

Table 7. Effect of networks on participation in non-electoral political activities about here

Overall, it seems that more social interactions, irrespective whether political or not, make people more politically active. This effect holds even after controlling for respondents' prior degree of interest and exposure to politics measured through diverse indicators, such as self-reported interest in politics, the habit of following politics in different media and being socialized in a family where politics was a current topic of conversation. This test is conducted only for 2003 because this data contains more variables that can be added to control at least partially for endogeneity and reverse causation.

Taking advantage of the two-wave panel I conducted an additional test for establishing the direction and the stability of the effect exerted by networks on participation. This time political participation in 2006 was regressed on network measures, as recorded in 2003. As before, the dependent variable is an index summing up participation in thirteen political activities during the last year. Table 8 reports the results of the OLS equation with participation in 2006 as dependent variable and various network measures from 2003 as independents. The equation controls for socio-demographics, various measures of political interest and variables that supposedly affects participation while also being significantly correlated with network measures. The variables recording a positive and significant effect are political interest, early socialization (whether respondents grew up in a family where politics was a usual topic of conversation) and the number of close others with whom respondents recalled discussing politics in 2003. This finding indicates stability in the effect exerted by political discussion over time. It also gives additional support that the influence might

flow from discussion towards participation, although I do not make a strong claim ruling their close entanglement.

**Table 8.** Effects of network on participation in political activities (panel data) about here

To summarize, the results concluded in this section are as follows. Firstly, being embedded in larger core networks or more politicized ones do not make a significant difference in turnout once most personal and accessible parts of social interaction are controlled for (see single and employed). Secondly, people who engage more often in political discussion with their important others (voluntarily or not) will be more likely to develop a sense of political efficacy, which in its turn makes them more likely to engage in participatory acts where the profit is infinitesimal. This indicates that networks might be effective in mitigating collective action dilemmas. Thirdly, people who have more close contacts (or are more likely to talk openly about them), engage more often in political discussion with them and have a predominantly agreeable exchange of political opinions at network level are more likely to engage in political and civic activities. The effect of political discussion, irrespective whether agreeable or not seems to be stable over time (see panel data results).

#### **4.2. Homogeneity and turnout: the generation hypothesis**

This section presents the results of investigating the hypothesis about the specific character of interpersonal influence in communist societies and its survival mainly among people who have been socialized prior to the 1990s. The hypothesis is tested with all four data sets and results are presented in parallel. As stated in the second hypothesis, one would expect a decline in the influence exerted by personal social networks on individual electoral participation after the 1990s. On the other hand, the remnants of this influence are expected to be observed in the case of those who have been mainly socialized prior to the 1990s and thus less likely to change their social habits overnight. The hypothesis about a generational difference in the effect exerted by personal networks is explored

only for fully and partially homogeneous, by the mean of interaction terms between network composition and generation<sup>6</sup>.

The measures of political homogeneity and heterogeneity were computed by matching respondents' partisanship (based on their prospective vote choice) and discussants' party preferences (as identified by respondents). Two measures for each of the two indicators record whether respondents are embedded in groups of political discussion which are exclusively or predominantly homogeneous or heterogeneous, respectively.

Table 9 and 10 report the results of the logistic regression with self-declared turnout in last elections as the dependent variable and a measure of fully homogeneous and predominantly homogeneous political discussion networks, respectively along with demographics and level of political interest as the independent variables. The measure of fully homogeneous networks is positively and significantly associated with voting in last election in 2003 and 2006. As regards the other equation, the measure of predominantly heterogeneous political networks records a positive and significant effect only for the 2003 data. As noticed before, the moment when networks gained significance coincides with the time when they became more partisan, too perhaps as a result of the change in the electoral strategies employed by political parties. Although both main players of the 2002 national elections employed more direct forms of campaigning with an overall shift from national towards local level, the right wing, conservative party Fidesz relied more on a dense network of activists and civic organizations (Mihalyffy, 2005). While this direct form of campaigning that made an extensive use of various formal and informal social networks was a new strategy for the right-wing Fidesz and, consequently, a new phenomenon for the right-wing supporters, the socialist party MSZP was experienced in employing it, as the party inherited and maintained the old network structure developed by the Communist Party before the 1990s. Overall, personal communication and face-to-face talk acquired a central role in that electoral campaign.

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<sup>6</sup> The variable recording generational group membership is computed so that to separate between respondents who were less than 16 in 1990 and those who were 16 or above in 1990.

Table 9. Effects of fully homogeneous political networks on electoral participation about here

Table 10. Effects of predominantly homogeneous political networks on electoral participation about here

Tables 11 and 12 present the results of the logistic regression with participation in national elections of 2002 as dependent variable and a measure of fully heterogeneous and predominantly heterogeneous political discussion networks, respectively together with demographics and respondent's level of political interest as the independent variables. The results partially support the hypothesis of the detrimental influence of fully heterogeneous networks on turnout since the effect in question is always negative in both equations. Yet, the measure of fully heterogeneous networks of political discussion records a statistically significant effect only in 2003.

Table 11. Effects of fully heterogeneous political networks on electoral participation about here

Table 12. Effects of predominantly heterogeneous political networks on electoral participation about here

In the second part of this analysis I tested the hypothesis that the effect of homogeneous political discussion is stronger for those who have been mainly socialized prior to the 1990s and thus more familiar with an agreeable exchange of political opinions. This claim is tested separately for fully homogeneous and partially homogeneous groups by adding to the equations an interaction term between partisan composition and generation affiliation (less and above 16 in the 1990).

Table 13 and 14 show the results of testing the hypothesis for fully homogeneous and predominantly homogeneous networks of political discussion, respectively. It records the results of the logistic regression with vote in last election as the dependent variable and generation, embeddedness in fully/partially homogeneous political discussion network and the interaction between the two as the independent variables. The equation controls for respondents' demographics and their level of political interest. The hypothesis of a

higher effect of personal networks for the pre-1990s group (those who have been mainly socialized prior to the 1990s and were 16 or above in 1990) is supported only for 2003 in both cases. The interaction term between generation and fully/partially homogeneous political networks is significantly and positively associated with respondents' probability to cast a vote only in 2003<sup>7</sup>.

Table 13. Effects of generation and fully homogeneous political networks on electoral turnout about here

Table 14. Effects of generation and predominantly homogeneous political networks on electoral turnout about here

#### 4.3. Political discussion and practical knowledge

Based on the claim that people can make decisions in the absence of full information the paper tests the possibility that political discussion at core network level can provide informational cues, thus contributing to an increase in the practical knowledge people possessed in political sphere. To investigate the cognitive gain brought by social interaction and political talk with network members I tested whether political discussion network promote the understanding of left-right semantics. Left and right notions are seen as functional equivalents of full information on political parties and their stances on various issues.

The measure of practical knowledge was therefore computed using respondents' placement of six political parties on the left-right scale. Each respondent's level of practical knowledge was calculated using the absolute distance between her placement of each of the six parties on a 10-point ideological scale and the mean placement of those parties by all the respondents who answered these questions.<sup>8</sup> The differences between one's placement and the mean placement were summed up, with the resulting measure indicating lower level of political knowledge in the case of respondents recording higher

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<sup>7</sup> When the hypothesis of a generation difference is tested for fully/partially heterogeneous political networks the interaction term records a negative and significant effect on turnout only for partially heterogeneous networks in 2003. Results of these tests can be provided upon request.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon and Segura (1997) found this measure of political knowledge appropriate in the case of Western European behavior and I consider that it is an appropriate measure for Hungary as well due to a quite high stabilized party system in 2002 (for more details about the Hungarian party system see Enyedy, 2006).

scores. Further on, this measure was recoded as a dummy variable, with values lower than the mean indicating high political knowledge and values higher than the mean low political knowledge.

Table 15 reports the results of logistic regression with the measure of practical knowledge as dependent variable and a series of network measures together with socio-demographics and various measures of political interest as controls in the equation. Results indicate that people who have more political discussants (irrespective of the size of their core networks) would experience a cognitive gain as their ability to use left-right semantics significantly increases. Political homogeneity did not appear to obstruct this process. Moreover, this effect holds true even after controlling for factors that can be correlated with political discussion while bearing upon people's ability to place parties on the left-right scale, such as interest for politics, consumption of political news in various media and political socialization. Again, for reasons related to the wealth of indicators that can be introduced as controls in the equation the test is conducted only with 2003 data.

Table 15. The effect of networks on practical political knowledge/use of left-right heuristics about here

## **5. Conclusions**

The paper proposed an empirical test of the claim that political talk with personal network members has beneficial consequences for individual ability to understand and engage in political activities. This investigation was conducted in the post-communist Hungary, a setting where networks and social interactions were particularly tailored by the communist experience. Hungary appeared to be an example of a post-communist country, while also standing apart in what regards some pre-1990s patterns of social interaction and developments following the regime change. For these reasons the conclusions formulated by this paper are emblematic for the post-communist space and the general investigation of the role of political debate, alike.

The finding of private networks still assuming a central role for individuals' lives has twofold consequences. On the one hand, it indicates personal social networks as

important venues for generating social capital and thus solving collective action problems by generating trust and local coordination. On the other hand, it signals the potential risks of preserving informal institutions created by communism and consequently maintaining an atomized society where reliance on networks is synonym to isolation and self-centred perspective as regard public issues.

The paper investigated three hypotheses. First it checks whether personal and political discussion networks spread participatory norms that help people to solve collective action problems posed by participation in public decision making, such as vote. A similar hypothesis is tested for participation in non-electoral activities. Secondly, it tests whether as a result of agreeable patterns of political talk during communism the homogeneous settings preserved their significance after the regime change. Thirdly, it looks at the possibility that political talk leads to cognitive gains, which although different from full knowledge are nevertheless useful in helping people to make political decisions.

The results showed that embeddedness in larger networks or more politicized ones do not make a significant difference in turnout once most important part of social interaction is controlled for. It also showed that political discussion might encourage commitment to participatory norm and consequently had a positive effect on individuals' likelihood to turn out to vote. When it comes to non-electoral participation, the results showed it to be influenced by the network size, politicization and homogeneity in quite equal proportions. Embeddedness in more extensive private networks, more politicized and more politically homogeneous ones makes people more likely to engage in political and civic activities. This effect seems to hold over time as shown by the panel analysis. As regards the assumed generation effect, results indicated that people who have been mainly socialized prior to the 1990s seem to be more swayed by homogeneous social surroundings. Finally, participation in more political discussion with relevant others appeared to increase people's ability to use the left-right concepts in politics.

It is important to keep in mind that these observed effects hold mainly for 2003, a moment when networks also became more politicized and partisan. I interpret this as an effect of the interaction between the social structure, patterns and norms of social

communication tailored by the pre-1990s communist regimes and the strategies employed by political parties in the electoral campaign of 2002.

Similar to the other communist countries in the region, Hungary was a highly atomized society where trust in people outside one's close circle was low. Hungarian society displayed higher family cohesion than other Western countries and instrumental considerations rather than genuine emotions constituted the main motivations for forming and maintaining strong and weak ties alike. Political and social resources were found to be highly correlated, a finding that anticipated in a way later developments where politics secured an important role. Based on evidence furnished by previous studies, the paper showed that little change took place after the political regime change in Hungary. Social networks retained their central role and remained small in size, inward-oriented and highly instrumental. Social trust remained low and people did not participate more than before in public life. On this background, the strategy employed by political actors (especially the right wing conservative party Fidesz) to increase political participation and raise people's sense of civicness and common belonging had as side-effects the decrease in an already low social cohesion and the increase of political seclusion in the detriment of a genuine political debate between the two major political camps. It nonetheless led to an increase in various forms of political participation, from turnout to membership in both political and non-political organizations and it gave people the feeling that politics was not a remote territory (see Enyedi, 2005; Enyedi and Toka, 2006). Although the intended effect, namely increase in political participation seems to be gone by 2006 the side-effects are still present. Nowadays Hungary is still seen as a society highly divided on political issues.

## Appendix

**Table 1. Size of networks over time (1997-2006)**

	Average size of personal social networks <sup>9</sup> (SD in parentheses)	Average size of core networks <sup>10</sup> (SD in parentheses)	Average size of politically relevant core network <sup>11</sup> (SD in parentheses)
1997	2.23 (1.39) N=995	2.99 (1.63) N=995	1.73 (1.50) N=921
1998	2.41 (1.44) N=798	2.95 (1.57) N=798	1.40 (1.51) N=746
2003	2.76 (1.88) N=1516	2.79 (1.45) N=1516	1.75 (1.68) N=1516
Panel data 2003	3.13 (2.15) N=451	2.82 (1.25) N=451	1.99 (1.68) N=418
Panel data 2006	4.32 (2.84) N=422	2.92 (1.51) N=446	2.03 (1.75) N=405

**Table 2. Family/relatives in the core network (%)**

Family/Relatives (%)	First important alter	Second important alter	Third important alter	Fourth important alter	Fifth important alter
1997	89	82	74	59	56
1998	88	81	72	58	46
2003	82	76	66	58	51
2003 (panel)	86	80	71	61	53
2006 (panel)	85	78	74	58	56

<sup>9</sup> The size of personal social networks was computed using data elicited through three name-generators (The questions read as follows: ‘Please indicate up to 5 persons with whom you discuss important things/up to 5 persons with whom you spend your free time/up to 5 persons who help you in household activities).

<sup>10</sup> The size of core networks was computed using data elicited through one additional name-generator (The question reads as follow: ‘Please select from the previous listed persons up to five people whom you consider the most important for you’.

<sup>11</sup> The size of politically relevant core networks was computed as number of people belonging to the core networks with whom respondents report discussing politics.

**Table 3. Homogeneity of political discussion networks (1997-2006)**

<b>Pairs</b>	<b>Discuss politics (%)</b>		
<b>Years</b>		<b>Similar views (%)</b>	<b>Different views (%)</b>
1997	45	13	87
1998	40	33	67
2003	57	59	41
2003 panel	75	58	42
2006 panel	70	66	34

**Table 4. The effect of networks on self-reported turnout in last elections**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Exp(B) 1997 N=977</b>	<b>Exp (B) 1998 N=731</b>	<b>Exp(B) 2003 N=1385</b>
<b>Age</b>	1.047***	1.025***	1.022***
<b>Female</b>	1.116	1.130	.847
<b>Education</b>	1.237**	1.367***	1.660***
<b>Budapest</b>	.626	1.970**	1.131
<b>Village</b>	1.052	1.153	1.330
<b>Church-goer</b>	1.356	1.236	.946
<b>Live alone</b>	1.272	1.483	.796
<b>Single</b>	.415***	.660**	.556***
<b>Employed</b>	1.926***	1.086	1.110
<b>Former member of Communist Party</b>	.812	.508	1.275
<b>Self-declared political interest</b>	1.631***	1.659***	1.863***
<b>Personal network size</b>	.999	1.072	1.011
<b>Political discussion network size</b>	.954	1.023	1.098
<b>Nagelkerke R-square</b>	.274	.211	.203
<b>Cox &amp; Snell R-square</b>	.178	.142	.123

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05

**Table 5. The influence of participatory norms on turnout**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Exp (B) N=1319</b>
<b>Age</b>	1.026***
<b>Female</b>	.791
<b>Education</b>	1.593***
<b>Budapest</b>	1.278
<b>Village</b>	1.320
<b>Live alone</b>	.896
<b>Single</b>	.482***
<b>Employed</b>	1.273
<b>Church-goer</b>	.820
<b>Political interest</b>	1.400***
<b>Network size</b>	1.017
<b>Political network size</b>	.931
<b>A vote does not matter much</b>	.799***
<b>Election is an interesting, exciting event</b>	1.255***
<b>Should vote to prevent the victory of the opponent party</b>	1.832***
<b>Nagelkerke R-square</b>	.209
<b>Cox &amp; Snell R-square</b>	.356

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05

**Table 6. The effect of networks on attitude towards vote ('one should vote to prevent the victory of the opposing party')**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Unstandardized B (S.E.)</b>
<b>Age</b>	.002 (.002)
<b>Female</b>	.052 (.058)
<b>Education</b>	.052** (.025)
<b>Church-goer</b>	.025 (.081)
<b>Live alone</b>	-.080 (.107)
<b>Employed</b>	-.022 (.065)
<b>Single</b>	-.017 (.068)
<b>Political interest</b>	.150*** (.035)
<b>Network size</b>	.024 (.018)
<b>Political network size</b>	.090***(.021)

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05

Table 7. Effect of networks on participation in other political and civic activities (2003)

Variable	Unstandardized B (S.E.) Model 1	Unstandardized B (S.E.) Model 2	Unstandardized B (S.E.) Model 3
Age	-.003 (.002)	-.002 (.002)	-.007 (.004)
Female	-.207*** (.069)	-.226*** (.072)	-.239** (.106)
Education	.145*** (.031)	.138*** (.033)	.131*** (.050)
Employed	.122 (.078)	.119 (.080)	.159 (.120)
Live alone	.306*** (.122)	.333** (.131)	.433** (.208)
Single	.141 (.080)	.144 (.083)	.232 (.125)
Budapest	.420*** (.092)	.362*** (.096)	.522*** (.137)
Village	.097 (.077)	.081 (.080)	.139 (.123)
Politics in newspapers	.047** (.023)	.010 (.025)	.046 (.037)
Politics in weekly papers	.020 (.012)	.150*** (.034)	.127** (.049)
Politics on TV	-.062 (.034)	-.058 (.036)	-.068 (.061)
Politics on radio	-.044 (.023)	-.056** (.024)	-.042 (.036)
Politics on internet	.014 (.012)	.009 (.013)	.009 (.014)
Church attendance	.458*** (.096)	.413*** (.100)	.480*** (.147)
Political socialization in childhood	.156*** (.038)	.151*** (.039)	.163*** (.055)
Political interest	.379*** (.044)	.336*** (.047)	.448*** (.065)
Personal network size	.078*** (.018)	.048** (.022)	.066** (.028)
Political discussion network size		.057** (.027)	
Politically homogeneous network			.044** (.020)
Constant	-1.081*** (.234)	-1.095*** (.249)	-1.611*** (.418)
Adjusted R-square	.23	.24	.25

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05

**Table 8. Effects of network on participation in political activities  
(Dependent variable: participation in political activities in 2006)**

Variable	B (S.E.)
Age	-.008 (.006)
Female	-.315 (.179)
Education	.054 (.044)
Budapest	.148 (.274)
Village	.185 (.183)
Employed	.038 (.188)
Live alone	.109 (.306)
Church goer	-.494 (.248)
Early socialization	.320*** (.089)
Political interest	.265*** (.108)
Network size 2003	-.028 (.047)
Political network size 2003	.149** (.063)
Politically homogeneous network 2003	.052 (.034)

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05

**Table 9. Effects of fully homogeneous political networks on electoral participation  
(1997-2006)**

	<i>B(S.E) 1997</i> N=302	<i>B (S.E.) 1998</i> N=261	<i>B(S.E.) 2003</i> N=792	<i>B(S.E)2006p</i> N=203
All network members have same party preference as respondent	.056 (.576)	.790 (.468)	.834***(.261)	1.531**(.607)
Controls: demographics				
Gender	-.208 (.375)	.125 (.441)	-.059 (.246)	-.931 (.594)
Age	.322***(.056)	.391***(.069)	.105**(.037)	.263**(.091)
Age squared	-.003***(.001)	-.003***(.001)	-.001 (.0)	-.002** (.001)
Education	.397 (.224)	-.184(.252)	.586***(.122)	.234(.167)
Other control				
Political interest	.057 (.168)	.159 (.229)	.474**(.156)	.604 (.409)
Constant	-6.565***(1.285)	-7.744***(1.500)	-4.017***(.992)	-6.678 (2.303)
Nagelkerke R square	.317	.506	.193	.311
Cox&Snell R square	.182	.309	.097	.136
-2 Log likelihood	197.137	149.605	471.687	87.149

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05

**Table 10. Effects of predominantly homogeneous political networks on electoral participation (1997-2006)**

	<i>B(S.E) 1997</i> N=302	<i>B (S.E.) 1998</i> N=261	<i>B(S.E.) 2003</i> N=791	<i>B(S.E) 2006p</i> N=224
Majority of network members have same party preference as respondent	.066 (.540)	.733 (.440)	.956***(.249)	.790 (.553)
<b>Controls: demographics</b>				
Gender	-.208 (.375)	.180 (.443)	-.072 (.247)	-.866 (.556)
Age	.322***(.056)	.396 (.069)	.113**(.037)	.294*** (.085)
Age squared	-.003***(.001)	-.003**(.001)	-.001**(.0)	-.003*** (.001)
Education	.396 (.224)	-.190 (.249)	.581***(.124)	.256 (.166)
<b>Other control</b>				
Political interest	.056 (.169)	.144(.230)	.462**(.157)	.546 (.405)
Constant	- 6.564***(1.285)	-7.863*** (1.505)	- 4.257***(1.005)	-6.897 (2.186**)
Nagelkerke R square	.317	.506	.102	.268
Cox&Snell R square	.182	.309	.204	.115
-2 Log likelihood	197.131	149.740	466.855	97.944

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05

**Table 11. Effects of fully heterogeneous political networks on electoral participation (1997-2006)**

	<i>B(S.E) 1997</i> N=302	<i>B (S.E.) 1998</i> N=261	<i>B(S.E.) 2003</i> N=792	<i>B(S.E)2006</i> N=210
All network members have different party preference than respondent	.179 (.409)	-.693 (.435)	- 1.073***(.245)	.087 (.836)
<b>Controls: demographics</b>				
Gender	-.217 (.375)	.204 (.441)	-.029 (.249)	-.245 (.633)
Age	.323***(.056)	.392***(.069)	.111** (.037)	.281** (.091)
Age squared	-.003***(.001)	-.003***(.001)	-.001 (.0)	-.003**(.001)
Education	.399 (.224)	-.229 (.250)	.566***(.123)	.193 (.169)
<b>Other control</b>				
Political interest	.075 (.172)	.184 (.229)	.438**(.157)	.304 (.462)
Constant	-	-	-3.395***(1.0)	-5.433**

	<i>B(S.E) 1997</i> N=302	<i>B (S.E.) 1998</i> N=261	<i>B(S.E.) 2003</i> N=792	<i>B(S.E)2006</i> N=210
	6.751***(1.356)	7.229***(1.512)		(2.320)
<b>Nagelkerke R square</b>	.318	.504	.211	.159
<b>Cox&amp;Snell R square</b>	.182	.308	.106	.059
<b>-2 Log likelihood</b>	196.957	150.031	463.712	84.711

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05

**Table 12. Effects of predominantly heterogeneous political networks on electoral participation (1997-2006)**

	<i>B(S.E) 1997</i> N=302	<i>B (S.E.) 1998</i> N=260	<i>B(S.E.) 2003</i> N=786	<i>B(S.E)2006</i> N=166
<b>Majority of network members have different party preference than respondent</b>	-.066 (.540)	-.686 (.442)	-.974*** (.251)	-.913(.607)
<b>Controls: demographics</b>				
<b>Gender</b>	-.208 (.375)	.141 (.444)	-.044 (.248)	-.949(.618)
<b>Age</b>	.322***(.056)	.398***(.069)	.106** (.037)	.241** (.096)
<b>Age squared</b>	-.003***(.001)	-.003***(.001)	-.001 (.0)	-.002** (.001)
<b>Education</b>	.396 (.224)	-.178 (.250)	.588***(.125)	.139 (.164)
<b>Other control</b>				
<b>Political interest</b>	.056 (.169)	.147 (.230)	.463**(.157)	.554 (.431)
<b>Constant</b>	-6.498***(1.408)	-7.250***(1.527)	3.192** (1.007)	4.432** (2.240)
<b>Nagelkerke R square</b>	.317	.509	.202	.255
<b>Cox&amp;Snell R square</b>	.182	.311	.101	.116
<b>-2 Log likelihood</b>	197.131	148.692	463.230	80.286

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05.

**Table 13. Effects of generation and fully homogeneous political networks on electoral turnout (1997-2006)**

	<i>B(S.E) 1997 N=302</i>	<i>B (S.E.) 1998 N=261</i>	<i>B(S.E.) 2003 N=792</i>	<i>B(S.E) 2006 N=187</i>
<b>Generation*Fully homogeneous political group</b>	1.684 (1.440)	1.813 (1.364)	1.206**(.538)	-1.381 (1.263)
<b>Demographics</b>				
<b>Gender</b>	-.162 (.362)	-.002 (.477)	.005 (.244)	-1.176(.631)
<b>Education</b>	.272 (.191)	-.482**(.237)	.519***(.113)	.216 (.175)
<b>Other control</b>				
<b>Political interest</b>	.181 (.163)		.498***(.154)	.776 (.417)
<b>Constant</b>	-3.425*** (.995)	-4.272*** (1.214)	-2.526** (.817)	-4.442**(1.768)
<b>Nagelkerke R square</b>	.227	.550	.187	.302
<b>Cox&amp;Snell R square</b>	.130	.336	.094	.134
<b>-2 Log likelihood</b>	215.606	139.444	474.609	82.402

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05

**Table 14. Effects of generation and predominantly homogeneous political networks on electoral turnout (1997-2006)**

	<i>B(S.E) 1997 N=302</i>	<i>B (S.E.) 1998 N=261</i>	<i>B(S.E.) 2003 N=791</i>	<i>B(S.E) 2006 N=206</i>
<b>Generation</b>	-.133 (1.596)	3.792**(1.526)	-.732 (.778)	3.983**(1.877)
<b>Generation *predominantly homogeneous political group</b>	2.321 (1.411)	.219 (1.042)	1.468**(.520)	-1.453(1.159)
<b>Demographics</b>				
<b>Gender</b>	-.196 (.364)	.081 (.479)	.007 (.245)	-1.062(.578)
<b>Education</b>	.257 (.191)	-.435 (.233)	.508***(.114)	.219 (.170)
<b>Other controls</b>				
<b>Political interest</b>	.193 (.165)	.122 (.233)	.499***(.155)	.680 (.396)
<b>Constant</b>	-3.224*** (1.002)	-4.979*** (1.356)	-2.325** (.855)	-4.171** (1.768)
<b>Nagelkerke R square</b>	.236	.541	.204	.236
<b>Cox&amp;Snell R square</b>	.135	.330	.102	.103

	<i>B(S.E) 1997</i> N=302	<i>B (S.E.) 1998</i> N=261	<i>B(S.E.) 2003</i> N=791	<i>B(S.E) 2006</i> N=206
<b>-2 Log likelihood</b>	213.853	141.529	466.782	95.066

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05

**Table 15. The effect of networks on practical political knowledge/use of left-right heuristics/ (2003)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Exp (B)</b> N=1363	<b>Exp (B)</b> N=789
<b>Age</b>	.999	.995
<b>Female</b>	1.355**	1.194
<b>Education</b>	.861***	.959
<b>Budapest</b>	.545***	.628**
<b>Village</b>	1.212	1.409
<b>Employed</b>	.868	.770
<b>Live alone</b>	.681	.989
<b>Single</b>	.745**	.861
<b>Early socialization</b>	.927	.899
<b>Politics in newspapers</b>	.973	.952
<b>Politics in weekly papers</b>	1.051	1.083
<b>Politics on TV</b>	.932	1.135
<b>Politics on radio</b>	1.042	.994
<b>Politics on internet</b>	.790***	.764***
<b>Political interest</b>	1.006	1.019
<b>Personal network size</b>	1.037	1.012
<b>Political discussion size</b>	.842***	.828***
<b>Politically homogeneous network</b>		1.036

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05

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