

How Context Affects Interpersonal Political Conversation

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Key Question

How does the context of a potential political discussion affect the ways people engage – or avoid engaging – in the conversation?

Hypotheses

- **Online** encounters will increase:
 - Ignoring the conversation ✓
 - {Among those who engage} trying to persuade
- Encounters with **close family** will increase:
 - Engagement in the conversation
- Expressed **uncertainty** will increase:
 - Engagement in the conversation ✓
 - Trying to persuade the other person ✓

Experimental Treatment

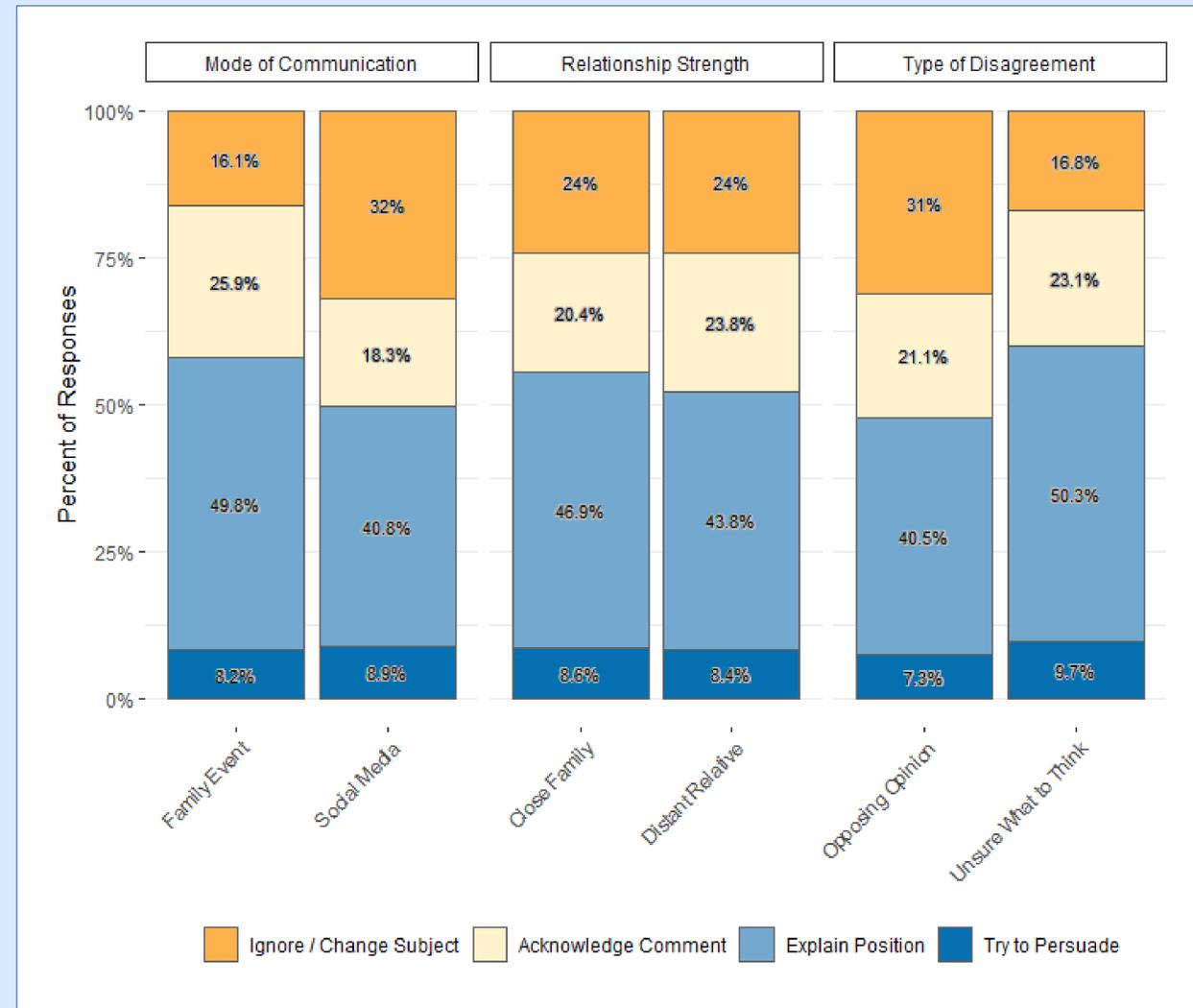
Imagine that you are [looking at social media / attending a family event], and a [close family member / relative you have not talked to in a while] [expresses a political opinion that you do not agree with / says they are not sure what to think] about a candidate or issue that is very important to you.

Which of the following best describes how you would react?

- Ignore the comment or change the topic to something else
- Say something that acknowledges their comment but does not invite further conversation
- Explain your position on the issue, but acknowledge that not everyone agrees
- Explain your position and give reasons why the other person should agree with you

Data

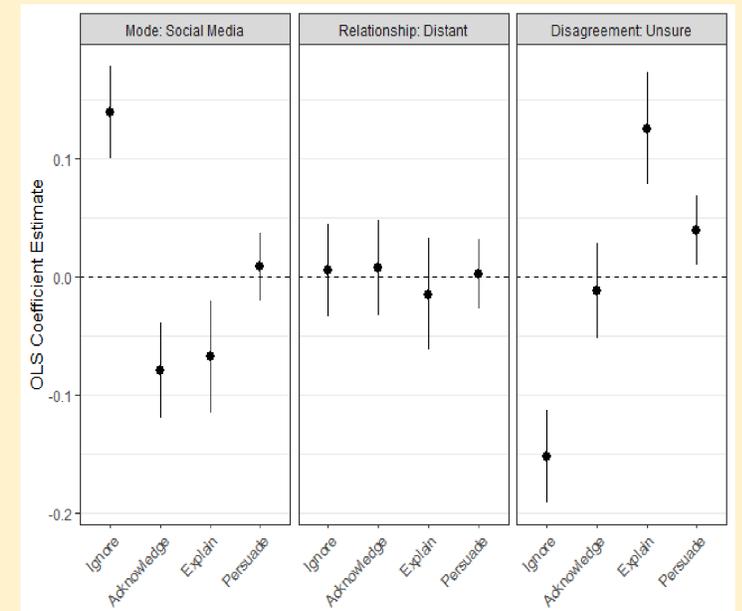
2018 CCES: On both pre- and post- survey, N = 1,000
2018 Survey of Republican Party Activists, N = 11,214



Conclusions

- People are more likely to ignore political comments made by others when they occur online than in person.
- Relationship strength has very little impact on the variation in how people approach and avoid political conversation.
- People are significantly more likely to say they would ignore a political conversation when a potential political discussion partner leads with an opposing opinion.
- When the other person expresses uncertainty about the topic, respondents are more likely to say they would engage in the conversation and more likely to say they would try to persuade the other person.

Within-Subject Effects



Replication: Republican Party Activists

