

**Partisan discord in the family and political engagement:  
A comparative behavioral analysis**

Jennifer Fitzgerald  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Political Science  
University of Colorado at Boulder

K. Amber Curtis  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Department of Political Science  
University of Colorado at Boulder

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**Abstract:** What happens to a person's level of political engagement when he is surrounded by partisan disagreement? Previous work offers a mixed picture; in certain circumstances political discord promotes engagement while in others it has the opposite effect. This analysis tests existing theories by looking at the implications of disagreement within the family. We leverage panel data to trace effects over time and we examine this dynamic across political units. Household data from Britain, Germany and Switzerland reveal that those whose parents are divided politically tend to become *more*, not less, engaged in politics. Comparatively, these effects appear stronger in some countries than in others, but the three-country analysis only suggests reasons why. Therefore, we take advantage of Swiss sub-national political variation to further investigate the conditioning role of institutions. This step confirms that proportional representation elections moderate the relationship between parental disagreement and interest in politics.

**Key words:** Political disagreement, political interest, political engagement, household panel data, proportional representation

Is political disagreement good or bad for democracy? Normative theorists claim political deliberation among citizens is essential for a healthy democratic system (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 2004). Open exchange of political ideas should help citizens make informed decisions and hold government accountable. Some empirical studies demonstrate that exposure to diverse political viewpoints increases political tolerance (Mutz and Mondak 2006) and promotes political participation (Campbell 2006; Leighley 1990). Yet other work leads us to question whether disagreement produces the participatory public required for successful democracy. Those faced with political discord tend to be less politically engaged (McClurg 2006), less trustful toward politics (Mutz 2002a; Mutz 2002b; Mutz and Reeves 2005), and more willing to restrict others' political freedoms (Gibson 1992). Disagreement also has the potential to suppress political discussion (Huckfeldt and Mendez 2008) and engender apathy (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954). At best, discord educates and motivates. At worst, it leads to intolerance and retreat from political life.

To deepen our knowledge about disagreement's effects, we ask: what happens to a person's level of political engagement when his parents disagree about politics? Existing work investigates the effects of political cross-pressures in interpersonal networks populated by friends, neighbors, co-workers and other acquaintances, or broader social arenas such as neighborhoods and electoral districts. Yet relatives constitute major portions of individuals' social networks (Marsden 1987), and the family is a foundational social structure that shapes political orientations (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1991; Jennings and Niemi 1968; Verba, Schlozman, and Burns 2005; Zuckerman, Fitzgerald, and Dasović 2005). Moreover, when asked to identify political discussion partners, most people name family members (Liu, Ikeda, and Wilson 1998; Zuckerman, Kotler-Berkowitz, and Swain 1998), and most political conversations

take place in private settings such as the home (Conover, Searing, and Crewe 2002; Eliasoph 1998; Wyatt, Katz, and Kim 2000). It is therefore important to assess the implications of having family members who are politically at odds with each other. Since mothers and fathers exert especially strong influence (Dalton 1980; Davies 1965; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009; Niemi and Jennings 1991; Zuckerman, Dasović, and Fitzgerald 2007), we consider the impact of a person's parents supporting different parties.

Our study contributes to existing debates over the effects of disagreement in several ways. First, we bring in the family environment via household surveys, which provide first-hand measures of various family members' political orientations. As such, our analysis avoids one pitfall of many network studies that ask a central respondent to report on the politics of people in their networks. Second, panel data allow us to examine yearly shifts in political engagement, providing a rare, dynamic view of influence processes as they unfold. They also allow us to control for time-invariant factors that likely influence the effects of disagreement.<sup>1</sup>

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Third, we avoid the trappings of selection effects. Existing work may be biased because those who willingly surround themselves with political disagreement might be fundamentally different kinds of people than those who spend time around people who agree with each other. Importantly, people cannot choose their parents the way they pick members of their other social networks. Without the potential for selection effects we can unpack the mechanisms associated with discord in a new way. Lastly, we compare the effects of parental disagreement in three national contexts (Britain, Germany and Switzerland) and 26 sub-national contexts in Switzerland. We thus probe the effects of institutions on the relationship between parental discord and political engagement.

### **Political heterogeneity and political engagement**

Two sets of studies examine political diversity's effects on engagement; we classify them as social arena studies and network studies. Research on disagreement in the social arena examines partisan heterogeneity in a particular setting, typically geographically defined. Most such findings point to a positive effect of political disagreement among people in the area on citizen engagement. Political diversity and competitiveness in the metropolitan arena (Campbell 2006) and electoral district (Blais 2000; Franklin 2004) promote political participation. In neighborhoods with greater partisan heterogeneity, high schoolers are more positively oriented toward politics (Gimpel, Lay, and Schuknecht 2003; Pacheco 2008). Media context also exposes people to political disagreement; incivility in television ads increases viewer interest in politics (Mutz and Reeves 2005). One explanation for this positive effect is that in discordant situations,

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for Social and Economic Research. The German Socio-Economic Panel is located at the German Institute for Economic Research, DIW Berlin.

people feel the need to engage in political competition to pursue their own interests (Cox and Munger 1989; McClurg 2006). Another is that people become politically informed through exposure to divergent viewpoints (Scheufele et al. 2004), and are therefore better equipped to engage in politics (McLeod, Scheufele, and Moy 1999).

Other work focuses on the effects of political diversity in interpersonal networks, revealing mostly negative implications for political engagement. This research typically identifies a respondent's main discussants and records their political orientations. From such inquiries we learn that an individual's political engagement decreases when his political conversation partners hold divergent viewpoints (Eveland and Hively 2009; Huckfeldt, Johnson and Sprague 2004; McClurg 2006). Furthermore, residents of houses characterized by partisan diversity (as opposed to unity) are less likely to vote (Bélanger and Eagles 2007), and when individuals feel politically cross-pressured by people they know, they are less participatory in general (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944).<sup>2</sup>

A proposed psychological mechanism driving this tuning out process is ambivalence (Huckfeldt, Mendez, and Osborn 2004; Mutz 2002a). When people feel ambivalent, competing considerations preclude them from actively engaging in politics. A second posited mechanism is social accountability or conflict avoidance (Conover, Searing, and Crewe 2002; Mutz 2006; Ulbig and Funk 1999). Political disagreement violates norms of social conformability, which people go to great lengths to maintain (Milgram 1974; MacKuen 1990; Sherif and Sherif 1964).

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<sup>2</sup> Others find that *disagreement with* members of a person's network can enhance turnout and campaign participation (Leighley 1990) and town meeting participation (McLeod et al. 1999), or suppress political interest and voting (McClurg 2006; Mutz 2006; Pattie and Johnston 2009).

Faced with discord, people hesitate to take sides and risk alienating a fraction of their networks. This can lead to retreat from politics altogether, or “chickening out” (Mutz 2006: 105).

In general, social arena studies identify a positive relationship between discord and engagement, while network studies find the opposite. In light of this divergence, we ask: should parental disagreement operate more like a context and promote political engagement, or should it function more like a social network that inhibits it? We draw on the social accountability and information flow mechanisms to predict the former. Due to the social nature of the conflict avoidance impulse, it should be more relevant for public than private behavior (Mutz 2002a). But so far this thesis on the silencing effect of political disagreement has only been tested on non-family networks.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to less intimate settings, social accountability considerations should be lowest within the private context of the family. Discussion among family members should be more frank and less inhibited by norms of social decorum than exchanges with less familiar acquaintances. Within this safer social environment, the informing mechanism of disagreement—which pushes discord’s effects in a positive direction—should be enhanced. Families host more open and supportive communication on a range of matters than other social networks (Procidano and Heller 1983; Scheufele 1999; Wolak and McDevitt forthcoming). And because family relationships are so strong and personal, they facilitate communication and transmission of political information (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Levine 2005). We therefore anticipate parental partisan discord to promote information transfer and boost political interest for the next generation.

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<sup>3</sup> I.e., Eliasoph (1998); Huckfeldt and Mendez (2008); Noelle-Neumann (1993).

## **Institutional context**

Studies devoted to political homogeneity outside the U.S. are rare, as are cross-national comparisons.<sup>4</sup> Here, we offer both. Britain, Germany and Switzerland provide very different political environments in which to examine the impact of parental partisan disagreement. Prior comparative work tells us that both the extent and content of family influence can take various forms across systems (Percheron and Jennings 1981; Ventura 2001; Westholm and Niemi 1992). We therefore view three aspects of countries' institutions as especially relevant to our analysis: electoral system design, party system fragmentation and level of consensus democracy.<sup>5</sup>

Electoral institutions are typically classified as majoritarian or proportional; their party systems range from low to high levels of fragmentation depending on how closely any party comes to receiving a majority of votes or seats (Sartori 1976); and governing is characterized as more or less consensus-based (Lijphart 1999; Vatter 2009).<sup>6</sup> Cross-nationally, these traits tend to come in bundles. One ideal-type system is highly competitive, hosting majoritarian elections, low party fragmentation and low consensus politics. The opposite type utilizes proportional representation (PR), has high party fragmentation and uses consensus-based processes.

Our three countries line up nicely along these dimensions. British politics are highly competitive. The UK has majoritarian elections, exhibits low party system fragmentation and is among the least consensual democratic systems in the world. In contrast, Switzerland is

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<sup>4</sup> Though see analyses of Britain (Pattie and Johnson (2009) and more than one country (Huckfeldt et al. 2005; Ikeda and Huckfeldt 2001; Liu et al. 1998; Mutz 2006).

<sup>5</sup> National electoral systems of interest relate to lower legislative bodies.

<sup>6</sup> In consensus democracies, minority interests are formally integrated into deliberative decision-making structures; in contrast, competitive systems empower political majorities.

significantly less competitive. It has a PR system with high party fragmentation, and is known as a prototypical consensus democracy. Germany stands between these two extremes on all three dimensions. It uses a mixed member electoral system that combines features of both majoritarian (single member districts) and proportional (proportionality in the legislature) systems. It also has intermediary levels of party fragmentation and consensus democracy.

These systemic differences may influence the relationship between exposure to political disagreement and political engagement; the effects could cut two ways. If electoral system competitiveness matters for the way people respond to network disagreement (Campbell 2006), then the positive effects of parental discord should be especially strong in the most adversarial systems. Where parties have antagonistic relationships and electoral competition is winner-take-all, disagreement within the family should be especially charged because the political stakes are so high. This would drive a prediction that disagreement has the most positive effects in the UK, somewhat less positive effects in Germany, and the weakest positive effects in Switzerland.

Alternately, other studies (Mutz 2002a) lead us to expect that social accountability considerations are less pervasive in less competitive systems. Institutions designed to accommodate a wide array of political viewpoints should reduce worries about what others think because politics are less confrontational. This implies that the positive effects of disagreement are enhanced in such contexts—a prediction supported by comparative findings that multi-party systems host high levels of network heterogeneity (e.g. Baker, Ames, and Renno 2006) and that greater political heterogeneity increases frequency of political discussion (Anderson and Paskeviciute 2005). Where disagreement is more socially acceptable and less adversarial, people should be less averse to it. Conversely, where elections represent a zero-sum game, we might expect the social costs of disagreement to be especially high. If these second conditional

predictions are valid, parental disagreement should have the most positive effects in Switzerland followed by Germany, with the least positive effects in the UK.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, we have competing ideas about how the key relationship in our study should operate across system types. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of each country and shows the expected strength of disagreement's effects depending on whether we use competition or conflict avoidance as our point of analytical departure. As discussed above, we expect parental disagreement on the whole to boost next-generation political engagement.

### **Data and analysis description**

Our analysis uses three household panel data sets. In each, every family member is interviewed on an annual basis, providing first hand reports of their political attitudes. This feature yields data untainted by the problems of perceptual accuracy inherent in many other network studies, which rely on second hand accounts of others' views (Westholm 1999). Another advantage is that each of these surveys spans at least a decade so the immediate political environment in any one year or even electoral cycle will not influence all observations.<sup>8</sup>

To qualify for the sample used here, an individual must have answered the relevant questions at time  $t$ , as well as the dependent variable question the year before ( $t-1$ ). Furthermore, both of the respondent's parents must have answered the relevant party preference and political interest questions. We limit the age range so that no participant is younger than 18, the official

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<sup>7</sup> We do not expect ambivalence and information transfer to function differently across systems.

<sup>8</sup> The German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP, version 25) runs from 1985 to 2008; the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) from 1991 to 2008; and the Swiss Household Panel Survey (SHP) from 1999 to 2008. Additional survey information appears in *WebAppendix 1*.

voting age in all three countries. But we do not cut off age at the top end—we are interested in how adults of all ages are influenced by their parents’ partisan choices. This makes our oldest second-generation respondent 60 in Britain, 58 in Germany, and 49 in Switzerland, though the average age for all three surveys stands in the low- to mid-twenties.<sup>9</sup>

Our main dependent variable is a standard measure of political interest that captures cognitive engagement.<sup>10</sup> Participants register their level of interest within a range of “not interested” to “very interested.” Because this scale does not have the same number of categories across surveys (GSOEP 4, BHPS 4, SHP 11), we code values from 0 to 1 to make the results more comparable. In fact, we code all variables this way to standardize the effects.

We use regression because it provides readily interpretable results. We include lagged dependent variables to account for autocorrelation, control for omitted variables, and control for past socialization effects, personality traits and genetics. This facilitates a tough test of existing theories since any effect of parental discord must be independent of how politically engaged the respondent was the prior year. The lag’s interpretation can be understood in terms of year-to-year change (Keele and Kelly 2006): controlling for everything that predicted past political interest, what additional features make an individual more or less politically engaged over time?

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix for descriptive statistics and *WebAppendix 2* for precise question wording.

<sup>10</sup> The SHP allows us to test parental discord’s effects on additional dependent variables: electoral participation, political efficacy and trust in government. Existing work tells us that family discord might affect electoral participation and political trust (Blais 2000; Franklin 2004; Mutz 2002a; Mutz 2002b; Mutz and Reeves 2005) though its effects on efficacy are untested (Eveland and Hively 2009: 221). See *WebAppendix 5*.

Our main quantity of interest relates to parental partisan division. *Parents prefer different parties* is coded 1 if each parent prefers a political party, but they like different ones.<sup>11</sup> It is coded 0 in all other cases: if parents agree on a party, if one parent prefers a party and the other prefers none, and if neither parent prefers any party.<sup>12</sup> This allows us to examine political engagement among respondents whose parents disagree on a political party—compared to all others. In our samples, approximately 7% of British, 6% of German and 18% of Swiss respondents have parents who prefer different parties.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Per *WebAppendix 2*, the party preference items are not identical across surveys: British and German questions measure party support while the Swiss item asks about prospective vote. To test whether this affects the results, we run the British models using two alternate party measures more similar to the Swiss item: 1) party choice, combining party preference with prospective vote; and 2) party voted for in the most recent general election. The findings are unchanged; see *WebAppendix 3*, Panel 1. We also test whether party preference has different dynamics among the three countries over time, since stability is a key characteristic of partisanship (Converse 1969; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002). If respondents in different countries were to exhibit different rates of partisan change, we would suspect that the three measures do not tap the same concept. *WebAppendix 6* graphs the percent of individuals who prefer the same party they chose at time  $t$  in subsequent years from  $t+1$  to  $t+9$  (the maximum number of SHP waves). The trajectories are nearly identical, providing assurance that the items are meaningfully comparable.

<sup>12</sup> We use support for all parties on which we have information. See *WebAppendix 4*.

<sup>13</sup> Debate about measuring political discord (see Klofstad, Sokhey, and McClurg 2010) prompts us to experiment with additional measures of disagreement. *WebAppendix 7* describes our procedure and displays the results, which complement those identified in the main text.

In addition to parental partisan disagreement, our models control for *Parental political interest* in the prior year ( $t-1$ ) to be sure that parental disagreement's effects are not simply a function of how politicized one's parents are.<sup>14</sup> We also include several covariates. Education level is a known predictor of political interest and electoral participation (Bennett 1986; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995). Males (Bennett 1986), older people (Blais 2000) and native-born respondents (Messina 2006) are on average more engaged. We expect to see increased engagement during an election year (Farrell and Schmitt-Beck 2002; Sears and Valentino 1997). Lastly, all models include yearly and regional fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by household to address the non-independence of observations that exists in a household survey.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Existing work uncovers reciprocal political influence across generations (Fitzgerald *forthcoming*; McDevitt and Chaffee 2002; Wolak 2009; Zuckerman, Dasović and Fitzgerald 2007). We lag parental political interest to accommodate these effects. As a robustness check, *WebAppendix 3, Panel 3* controls for contemporaneous parental political interest.

<sup>15</sup> Siblings appear as independent respondents but are statistically accounted for through clustered standard errors. Survey waves are pooled in the analysis. Thus, our ultimate model is as follows:  $Y_{it} = \alpha + \lambda Y_{it-1} + \beta X_{it} + \gamma Z_i + v_i + \varepsilon_{it}$  Where:  $\alpha$  = constant;  $\lambda$  = effect of past values of  $Y$ ;  $\beta$  = effect of time-varying factors for individuals ( $i$ ) and/or over time ( $t$ );  $\gamma$  = effect of time-invariant factors for individuals ( $i$ ); and  $v_j$  = unobserved panel heterogeneity controlled for by clustering by household ( $j$ ). More substantively, this translates to:  $\text{Political Interest}_{it} = \alpha + \lambda \text{Political Interest}_{it-1} + \beta_1 \text{Parents Disagree}_{it} + \beta_2 \text{Parents' Political Interest}_{it-1} + \beta_3 \text{Education}_{it} + \beta_4 \text{Age}_{it} + \beta_5 \text{Election Year}_t + \beta_6 \text{Year}_t + \beta_7 \text{Canton}_t + \gamma_1 \text{Male}_i + \gamma_2 \text{Native}_i + v_j + \varepsilon_{it}$

## Results

Table 2 shows that parental disagreement is nowhere a negative predictor of political interest, and its effects are positive and significant in Germany and Switzerland. This signals that parents who prefer different parties inspire second generation political interest. Control variables function mainly as expected. Education and gender have significant and positive effects in each model. Age is significant for Germany, and being a non-native citizen is associated with increasing political interest in the UK.<sup>16</sup> The large coefficients on the lagged dependent variables show that political interest is a highly stable characteristic (Prior 2010).

Figure 1 presents the effects of parental disagreement for the three countries. The bars represent the estimated change in political interest upon moving parental partisan disagreement from its minimum to maximum values. Monte Carlo simulations via CLARIFY (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000) generate these predictions. The picture that emerges is that German and Swiss political interest is boosted by parental disagreement. Respondents whose parents support different parties display a 2 to 3% year-to-year increase in political interest in Germany and Switzerland, respectively.<sup>17</sup> Though these numbers seem small, recall that this impact is independent of past levels of political interest (at  $t-1$ ). Given that current interest is largely determined by past interest, the magnitude of disagreement's yearly effect is quite substantial.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This suggests that growth in engagement is strongest for immigrants in the UK, where immigrants are more readily incorporated into the political system (Koopmans 2005).

<sup>17</sup> The SHP models of other dependent variables (in *WebAppendix 5*) show that parental discord promotes electoral participation but neither political efficacy nor trust in government.

<sup>18</sup> We present robustness checks, all of which yield supportive results, in *WebAppendix 3* to address the fact that our British and German dependent variables have four categories (Panel 2),

Cross-national predictions can be assessed in light of our results. The competition mechanism led us to expect that the effects of disagreement in the UK would be especially positive, while the social accountability thesis forecasted a strong, positive impact in Switzerland. The latter expectation is borne out: disagreement's effects are strongest in Switzerland, followed by Germany. They are weakest in the UK.

### **Cross-cantonal analysis**

The different findings for the UK, Germany and Switzerland suggest that institutional factors influence the way parental disagreement operates. However, we cannot draw definitive conclusions about such patterns from the three-country analysis. Therefore, we take advantage of political variation across Swiss cantons to further investigate the observed cross-national results. To mirror the above discussion about national system differences, we consider the same three dimensions of cantonal politics: electoral systems, party systems and consensus governing.

The Swiss state is comprised of 26 sub-national units, or cantons, each with distinct institutions. Electoral contexts at the cantonal and even communal (municipal) levels are

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control for parental political interest at time  $t$  (Panel 3), and limit our sample to 18-30 year-olds (Panel 4). We also control for parental *agreement* (Panel 5), as 27% of British, 34% of German and 37% of Swiss respondents have parents who agree on a party. Importantly, parental agreement is more prevalent than disagreement in these countries, and depending on the modeling specifications it can be a significant, positive predictor of second generation engagement in each case. If we step back to consider which kinds of parental dynamics are most important for an engaged citizenry, we cannot overlook the potential positive effects of partisan agreement in the family.

politically salient due to the highly devolved nature of the Swiss system (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008). Sub-national electoral systems span the types represented by Britain, Germany and Switzerland: some are dominated by majoritarian elections, some combine majoritarian and PR processes, and the rest rely heavily on proportional voting.<sup>19</sup> Cantons also vary in terms of party fragmentation, and their governing systems range from more to less consensual based on how much power they afford to municipal units and how frequently they exercise direct democracy.

*Prevalence of PR elections* denotes the average percentage of districts in each canton that use proportionality for cantonal parliamentary, cantonal executive council and communal executive council elections.<sup>20</sup> Some cantons, for instance, use majoritarian voting across all districts for all three of these elections ( $x=0$ ). Others consistently use PR in all districts for all elections ( $x=1$ ). “Mixed” systems use a combination of processes across districts and elections. An example is the canton of Zurich, which uses only PR elections for its cantonal parliament, but relies exclusively on majoritarianism for cantonal executive bodies and all communal executive bodies ( $x=.333$ ). A slightly more complicated case is the canton of Uri, in which PR is used in half of the districts for cantonal parliamentary elections and none of the districts for cantonal and communal executive contests ( $x=.167$ ).

*Effective number of parties per votes* and *Effective number of parties per seats* denote the fragmentation of cantonal party systems as a function of vote and seat distributions for cantonal parliamentary elections. These values range from 2.82 to 14.24 for votes and 2.42 to 11.49 for

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<sup>19</sup> Mixed cantonal systems are not of the German compromise type. Instead, in a mixed canton some districts or communes are majoritarian while others use PR.

<sup>20</sup> District level data from 1999-2008 come from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office: Politics, culture and media section. See also Lutz and Strohmman (1998) and Ladner and Milner (1999).

seats.<sup>21</sup> *Consensus government* is an index ranging from .66 to .98, as calculated by Freitag (2006).<sup>22</sup> Like above, each of these variables is coded to range from 0 to 1.

This sub-national comparative analysis stands to more fully illuminate the cross-national patterns identified earlier, which are obscured by the fact that different system characteristics tend to clump together cross-nationally. Thus, here we unpack systemic features to assess the strength of each on its own. A positive interaction coefficient for the *Prevalence of PR* variable would signal that parental disagreement's positive effects are most motivating at low levels of electoral competitiveness. For the *Effective number of parties/seats* interaction, a positive coefficient would imply that fragmentation in the cantonal legislature (which should promote coalition building and cooperative inter-party dynamics) makes parental disagreement more inspiring to the next generation. Cantons with high values of *Effective number of parties/votes* host the most partisan disagreement in society, and as such a positive interactive coefficient would mean that the prevalence of discord in the broader society renders parental effects more positively influential. Finally, if the *Consensus* interaction has positive effects, this would indicate that politics practiced in a cooperative manner create an environment where parental disagreement has motivating effects.

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<sup>21</sup> Cantonal party statistics from <http://www.BADAC.ch>. Effective number of parties calculated as  $1/\sum(p^2)$ , where  $p$  is the proportion of seats or votes received by a party (Laakso and Taagepera 1979). The data specify vote shares for the five major Swiss parties and an "other" category of small parties and independents. We use this information two ways: by making the "other" category singular ( $p^2=\text{other}^2$ ) or entirely fragmented ( $p^2=0^2$ ). In neither case is the resultant interaction variable significant. Results displayed use the latter calculation.

<sup>22</sup> To create this index, Freitag compiles data from Frey and Stutzer (2000) and Stutzer (1999).

Table 3 displays interactive effects in four hierarchical models of individuals nested within households within cantons within years. To isolate the impact of each systemic feature, each model interacts a single contextual aspect with parental disagreement while controlling for the other system characteristics.<sup>23</sup> *Effective number of parties* does not matter in either configuration, and *Consensus government* just misses the 95% level of statistical significance ( $p=.056$ ). However, *Prevalence of PR* is significant, suggesting the most important contextual factor is the type of electoral system. Where PR rules structure elections, parental disagreement has an especially positive effect on second generation political interest.

Figure 2 illustrates this moderating effect. Starting about one-third of the way through the PR index ( $x=.333$ ), the effect of parental disagreement has an increasingly positive and significant effect on second generation political interest. This is the point at which a canton such as Zurich—which uses majoritarian rules for one sub-national election and proportionality for the other two—stands. An individual in such a canton whose parents disagree about politics, has a predicted value of political interest of 0.58 (on a scale of 0-1). This value jumps to 0.66 when the individual lives in an all-PR canton, replicating our cross-national findings.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> These variables are not highly correlated; the highest correlation, between Consensus and Effective number of parties/votes, is .32 (though Effective number of parties/votes and Effective number of parties/seats correlate at .95 so we do not model them together).

<sup>24</sup> Because the *Consensus* interaction is nearly significant, we plot these marginal effects in WebAppendix 8. The relationship becomes significant about halfway through the index.

## Discussion

When parents are at odds politically, how does this shape second-generation political engagement? We find that parental discord usually promotes political engagement. This effect is especially strong in Switzerland, and also apparent, though slightly less forceful, in Germany. Its effects in the UK are not statistically significant. Our Swiss sub-national analysis provides insight into such patterns, as the positive implications of disagreement are greatest in cantons reliant on PR elections and weakest where majoritarianism dominates. Altogether, these results reveal the conditioning role of institutions, shed light on micro-level mechanisms, and contribute to the broad debate about discord and democracy. We address these themes in turn.

We find that the least competitive systems host the most positive effects of parental discord on political engagement. Results indicate that it is the electoral system itself that matters, followed by political structures designed to build consensus in governing. This invites consideration of what it is about PR, in particular, that enables disagreement to enhance engagement. We suspect that proportionality has this effect because it does not force a zero-sum dynamic on electoral politics. Where electoral rules facilitate power-sharing among parties, people's discordant political views may bear a lower social cost. Even if parents support different parties, they can still both "win" an election in a way that opposing parents in majoritarian systems cannot. Even "losing" can be less painful since electoral losers feel more satisfied with democracy under PR versus majoritarian rules (Anderson and Guillory 1997).

We find no evidence that party system fragmentation conditions the effects of parental political discord, signaling that partisan disagreement in society and in the halls of power has no moderating influence. The broader social dynamics of discord—for instance, whether partisan heterogeneity is more pervasive and therefore better accepted—are not shown to be important for

shaping the relationship under examination. Thus, the idea that norms of disagreement in society influence discord's effects is not supported here. Instead, the sheer mechanics of political contests are the most relevant contextual factors.

We can also weigh in on the role of various micro-level processes that political discord prompts. As described above, four main mechanisms are suspected of connecting political discord with political behavior: competition and information promote engagement, while conflict avoidance and ambivalence inhibit it. We interpret our results as support for the conflict avoidance and information theses, and contradictory to the competition thesis. If the desire to engage in politics is driven by perceptions of heated electoral competition and the resulting desire to fight for one's interests, then the positive effects of discord should be strongest in competitive systems like the UK and the Swiss cantons that employ only majoritarian sub-national elections. Instead, the results showed the opposite.

Our findings also lead us to question the purported power of ambivalence, since it does not come through as a strong mechanism here. If competing considerations drive political paralysis and retreat, we would expect these effects to be just as powerful when the disagreement is between parents rather than less familiar acquaintances. Perhaps ambivalence only functions for certain types of relationships, or perhaps it works best in conjunction with conflict avoidance.

Our results speak to the importance of social conflict avoidance for studies of political discord that do *not* involve close relatives. The findings suggest that the positive effects of political heterogeneity in the family are largely made possible through the relative absence of accountability pressures. This helps explain the positive direction of our results, since social pressures are weaker in a setting as safe and comfortable as the family. The SHP survey provides some supportive statistics: 53% of respondents receive a great deal of emotional

support and understanding from their spouse and 41% from their adult children; only 25%, 14% and 11% claim they get this level of support from their friends, neighbors and co-workers, respectively.<sup>25</sup> This closeness connects to the mechanism we think is most likely responsible for positively linking parental discord with engagement: information transmission. Because communication within the family is especially open, individuals with disagreeing parents can learn about multiple parties and witness debate firsthand. This can get them interested in politics, as well as prompt them to participate in elections.

Recent work supports this information narrative: Americans whose discussion partners disagree with each other are more politically knowledgeable (Eveland and Hively 2009); political heterogeneity in discussion networks facilitates interpersonal persuasion (Huckfeldt, Johnson and Sprague 2004); and citizens of countries with PR electoral systems know more about politics (Fraile 2010; Iyengar et al. 2010; Milner 2009). Socialization studies also lend support. Parents are key socializers, and the home is the place where people first become oriented to politics. It makes sense, therefore, that a learning mechanism is at work in such an environment.

In regards to the broad debate over the benefits and drawbacks of political disagreement, our analysis offers rare insight into the behavioral implications of both social arenas and interpersonal networks. As such, an examination of families has the potential to adjudicate between discrepant findings among different units of analysis. By examining parental influence, we side-step selection effects that might shape the findings of network analyses. As expected, our results more closely resemble social context findings than social network ones, signaling that

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<sup>25</sup> This sample of respondents ( $n=643$ ) comes from the 1999 SHP wave. Individuals answer each of these support questions, making it possible to identify the relative influence of different ties.

the divergent predictions generated by these two approaches may relate to selection. While conceivable that people factor politics into their residential choices, decisions about whom to talk politics with are no doubt more prevalent. The resounding message is that exposure to disagreement among network members *we don't choose* can inspire political engagement.

Is disagreement good or bad for democracy? We offer an optimistic message: discord in the family can fuel political engagement. The fact that our evidence comes from the most private of social spheres suggests that the negative effects uncovered by prior studies may actually be a property of the public sphere. Yet the fact that disagreement is most prevalent in public contexts may mean that the motivating consequences of discord at home are of little consolation. Political disagreement in non-family networks may still clash with the positive effects we have uncovered—that is, unless people who experience family discord are open to disagreement when it characterizes their less intimate networks. If this is the case, more marriages across partisan lines—a distinct possibility in many systems where traditional party allegiances are waning—might eventually shape new generations of deliberative, engaged citizens that will sustain our democracies into the future.

**Appendix** (intended for publication)

**Descriptive statistics for variables**

	<b>Britain</b>		<b>Germany</b>		<b>Switzerland</b>	
	Mean	<i>S.D.</i>	Mean	<i>S.D.</i>	Mean	<i>S.D.</i>
<i>Dependent variables</i>						
Political interest	.33	.30	.36	.26	.57	.24
Electoral participation					.75	.30
Political influence					.44	.24
Trust in government					.60	.19
<i>Parental variables</i>						
Parents prefer different parties	.07	.25	.06	.34	.18	.54
Parents prefer the same party	.27	.44	.34	.47	.37	.48
Parents choose different parties	.22	.42				
Parents voted for different parties	.22	.42				
Distance between parents' parties			.02	.11		
Ideological distance between parents			.14	.16		
Parental political interest	.44	.23	.41	.22	.66	.18
Parental electoral participation					.85	.20
Parental political influence					.43	.19
Parental trust in government					.57	.16
<i>Individual predictors</i>						
Education	.68	.27	.47	.36	.46	.30
Male	.55	.50	.56	.50	.52	.50
Age	.12	.14	.19	.16	.14	.14
Native	.95	.22	.88	.33	.85	.36
Election year	.16	.37	.25	.44	.23	.42
<i>Swiss cantonal factors</i>						
Prevalence of PR elections					.38	.16
Effective number parties/votes					.17	.14
Effective number parties/seats					.21	.13
Consensus government					.54	.20

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Table 1

## Dimensions of difference and predicted relationships across cases

System types	Most competitive		Least competitive
Examples of different systems	UK	Germany	Switzerland
<i>System features</i>			
Electoral system type	Majoritarian (Maj)	Mixed (Maj + PR)	Proportional (PR)
Level of party fragmentation (votes) <sup>»</sup>	3.3	3.9	5.6
Level of party fragmentation (seats) <sup>»</sup>	2.3	3.5	5.1
Level of consensus democracy <sup>» »</sup>	-1.26	0.05	1.54
<i>Predicted relationships<sup>» » »</sup></i>			
Parental disagreement's effects per...			
--Competition thesis	+	+	+
--Conflict avoidance thesis	+	+	+

<sup>»</sup> Source: Michael Gallagher's Electoral Systems website: [http://www.tcd.ie/Political\\_Science/staff/michael\\_gallagher/EISystems/](http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/EISystems/)  
Numbers displayed are averages from across each country's survey years.

<sup>» »</sup> Source: Lijphart (1994: 9). A negative number implies a more competitive system.

<sup>» » »</sup> Size of symbol represents strength of expected effect. Plus signs signal our expectation of positive effects over all.

Table 2

**Political interest in Britain, Germany and Switzerland**  
*Effects of parental partisan disagreement*

<i>Predictor</i>	Britain		Germany		Switzerland	
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>
Lagged DV ( <i>t-1</i> )	.67	(.02) *	.59	(.01) *	.68	(.02) *
Parents prefer different parties	.01	(.02)	.02	(.01) *	.03	(.01) *
Parental political interest ( <i>t-1</i> )	.12	(.02) *	.11	(.01) *	.09	(.02) *
Education	.04	(.02) *	.05	(.003) *	.05	(.01) *
Male	.03	(.01) *	.04	(.002) *	.03	(.01) *
Age	.02	(.03)	.03	(.01) *	-.008	(.03)
Native	-.05	(.02) *	.002	(.004)	-.007	(.01)
Election year	.11	(.02) *	.02	(.01) *	-.001	(.02)
Constant	.06	(.07)	.09	(.02) *	.04	(.03)
<i>N</i>	2412		40315		2214	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.55		.45		.62	

**OLS regression**, fixed effects (for region & year) models; S.E.s clustered by household identifier; \*p<.05.

To be sure that the statistically significant results in the German case are not simply driven by the very large number of observations, we replicate this model using a comparably sized subsample of the German data. Results are unchanged; see *WebAppendix 3, Panel 6*.

Table 3

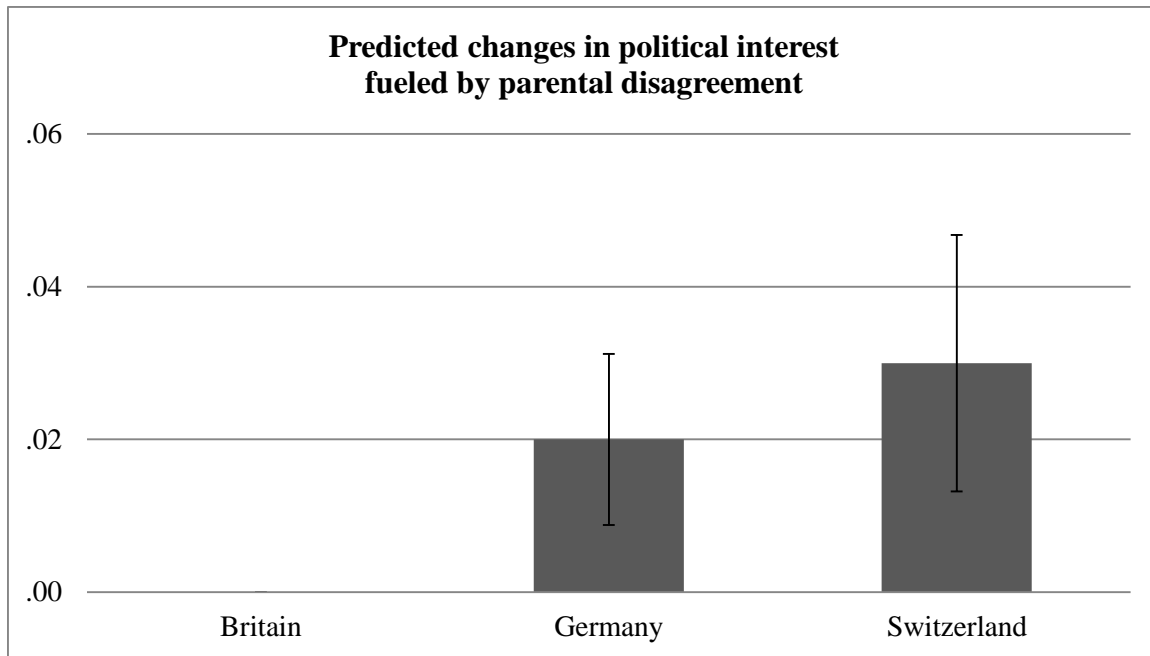
**Political Interest in Switzerland**  
*Interactive effects: Cantonal features X Parental partisan disagreement*

<i>Predictor</i>	Electoral system Percent PR		Party System Fragmentation				Government Consensus	
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	Votes Seats		<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>
<b>Fixed Effects</b>								
Lagged DV (t-1)	.69	(.01) *	.70	(.01) *	.70	(.01) *	.69	(.01) *
Parents prefer different parties	-.04	(.02)	.03	(.01)	.03	(.02)	-.02	(.03)
PR	-.04	(.02)	-.02	(.02)	-.02	(.02)	.03	(.03)
Effective number of parties/votes			.04	(.03)				
Effective number of parties/seats	.02	(.03)			.03	(.03)	.03	(.03)
Consensus government	-.001	(.001)	-.02	(.02)	-.02	(.02)	-.03	(.02)
Parental political interest (t-1)	.10	(.02) *	.09	(.02) *	.09	(.02) *	.10	(.02) *
Education	.03	(.01) *	.03	(.01) *	.03	(.01) *	.03	(.01) *
Male	.03	(.007) *	.03	(.007) *	.03	(.007) *	.03	(.007) *
Age	.003	(.03)	.004	(.03)	.004	(.03)	.004	(.03)
Native	.003	(.01)	.003	(.01)	.003	(.01)	.002	(.01)
Election year	.005	(.009)	.004	(.009)	.004	(.009)	.00	(.03)
<b>Random Effects</b>								
Prevalence of PR elections in canton								
X Parents prefer different parties	.17	(.06) *						
Effective number of parties/votes								
X Parents prefer different parties			-.04	(.07)				
Effective number of parties/seats								
X Parents prefer different parties					-.02	(.07)		
Consensus government								
X Parents prefer different parties							.08	(.04)
Constant	.57	(.02) *	.55	(.02) *	.55	(.02) *	.58	(.02) *
<b>Variance Components</b>								
Individual-Level Variance	.02	(.000) *	.02	(.000) *	.02	(.000) *	.02	(.001) *
Household-Level Variance	.003	(.001) *	.003	(.001) *	.000	(.000)	.003	(.001) *
Canton-Level Variance	.000	(.000)	.000	(.000)	.000	(.000)	.000	(.000)
Year-Level Variance	.000	(.000)	.000	(.000)	.000	(.000)	.000	(.000)
Number of Individuals	2,102		2,102		2,102		2,102	
Number of Households	1,674		1,674		1,674		1,674	
Number of Cantons	194		194		194		194	
Number of Years	9		9		9		9	
Wald Chi <sup>2</sup>	3,094	*	3,075	*	3,074	*	3,085	*

**Mixed-effects multilevel regression.** \*p<.05. All control variables centered at mean.

Intercept-slope covariance is insignificant in each model (not reported).

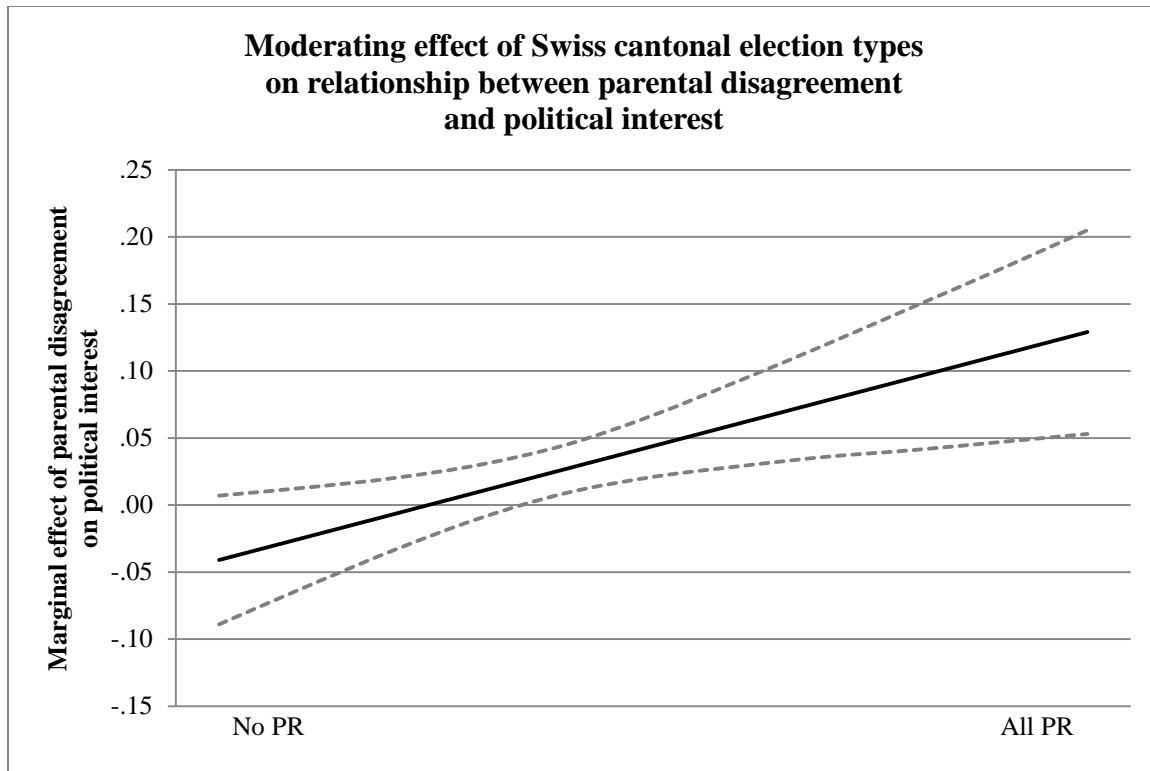
Figure 1



No bar represents non-significant relationship. Vertical lines denote 95% confidence intervals.

Predictions based on models in Table 2.

Figure 2



lincom in Stata 11 produces these point estimates along with their 95% confidence intervals.

## WebAppendix 1

### Detailed survey information

Our analysis utilizes panel data from three separate longitudinal analyses: the British Household Panel Survey (1991-2008) (though the dependent variable (*Political interest*) question is not asked from 1997-2000); the German Socio-Economic Panel (1985-2008);<sup>26</sup> and the Swiss Household Panel Survey (1999-2008). Each project initially selected a random sample of households from which to interview all individuals over a certain age. These same individuals were then followed and re-interviewed year after year—even in the event of a household move or a person leaving home and starting a new household—in order to capture their opinions over time. This helps guard against attrition and affords us unique causal leverage over the dynamics of political interest. The samples were also refreshed at various points. The BHPS added extension samples from Scotland and Wales in 1999 and from Northern Ireland in 2001. The GSOEP added to its original sample of West Germans a set of East Germans starting in 1990, and it also incorporated refresher samples in 1998 (the E sample), 2000 (the large F sample of over 10,000 new respondents) and 2002 (the G sample). Overall, the GSOEP also over-samples foreigners. The SHP brought in a refresher sample in 2004. Sampling descriptions are available at: <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/bhps> for BHPS, [http://www.diw.de/documents/dokumentenarchiv/17/diw\\_01.c.38951.de/dtc.409713.pdf#page=6](http://www.diw.de/documents/dokumentenarchiv/17/diw_01.c.38951.de/dtc.409713.pdf#page=6) for GSOEP, and <http://www.swisspanel.ch/?lang=en> for the SHP.

Because we focus substantively on political disagreement within the family, our analysis necessarily examines only households where complete information is available for both the

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<sup>26</sup> Though the GSOEP originally started to survey in 1984, its party preference variable only becomes usable in 1985.

respondent and his/her parents (but regardless of whether respondents and parents are actually living together). We acknowledge that this limits our sample to only second-generation respondents whose parents were interviewed in the relevant years. But to establish whether this should matter for our analysis, we break down the surveys into three age groups for which we then produce some descriptive statistics. We use these different sets of second generation respondents because the category is tricky to define; technically, all respondents could be considered second-generation. These age groups are: 1) average age in the sample [23 in the British and Swiss data, 25 in the German data]; 2) 18-30 years-old [robustness-check models for this age group displayed in Appendix C, Panel 4]; and 3) 18 years-old and over. (All of the relevant statistics are presented in the table below.) For the average aged respondent in each survey, we calculate that the availability of parental variables (*Parents prefer different parties<sub>t</sub>* and *Parental political interest<sub>t-1</sub>*) makes it possible to include 10% of British 23-year-olds, 46% of German 25-year-olds, and 34% of Swiss 23-year-olds in the models. (When we drop the requirement for *Parental political interest*, these numbers rise considerably and the model results are substantively the same.)

We also investigate whether there are important differences between different kinds of respondents (for instance those in single-parent versus two-parent homes) that might threaten the generalizability of our findings. To address this possibility, we calculate the average level of *Political interest* (our dependent variable) and the average *change* in political interest from year to year, since we are interested in the dynamics of engagement over time. As shown below, these figures do not vary much across different groups of respondents. For instance, for British 18-30 year-olds, average political interest for those who make it into the sample is .32 on a 0-1 scale. For respondents of this same age group who live with only one parent, this figure is .31,

and for the same-aged respondents who live with no parents the level of political interest is .35. Importantly, none of these figures is statistically distinguishable from the others at 95% confidence levels. Change in political interest varies even less across these three groups, with average figures of .0009 for in-sample respondents, .0001 for single-parent-home respondents and -.001 for respondents with no parental information. Overall, we are confident that the individuals analyzed in our models are not substantively different on key analytical dimensions from those we leave out.

## Representativeness of samples

	BHPS	GSOEP	SHP
<b>Age group: Rs are Average age (23 in BHPS, 25 in GSOEP, 23 in SHP)</b>			
Percent of [average age] respondents in sample	10	46	34
Mean political interest for Rs in sample (range 0 to 1)	0.32	0.38	0.55
Mean political interest for Rs who live w/both parents, but not in sample	0.36	0.37	0.56
Mean political interest for Rs who live w/one parent	0.33	0.35	0.54
Mean political interest for Rs who live w/no parents	0.34	0.37	0.49
Mean change in political interest* for Rs in sample (range -1 to 1)	-0.03	0.001	0.02
Mean change in political interest for Rs who live w/both parents, but not in sample	-0.01	-0.02	-0.003
Mean change in political interest for Rs who live w/one parent	0.01	0	-0.08
Mean change in political interest for Rs who live w/no parents	-0.003	0.01	0.02
<b>Age group: Rs are 18-30**</b>			
Percent of 18-30 years-old respondents in sample	9	49	30
Mean political interest for Rs in sample (range 0 to 1)	0.32	0.35	0.56
Mean political interest for Rs who live w/both parents, but not in sample	0.35	0.36	0.52
Mean political interest for Rs who live w/one parent	0.31	0.32	0.52
Mean political interest for Rs who live w/no parents	0.35	0.37	0.55
Mean change in political interest for Rs in sample (range -1 to 1)	0.0009	0.009	0.02
Mean change in political interest for Rs who live w/both parents, but not in sample	0.003	0.01	0.01
Mean change in political interest for Rs who live w/one parent	0.0001	0.005	0.008
Mean change in political interest for Rs who live w/no parents	-0.001	0.004	0.003
<b>Age group: Rs are 18+</b>			
Percent of 18+ years-old respondents in sample	2	13	5
Mean political interest for Rs in sample (range 0 to 1)	0.33	0.36	0.57
Mean political interest for Rs who live w/both parents, but not in sample	0.35	0.36	0.52
Mean political interest for Rs who live w/one parent	0.34	0.33	0.53
Mean political interest for Rs who live w/no parents	0.43	0.39	0.57
Mean change in political interest for Rs in sample (range -1 to 1)	0.0008	0.007	0.02
Mean change in political interest for Rs who live w/both parents, but not in sample	0.0006	0.01	0.01
Mean change in political interest for Rs who live w/one parent	-0.001	0.002	0.006
Mean change in political interest for Rs who live w/no parents	-0.003	0.001	0.004

\*Change in political interest=Political interest<sub>t</sub> - Political interest<sub>t-1</sub>

\*\*Models for respondents age 18-30 in Appendix C, Panel 4

## **WebAppendix 2**

### **Survey questions**

#### **BHPS**

##### **Party preference**

Generally speaking do you think of yourself as a supporter of any one political party? Which one?  
[If no:] Do you think of yourself as a little closer to one political party than to the others? Which one?

##### **Party choice**

Generally speaking do you think of yourself as a supporter of any one political party? Which?  
[If no:] Do you think of yourself as a little closer to one political party than to the others? Which?  
[If no:] If there were to be a General Election tomorrow, which political party do you think you would be most likely to support?

##### **Party voted for**

Did you vote in the [most recent] UK general election? [If yes:] Which political party did you vote for?

##### **Political interest**

How interested would you say you are in politics? Would you say you are...  
Very interested, Fairly interested, Not very interested or Not at all interested?

#### **GSOEP**

##### **Party preference**

Many people in Germany lean towards one party in the long term, even if they occasionally vote for another party. Do you lean towards a particular party? [If yes] Toward which party do you lean?

##### **Left-right ideology**

In politics, people often talk about "left" and "right" when describing different political views.  
When you think about your own political views, how would you rate them on the scale below?

##### **Political interest**

Generally speaking, how much are you interested in politics...  
Very much, Much, Not so much or Not at all?

#### **SHP**

##### **Party preference**

If there was an election for the National Council tomorrow, for which party would you vote?

##### **Political interest**

Generally, how interested are you in politics, if 0 means "not at all interested" and 10 "very interested"?

##### **Electoral participation**

Let's suppose that there are 10 federal polls in a year. How many do you usually take part in ?

##### **Political efficacy**

How much influence do you think someone like you can have on government policy, if  
0 means "no influence", and 10 "a very strong influence"?

##### **Trust in government**

How much confidence do you have in the federal government (in Bern), if 0 means "no confidence"  
and 10 means "full confidence"?

**WebAppendix 3, Panels 1-6**

**Alternate model specifications**

Panel 1

**Political interest in Britain**

*Effects of alternate parental partisan disagreement measures*

<i>Predictor</i>	Alternative 1			Alternative 2		
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>		<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	
Lagged DV ( <i>t-1</i> )	.66	(.02)	*	.66	(.02)	*
Parental disagreement						
Alternative 1: Choose different parties	.001	(.01)				
Alternative 2: Voted different parties				.02	(.01)	
Parental political interest ( <i>t-1</i> )	.12	(.02)	*	.12	(.02)	*
Education	.03	(.02)		.05	(.02)	*
Male	.03	(.01)	*	.04	(.01)	*
Age	.02	(.03)		-.01	(.03)	
Native	-.03	(.03)		-.03	(.03)	
Election year	-.01	(.02)		.04	(.02)	*
Constant	.07	(.08)		.10	(.07)	
<i>N</i>	2225			2112		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.52			.53		

**OLS regression**, fixed effects (for region and year) models; S.E.s clustered by household identifier; \*p<.05.

Panel 2

**Political interest in Britain, Germany and Switzerland**

*Effects of parental partisan disagreement, ordered logit models*

<i>Predictor</i>	Britain			Germany			Switzerland		
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>		<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>		<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	
Lagged DV ( <i>t-1</i> )	6.52	(.23)	*	6.28	(.08)	*	8.58	(.31)	*
Parents prefer different parties	.07	(.17)		.16	(.05)	*	.28	(.12)	*
Parental political interest ( <i>t-1</i> )	1.22	(.22)	*	1.50	(.07)	*	.96	(.24)	*
Education	.36	(.17)	*	.50	(.04)	*	.62	(.18)	*
Male	.24	(.09)	*	.43	(.02)	*	.37	(.08)	*
Age	.26	(.27)		.37	(.09)	*	.10	(.42)	
Native	-.53	(.22)	*	.05	(.04)		.02	(.11)	
Election year	.06	(.20)		.01	(.06)		.07	(.18)	
<i>N</i>	2414			40315			2214		
Wald Chi <sup>2</sup>	1063.5			8730.9			1359.5		

**Ordered logit**, fixed effects (for region and year) models; S.E.s clustered by household identifier; \*p<.05.

Panel 3

**Political interest in Britain, Germany and Switzerland**  
*Effects of parental partisan disagreement controlling for parental political interest at time t*

<i>Predictor</i>	Britain			Germany			Switzerland		
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>		<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>		<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	
Lagged DV ( <i>t</i> -1)	.66	(.02)	*	.58	(.01)	*	.68	(.02)	*
Parents prefer different parties	.01	(.02)		.01	(.01)	*	.03	(.01)	*
Parental political interest ( <i>t</i> )	.16	(.02)	*	.17	(.01)	*	.11	(.02)	*
Education	.04	(.02)	*	.04	(.003)	*	.04	(.02)	*
Male	.03	(.01)	*	.04	(.002)	*	.03	(.007)	*
Age	.01	(.03)		.03	(.01)	*	.003	(.04)	
Native	-.05	(.02)	*	-.01	(.004)		-.005	(.02)	
Election year	.01	(.02)		-.02	(.01)		.004	(.02)	
Constant	.11	(.07)		.07	(.01)	*	.22	(.05)	*
<i>N</i>	2519			40633			2200		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.56			.46			.62		

**OLS regression**, fixed effects (for region and year) models; S.E.s clustered by household identifier; \*p<.05.

Panel 4

**Political interest in Britain, Germany and Switzerland**  
*Effects of parental partisan disagreement for 18-30 y.o. respondents*

<i>Predictor</i>	Britain			Germany			Switzerland		
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>		<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>		<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	
Lagged DV ( <i>t</i> -1)	.66	(.02)	*	.57	(.01)	*	.68	(.02)	*
Parents prefer different parties	.002	(.02)		.02	(.01)	*	.03	(.01)	*
Parental political interest ( <i>t</i> -1)	.11	(.02)	*	.13	(.01)	*	.09	(.02)	*
Education	.05	(.02)	*	.04	(.003)	*	.04	(.01)	*
Male	.03	(.009)	*	.04	(.002)	*	.03	(.007)	*
Age	-.06	(.06)		.08	(.01)	*	.004	(.04)	
Native	-.06	(.03)	*	.003	(.004)		-.005	(.01)	
Election year	.05	(.02)	*	-.02	(.01)		.01	(.01)	
Constant	.13	(.07)		.09	(.02)	*	.20	(.05)	
<i>N</i>	2189			32339			2115		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.53			.43			.61		

**OLS regression**, fixed effects (for region and year) models; S.E.s clustered by household identifier; \*p<.05.

Panel 5

**Political interest in Britain, Germany and Switzerland**  
*Effects of parental partisan disagreement controlling for parental partisan agreement*

<i>Predictor</i>	Britain			Germany			Switzerland		
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>		<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>		<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	
Lagged DV ( <i>t-1</i> )	.67	(.02)	*	.58	(.01)	*	.68	(.02)	*
Parents prefer different parties	.007	(.02)		.03	(.01)	*	.03	(.01)	*
Parents prefer the same party	.01	(.01)		.02	(.003)	*	.001	(.007)	
Parental political interest ( <i>t-1</i> )	.11	(.02)	*	.10	(.01)	*	.09	(.02)	*
Education	.04	(.02)	*	.05	(.003)	*	.05	(.01)	*
Male	.03	(.009)	*	.04	(.002)	*	.03	(.007)	*
Age	.02	(.03)		.03	(.01)	*	-.01	(.03)	
Native	-.05	(.02)	*	-.001	(.004)		-.004	(.01)	
Election year	.11	(.02)	*	-.02	(.01)	*	.009	(.02)	
Constant	.06	(.07)		.09	(.02)	*	.20	(.05)	*
<i>N</i>	2414			40315			2133		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.55			.45			.62		

**OLS regression**, fixed effects (for region and year) models; S.E.s clustered by household identifier; \*p<.05.

Panel 6

**Political interest in Britain and Germany ("F" sample)**  
*Effects of parental partisan disagreement*

<i>Predictor</i>	Britain			Germany			Germany		
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>		<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>		<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	
Lagged DV ( <i>t-1</i> )	.71	(.01)	*	.64	(.02)	*	.56	(.02)	*
Parents prefer different parties	.01	(.02)		.04	(.01)	*	.025	(.01)	*
Parental political interest ( <i>t-1</i> )							.16	(.02)	*
Education							.04	(.009)	*
Male							.05	(.006)	*
Age							.05	(.02)	*
Native							-.008	(.010)	
Election year							.01	(.01)	
Constant	.09	(.004)	*	.13	(.01)	*	-.02	(.04)	
<i>N</i>	4235			4445			4399		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.51			.41			.45		

**OLS regression**, fixed effects (for region & year) models

S.E.s clustered by household identifier, \*p<.05

German models draw only from the "F" sample of the GSOEP

## WebAppendix 4

### Parties included in analyses (In order of appearance in surveys)

<i>Britain</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Switzerland</i>
Conservatives	SPD Social Democrats	PRD Swiss Radical-Democratic Party
Labour	CDU Christian Democrats	PDC Swiss Christian-Democrat Party
Liberal Democrats	CSU Christian Socialists	PSS Swiss Socialist Party
SNP Scottish National	FDP Free Democrats	UDC Democratic Union of the Centre
PC Plaid Cymru	The Greens	PLS Swiss Liberal Party
The Greens	PDS/Left	AdI Independent Alliance
UUP Ulster Unionist	REP Republikaner	PEV Swiss Evangelical Party
SDLP Social Democratic and Labour		PCS Swiss Christian Social Party
DUP Democratic Unionist		PST Swiss Labour Party
SF Sinn Fein		AVF Socialist Green Alternative
		PES Swiss Ecology Party
		DS Swiss Democrats
		UDF Federal Democratic Union
		PSL Swiss Freedom Party
		Lega dei ticinesi
		GL Green liberals
		BDP Conservative Democratic Party

## WebAppendix 5

### Alternate Dependent Variables in Switzerland

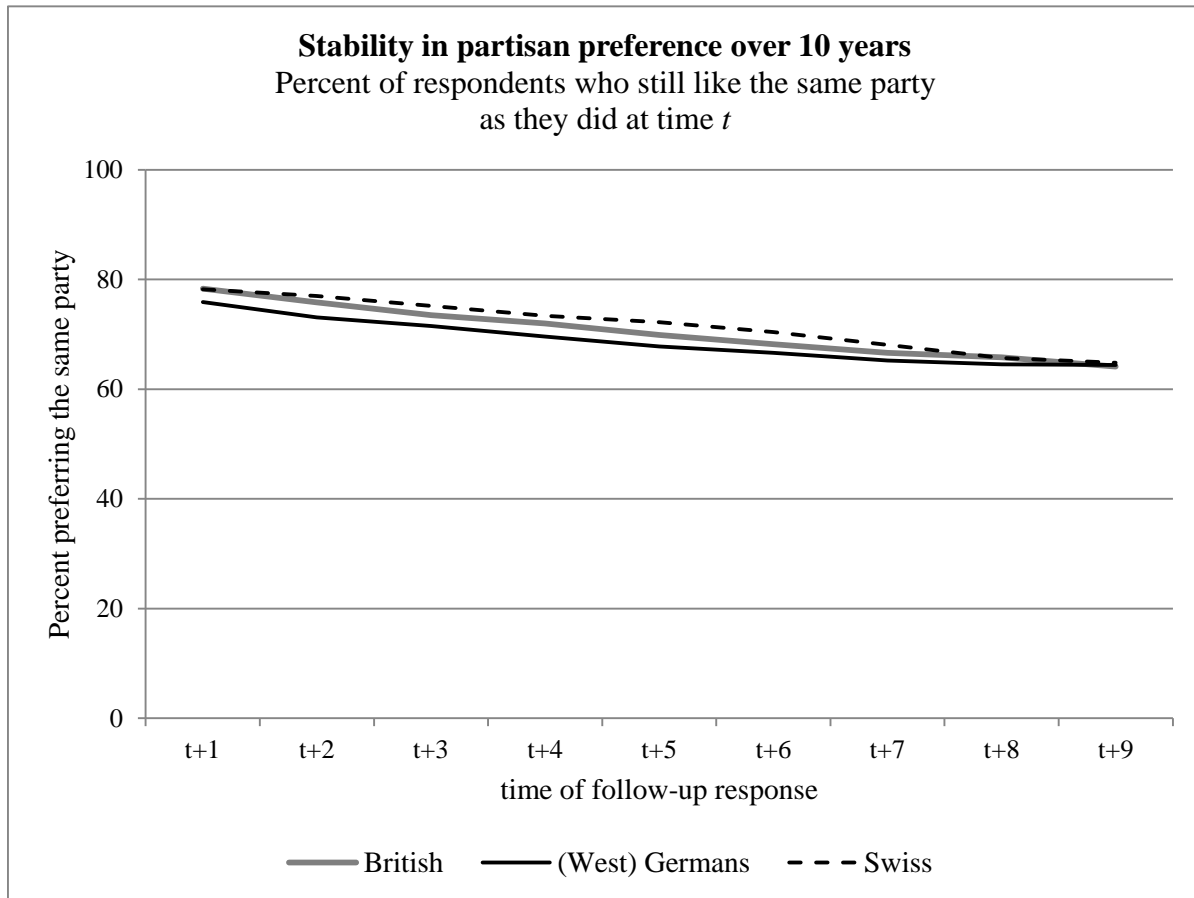
#### Electoral Participation, Political Influence and Trust in Government in Switzerland

##### *Effects of parental partisan disagreement*

<i>Predictor</i>	Electoral Participation			Political Influence		Trust Government			
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>		<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>		
Lagged DV ( $t$ )	.06	(.003)	*	.42	(.03)	*	.54	(.03)	*
Parents prefer different parties	.03	(.01)	*	.002	(.01)		-.003	(.009)	
Parental version of DV ( $t-1$ )	.24	(.04)	*	.11	(.03)	*	.17	(.03)	*
Education	.05	(.02)	*	-.003	(.02)		.03	(.01)	*
Male	.008	(.009)		-.001	(.01)		-.004	(.007)	
Age	-.07	(.05)		.04	(.04)		.001	(.03)	
Native	-.01	(.02)		-.006	(.01)		.007	(.01)	
Election year	-.02	(.02)		-.004	(.02)		-.006	(.02)	
Constant	.15	(.04)	*	.37	(.09)	*	.25	(.04)	*
<i>N</i>	1847			2148		2121			
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.55			.25		.40			

**OLS regression models**, fixed effects (for region and year) models; S.E.s clustered by household identifier; \* $p < .05$ .

## WebAppendix 6



The samples are native born respondents, 18 years old or older, who chose a party at time  $t$ .

Including East Germans lowers the percent of respondents displaying stability by 1-2 points in each year.

## **WebAppendix 7: Alternate measures of disagreement**

Given that scholars dispute the best way to measure disagreement, we test its effects in multiple ways. The first alternative measure of parental discord is the ideological distance between parents' preferred parties. To determine the ideological placement of parties, we draw on existing studies by Laver and Hunt (L/H) (1992) and Benoit and Laver (B/L) (2006). These cross-national inquiries use expert surveys to establish parties' ideological stances. The L/H study estimates party placement in eight main policy areas as of 1988-1989, and B/L updates this study in 2003, providing a more concise overall left-right score for each party. For the German survey we use an average score across the eight policy dimensions of the L/H study to impute party positions for waves up through 2002. For years 2003 and later we use the B/L basic left-right placement of each party. The correlation between the two scales is .87, indicating that not much changes with the switch from L/H to B/L. And we think it worth the adjustment to boost the accuracy of the measure.<sup>27</sup>

Using these values, we created a variable for the ideological distance between parents' parties. This is the absolute difference between the left-right score of the mother's preferred party minus the score of the father's preferred party. The greatest distance to register on a 20-point scale is 7.6 in Germany, (it is 9.6 in Britain and 13.7 in Switzerland). However, we scale the item from 0 to 1. A 0 signals that there is no ideological distance between parents' preferred parties, that one parent supports a party while the other supports no party, or that both parents support no party.

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<sup>27</sup> We also ran the model using Huber-Inglehart (H/I) (1995) party placement scores. The H/I estimates are no different substantively from the L/H and B/L studies, hence we use the two data points offered by combining the L/H and B/L studies.

Our other alternative measure of parental disagreement is the absolute difference between parents' self-reported left-right positions. This ideology question is asked only once and in only one survey (GSOEP 2005). The results of these alternate analyses are presented below.

Political *Distance between parents' parties* has a significant, positive effect on the next generation's political interest. This is similar to the effect of the base parental party disagreement measure used in the main text. This signals that a wider gap between parents' preferred parties boosts the effects of disagreement. Substantively, German respondents whose parents are polarized by party experience a 2% increase in political interest from year-to-year, above and beyond everything that predicted political interest the prior year.

As shown in the second model, left-right ideological distance divorced of party allegiance has no effect on political interest. When ideological distance is used, there are no significant results. This signals that the relevant dynamic for Swiss political interest is parents' support of different parties, rather than the political-ideological distance between them.

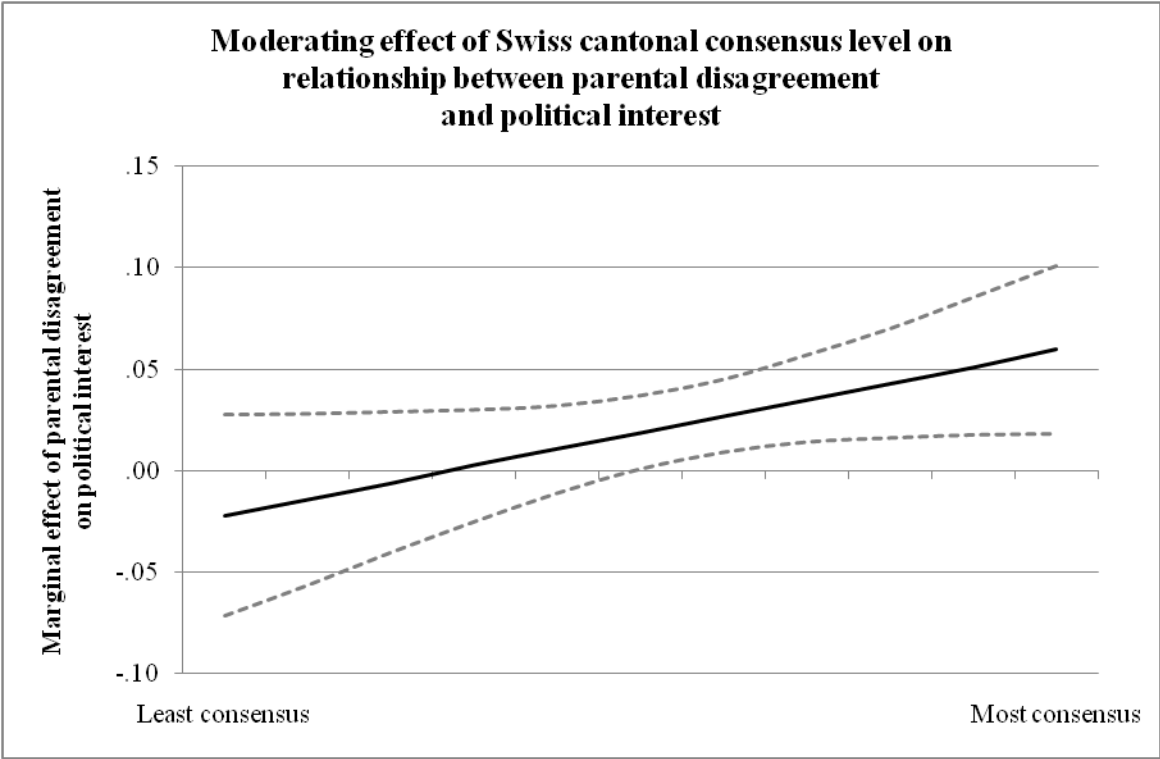
**Political interest in Germany**  
*Effects of parental party and ideological distance*

<i>Predictor</i>	Party distance			Ideology distance		
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>		<i>Coef.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	
Lagged DV ( <i>t</i> -1)	.58	(.01)	*	.62	(.02)	*
Distance between parents' positions	.02	(.01)	*	.03	(.02)	
Parents' political interest ( <i>t</i> -1)	.11	(.006)	*	.11	(.020)	*
Education	.05	(.003)	*	.04	(.010)	*
Male	.04	(.00)	*	.05	(.01)	*
Age	.03	(.01)	*	.01	(.02)	
Native	.00	(.004)		-.01	(.010)	
Election year	-.02	(.01)				
Constant	.08	(.01)	*	.05	(.04)	
<i>N</i>	44223			2551		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.44			.47		

**OLS regression**, fixed effects (for year and region) models.

S.E.s clustered by household; \**p*<.05, \*\**p*<.01. Ideology distance measured only in 2005.

WebAppendix 8



Lincom in Stata 11 produces these point estimates along with their 95% confidence intervals.