

Let's Talk Politics

A Naive Approach for Measuring Political Sophistication

Patrick W. Kraft

University of Barcelona

February 20th 2020



Content

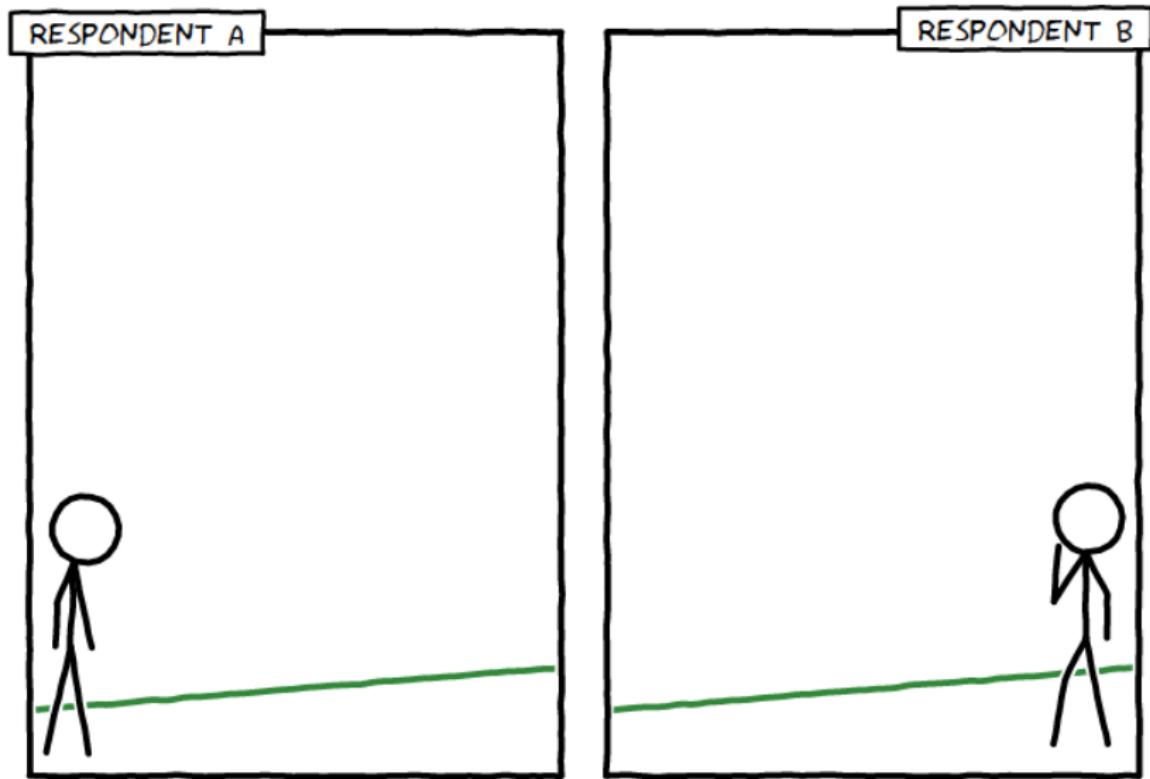
Theoretical Introduction

Validation: Discursive Sophistication and Political Competence

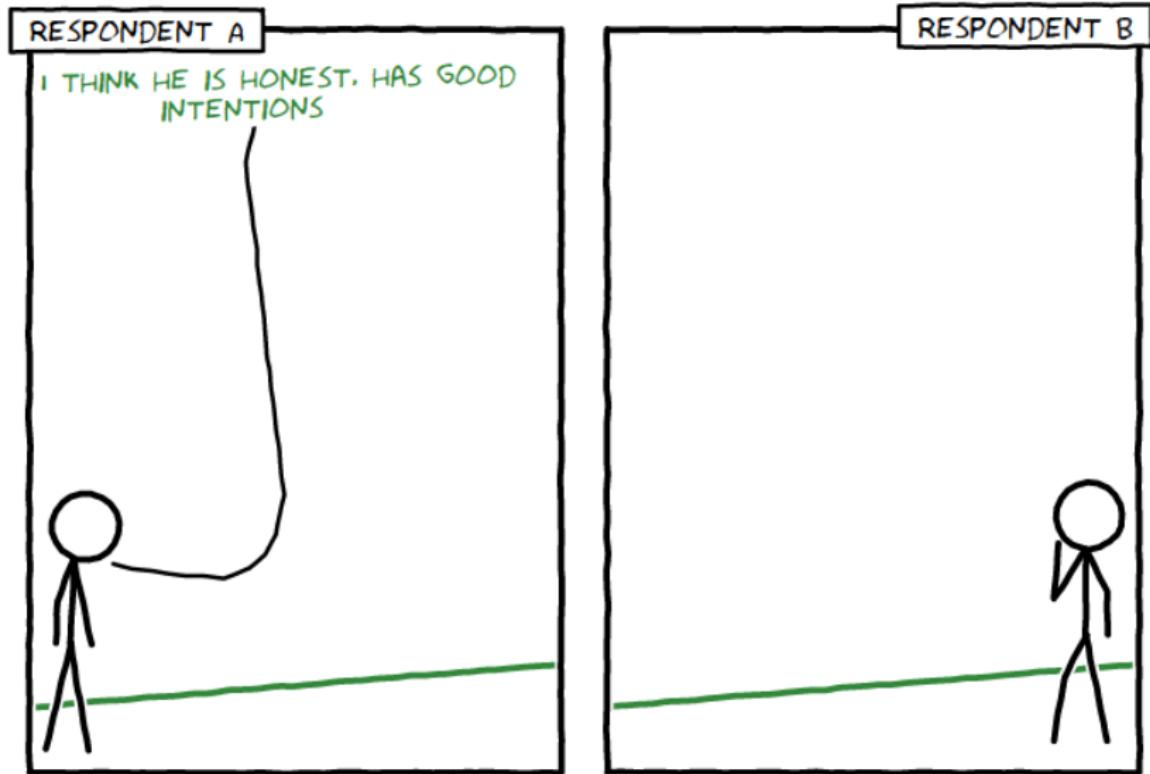
Application: Assessing the Gender Gap

Conclusion

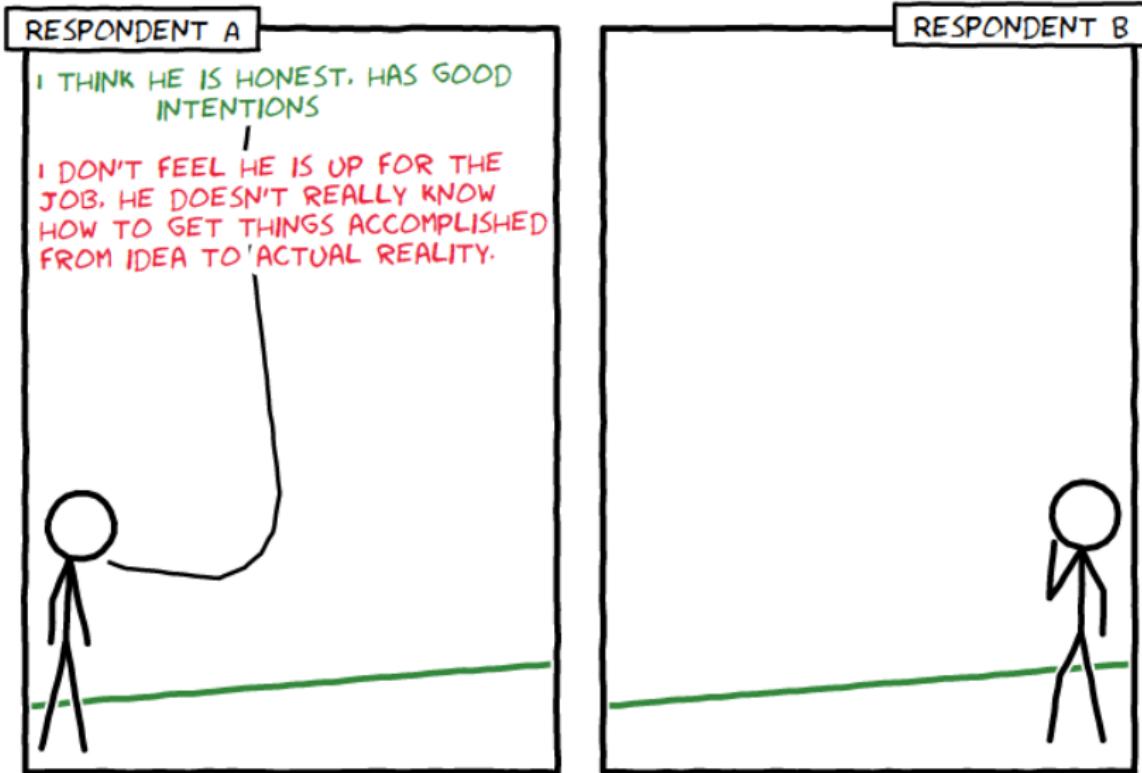
Who scores higher on political knowledge?



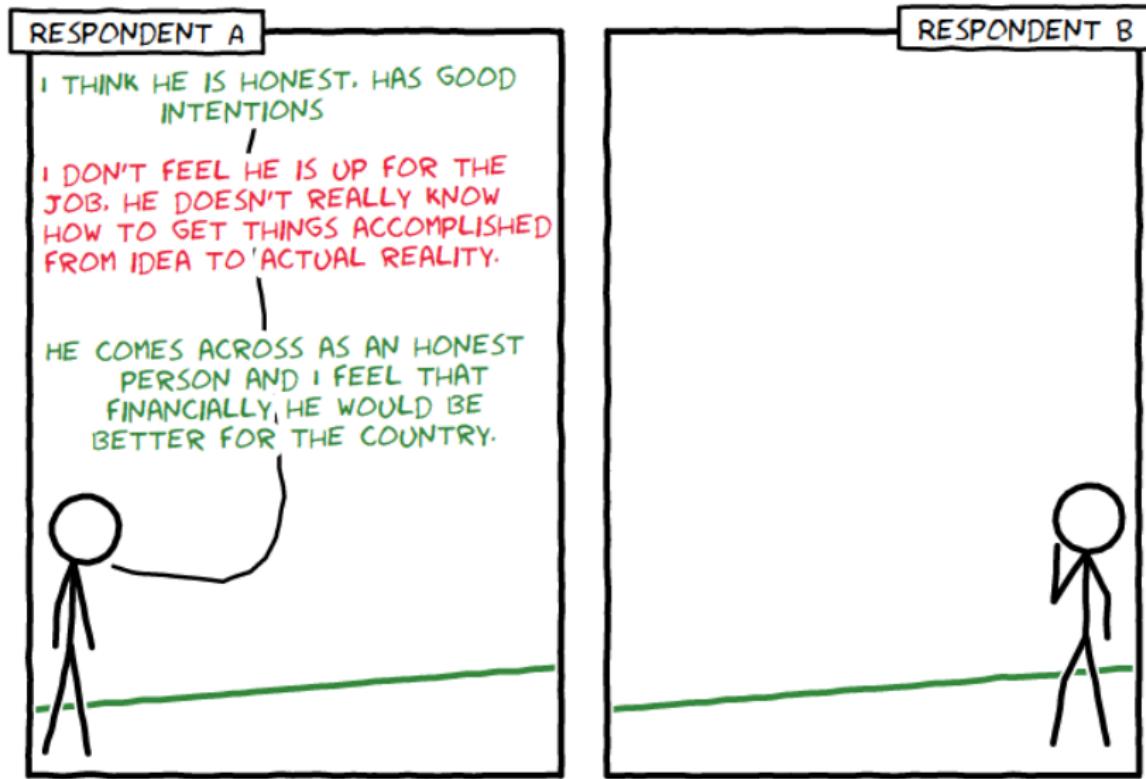
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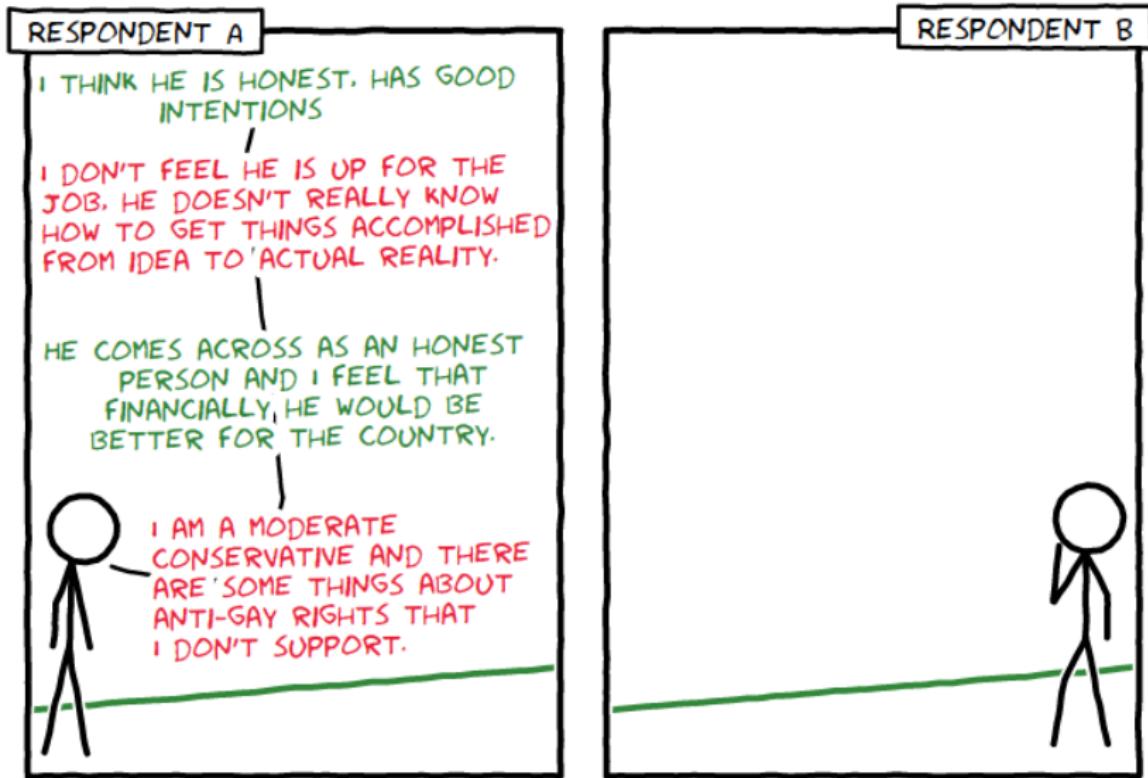
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RESPONDENT A

I THINK HE IS HONEST, HAS GOOD INTENTIONS

I DON'T FEEL HE IS UP FOR THE JOB. HE DOESN'T REALLY KNOW HOW TO GET THINGS ACCOMPLISHED FROM IDEA TO ACTUAL REALITY.

HE COMES ACROSS AS AN HONEST PERSON AND I FEEL THAT FINANCIALLY, HE WOULD BE BETTER FOR THE COUNTRY.

I AM A MODERATE CONSERVATIVE AND THERE ARE SOME THINGS ABOUT ANTI-GAY RIGHTS THAT I DON'T SUPPORT.



RESPONDENT B

HE'S GOT A HOT WIFE. SOUND MIND. BILL CLINTON, THE BEST PRESIDENT WE EVER HAD. IS VOTING FOR HIM. HE'S NOT IN ANY TYPE OF SCANDAL AND IS THE PERFECT PRESIDENT FOR US NOW.



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Both respondents scored
equally

on the conventional political knowledge measure
in the 2012 ANES!

EVERYTHING.



Conventional Measures of Political Knowledge

Definition: “The range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory.” (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996, 10)

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General finding: Lack of information among the public

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Caveat 1: Measurement issues

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Caveat 1: Measurement issues

Caveat 2: Theoretical relevance

Discursive Sophistication and Competence

Verbatim political attitude expression:

- ▶ Communication and information diffusion

Discursive Sophistication and Competence

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→ A Naive Approach for Measuring Sophistication

RESPONDENT A

RESPONDENT B

Measuring Discursive Sophistication



Discursive Sophistication – Components

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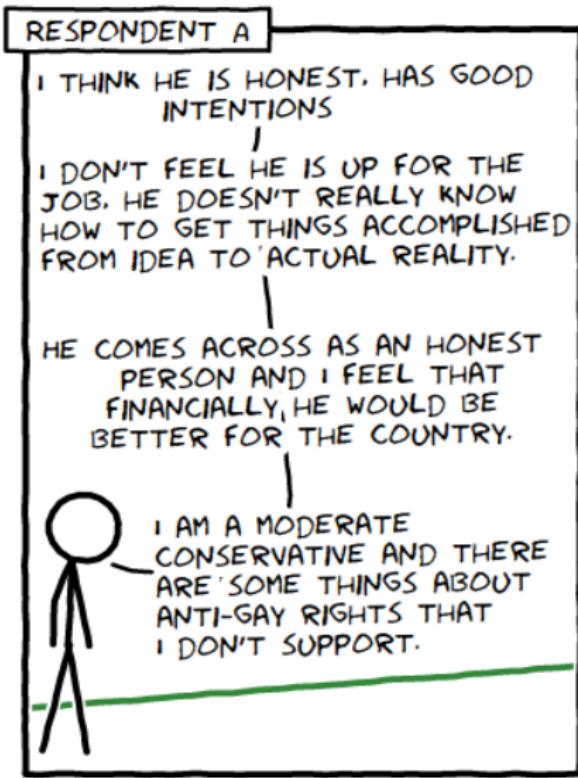
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► Opinionation

Does a respondent discuss all questions?

Discursive Sophistication – Components



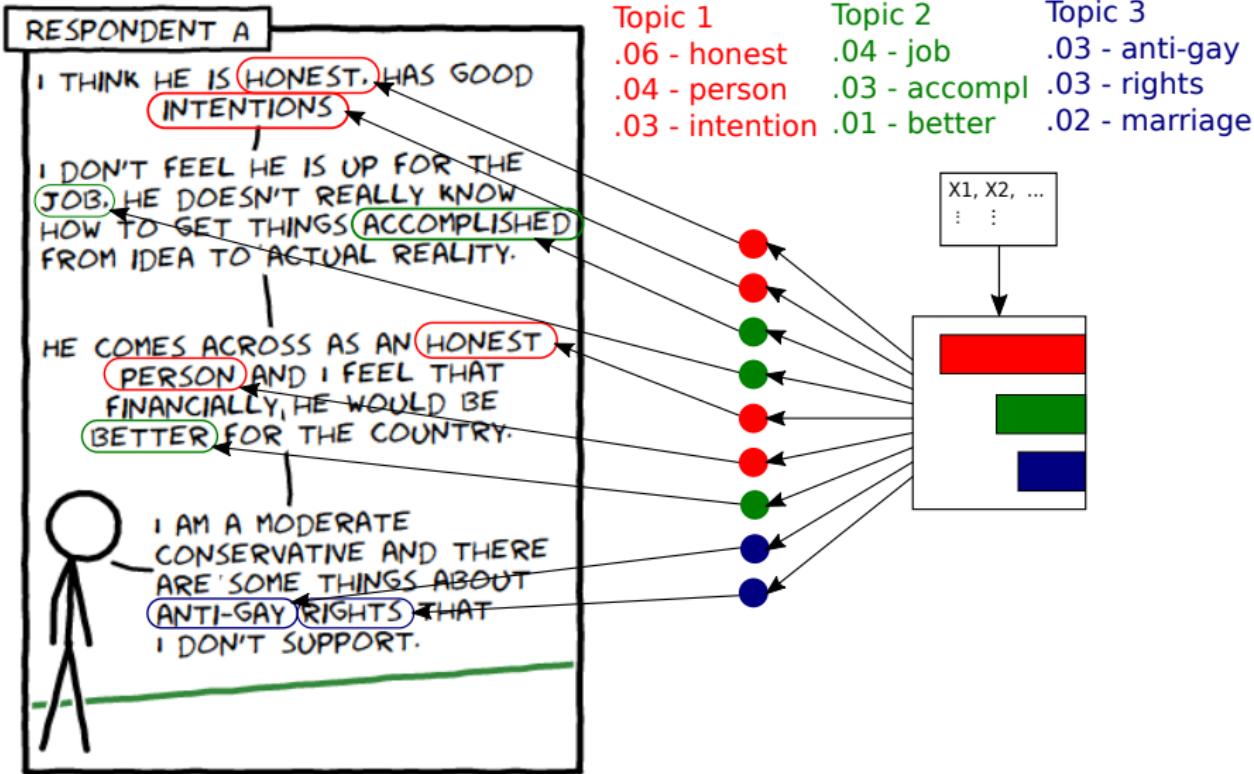
► Opinionation

Does a respondent discuss all questions?

► Considerations

How many topics are mentioned?

Discursive Sophistication – Structural Topic Model



Discursive Sophistication – Components

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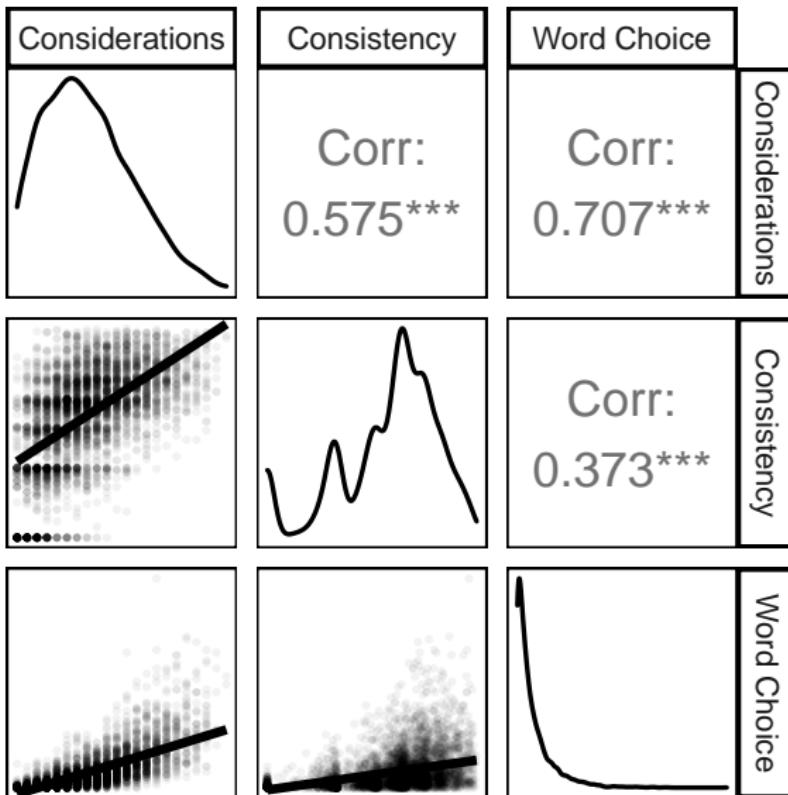
► Word Choice:

Are terms highly descriptive of topics?

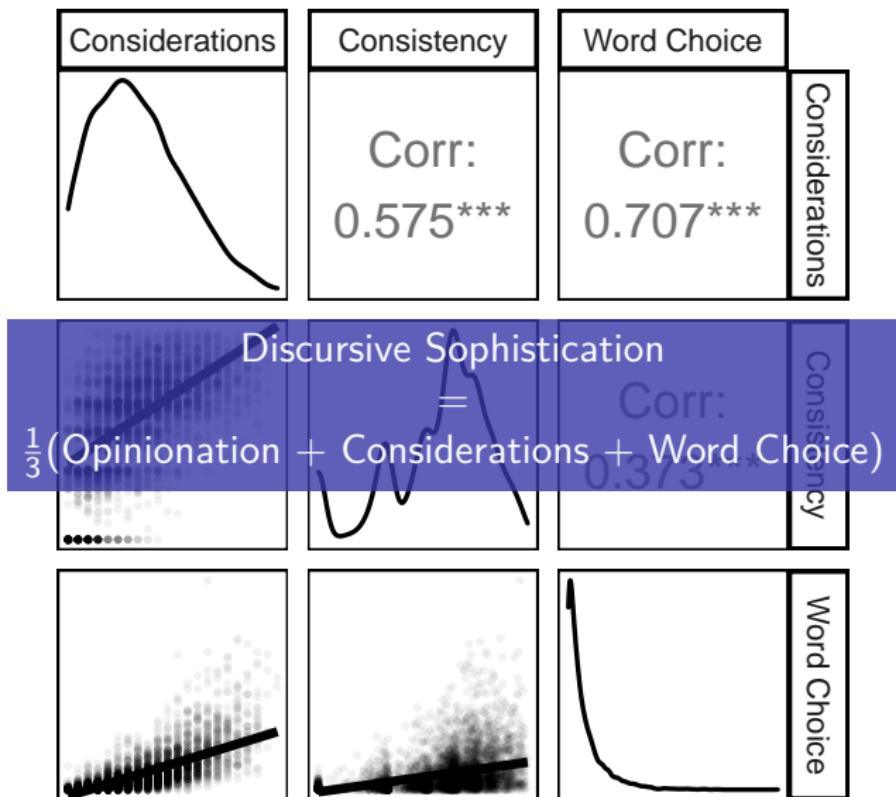
Discursive Sophistication – Components (2012 ANES)

Considerations	Consistency	Word Choice

Discursive Sophistication – Components (2012 ANES)



Discursive Sophistication – Components (2012 ANES)



RESPONDENT A

RESPONDENT B



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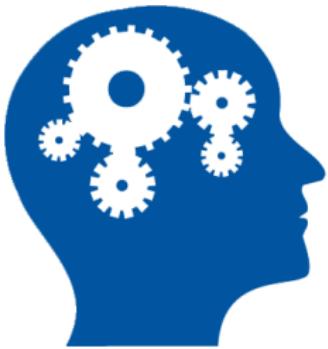
RESPONDENT B



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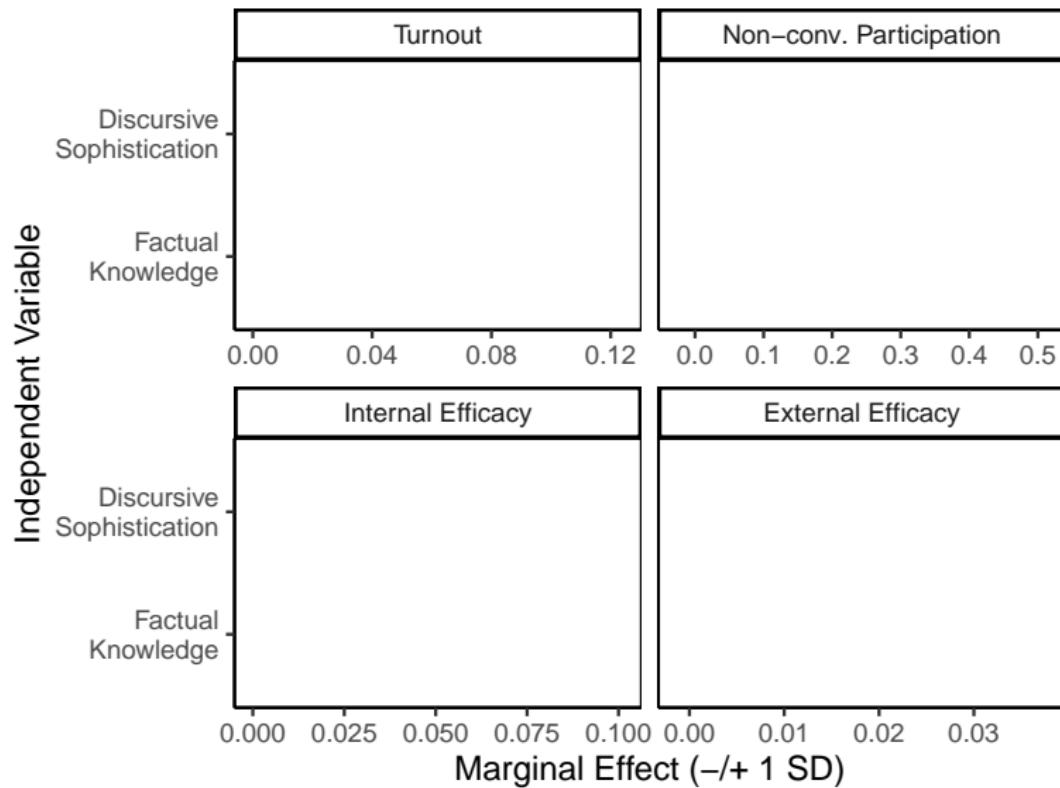


Validation 1
2012 American National Election Study

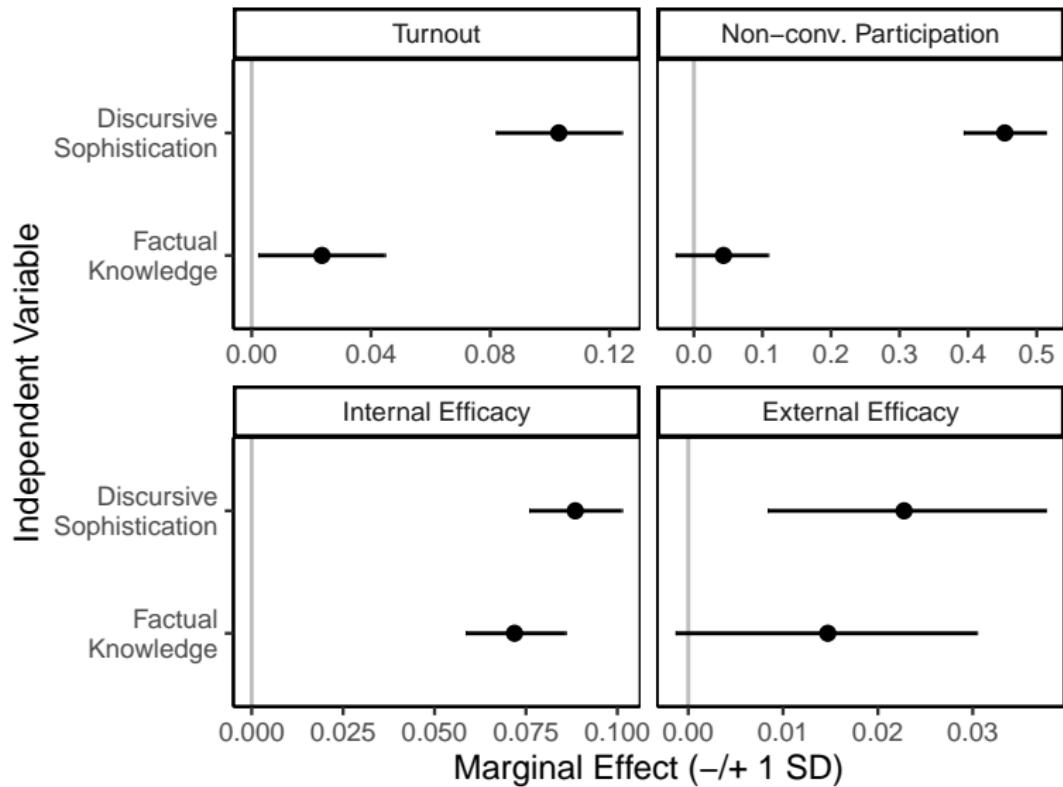
N = 5914 (2054 f2f + 3860 online)



Engagement and Participation



Engagement and Participation



RESPONDENT A

RESPONDENT B



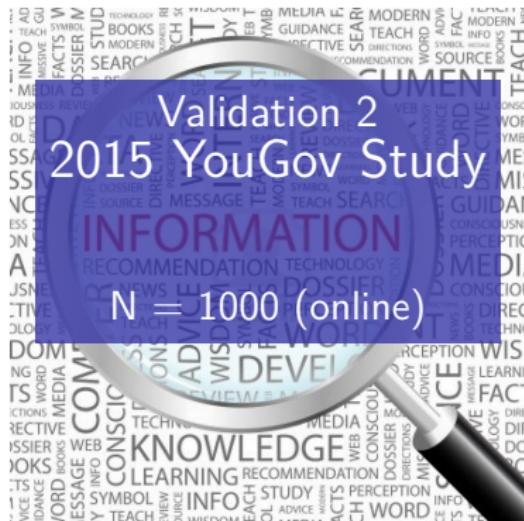
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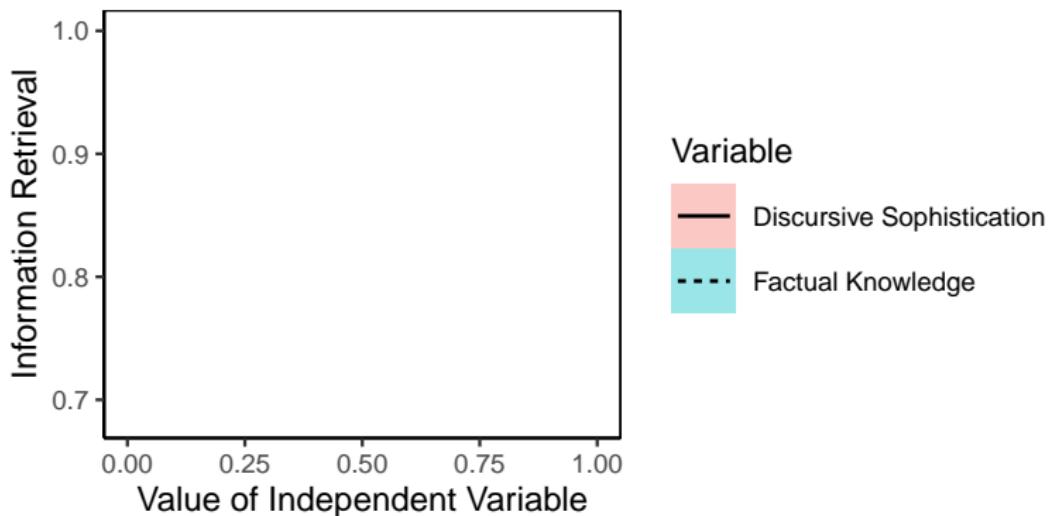


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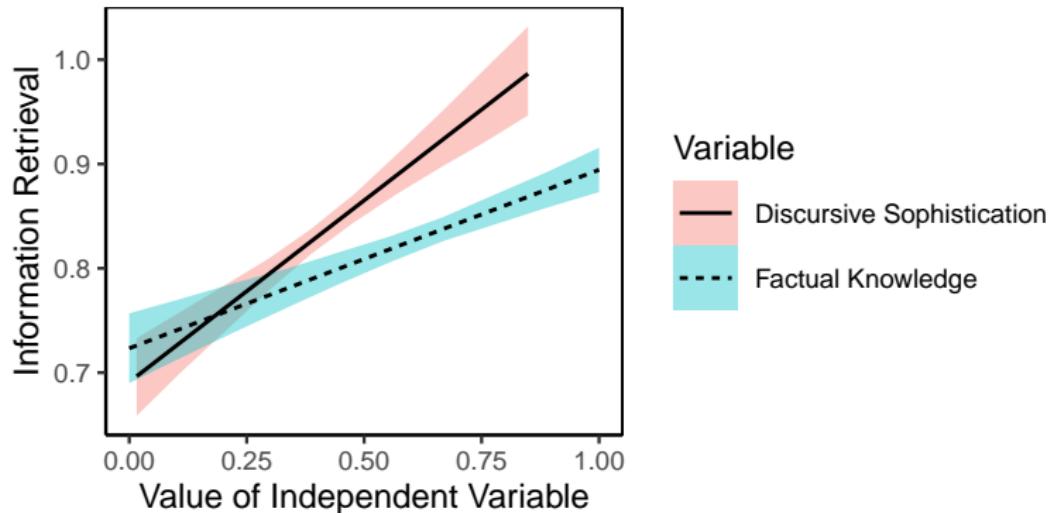
RESPONDENT B



Accurate Information Retrieval



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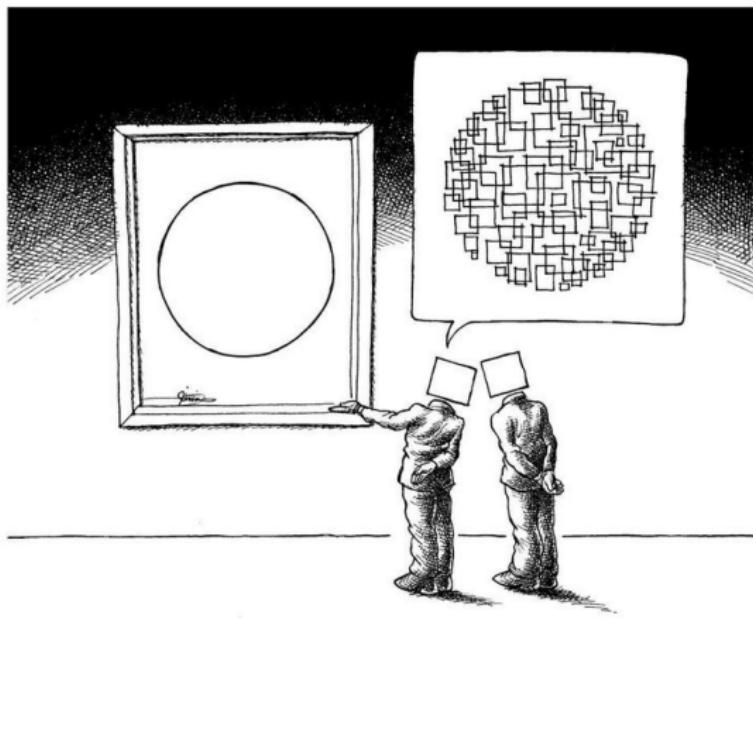
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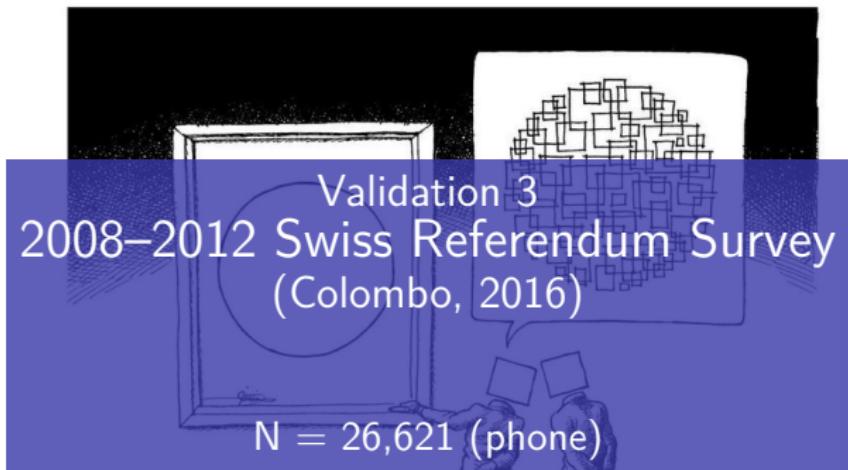
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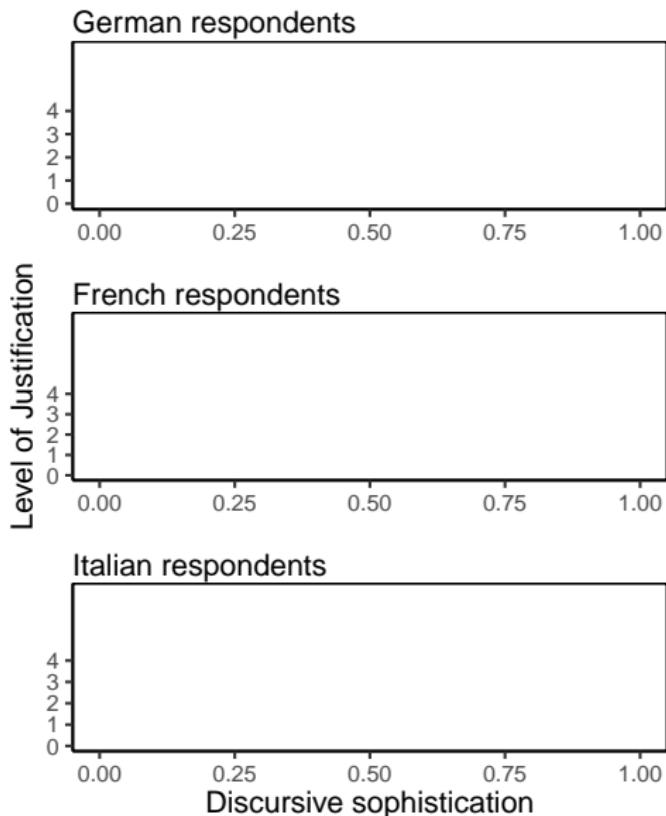


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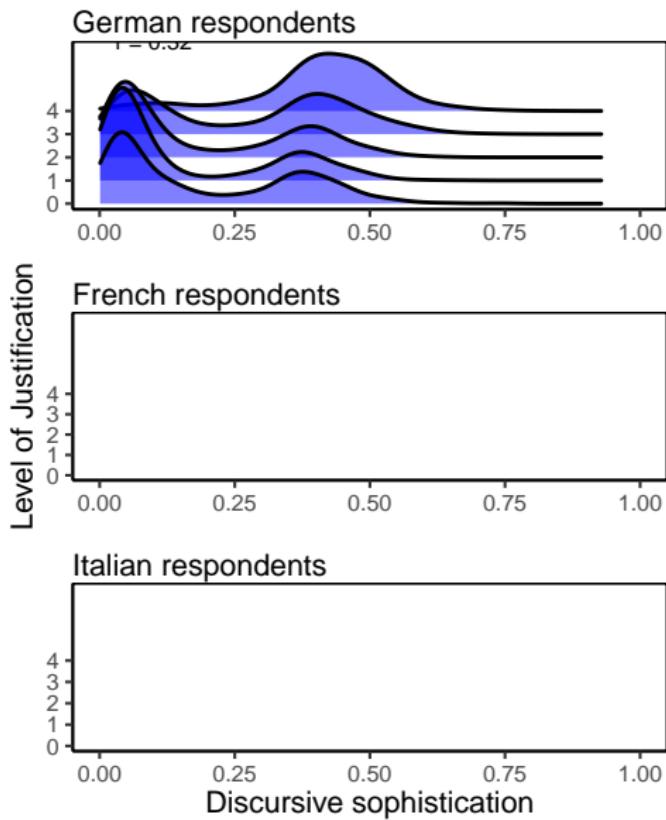
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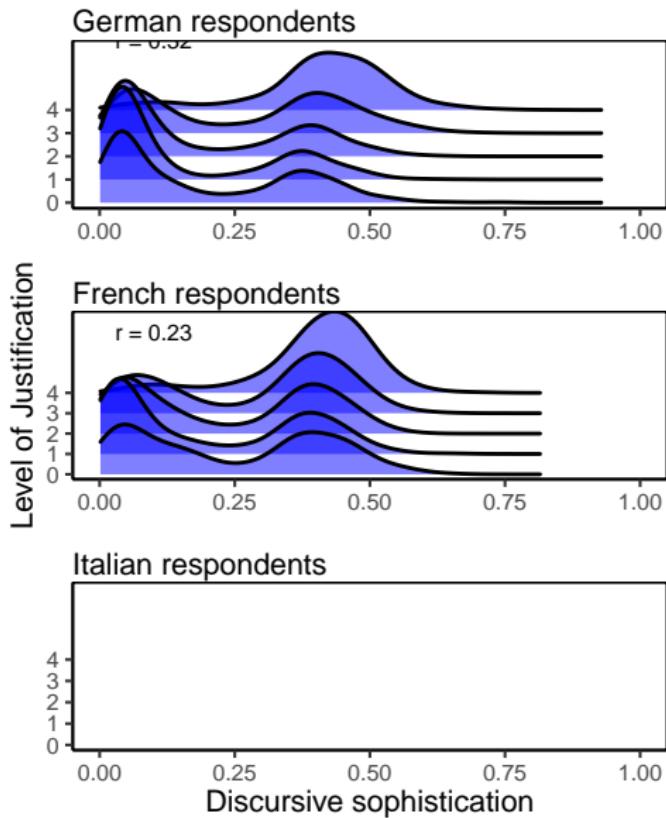
Comparison with Manually Coded Levels of Justification



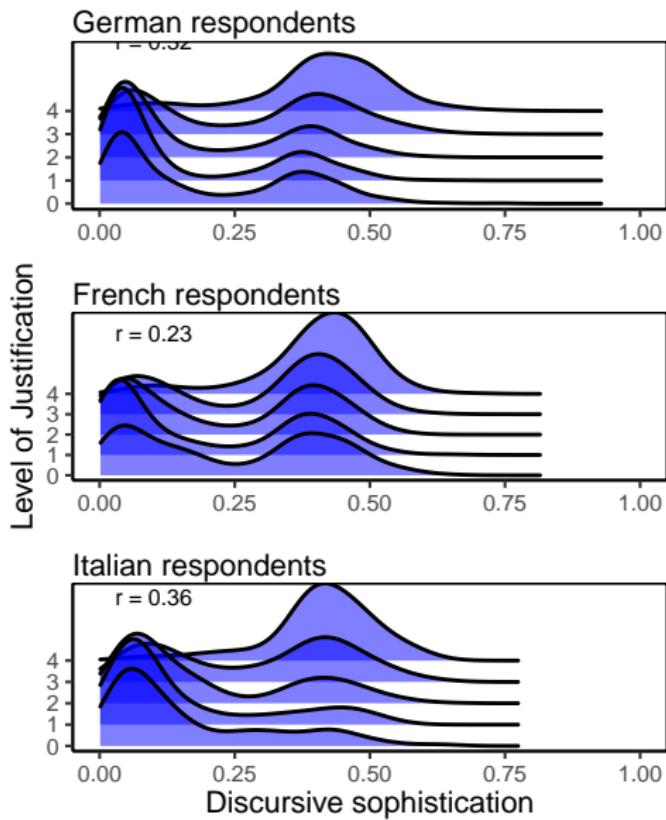
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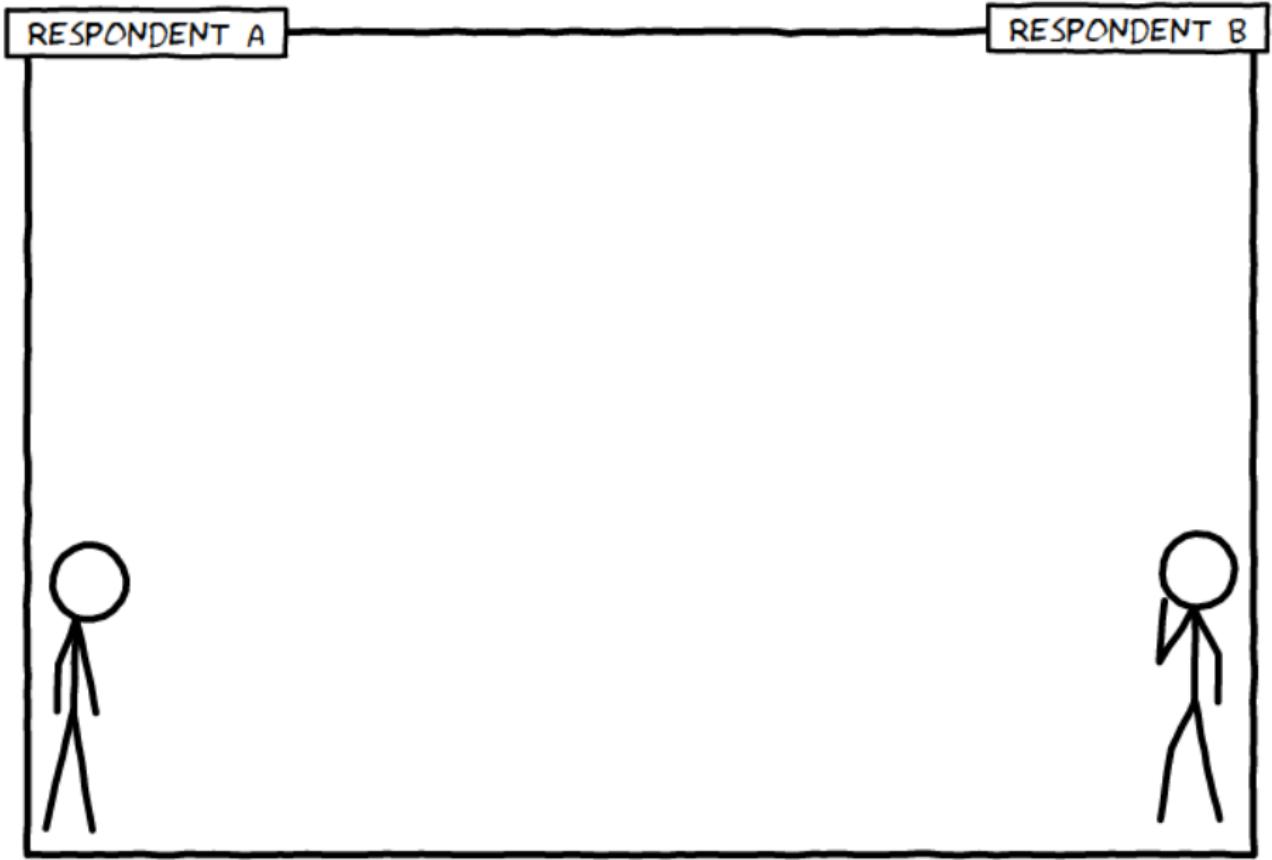


Comparison with Manually Coded Levels of Justification



Comparison with Manually Coded Levels of Justification





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RESPONDENT B



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Application
Assessing the Gender Gap
in Political Sophistication

(2012 & 2016 ANES + 2015 YouGov)

Previous Research on Gender Differences in Knowledge

General finding: Women score lower than men on conventional measures of political knowledge

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Explanation 1: Personality characteristics

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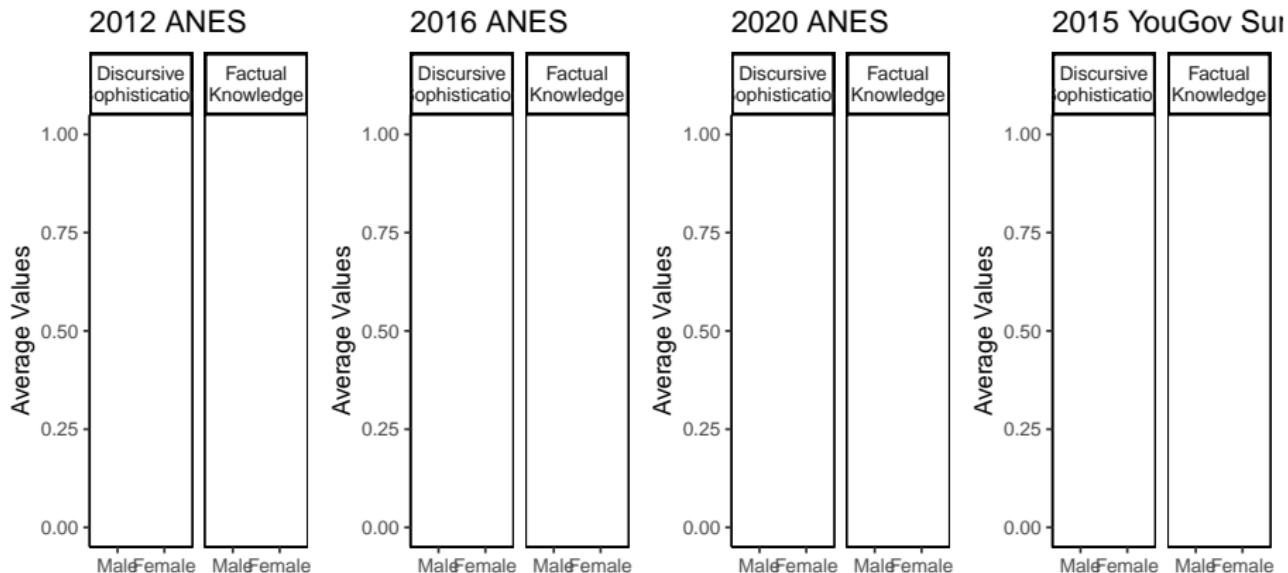
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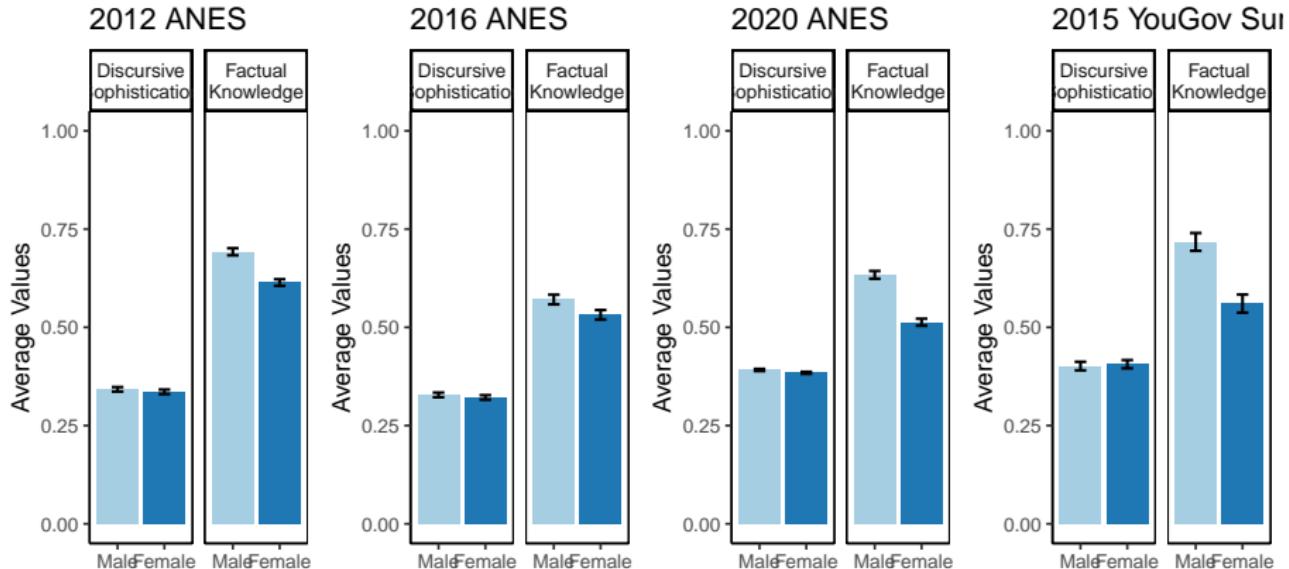
Explanation 1: Personality characteristics

Explanation 2: Question content / gender-relevant knowledge

Gender Differences in Sophistication

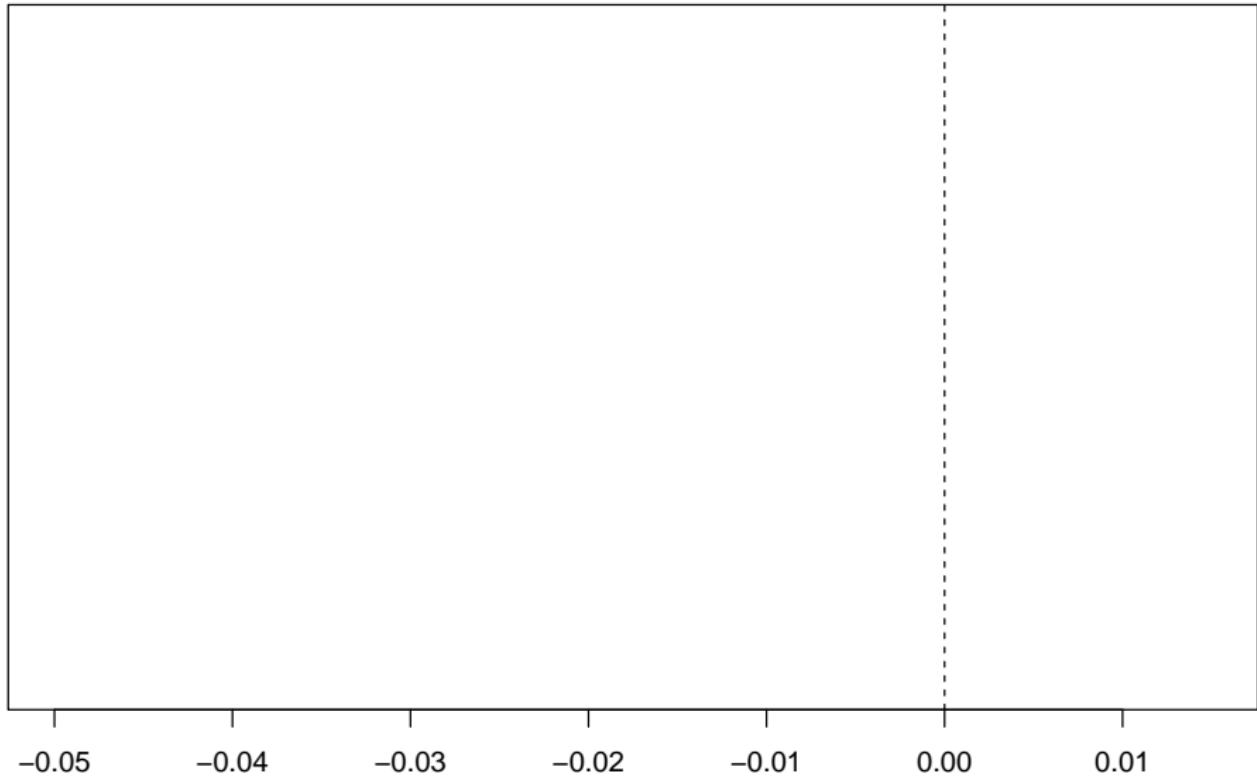


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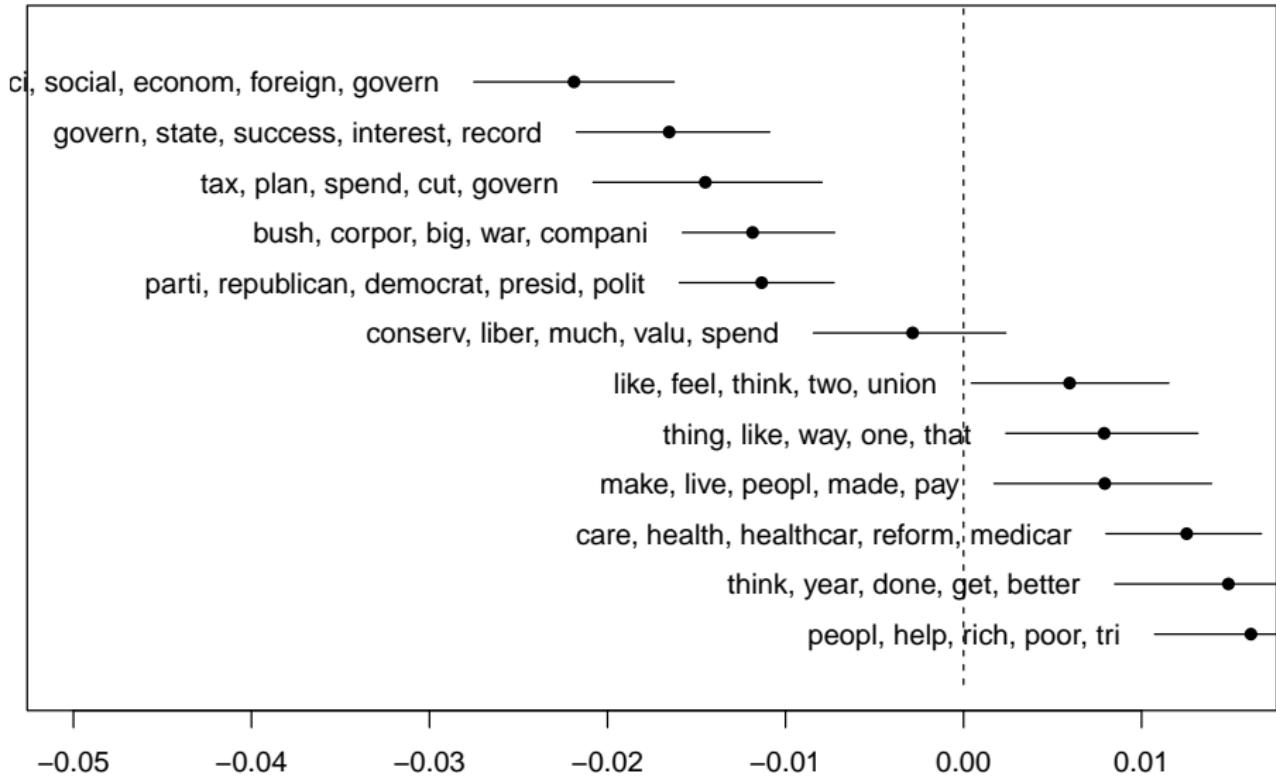
Explaining the Gender Gap in Political Knowledge

Gender Differences in Topic Proportions (2012 ANES)



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Conclusion



General Discussion

- We observe theoretically meaningful variation in the complexity of verbatim open-ended responses.

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- ▶ By directly examining how individuals justify their attitudes, we can measure sophistication related to specific political tasks.
- ▶ Discursive sophistication is conceptually closer to the structure of belief systems than conventional measures.

- ▶ Women might score lower than men on factual knowledge about political institutions, but there are no differences in the sophistication of expressed political attitudes.

Illustration – Who scores higher on political knowledge?

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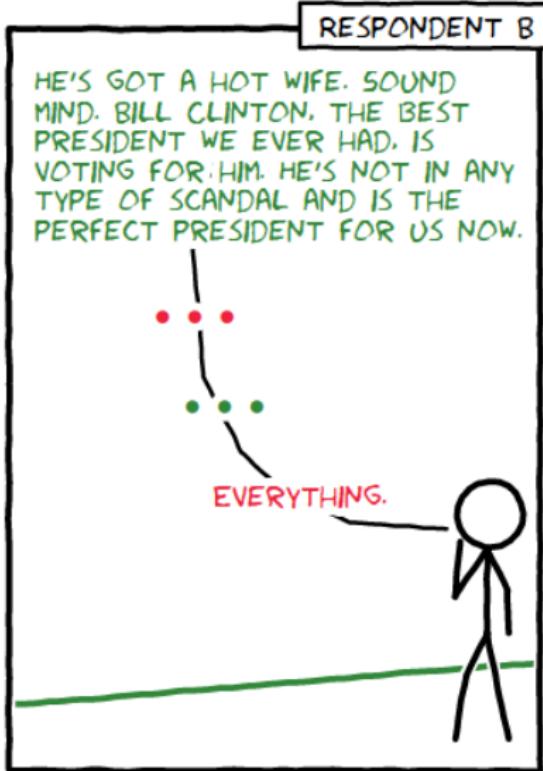
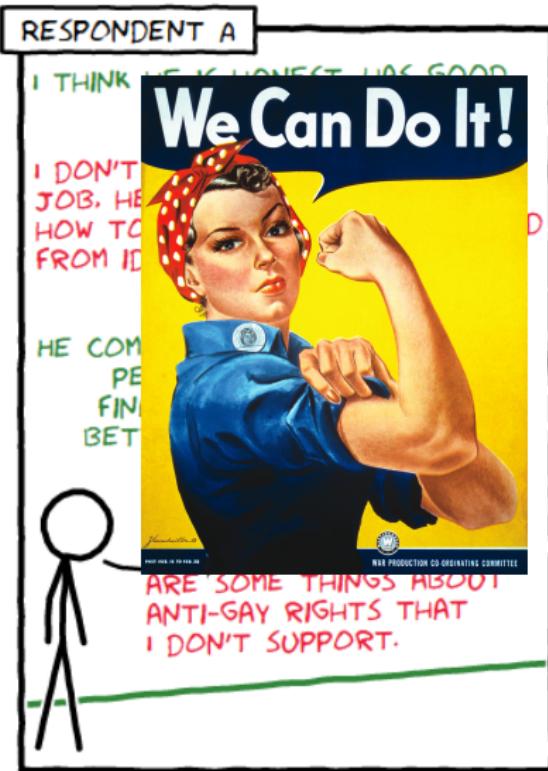
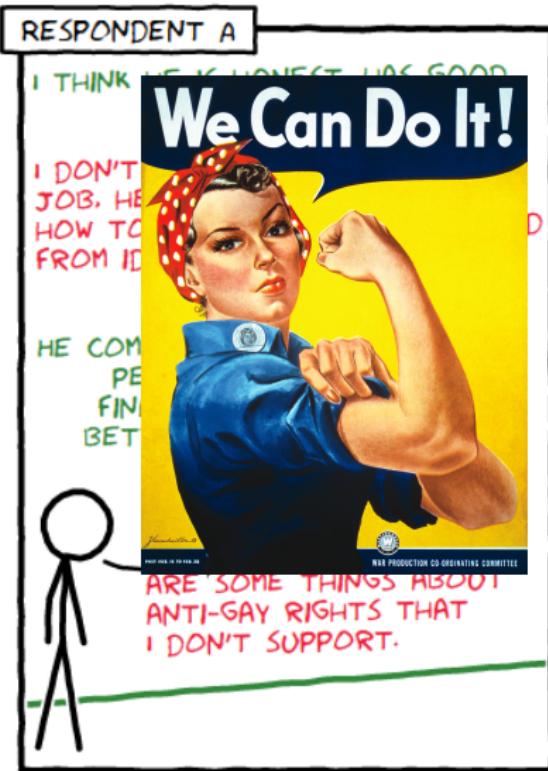


Illustration – Who scores higher on political knowledge?



Thank you very much for your attention!

Manuscript and code available at:

<https://github.com/pwkraft/knowledge>

Comments, questions?

 kraftp@uwm.edu

 pwkraft.github.io

 [@patrickwkraft](https://twitter.com/patrickwkraft)

Content

Theoretical Introduction

Knowledge, Sophistication, and Competence

Measuring Discursive Sophistication

Validation: Discursive Sophistication and Political Competence

2012 ANES

2015 YouGov Study

2008–2012 Swiss Referendum Survey

Application: Assessing the Gender Gap

Previous Research on Gender Differences in Knowledge

Gender Differences in Sophistication

Conclusion

General Discussion

Appendix Content

Measuring Discursive Sophistication

Item Wording

Opinionation

Considerations

Word Choice

Additional Results & Robustness Checks

Comparison with Conventional Measures

Choosing the Number of Topics

Topic Proportions – 2012 & 2016 ANES

Control for Word Count

Control for Personality

Determinants of Sophistication

Factual Knowledge Questions

- ▶ [Carpini and Keeter \(1993\)](#): House majority, veto override percent, party ideological location, judicial review, identifying the vice president
- ▶ [2012 ANES](#): Number of times president can be elected, size of federal deficit, full term of senator, meaning of medicare, federal government spending
- ▶ [2015 YouGov](#): Speaker of the House, TTIP, Chair of Federal Reserve Board, unemployment rate, veto override percent, common core, largest electricity source, Senate majority

Open-Ended Items: 2012 ANES

- ▶ Is there anything in particular about [CANDIDATE] that might make you want to vote for him? [...] What is that?
- ▶ Is there anything in particular about [CANDIDATE] that might make you want to vote against him? [...] What is that?
- ▶ Is there anything in particular that you like about [PARTY]? [...] What is that?
- ▶ Is there anything in particular that you don't like about [PARTY]? [...] What is that?

Open-Ended Items: 2015 YouGov

- ▶ Do you favor or oppose stricter gun control laws? [...] Still thinking about the question you just answered, what thoughts came to mind while you were answering that question? Please try to list everything that came to mind.
- ▶ Thinking about the mass shootings that have occurred in the U.S. in the last few years, what factors do you think are responsible for the shootings?
- ▶ Do you support or oppose the health care law passed by the President and Congress in 2010? [...] Still thinking about the question you just answered, what thoughts came to mind while you were answering that question? Please try to list everything that came to mind.
- ▶ For decades, experts have observed that the United States spends far more per person on health care than any other country. However, the U.S. falls behind on most measures of health care outcomes, such as life expectancy. What factors do you think are responsible for the state of our health care system?

Open-Ended Items: 2008–2012 Swiss Referenda

- ▶ Which are your main reasons for accepting/rejecting the proposal [X]?
- ▶ What are additional reasons for accepting/rejecting the proposal [X]?

Opinionation

$$\text{Opinionation}_i = \frac{-\sum_{j=1}^J p_{ij} \ln p_{ij}}{\ln J}$$

i	Respondent
$j \in \{1, \dots, J\}$	Open-ended items
p_{ij}	Proportion of words in the response of individual i to question j relative to the overall size of the individual's response

Considerations

$$\text{Considerations}_i = \frac{|\mathcal{T}_i^*|}{\max |\mathcal{T}_i^*|}$$

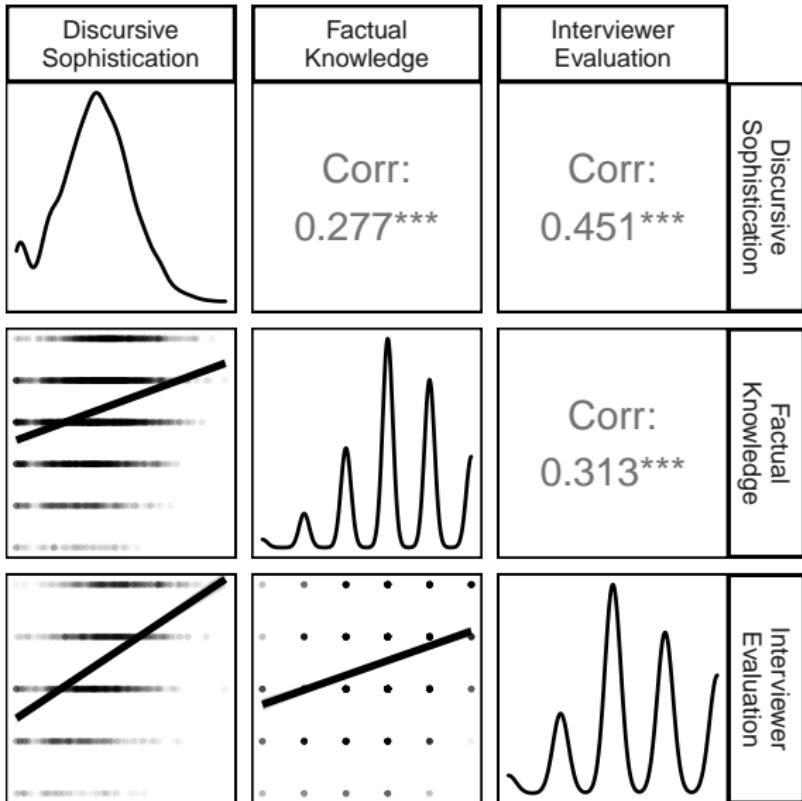
i	Respondent
\mathcal{T}_i^*	Topic representation of response set \mathcal{W}_i , such that $w \rightarrow t^* \forall w \in \mathcal{W}_i$
$w \in \mathcal{W}_i$	Individual word w in response set \mathcal{W}_i
$t^* \in \{1, \dots, T\}$	Topic t^* out of total number of topics T assigned to w such that $P(t^* w, X_i) > P(t w, X_i) \forall t \neq t^*$ $P(t w, X_i) = \frac{P(w t)P(t X_i)}{P(w X_i)}$
X_i	Covariates used in structural topic model

Word Choice

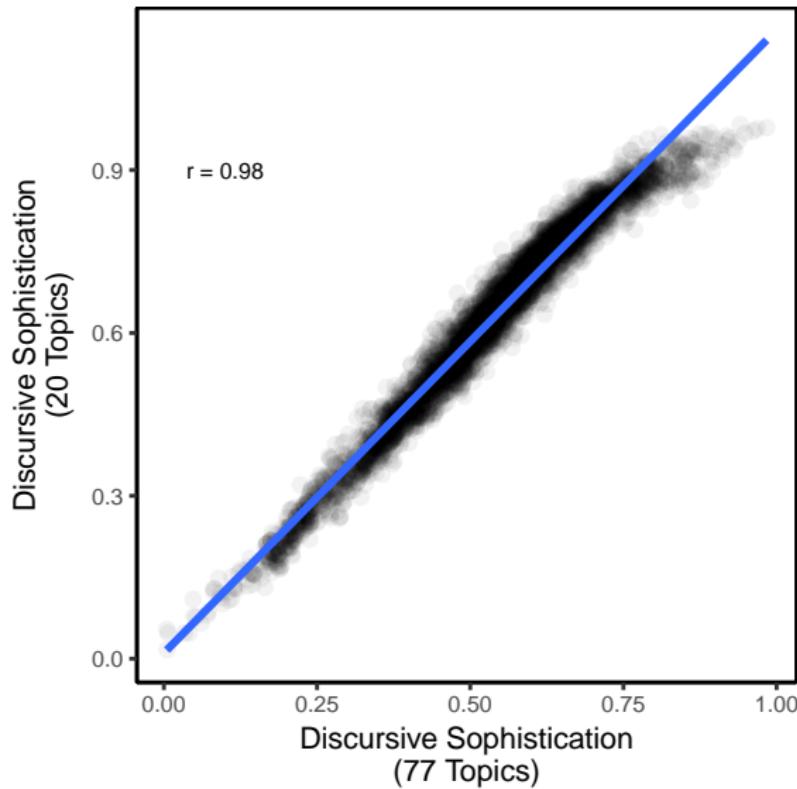
$$\text{Word Choice}_i = \frac{\log \sum_{\mathcal{W}_i} P(w|t^*)}{\max \left[\log \sum_{\mathcal{W}_i} P(w|t^*) \right]}$$

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X_i	Covariates used in structural topic model

Comparison with Conventional Measures – 2012 ANES

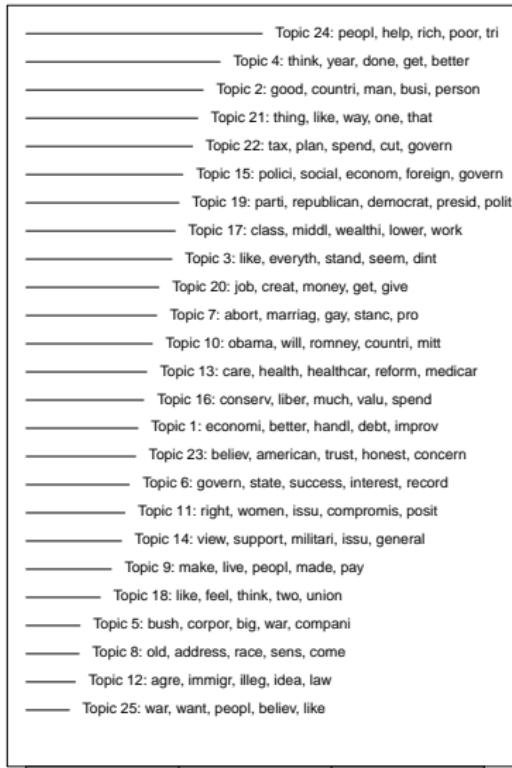


Choosing the Number of Topics (2012 ANES)

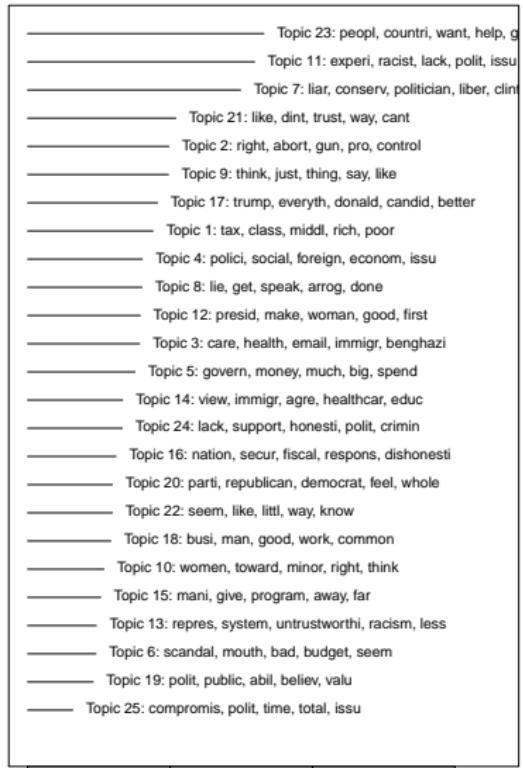


Topic Proportions – 2012 & 2016 ANES

2012 ANES (k = 25)

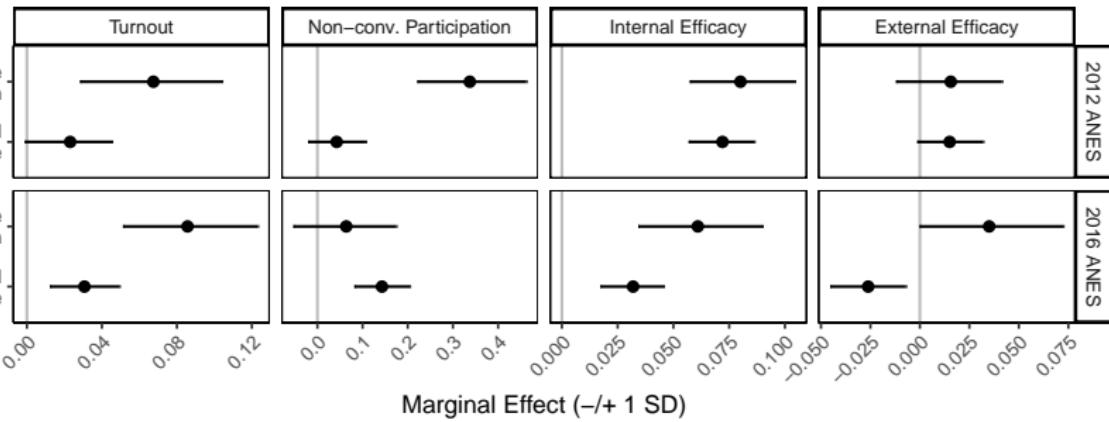


2016 ANES (k = 25)



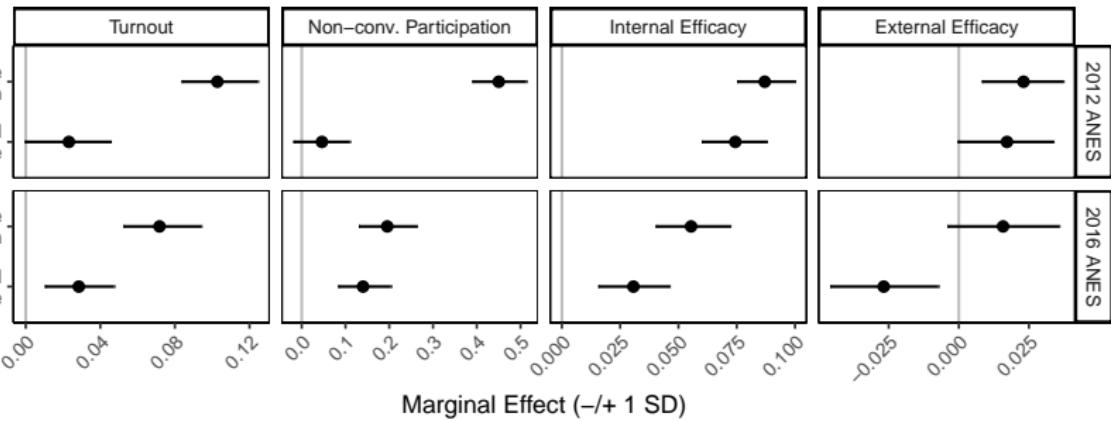
Engagement and Participation – Control for Word Count

Independent Variable

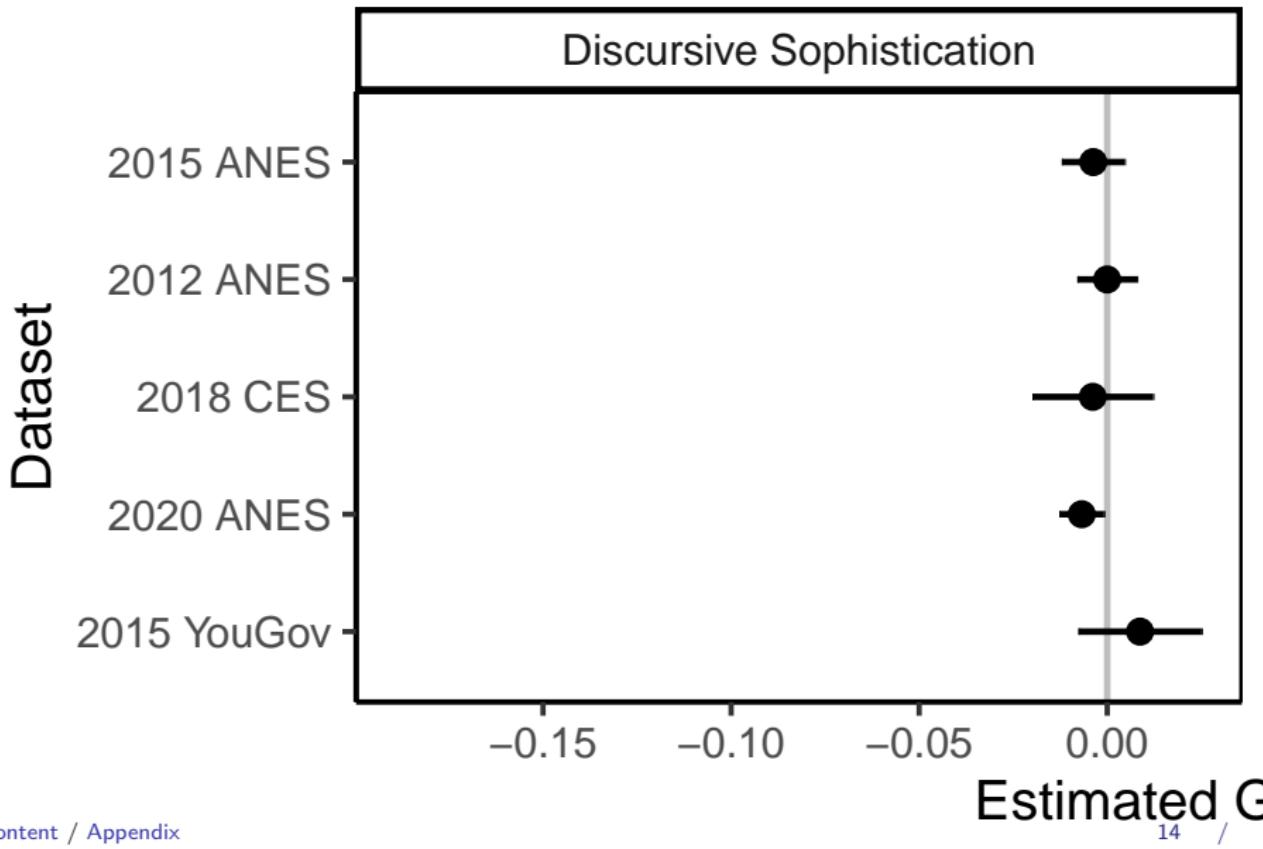


Engagement and Participation – Control for Personality

Independent Variable



Determinants of Sophistication



References

- Carpini, Michael X Delli, and Scott Keeter. 1993. "Measuring political knowledge: Putting first things first." *American Journal of Political Science* 37 (4): 1179–1206.
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