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T. K. Ahn, Robert Huckfeldt and John Barry Ryan
Frontmatter
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Experts, Activists, and Democratic Politics: Are Electorates Self-Educating?

This book addresses opinion leadership in democratic politics as a process whereby individuals send and receive information through their informally based networks of political communication. The analyses are based on a series of small group experiments, conducted by the authors, which build on accumulated evidence from more than seventy years of survey data regarding political communication among interdependent actors. The various experimental designs provide an opportunity to assess the nature of the communication process, both in terms of increasing citizen expertise as well as in terms of communicating political biases.

T.K. Ahn is a professor of political science at Seoul National University. His work has been published in a number of journals, including the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *Journal of Politics*, *Political Psychology*, the *Journal of Public Economics*, the *Journal of Public Economic Theory*, and the *Journal of Economy Psychology*. He has received the Paul Lazarsfeld Award from the American Political Science Association for the best paper on political communication. He received his PhD from Indiana University, Bloomington.

Robert Huckfeldt is Distinguished Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Davis. He is the author or coauthor of *Politics in Context*; *Race and the Decline of Class in American Politics*; *Citizens, Politics, and Social Communication* (Cambridge); *Political Disagreement* (Cambridge); and a number of articles. He received the 1979 E.E. Schattschneider Award for the outstanding dissertation in American politics from the American Political Science Association; the 2012 Doris Graber Outstanding Book Award from the Political Communication Section of the American Political Science Association; and outstanding conference-paper awards from the Political Communication Section and the Elections, Public Opinion, and Voting Section of the American Political Science Association. He received his PhD from Washington University in St. Louis.

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John Barry Ryan is an assistant professor of political science at Stony Brook University. His work has appeared in journals such as the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Political Behavior*, and *Political Communication*. He has received the Paul Lazarsfeld Award from the American Political Science Association for the best paper on political communication. He received his PhD from the University of California, Davis.

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"Against the onslaught of declarations that modern political life is isolated and anomic, this sparkling analysis of networks and experiments shows how networks of ideas and individuals connect our political activities. Ahn, Huckfeldt, and Ryan weave together network surveys and small group experiments to show how political ideas may spread in daily life as well as what structures enhance or restrict that spread. In the end, they present a very compelling vision of modern political life that encompasses politics in the current century, as well as the last half of the twentieth."

– Michael Ward, Duke University

"This book reveals the ways in which pundits, partisans, and political activists are central to forming public opinion and to the resilience of democracy. These biased opinion leaders garner expertise in issues that interest them, and their views are channeled to citizens with little incentive to gather their own information. Anyone seeking to explain public opinion, opinion leaders, partisan bias, political activism, or political communication is going to have to tackle this book. Disputing its findings will be a herculean task. The authors marshal observational data, laboratory experiments, agent-based models, network analysis, and statistical simulations to support their central theoretical claims. The book is an excellent model of social science, using diverse methods to answer well-defined questions."

– Rick K. Wilson, Rice University

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Experts, Activists, and Democratic Politics

Are Electorates Self-Educating?

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More information

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Dedicated to
John Sprague
and
the memory of
Elinor Ostrom

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T. K. Ahn, Robert Huckfeldt and John Barry Ryan
Frontmatter
More information

Contents

List of figures *page* xiii
List of tables xiv
Origins and acknowledgments xvi

1 Experts, activists, and self-educating electorates 1
Ahn, Huckfeldt, and Ryan
High hopes and realistic concerns 3
Political expertise in the corridors of everyday life 5
The civic capacity of voters and electorates 6
Expertise, knowledge, and self-educating electorates 9
Contextual constraints on network construction 10
Consequences of network diversity 10
Limitations on influence 11
Individual, aggregate, and dynamic implications 12
Expertise, motivation, and communication 14
Sources and consequences of motivation 15
Implications and conclusion 18

2 The imperatives of interdependence 20
Ahn, Huckfeldt, and Ryan
Moving beyond individual observations 22
Opinion leadership, interdependence, and density dependence 23
Interdependence and structures of indeterminacy 26
Networks at the intersection between demand and supply 27
Interdependence and political complexity 29
Observational strategies for studying interdependent actors 31
Path-breaking contributions 32
Network surveys 33
A roadmap for the analysis 35
The small group experiments 37

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-06887-2 - Experts, Activists, and Democratic Politics: Are Electorates Self-Educating?
T. K. Ahn, Robert Huckfeldt and John Barry Ryan
Frontmatter
More information

An outline of the experimental studies 39
Summary and implications 40

3 Experts, activists, and the social communication of political expertise 44
Ahn, Huckfeldt, Mendez, Osborn, and Ryan
I. Recognizing expertise: do citizens know it when they see it? 45
II. Discussion as delegation: aggregate implications 63

4 Unanimity, discord, and opportunities for opinion leadership 68
Ahn, Huckfeldt, Mendez, and Ryan
I. The role of opinion variance within communication networks 69
II. Opinion leaders and controversy – moths and flames 77

5 Informational asymmetries among voters 90
Ahn, Huckfeldt, and Ryan
Social communication and information costs 91
Sources and consequences of uncertainty 92
Experimental design 93
The underlying spatial voting model 94
Obtaining information on candidates' positions 95
Summary of procedure 97
The cost and value of individually obtained information 98
Criteria for selecting informants 100
The reliability of expert advice 102
Coping with advice from suspect sources 103
Cross-pressures and the implications for correct voting 108
The experiment and the real world 112
Implications and conclusions 113
Chapter 5 appendix 115
1. Description of subjects 115
2. Evidence regarding strategy evolution during the experiment 116
3. Instructions to participants 117

6 Expertise and bias in political communication networks 120
Ahn, Huckfeldt, Mayer, and Ryan
Experts, bias, and opinion leaders 121
The costs of communication 122
The experimental framework 124
The experimental procedure 126
Contextual contingencies operating on political centrality 130
Who receives the most requests for information? 130
Non-directional centrality 132
What are the criteria that individuals use in selecting informants? 133
Aggregate consequences of individual choice criteria 134
Symmetric distributions 136
Asymmetric preferences 137
Asymmetric information 137
Patterns of communication among the agents 137

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-06887-2 - Experts, Activists, and Democratic Politics: Are Electorates Self-Educating?
T. K. Ahn, Robert Huckfeldt and John Barry Ryan
Frontmatter
More information

Dynamical implications of contextual variation 139
How accurate is the communicated information? 140
Implications and conclusions 141
Chapter 6 appendix 144
Instructions to participants 144
2. High-cost subjects in the agent-based model 147
3. Patterns of change across the periods 148

7 Interdependence, communication, and calculation: costs, benefits, and opinion leadership 153
Ahn, Huckfeldt, and Ryan
The use of analytic benchmarks 154
The value of public signals 154
Belief update with private signals 155
The value of private signals 158
Conflict of interest and incentives for strategic communication 160
Trade off between expertise and preference similarity 162
Incentives for cross-boundary information acquisition 164
Implications and conclusions 168

8 Partisanship and the efficacy of social communication in constrained environments 169
Ryan
Dyadic social communication 170
Moving beyond the dyad: the autoregressive influence model 171
What does it mean to vote correctly? 172
Research design 174
The treatment group 174
Global benefits 175
Partisan payoffs 175
Timeline of the experiment 175
Stage 1: Private information stage 176
Stage 2: First social information stage 177
Stage 3: Second social information stage 178
Stage 4: Voting and payoffs 178
The control group 179
What have we learned? 179
The in-party message acceptance hypothesis (H_1) 180
The contingent benefit for the uninformed hypothesis (H_2) 180
The autoregressive influence hypothesis (H_3) 180
The between-subject results 180
The within-subjects results 185
Implications and conclusions 189
Chapter 8 appendix 191
Instructions to participants 191

9 Noise, bias, and expertise: the dynamics of becoming informed 194
Huckfeldt, Pietryka, and Reilly

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-06887-2 - Experts, Activists, and Democratic Politics: Are Electorates Self-Educating?
T. K. Ahn, Robert Huckfeldt and John Barry Ryan
Frontmatter
More information

Expertise, information costs, and interdependent citizens 195
Memory constraints on the process of becoming informed 196
The experimental design 197
The experimental procedure 198
Heterogeneity and bias within networks 201
Criteria for selecting informants 201
Network centrality in a context of limited choice 205
Implications for bias 206
Information, memory decay, and autoregressive processes 206
A simple model of the process 209
The effect of the prior 210
The effect of updated judgments 210
Incoming information 210
Estimating the model 211
Heterogeneous information and the vote 216
Implications and conclusions 220
Chapter 9 appendix 223
Instructions to participants 223

10 The complex dynamics of political communication 227
Huckfeldt, Pietryka, and Reilly
Expert citizens and higher-order communication effects 228
A DeGroot model of social influence 229
Estimates for the model 231
Long-term dynamics of political communication 233
Information, expertise, and opinion leadership 236
The decisive effects of slowly decaying priors 237
Incorporating the model of memory decay 238
The effect of the prior 238
The effect of updated judgments 238
Incoming information 239
Obtaining estimates for the DeGroot model 239
Implications and conclusions 245

11 Experts, activists, and democratic prospects 248
Ahn, Huckfeldt, and Ryan
The role of opinion leaders 249
The perception of expertise 251
Interdependence and the micro-macro divide 252
Conflict, controversy, and opinion leadership 252
Noise, bias, and dynamic interdependence 253
Biased messengers and correct votes 254
Activism and expertise in a political process 255
The problem of wrong-headed experts 256

References 258
Index of key concepts and authors 273

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-06887-2 - Experts, Activists, and Democratic Politics: Are Electorates Self-Educating?
T. K. Ahn, Robert Huckfeldt and John Barry Ryan
Frontmatter
More information

Figures

4.1.	The simultaneity of discussion and disagreement.	*page* 86
5.1.	Voting, social messages, and priors.	106
5.2.	Predicted probability of a correct vote by subject information level and distance between subject and informant.	112
A6.1.	Social information exchange over time.	151
7.1.	Deriving the Bayesian posterior for the probability that Candidate A holds position 1, given that a subject receives a signal that Candidate A holds position −1.	157
7.2.	Truthful signals sent by informants when subject–informant pairs are on the same side or different sides of the midpoint.	161
7.3.	Percent of correct votes using Bayesian elimination, votes implied by the initial estimates of candidates' positions, and the actual percent of correct votes.	163
8.1.	Percentage of correct votes for control and treatment groups by information level and network partisanship.	181
8.2.	Comparing the percentage of actual correct votes to the percentage of initial, implied votes that were correct.	185
9.1.	Directed graphs for typical periods in an experiment.	202
9.2.	The autoregressive influence of social information.	208
9.3.	Implications of the model.	215
9.4.	The effect of prior judgment on the probability of voting for Candidate B as a function of the certainty of the final judgment.	220
10.1.	Directed graphs for randomly chosen rounds.	232
10.2.	Convergence to equilibrium.	243

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-06887-2 - Experts, Activists, and Democratic Politics: Are Electorates Self-Educating?
T. K. Ahn, Robert Huckfeldt and John Barry Ryan
Frontmatter
More information

Tables

4.1. Effects of randomly applied network name generator on political composition of network. *page* 82
5.1. Absolute value of difference between prior and candidate position. 99
5.2. Requests for information within dyads. 101
5.3. Biases in communicated messages. 103
5.4. Subject vote by priors and socially communicated information, with interactions for heuristic devices. 105
5.5. Correct votes, subject priors, and informant messages. 109
5.6. Correct vote by subject and informant information levels and the distance between subject and informant. 111
A5.1. Subject demographics and political orientations. 115
A5.2. Mean behaviors within a round regressed on the sequence number for the round, for all rounds and sessions. 116
6.1. Experimental design. 126
6.2. Expertise, priors, and biased messages. 129
6.3. Centrality and expertise. 131
6.4. Factors affecting the subjects' selection of informant. 134
6.5. Symmetrical and asymmetrical preference and information distributions across groups for agent-based model. 135
6.6. Agent-based simulations of cross-group communication for low- and medium-cost subjects: group transition rates with implied equilibria. 138
6.7. Agent-based simulations of noise in cross-group communication, for low- and medium-cost subjects, in contexts with asymmetrically distributed preferences. 142
A6.1. Agent-based simulations of cross-group communication for all subjects: group transition rates with implied equilibria. 147

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-06887-2 - Experts, Activists, and Democratic Politics: Are Electorates Self-Educating?
T. K. Ahn, Robert Huckfeldt and John Barry Ryan
Frontmatter
More information

A6.2. Agent-based simulations of noise in cross-group communication, for low-, medium-, and high-cost subjects, in contexts with asymmetrically distributed preferences. 149
A6.3. Replicating Table 6.2A with data split between early and late periods. 150
A6.4. Mean number of in-group and out-group requests subjects received by period. 150
7.1. Probability of Candidate A's position, contingent on value of privately purchased signals. 156
7.2. Subject information purchases by information costs for subjects in the experiments in Chapters 5 and 6. 159
7.3. Ex ante conflict of interest probability – the probability that two voters will have strictly opposite candidate preference. 161
7.4. Determining the value of private information. 167
8.1. Subject information levels and networks. 176
8.2. Comparing correct votes in control and treatment groups by information level and network partisanship. 184
8.3. Bias in first messages sent about global benefits provided by candidates Adams and Bates by partisanship of sender and receiver. 188
9.1. Proximate effects of experimental manipulations. 203
9.2. Final judgments by priors and messages, with messages contingent on contemporaneous judgments. 207
9.3. Estimating the dynamic model of judgment formation. 213
9.4. Candidate vote by prior assessment, final assessment, and information purchased at the last opportunity, contingent on amount of initial information purchase. 218
9.5. Predicted probabilities of voting for Candidate B by candidate propensities of prior and final judgments. 219
10.1. Subject's final judgment regarding Candidate A at each round by their initial (prior) judgment as well as the information conveyed by each of their informants. 230
10.2. Unit eigenvectors for experimental periods. 235
10.3. Final judgment regarding candidate positions by initial prior judgment, immediately previous judgment, and previous (third) message received from other participants, for high-information and low-information subjects. 240

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
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T. K. Ahn, Robert Huckfeldt and John Barry Ryan
Frontmatter
More information

Origins and acknowledgments

The origin and path of this project reveal the magic of serendipity. Huckfeldt taught a seminar at Indiana University in the mid-1990s on interdependence and communication among citizens – a seminar in which Ahn happened to be enrolled. In spite of Huckfeldt's best efforts at convincing him to undertake a dissertation in the area, Ahn decided instead to work with their friend and colleague, Elinor Ostrom. As a consequence, Ahn also had the opportunity to work with Jimmy Walker and Roy Gardner on the experimental analysis of strategic behavior. Ten years later, Huckfeldt happened to be giving a talk at Florida State, where Ahn was a faculty member. They began a series of discussions on translating the study of network effects on political behavior into an experimental research program. Crucially, this was during the same period that John Ryan happened to arrive as a graduate student at the University of California in Davis, where he subsequently received a doctoral dissertation improvement grant from the National Science Foundation to run a series of experiments on networks and political communication. Finally, during this same period, the project also happened to benefit from a series of related discussions and collaborations with Mayer, Mendez, Osborn, Pietryka, and Reilly – all of whom we gratefully acknowledge as the coauthors of various chapters. Viewed in the rear view mirror, this all seems like a perfectly orderly process, but retrospective judgments obscure the inherently stochastic element within all our journeys – intellectual and otherwise!

The authors are also grateful for the helpful comments, suggestions, and assistance that came from a long list of outstanding colleagues: Chris Achen, John Aldrich, Bill Berry, Cheryl Boudreau, Amber Boydstun, Matt Buttice, Colin Cameron, David Cooper, David Cutts, Erik Engstrom, Stanley Feldman, Ed Fieldhouse, James Fowler, Brad Gomez, Kyu S. Hahn, Matt Hibbing, Ken'ichi Ikeda, Jennifer Jerit, Paul Johnson, Brad Jones, Cindy Kam, Don Kinder, Carol Kohfeld, Howie Lavine, David Lazar, Jan Leighley, Milton Lodge, Scott McClurg, Scott MacKenzie, Zeev Maoz, Jeff Mondak, Diana Owen, Franz Pappi, Won-ho

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Frontmatter
More information

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We are also grateful to several publishers, not only for publishing our work in the past, but also for allowing us to build on these earlier efforts in this book. Chapter 1 incorporates arguments originally published by Oxford University Press in Ahn, Huckfeldt, Mayer, and Ryan (2010). Chapter 2 builds on arguments published by Sage Publications in Huckfeldt (2009). Chapter 3 relies on research previously published by John Wiley and Sons in Huckfeldt (2001); Sage Publications in Mendez and Osborn (2010); Springer in Ryan (2011a), and Taylor and Francis in Ryan (2010). Chapter 4 builds on research previously published by Cambridge University Press in Huckfeldt and Mendez (2008) and by John Wiley and Sons in Huckfeldt (2007). Chapter 5 relies on Ahn, Huckfeldt, and Ryan (2010), published by John Wiley. Chapter 6 is based on Ahn, Huckfeldt, Mayer, and Ryan (2013), published by John Wiley. Chapter 8 is based on Ryan (2011b), published by John Wiley. Chapter 9 is an expanded treatment of Huckfeldt, Pietryka, and Reilly (2014), published by Elsevier.

At various points along the way, research funding has been crucial to our effort. Chapter 8 is based on a project funded with a dissertation support grant for John Ryan from the National Science Foundation (SES-0817082). Alex Mayer was supported by a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship. Field work for the Indianapolis-St. Louis Study was supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation to Robert Huckfeldt and John Sprague (SBR-9515314). T. K. Ahn received support from a National Research Foundation of Korea Grant, funded by the Korean Government (NRF-2012S1A5A2A03). Finally, all three authors received crucial support from their respective institutions during the time of the project – Florida State University, the University of California at Davis, and Seoul National University.

We owe a particularly large debt of gratitude to two individuals who have been with us over the long haul as sources of motivation, inspiration, and intellectual insight. Hence, the book is dedicated to John Sprague and the memory of Elinor Ostrom.

Finally, each of us is grateful to those individuals who play crucial roles in our own lives: T.K. to Mi-young; Bob to Sharon and the other members of their family; and John to Yanna and his parents John and Jeanette Ryan.

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