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Pattie, C.J. and Johnston, R.J. (2016) Talking with one voice? Conversation Networks and political polarisation. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. ISSN 1369-1481

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148115620989>

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Talking with one voice? Conversation networks and political polarization

Journal:	<i>The British Journal of Politics and International Relations</i>
Manuscript ID	BJPIR-1018.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	political behaviour, conversation, political attitudes, polarisation, ideology, United Kingdom

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Talking with one voice?

Conversation networks and political polarization

- Analyses the effects of political homogeneity and heterogeneity in citizens' conversation networks on ideological position
- Other things being equal, membership of more politically homogenous conversation networks leads individuals into more extreme political evaluations
- Network homogeneity drives polarisation of political attitudes and creates larger perceived gulfs between individuals' own views and the views they ascribe to parties opposed by their conversation partners.

For Review Only

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Talking with one voice?

Conversation networks and political polarization

Abstract

Persuasion is a well-known consequence of political discussion between citizens: people bring their partisan and ideological views into line with those of their discussion partners. Less often considered is another aspect of this process: does persuasion in conversation networks increase the gap individuals perceive between their own views and those of groups or parties opposed by their discussion partners? Building on work which suggests that ideological homogeneity within networks leads to increased polarisation and drives individuals to relative political extremes, the paper examines British voters' perceptions of parties whose views they do not share. The more internally homogeneous the partisan message coming from their main discussion partners, the more extreme individuals become in their views, and the greater the gulf they perceive between themselves and parties not supported by their networks. But the effect is evident only on issues which are politically salient, suggesting this is a real conversation effect.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Editors of BJPIR and to the three anonymous referees for their helpful comments and advice on earlier drafts of the paper.

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6 Research over the last two decades has examined the effects of conversation between citizens
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8 on vote choice (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995; Pattie and Johnston, 1999, 2000), changing
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10 political attitudes over time (Pattie and Johnston, 2001), levels of tolerance and understanding
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12 of viewpoints different to one's own (Mutz, 2002a, 2006; Pattie and Johnston 2008; Ben-Nun
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14 Bloom and Bagno-Moldavsky, 2014) and political participation (Mutz, 2002b, 2006; Mutz
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16 and Mondak, 2006; Nir, 2005, 2011; Pattie and Johnston 2009, 2013). Much of that work has
17
18 shown that people – especially those who are not themselves strongly partisan – tend to come
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20 into agreement with the dominant political view among those they talk to regularly (e.g.
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22 Pattie and Johnston, 2002; McClurg, 2004). That said, few conversation networks are
23
24 comprised of entirely like-minded individuals, and most contain some members who think
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26 differently from the majority on at least some issues. This ensures that, despite the tendency
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28 for conversation networks to converge on similar positions, disagreement and political
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30 diversity persist (Huckfeldt *et al.*, 2004).
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37 Less attention has been paid, however, to the possibility that conversation networks might
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39 increase the perceived distance between individuals' opinions and those of individuals or
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41 groups holding views opposed by most in one's conversation network. Conversations might
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43 bond individuals within the network, both socially and ideologically. But do they also tend to
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45 isolate their members, at least ideologically, from individuals in other networks? And,
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47 potentially still worse, does homogeneity in conversation networks contribute to polarisation
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49 of views? Do individuals in politically homogeneous conversation networks see parties
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51 opposed by others in their networks as more extreme (both absolutely and relative to their
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53 own positions), and parties supported by their networks as more moderate than do voters in
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55 less homogeneous networks? As discussed below, American work suggests this might indeed
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3 be the case, contributing to the widely-noted polarisation of politics there. But is this just a
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5 feature of the political landscape in the USA, or does it apply more widely? This is the
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7 question at the heart of the current paper, which investigates the effects of political
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9 heterogeneity and homogeneity within conversation networks on perceptions of ideological
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11 polarisation in the UK.
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16 **Discussion, diversity and polarisation**

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20 Political discussion between citizens is often seen as normatively desirable. Sharing and
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22 comparing views, advocating positions, persuading each other: these are generally taken as
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24 cornerstones of healthy democratic politics (e.g. Dahl, 1998). However, there is also a dark
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26 side. If convergence within peer groups leads to 'group think', political conversations
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28 between citizens could lead away from open deliberation and tolerance towards a balkanized
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30 political landscape, in which individuals increasingly occupy echo chambers where their own
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32 opinions and prejudices are validated by like-minded others and where opposing points of
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34 view are seldom given a hearing and are dismissed as beyond the pale of reasonable
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36 discussion. If this happens, those within the echo-chamber may come to see themselves and
37
38 their opinions as reasonable and correct, while those holding alternative views are dismissed
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40 as wrong-headed, extreme zealots. In the United States, for instance, as the mainstream
41
42 political parties have become ever more ideologically distinct from each other, and as
43
44 political discourse has become more heated, a lively debate has emerged over whether
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46 American citizens are becoming more polarised socially, geographically and politically (e.g.
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48 Bishop and Cushing, 2009; Gimpel and Schuknecht, 2004; Gelman *et al.*, 2008; Poole and
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50 Rosenthal, 1984; Ura and Ellis, 2012; Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008; Fiorina and Abrams,
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52 2008; Fiorina *et al.*, 2008).
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5 Social networks have the potential to affect such polarization. For instance, widespread and
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7 active interaction with other citizens helps build social capital (Putnam, 1993). But not all
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9 social capital is 'good'. Putnam (2000, 24) distinguishes between bridging and bonding social
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11 capital. The former, he argues, develops when people encounter a diverse range of others in
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13 conditions of relative equality. By rubbing along with people who think differently, behave
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15 differently, and so on, we learn to trust each other and to tolerate and accommodate
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17 difference (see Christ *et al.*, 2014). But, he further claims, when people socialise largely
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19 within closed communities of the like-minded, bonding social capital develops. This stresses
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21 the factors which unite members of the in-group but divide them from the out-group. Where
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23 bonding social capital dominates, therefore, those in the in-group increasingly come to trust
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25 and understand other in-group members, while seeing those outside the group as alien.
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32 Recent experimental research (summarised in Sunstein, 2009) demonstrates that the extent to
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34 which discussion networks are open or closed to a diverse range of competing views has
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36 consequences not only for what individuals themselves think, but also for how they think of
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38 others. Other things being equal, the more uniform the views expressed within networks, the
39
40 greater the ideological distance network members perceive between their own views and the
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42 views of those whose opinions are not shared by others in the network. Individuals
43
44 surrounded by discussants who are all Republicans tend to see Democrats' views as more
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46 outré than do individuals in either mixed or Democrat-dominated networks, and *vice-versa*.
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48 As Sunstein notes, '(g)roups go to extremes', especially when group members receive
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50 affirmation for their own views from the opinions of their fellows (2009, 3). Far from leading
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52 to broad consensus and convergence on the political middle ground, he finds, discussion
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3 among the like-minded drives people apart ideologically: ‘We are right; everyone else is not
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5 only wrong, but they are even more wrong than we thought before we began to discuss it’.
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10 This is not a pleasing prospect for those (like advocates of deliberative democracy: Fishkin,
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12 1995; Elster, 1998) who hope deliberation will lead to the adoption of reasoned and
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14 consensual views. But does discussion among the like-minded really drive us apart
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16 ideologically, and (if it does) how far does it do so? Are we being driven into ideologically
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18 distinct ghettos, miles apart on the major issues? Or are the shifts smaller-scale and more
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20 subtle? What is more, how general is this phenomenon? Is it a feature of the currently
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22 relatively polarised political environment in the USA, or will it also apply in countries like
23
24 the UK, where there has been ideological convergence rather than polarisation between the
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26 major political parties over the last 20 years? In the remainder of the paper, therefore, we try
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28 to address these questions through a consideration of the effects of unanimity of voice in
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30 conversation networks among British voters.
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36 **Measuring political diversity in conversation networks**

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40 Assessing the effect of discussions within conversation networks on perceptions of how
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42 extreme each party is requires information on where respondents place themselves in
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44 ideological space, and where they place the parties. And it requires data on the political
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46 composition of individuals’ conversation networks. Few surveys provide both these
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48 requirements: we turn, therefore, to the 1987, 1992 and 2015 British Election Studies (BES),
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50 which do provide the necessary information. While most BES surveys since the early 1980s
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52 have asked questions which allow us to calculate how large a gap individuals perceive on a
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54 range of issues between their own views and where they think the major parties stand, only
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3 the 1987, 1992 and 2014 surveys used here ask relevant questions regarding conversation
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5 networks. We are therefore limited to these three data sets.
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10 There is a virtue to looking at several data sets rather than just one. Repeating our analyses in
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12 different years, and hence for different data sets and under different external political
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14 conditions allows us to check how robust and replicable our findings are. The first two BES
15
16 surveys used here were large, nationally representative post-election surveys, with much of
17
18 the data gathered in face-to-face interviews, and some further information solicited via mail-
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20 back self-completion questionnaires. The third, meanwhile, is a considerably larger internet
21
22 panel: in the analyses below, we look at data from the second wave of the panel, which was
23
24 conducted in May and June 2014, about a year before the 2015 UK General Election.¹ This
25
26 also provides a further dimension to our analyses, allowing us to compare conversation
27
28 network effects during ‘first order’ general elections (1987 and 1992) with those during
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30 ‘second order’ elections (2014 was not a general election year in the UK, but there was an
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32 election for the European Parliament).
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39 In all three surveys, BES respondents were asked about the people with whom they were
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41 most likely to talk about ‘important issues’ or politics. In 1987, they were asked about the
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43 two people they discussed politics with most often during the election campaign. In 1992
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45 they were asked about the two people they discussed ‘important matters with most often’ and
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47 (if they could identify someone) about another person with whom they talked ‘regularly
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49 about politics’. And in 2014, they were asked to name up to three individuals with whom they
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51 ‘sometimes talk(ed) about politics’. Despite the differences in the numbers of conversation
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53 partners elicited (a maximum of 2 in 1987, but up to 3 in 1992 and 2014), and the
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55 conversational contexts being tested (political conversations during the election campaign in
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3 1987, 'important matters' and 'politics' at any time in 1992, politics 'sometimes' in 2014), all
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5 three years' responses give insight into individuals' conversational networks. Unsurprisingly,
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7 the most frequently named discussion partner was the respondent's spouse or partner (47%
8
9 named their partner in 1987, as did 48% in 1992, and 43% in 2014). Other family members
10
11 and relatives were also frequently cited (29% of respondents named a family member in
12
13 1987, 38% did in 1992, and 37% did in 2014). But comparable numbers also said they talked
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15 about politics with people (friends, neighbours, work colleagues and so on) outside their
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17 families (40% named such a person in 1987, as did 38% in 1992 and 49% in 2014).
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23 In all three years, too, respondents were asked a range of questions about their conversation
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25 partners. Of particular interest here, they were asked to say which, if any, party they thought
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27 each of their discussants supported. These responses were used to get some idea of
28
29 conversation networks' political compositions.
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34 To measure the extent to which these conversation networks spoke with one political voice,
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36 or many, or none at all, respondents were classified into five groups, depending on what they
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38 said about the partisan composition of their conversation networks: those who said there were
39
40 no identifiable partisans in their networks (35% in 1987; 30% in 1992; 37% in 2014); those
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42 who said all the partisans in their network were Conservatives (18%, 17% and 14%
43
44 respectively); those who said all partisans were Labour voters (13%, 11% and 18%); those
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46 who said their networks contained only Liberal-SDP Alliance/Liberal Democrat partisans
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48 (5%, 2% and 3%);² and those who said their networks contained partisans supporting several
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50 parties (29%, 40% and 28%).³
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56 **Measuring ideological distance**

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5 The BES surveys also allow us to evaluate how close or far individuals think they are
6 ideologically from each of the main parties on a variety of issues, which gives us a rough
7 indicator of political polarization. Respondents were asked to place themselves, and then each
8 of the major parties, on a series of 11- or 7-point ideological scales, where one end of the
9 scale represented one ideological extreme on an issue, and the other end the opposite
10 extreme. Given this information, it is possible to measure not only where each individual sits
11 in ideological space but (by comparing their own scores with those they give each party) how
12 far they think they are from each party. In 1987, the questions were asked of all BES
13 respondents. In 1992, only about half (chosen at random) were asked them; in 2014,
14 meanwhile, one question was asked of around half the sample, and the other of almost all.

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30 The various political issues covered by these scales vary in salience: some are salient in most
31 elections, some are salient in some contests but not in others, and some are rarely if ever
32 salient. The variation in issue salience is useful here, as it means different issues had different
33 chances of coming up in political conversations, allowing us some (albeit limited) leverage
34 over what, if anything, was important about political conversation. Did the specific subject
35 matter of conversations matter (in which case we might expect to see larger effects for more
36 salient than for less salient issues)? Or was it the general ideological tenor of conversation
37 networks, and not the specific content of each discussion that mattered (in which case we
38 might expect to see similar effects of conversation on all scales, whether salient or not)?
39 Similarly, the comparison of first order (1987 and 1992) and second order (2014) election
40 years enables us to say something about whether political conversations work differently in
41 relatively high versus relatively low salience contests (as we might expect less frequent and
42 less intense political discussions between voters in the latter than in the former).

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5 The first ideological domain we investigate is the left-right dimension (Evans and Heath,
6 1995; Evans et al., 1996). This (and, with it, attitudes on income redistribution) is the
7 underlying ideological ground on which almost all modern British elections have been
8 fought. It is, therefore, highly salient in all contests and likely to have been reflected in most
9 political conversations throughout the period – hard to avoid, and hard not to take sides on.
10 There has, it must be noted, been substantial policy convergence between the major parties in
11 the UK since the 1980s, as all have moved closer to the ideological centre ground. Even so,
12 the rhetoric of elections still makes copious use of the language of left and right.
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25 To tap this dimension, we look at several measures. Four sets of questions were asked in the
26 BES surveys for both 1987 and 1992 (figure 1). The first asked about the relative pay-off
27 between tackling unemployment and tackling inflation. The far left of the scale (coded 1) was
28 the view that getting people back to work should be the government's top priority; the far
29 right (coded 11) was the view that the top priority should be tackling inflation. The second
30 scale (also coded from 1 to 11) asked for personal and perceived party positions on a scale
31 which contrasted increasing public spending, even if that required raising taxes, with cutting
32 taxes, even if that necessitated cutting public spending. The third scale, meanwhile, reflected
33 attitudes to nationalisation and privatisation of industry: the anchor on the left was the view
34 that government should nationalise many more private companies, while the right-wing
35 equivalent was the view that governments should sell off many more state-owned companies
36 to the private sector. Finally, the fourth scale (a variant of which was also asked of all
37 respondents in 2014) looked at attitudes on redistribution: at one extreme was the view that
38 government should make greater efforts to make people's incomes more equal, and at the
39 other was the view that government should be much less concerned with income inequality.
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5 As combining attitude scales helps minimise measurement errors inherent in using single-
6 item scales (Ansolabehere *et al.*, 2008), respondents' self-assessments of their own positions
7 on each of these scales were averaged to produce a summary left-right scale for both 1987
8 and 1992.⁴ Similar scales were calculated for their placement of the Conservatives, Labour
9 and the Liberal-SDP Alliance/Liberal Democrats.⁵ Subtracting each respondent's average
10 placement of each party on this summary left-right scale from their average self-placement
11 gives a measure of how large an ideological distance they perceived between themselves and
12 the party. The closer to zero the resulting answer, the more similar they thought the party's
13 position to their own. The more negative the answer, the more right-wing they thought the
14 party was compared to their own position. And the more positive the answer, the more left-
15 wing the party was perceived as being compared to themselves.
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32 As with the general left-right dimension, debates over welfare provision have also provided
33 one of the most regular and salient fault lines of political debate at least since the late 1970s.
34 In 1987, for instance, 75% of individuals surveyed by IPSOS-MORI in the month before the
35 election said unemployment was one of the main issues facing the country, while 19% named
36 the NHS and 17% education: five years later, these were still seen as important issues, 57%
37 naming unemployment as a key issue in 1992, 32% the NHS and 23% education. We use a
38 number of questions from different BES surveys to get at this. In 1987, respondents were
39 asked their views on welfare, contrasting those who felt 'the poor in Britain are entitled to
40 more help from government' (1) against those who felt 'the poor in Britain should get less
41 help from government and do more to help themselves' (11). Although this fitted the left-
42 right dimension, it was not replicated in the 1992 study, so was omitted from the left-right
43 scale, but we analyse it separately here. In 1992, half the respondents were asked another
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3 welfare-related question, on a 1-7 point scale which contrasted those who felt it was
4 government's responsibility to ensure that everyone had 'a good job and a good standard of
5 living' (coded 1) with those who felt 'government should just let each person get ahead on
6 their own' (coded 7).
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14 Other issues have fluctuated in importance over time. Defence is a good example. In 1987,
15 the Cold War was still in full flow, and war with the nuclear-armed USSR and Warsaw Pact
16 could not be ruled out. What is more, the major parties took radically different stances on the
17 issue, with the Conservative government favouring the maintenance of a strong UK military
18 and independent nuclear strike force, while its Labour opponents advocated unilateral nuclear
19 disarmament. Not surprisingly, therefore, defence proved a major battleground (*sic*) during
20 that year's election. By 1992, however, much of the heat had gone out of the issue. The
21 Warsaw Pact and the USSR had imploded dramatically in 1989, bringing the external
22 Communist threat and the Cold War to an abrupt and unexpected end. And in the meantime,
23 as part of its march back to the political centre ground, Labour had abandoned its unilateralist
24 position on nuclear weapons. Not surprisingly, given all this, the salience of defence issues
25 changed substantially over time: the same IPSOS-MORI polls discussed above reveal that in
26 April 1987, 21% thought nuclear weapons policy was a key issue facing the country: by 1992
27 this had dwindled to just 1%. Questions on attitudes to defence were asked in both the 1987
28 and 1992 surveys. In 1987, the relevant scale contrasted those who felt Britain should get rid
29 of its nuclear weapons immediately (1) with those who felt the country should increase its
30 nuclear arsenal 'without delay' (11).). In 1992, half the BES respondents were asked a 7-
31 point question on defence, contrasting with those who felt much less should be spent on
32 defence (coded 1) with those who felt defence spending should be much higher (coded 7).
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3 Some issues occupied something of a middle ground. Law and order was not a major
4 campaign issue in 1987, but 19% of the public, according to IPSOS-MORI, thought it an
5 important national issue. A 1987 BES scale tapped law and order attitudes, contrasting those
6 who felt protecting civil rights was a higher priority than cutting crime (1) against those who
7 felt cutting crime trumped civil rights (11).
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16 Britain's relations with the EU, meanwhile, hardly featured in the public mind in 1987 (only
17 1% of IPSOS-MORI respondents identified it as a key issue) but it had grown substantially in
18 importance by 1992 (when 14% named it as a key issue), no doubt reflecting the growing
19 disputes within the Conservative government over the issue (which contributed to Mrs
20 Thatcher's removal as party leader and Prime Minister in 1990). Intriguingly (and again no
21 doubt reflecting the Conservatives' travails on the issue in the late 1980s and early 1990s),
22 this public concern over the EU in 1992 was not reflected in the campaign itself: Europe did
23 not surface as a major issue. That said, while not a negligible issue in 1992, the EU had not
24 reached the pitch of public concern it was to receive over the next 20 years. By 2014, it had
25 moved centre-stage in British politics, fuelled by an increasingly Eurosceptic mood among
26 UK voters, and by the rapid rise of a new, explicitly anti-EU party, UKIP (Ford and
27 Goodwin, 2014). In addition, whereas 1992 was a general election year (with the policy focus
28 very much on the UK parliament) 2014 was a European Parliament election year, further
29 heightening the salience of the EU in that year as opposed to the earlier one.
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49 In 1992, half of all respondents were asked about the European Union: those who felt 'Britain
50 should do all it can to unite fully with the European Community' were coded 1, while those
51 who felt the country 'should do all it can to protect its independence from' the Community
52 were coded 11.
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5 Attitudes to the EU were also tackled in the 2014 survey: respondents were asked ‘Some say
6 European unification should be pushed further. Others say it has already gone too far. What is
7 your opinion? And where would you place the following parties...’ This time, the scale runs
8 from the most Eurosceptic responses (‘unification has already gone too far’, coded 0) to the
9 most Europhilic (‘Unification should be pushed further’, coded 10).
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18 Our last issue, meanwhile, women’s rights, has not been a major campaign issue in recent UK
19 elections. It did not play a major part in the 1992 election, for instance, despite Labour’s
20 manifesto commitments to equal rights protection and a separate Ministry for Women.
21 Women’s rights did not crop up at all as one of IPSOS-MORI’s salient issues that year.⁶ In
22 that year’s BES, half of the respondents were asked where they, and the parties, stood on
23 women’s rights: at one end of the scale were those who felt ‘women should have an equal
24 role with men in running business, industry and government’ (coded 1); at the other end were
25 those who felt ‘a woman’s place is in the home’ (coded 7).
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38 For all of these scales, the ideological gaps were calculated between respondents’ self-
39 placements and where they placed each of the main parties. This gives nine sets of
40 differential measures, therefore: left-right differentials for 1987; a similar set for 1992;
41 differentials in attitudes to welfare in 1987; differentials in attitudes in defence in 1987; 1987
42 differentials in ideological placements on law and order; differentials in perceived positions
43 on Europe in 1992 and 2014; differentials on attitudes to women’s rights in 1992; and finally
44 differentials on attitudes to redistribution in 2014.
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3 As discussed above, individuals who place themselves and a party on the same ideological
4 position on an issue will score 0 on the relevant party differential scale. For all but one of the
5 scales, if they think the party is to the left of them, their score on the party differential
6 measure will be positive; and if they think the party is to the right of them, their score will be
7 negative. The larger the score, positive or negative, the more extreme they think the party is
8 relative to their own position. In one case, attitudes to the EU in 2014, however, the scale
9 runs in the opposite direction – negative if they think the party is to their left and positive if
10 they think it is to their right. Summary information on all the scales is contained in Appendix
11 1 (Table A1).
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25 **Conversation networks and ideological distance from parties**

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29 These difference measures are used to get a sense of whether the political make-up of
30 individuals' conversation networks affects their perceptions of how ideologically extreme
31 each party is, relative to their own views. If politically homogeneous conversation networks
32 have a polarising effect on individuals' views of the parties, then (other things being equal)
33 those whose conversation networks are comprised entirely of partisans of one party should
34 perceive a larger gap between their own views and where they think the party's main rival
35 stands than should those whose networks are politically more diverse. The opposite should
36 hold too: other things being equal, the more politically homogeneous an individual's network,
37 the smaller the gap he or she should perceive between him- or herself and the party supported
38 by other network members.
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54 Individuals' scores on most of the party differential measures inevitably reflect a variety of
55 other factors besides the political composition of their social networks. For instance,
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3 individuals' own partisan inclinations might have an effect: other things being equal,
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5 Conservative supporters should see themselves as ideologically closer to where they would
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7 position that party on an issue than would Labour or Liberal Democrat supporters, and so on
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9 for the other partisans and other parties, *mutatis mutandis*. Similarly, strength of partisanship
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11 might be germane: the stronger individuals' partisan attachment to a particular party, the
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13 more certain they should be of their own views and of their evaluations of where the parties
14
15 stand on the issues, and the less they should be influenced by the collective political leanings
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17 of those they talk to. For much the same reasons, how interested individuals are in politics
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19 might affect the extent to which their acquaintances' views might influence their perceptions
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21 of the gap between their own ideological positions and those of the parties: other things being
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23 equal, those displaying a greater interest in politics might be expected to be less swayed by
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25 their peers than those who are less interested. Education, too, might play a similar role, such
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27 that those with more formal education might be less amenable to the influence of their peers
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29 than those with less. In a like manner, age might be a factor. The older individuals are, the
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31 more experience they have of politics and political parties on which to draw, and the more
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33 settled their own opinions are likely to be. Hence we might expect, other things being equal,
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35 older respondents to be less influenced by their peers than younger ones
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43 In our analyses of the party differential scores, we therefore control for: respondents' partisan
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45 identifications; their strength of partisanship; in 1987 and 1992 their interest in politics and in
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47 2014 the amount of attention they generally paid to politics; the highest educational
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49 qualification claimed by each respondent; and their age. In addition, we take into account
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51 individuals' social class. Details of the codings used are reported in Appendix 2.
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3 Our primary interest here is the independent effect of social networks upon the ideological
4 distance individuals perceived between themselves and each party. To assess this, the partisan
5 composition of respondents' conversation networks was added to the control variables in
6 each model. The measure differentiates between individuals whose networks contained only
7 supporters of the same party, were mixed (containing supporters of two or more different
8 parties), or were non-partisan (contained no individuals with identifiable partisanship: this is
9 the comparison group). As all models already control for respondents' own partisanship, we
10 take into account the tendency for people to see themselves as ideologically closer to parties
11 they support than to parties they oppose. The key results for the network variables are
12 reported in Tables 1, 2 and 3 (for 1987, 1992 and 2014 respectively: we also ran models
13 replacing this measure of network diversity with measures of the numbers discussants
14 supporting each of the main parties: these results, reported in Appendix 1 – see tables A2, A3
15 and A4 – largely confirm the results discussed here, suggesting they are not just artefacts of
16 how we measure our key independent variable).

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36 In 1987, a fairly consistent pattern emerges (Table 1: in this and subsequent tables only the
37 network coefficients are reported, though all models also control for respondents' own
38 partisanship, class, education, age and interest in politics). Where an issue was electorally
39 salient (the left-right scale, defence and welfare, in Tables 1a, 1b and 1c respectively),
40 individuals in exclusively Conservative discussion networks were more likely to place
41 themselves some distance to the right of the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal-SDP
42 Alliance than were individuals whose conversation networks were entirely non-partisan.
43 Similarly, individuals in exclusively Labour-supporting or exclusively Liberal-SDP Alliance
44 supporting networks on average placed themselves further to the left of the Conservatives
45 than did those in non-partisan networks. This is in line with the argument that political

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3 consistency in conversation networks encourages ideological divergence away from parties
4 not supported by network members. Those in politically mixed networks, meanwhile, on
5 average placed themselves further left of the Conservatives and further right than Labour or
6 the Alliance parties than did those on non-partisan networks.
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14 The main example of a non-salient issue in 1987 is law and order (reported in Table 1d), and
15 here the pattern breaks down. Only one of the effects for consistency of conversation network
16 reaches conventional levels of statistical significance. Consistent with expectations,
17 respondents in all-Conservative networks tended to place themselves further to the right of
18 Labour than did those in non-partisan networks. In no other case was there a clearly
19 discernible effect. That said, the law and order models were poor fits (with very low R^2
20 values).
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32 By and large, the results for the 1992 models offer some corroboration (Table 2). The two
33 most salient issue dimensions in 1992 were the left-right and the welfare dimensions (in
34 Tables 2a and 2c respectively), and there the more Conservative an individual's discussion
35 network, other things being equal, the further to the right, on average, they tended to place
36 themselves compared to Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The more Labour supporters they
37 talked to, the further to the left of the Conservatives they felt. And individuals who reported
38 that all their discussion partners were Liberal Democrats on average placed themselves
39 further to the right of Labour and (marginally) the Liberal Democrats than did individuals in
40 entirely non-partisan discussion networks.
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54 As in 1987, however, the partisan make-up of conversation networks has less clear effects
55 when we turn to issues which were less salient in 1992. The more Labour-supporting an
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3 individual's network, other things being equal, the further to the left of the Conservatives
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5 they felt themselves to be on Europe (Table 2b) and on defence (Table 2e). And the more
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7 Conservative supporters individuals reported talking to, the further to the right of Labour they
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9 reported themselves to be on defence. But few other network coefficients proved significant
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11 (and those that did prove significant for one operationalization of network partisanship were
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13 often not significant for the other, suggesting these were not consistent results).
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18 A similar story holds in 2014 (Table 3). The more exclusively Conservative an individual's
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20 conversation network, the further to the right they were, relatively, of all three parties on both
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22 European integration (Table 3a) and income redistribution (Table 3b). And the stronger the
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24 representation of Labour or Liberal Democrat voices among those they talked to, other things
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26 being equal, the further to the left, relatively, of the parties they were, other things being
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28 equal. This does not trump partisanship: for instance, analysis of the full models (not reported
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30 here) shows that Conservative supporters remain to the right of Labour supporters, and of
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32 where they themselves place the main parties, in absolute terms. But in relative terms,
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34 Conservatives whose discussion networks were mainly with other Conservatives placed
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36 themselves further to the right of the parties than did Conservatives whose discussion
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38 networks were mainly with Labour or Liberal Democrat supporters.
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45 Comparing the 2014 results with those for 1987 and 1992 also suggest that the influence of
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47 political homogeneity in conversation networks on ideological polarisation does not depend
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49 particularly on whether conversations take place in the context of a first order rather than a
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51 second order election. The effects are similar, and of comparable dimensions, in all three
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53 years. Political conversations between citizens are, it seems, part of the background of civic
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55 life: they have effects in both more and less politically salient contexts.
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5 There is evidence, therefore, to suggest that individuals in more politically homogeneous
6 conversation networks tend to perceive greater ideological polarisation on electorally salient
7 issues between their own views and where they think the parties stand than do those in less
8 consistently partisan networks. But how large are these effects? Most of the derived
9 difference scales have a 21-point potential range, from -10 to +10, while three of the 1992
10 scales (for welfare, defence and women's rights) have a 13-point range, from -6 to +6.
11 Bearing that in mind, the significant coefficients for the models focussing on partisan
12 unanimity in conversation networks suggest only modest effects. For instance, those whose
13 discussion networks contained only people who were themselves Conservative supporters
14 perceived a slightly wider gap between their own and Labour's position on the left-right scale
15 than did those in non-partisan networks, 0.81 points further right of Labour in 1987 and 1.11
16 points further right in 1992. Other significant effects are of the same order of magnitude or
17 smaller.

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36 While greater partisan unanimity within conversation networks can lead to increasingly
37 polarised views of the parties' positions on the major issues of the day relative to the
38 individual's, therefore, the effects are modest in size. That said, this should not of itself be
39 terribly surprising. Individuals' own ideological positions, and their evaluations of where the
40 parties stand, are shaped by many influences, including long-term socialisation, evaluations
41 of party performance, education, and so on. Such deep-seated influences are unlikely to be
42 overturned simply by the effects of conversations, therefore. Given that, even relatively
43 modest effects are still important. Like the proverbial dog walking on two legs, it isn't so
44 much that it is well done (or, in our case, has a large effect) that impresses: it is that it is done
45 (has an effect) at all.

Conclusions

Other things being equal, partisan consistency in British conversation networks drives a degree of ideological divergence. The more that the members of an individual's conversation networks speak with one political voice, preferring one party more than the others, the more that person's opinions on major issues tend to move away from where they place the other parties – and in the ideological direction of the party supported by their conversation networks. Those embedded in predominantly Conservative-supporting networks think of themselves as further to the right of Labour and the Liberals than do most other individuals. Those whose discussion partners mainly support Labour tend to see themselves as being further to the left, on average, of the Conservative and the Liberals than do others. And those in Liberal-supporting networks tend to think of themselves as further to the left of the Conservatives and further to the right of Labour than do other voters.

The effect holds both in 'first order election' years, when conversations about politics are likely to be frequent, intense and pervasive, and in 'second order election' years, when the intensity of political conversation is liable to be lower. However, this effect is clearest for issues which were salient in the particular election studied. It is weaker for less salient issues, and weakest of all for issues which barely featured during the election. In other words, the effect is most pronounced on those issues which were most likely to be part of the national conversation at that contest. While this does not prove that it is not only the general partisan leanings but also the specific issue content of conversations which matter politically, it is certainly strong circumstantial evidence that this is the case.

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3 But although increasing ideological unanimity in one's conversation network does create
4 pressures towards polarisation of political perceptions, the effects are, on the whole,
5 relatively modest. Those in all-Conservative supporting networks are a little more likely to
6 think Labour and the Liberal Democrats are further left of themselves than are individuals in
7 mixed or non-partisan networks, just as those in all-Labour networks are liable to see the
8 Conservatives as further from them to the right than are those in more mixed networks. But
9 not overwhelmingly so. Conversation may polarise a bit. But it does not seem (for most
10 people) to push them into ideological ghettos. Not only that, but most conversation networks
11 are either non-partisan or are to some degree mixed, exposing most people to alternative
12 views to their own, and to the views of most of those we talk to. At least in the British
13 context, therefore, the threat of citizens retreating into self-confirming communities of the
14 like-minded which perceive larger and larger ideological distances between their own and
15 rival political views is, while real, not overwhelming. Being embedded in friendship circles
16 with different partisan compositions may drive Britons apart a little, but not so far as to make
17 the gap unbridgeable. The implications for democracy, while not golden, are not disastrous
18 either. And there is a silver lining too: to the extent that most conversation networks remain
19 politically diverse, citizens are more likely to see at least some common ground with their
20 political rivals. Talk matters.
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Notes

- 1 All three surveys are weighted in the analyses below, to take account of sample biases and substantial over-samples of Scottish respondents.
- 2 In 1987, the centre ground of British politics was dominated by a formal alliance between the Liberal Party and the Social Democrats. Prior to the 1992 election, the two merged to form one party, the Liberal Democrats (Stevenson, 1993).
- 3 To check whether our results were dependent on how we defined key variables, we also used a different measure of network political diversity, the numbers of Conservative discussants, Labour discussants and Liberal-SDP Alliance/Liberal Democrat discussants in each individual's network. The findings (not discussed in the main text) are consistent with those reported below for our main measure of network diversity, giving us considerable confidence in our results (details of the key results are available in Appendix 1, Tables A2, A3 and A4).
- 4 Cronbach's Alpha for the four items was 0.640 in 1987, and 0.622 in 1992: as only one of the questions was asked in 2014, this was not an option then. While not a hard-and-fast rule, the conventional threshold for Cronbach's alpha is 0.7 or above. That said, the exact value of alpha is partly a function of the number of items going into a scale, however; the more items in the scale, other things being equal, the higher the alpha will be. Here, with just four items in each scale, alpha will tend to be lower than for similar scales with more items. In most cases, even so, alpha gets close to the conventional 0.7 threshold and none drop far below 0.6. To maintain comparability between scales, it is important that the scales are all defined in the same way. Hence we accept scales with alphas slightly below the 0.7 threshold.

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4 5 The Cronbach's Alpha scores for the Conservatives in 1987 and 1992 were 0.652 and 0.703
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6 respectively; for Labour, they were 0.572 and 0.552; and for the Liberal-SDP
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8 Alliance/Liberal Democrats, they were 0.572 and 0.604.
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11 6 It is worth noting that the survey company asked people to name, unprompted, the issues
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13 that mattered to them: it did not present them with a list to choose from. The absence of
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15 women's rights as a pressing issue reflects public priorities, therefore, and not
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17 methodological artefacts.
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Figure 1: The left-right scales

a) Unemployment and inflation

Getting people back to work should be government's top priority												Keeping prices down should be government's top priority
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		11	

b) Taxation and government services

Government should put up taxes a lot and spend much more on health and social services.												Government should cut taxes a lot and spend much less on health and social services
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		11	

c) Nationalisation and privatisation

Government should nationalise many more private companies												Government should sell off many more nationalised industries
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		11	

d) Redistribution

Government should make much greater efforts to make people's incomes more equal												Government should be much less concerned about how equal people's incomes are
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		11	

Table 1: Uniformity of partisan discussants and the difference between personal and perceived party placement on the 1987 dimensions: regression models (standard errors in brackets: all models control for age, education, class, partisan ID, strength of party ID and interest in the election result)

a)	Difference between respondent L-R self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Lib-SDP Alliance
Partisan composition of conversation network (comparison = non-partisan)			
All Conservatives	0.358 (0.132)**	0.807 (0.125)**	0.621 (0.120)**
All Labour	-0.877 (0.147)**	0.115 (0.137)	-0.052 (0.130)
All Lib-SDP	-0.650 (0.215)**	0.127 (0.202)	0.344 (0.182)+
Mixed	-0.480 (0.113)**	0.537 (0.107)**	0.317 (0.100)**
R ²	0.352	0.298	0.309

b)	Difference between respondent defence self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Lib-SDP Alliance
Partisan composition of conversation network (comparison = non-partisan)			
All Conservatives	0.342 (0.164)*	0.637 (0.169)**	0.463 (0.175)**
All Labour	-1.005 (0.182)**	-0.234 (0.186)	-0.664 (0.191)**
All Lib-SDP	-0.282 (0.269)	-0.096 (0.276)	-0.270 (0.275)
Mixed	-0.293 (0.141)*	0.226 (0.145)	-0.181 (0.148)
R ²	0.250	0.127	0.178

c)	Difference between respondent welfare self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Lib-SDP Alliance
Partisan composition of conversation network (comparison = non-partisan)			
All Conservatives	0.373 (0.184)*	0.473 (0.165)**	0.340 (0.160)*
All Labour	-1.017 (0.204)**	0.123 (0.181)	-0.137 (0.176)
All Lib-SDP	-0.755 (0.302)*	0.359 (0.268)	0.245 (0.249)
Mixed	-0.548 (0.158)**	0.200 (0.140)	-0.045 (0.135)
R ²	0.300	0.176	0.191

d)	Difference between respondent law & order self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Lib-SDP Alliance
Partisan composition of conversation network (comparison = non-partisan)			
All Conservatives	-0.165 (0.200)	0.466 (0.194)*	0.255 (0.172)
All Labour	-0.177 (0.222)	0.174 (0.213)	-0.029 (0.189)
All Lib-SDP	-0.629 (0.332)+	0.211 (0.318)	-0.299 (0.271)
Mixed	-0.498 (0.172)**	0.280 (0.166)	-0.038 (0.146)
R ²	0.052	0.066	0.044

+ significant at p = 0.10

* significant at p = 0.05

** significant at p = 0.01

Table 2: Uniformity of partisan discussants and the difference between personal and perceived party placement on the 1992 dimensions: regression models (standard errors in brackets: models control for age, education, class, partisan ID, strength of party ID and interest in the election result)

a)	Difference between respondent L-R self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Partisan composition of conversation network (comparison = non-partisan)			
All Conservatives	0.553 (0.330)+	1.108 (0.319)**	0.927 (0.286)**
All Labour	-1.398 (0.562)**	-0.099 (0.385)	-0.313 (0.345)
All Lib Dems	-0.179 (0.359)	0.498 (0.344)	-0.041 (0.293)
Mixed	-0.038 (0.042)	0.126 (0.041)**	0.084 (0.036)*
R ²	0.299	0.220	0.253

b)	Difference between respondent EU self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Partisan composition of conversation network (comparison = non-partisan)			
All Conservatives	-0.101 (0.558)	0.641 (0.578)	0.888 (0.541)
All Labour	-1.410 (0.690)*	-0.157 (0.696)	-0.169 (0.642)
All Lib Dems	-0.425 (0.618)	-0.183 (0.618)	0.151 (0.556)
Mixed	-0.123 (0.071)+	-0.096 (0.073)	0.008 (0.068)
R ²	0.065	0.039	0.038

c)	Difference between respondent welfare self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Partisan composition of conversation network (comparison = non-partisan)			
All Conservatives	0.433 (0.271)	0.715 (0.270)**	0.564 (0.240)*
All Labour	-0.716 (0.333)*	0.383 (0.327)	-0.029 (0.291)
All Lib Dems	-0.134 (0.235)	-0.087 (0.245)	0.004 (0.198)
Mixed	-0.014 (0.035)	0.056 (0.034)	0.029 (0.031)
R ²	0.266	0.063	0.098

d)	Difference between respondent women's rights self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Partisan composition of conversation network (number of discussants who support party x)			
All Conservatives	-0.039 (0.249)	-0.025 (0.248)	0.025 (0.245)
All Labour	0.098 (0.304)	0.329 (0.296)	0.285 (0.288)
All Lib Dems	0.227 (0.241)	0.167 (0.232)	0.145 (0.205)
Mixed	0.002 (0.032)	-0.012 (0.031)	0.004 (0.030)
R ²	0.115	0.039	0.044

e)	Difference between respondent defence self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Partisan composition of conversation network (comparison = non-partisan)			
All Conservatives	0.103 (0.272)	0.546 (0.270)*	0.205 (0.244)
All Labour	-0.628 (0.336)+	-0.053 (0.326)	-0.225 (0.297)
All Lib Dems	-0.320 (0.247)	0.153 (0.241)	0.045 (0.207)
Mixed	-0.021 (0.035)	0.062 (0.034)	0.020 (0.031)

R ²	0.074	0.087	0.090
+ significant at p = 0.10	* significant at p = 0.05	** significant at p = 0.01	

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Table 3: Uniformity of partisan discussants and the difference between personal and perceived party placement on the 2014 ideological dimensions: regression models (standard errors in brackets: models control for age, education, class, partisan ID, strength of party ID and attention to politics)

a)	Difference between respondent EU integration self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Partisan composition of conversation network (comparison = non-partisan)			
All Conservatives	-0.264 (0.126)*	-0.346 (0.127)**	-0.545 (0.142)**
All Labour	0.141 (0.121)	0.436 (0.121)**	0.303 (0.135)*
All Lib Dems	0.154 (0.072)*	0.187 (0.072)*	0.132 (0.079)+
Mixed	-0.021 (0.025)	-0.011 (0.025)	-0.079 (0.028)**
R ²	0.123	0.147	0.135

b)	Difference between respondent redistribution self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Partisan composition of conversation network (comparison = non-partisan)			
All Conservatives	-0.073 (0.096)	0.576 (0.086)**	0.509 (0.093)**
All Labour	-0.666 (0.090)**	-0.243 (0.080)**	-0.505 (0.087)**
All Lib Dems	-0.231 (0.054)**	-0.112 (0.048)*	-0.188 (0.051)**
Mixed	-0.100 (0.019)	0.008 (0.017)	-0.006 (0.018)
R ²	0.122	0.164	0.173

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: unreported analyses

Table A1: Respondents' ideological differentials between self-reported position and perceived party position.

	Minimum	Lower quartile	Median	Upper quartile	Maximum	Mean	N
1987 left-right scale: Conservative differential	-10.00	-5.00	-2.50	-0.50	9.25	-2.97	3392
1987 left-right scale: Labour differential	-8.50	0.00	1.75	3.75	10.00	2.02	3341
1987 left-right scale: Alliance differential	-10.00	-1.25	0.00	1.50	10.00	0.14	2898
1987 defence scale: Conservative differential	-10.00	-5.00	-2.00	0.00	10.00	-2.88	3624
1987 defence scale: Labour differential	-10.00	1.00	3.00	5.00	10.00	3.06	3634
1987 defence scale: Alliance differential	-10.00	-2.00	0.00	2.00	10.00	0.24	3148
1987 law + order scale: Conservative differential	-10.00	-1.00	0.00	2.00	10.00	0.19	3517
1987 law + order scale: Labour differential	-10.00	0.00	1.00	4.00	10.00	2.07	3438
1987 law + order scale: Alliance differential	-10.00	0.00	1.00	3.00	10.00	1.35	3144
1987 welfare scale: Conservative differential	-10.00	-7.00	-3.00	0.00	10.00	-3.41	3655
1987 welfare scale: Labour differential	-10.00	0.00	1.00	4.00	10.00	1.83	3622
1987 welfare scale: Alliance differential	-10.00	-1.00	0.00	2.00	10.00	0.16	3298
1992 left-right scale: Conservative differential	-10.00	-5.00	-2.50	-0.50	5.00	-2.90	1278
1992 left-right scale: Labour differential	-9.50	0.00	1.00	3.13	10.00	1.48	1268
1992 left-right scale: Lib Dem differential	-10.00	-1.25	0.00	1.25	8.75	0.03	1132
1992 Europe scale: Conservative differential	-10.00	-2.00	0.00	2.00	10.00	0.40	1316
1992 Europe scale: Labour differential	-10.00	-2.00	0.00	3.00	10.00	0.74	1252
1992 Europe scale: Lib Dem differential	-10.00	-2.00	0.00	3.00	10.00	1.02	1187

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1992 welfare scale: Conservative differential	-6.00	-4.00	-1.00	0.00	6.00	-1.91	1359
1992 welfare scale: Labour differential	-6.00	-1.00	0.00	2.00	6.00	0.38	1352
1992 welfare scale: Lib Dem differential	-6.00	-1.00	0.00	1.00	6.00	-0.25	1263
1992 defence scale: Conservative differential	-6.00	-2.00	0.00	1.00	6.00	-0.58	1313
1992 defence scale: Labour differential	-6.00	0.00	1.00	2.00	6.00	0.76	1302
1992 defence scale: Lib Dem differential	-6.00	-1.00	0.00	1.00	6.00	0.21	1179
1992 women's rights scale: Conservative differential	-6.00	-2.00	0.00	0.00	6.00	-0.79	1346
1992 women's rights scale: Labour differential	-6.00	-2.00	0.00	0.00	6.00	-0.55	1318
1992 women's rights scale: Lib Dem differential	-6.00	-2.00	-1.00	0.00	6.00	-0.64	1234
2014 EU integration scale: Conservative differential	-10.00	-4.00	-1.00	1.00	10.00	-1.12	10422
2014 EU integration scale: Labour differential	-10.00	-5.00	-2.00	0.00	10.00	-2.24	10151
2014 EU integration scale: Lib Dem differential	-10.00	-7.00	-3.00	0.00	10.00	-3.29	10165
2014 redistribution scale: Conservative differential	-10.00	-5.00	-1.00	0.00	10.00	1.08	21212
2014 redistribution scale: Conservative differential	-10.00	-1.00	0.00	3.00	10.00	-1.77	21198
2014 redistribution scale: Conservative differential	-10.00	-2.00	0.00	3.00	10.00	0.33	20207

Table A2.: Number of partisan discussants and difference between personal and perceived party placement on the 1987 defence ideological dimensions: regression models (standard errors in brackets: all models control for age, education, class, partisan ID, strength of party ID and interest in the election result)

a)	Difference between respondent L-R self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Lib-SDP Alliance
Partisan composition of conversation network (number of discussants who support party x)			
N Conservatives	0.233 (0.066)**	0.576 (0.062)**	0.411 (0.059)**
N Labour	-0.550 (0.071)**	0.070 (0.066)	-0.034 (0.062)
N Lib-SDP	-0.410 (0.093)**	0.181 (0.087)*	0.151 (0.080)+
R ²	0.353	0.307	0.314

b)	Difference between respondent defence self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Lib-SDP Alliance
Partisan composition of conversation network (number of discussants who support party x)			
N Conservatives	0.269 (0.083)**	0.439 (0.085)**	0.294 (0.087)**
N Labour	-0.509 (0.089)**	-0.122 (0.090)	-0.400 (0.093)**
N Lib-SDP	-0.182 (0.118)	0.010 (0.120)	-0.194 (0.121)
R ²	0.248	0.131	0.181

c)	Difference between respondent welfare self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Lib-SDP Alliance
Partisan composition of conversation network (number of discussants who support party x)			
N Conservatives	0.322 (0.093)**	0.292 (0.082)**	0.202 (0.080)*
N Labour	-0.588 (0.099)**	0.009 (0.087)	-0.109 (0.085)
N Lib-SDP	-0.441 (0.131)**	0.127 (0.116)	-0.010 (0.109)
R ²	0.303	0.178	0.191

d)	Difference between respondent law & order self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Lib-SDP Alliance
Partisan composition of conversation network (number of discussants who support party x)			
N Conservatives	-0.089 (0.101)	0.262 (0.098)**	0.115 (0.086)
N Labour	-0.207 (0.108)+	0.025 (0.103)	-0.051 (0.091)
N Lib-SDP	-0.397 (0.144)**	0.203 (0.138)	-0.128 (0.118)
R ²	0.052	0.067	0.045

+ significant at p = 0.10

* significant at p = 0.05

** significant at p = 0.01

Table A3: Number of partisan discussants and difference between personal and perceived party placement on the 1992 defence ideological dimensions: regression models (standard errors in brackets: all models control for age, education, class, partisan ID, strength of party ID and interest in the election result)

a)	Difference between respondent L-R self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Partisan composition of conversation network (number of discussants who support party x)			
N Conservatives	0.127 (0.088)	0.355 (0.085)**	0.256 (0.076)**
N Labour	-0.439 (0.096)**	-0.013 (0.092)	-0.096 (0.083)
N Lib Dems	-0.131 (0.162)	0.107 (0.156)	0.024 (0.135)
R ²	0.304	0.220	0.252

b)	Difference between respondent EU self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Partisan composition of conversation network (number of discussants who support party x)			
N Conservatives	-0.215 (0.149)	0.001 (0.154)	0.082 (0.143)
N Labour	-0.577 (0.165)**	-0.147 (0.169)	-0.065 (0.155)
N Lib Dems	-0.660 (0.273)*	-0.087 (0.283)	0.228 (0.255)
R ²	0.075	0.036	0.037

c)	Difference between respondent welfare self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Partisan composition of conversation network (number of discussants who support party x)			
N Conservatives	0.282 (0.072)**	0.224 (0.072)**	0.207 (0.064)**
N Labour	-0.289 (0.081)**	0.049 (0.080)	0.005 (0.071)
N Lib Dems	-0.126 (0.123)	-0.001 (0.124)	0.076 (0.106)
R ²	0.280	0.065	0.102

d)	Difference between respondent women's rights self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Partisan composition of conversation network (number of discussants who support party x)			
N Conservatives	0.055 (0.067)	-0.019 (0.066)	0.018 (0.065)
N Labour	-0.106 (0.075)	0.001 (0.072)	0.050 (0.070)
N Lib Dems	-0.045 (0.116)	-0.106 (0.112)	0.054 (0.105)
R ²	0.117	0.038	0.044

e)	Difference between respondent defence self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Partisan composition of conversation network (number of discussants who support party x)			
N Conservatives	0.067 (0.074)	0.173 (0.072)*	0.112 (0.065)+
N Labour	-0.284 (0.082)**	-0.048 (0.080)	-0.069 (0.073)
N Lib Dems	-0.127 (0.127)	0.036 (0.124)	-0.119 (0.108)
R ²	0.081	0.088	0.094

+ significant at p = 0.10

* significant at p = 0.05

** significant at p = 0.01

Table A4: Number of partisan discussants and difference between personal and perceived party placement on the 2014 ideological dimensions: regression models (standard errors in brackets: all models control for age, education, class, partisan ID, strength of party ID and attention to politics)

a)	Difference between respondent EU integration self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Partisan composition of conversation network (number of discussants who support party x)			
N Conservatives	-0.148 (0.055)**	-0.210 (0.055)**	-0.289 (0.061)**
N Labour	0.168 (0.050)**	0.311 (0.050)**	0.287 (0.056)**
N Lib Dems	0.400 (0.093)**	0.519 (0.093)**	0.445 (0.103)**
R ²	0.125	0.152	0.138

b)	Difference between respondent redistribution self-placement and:		
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Partisan composition of conversation network (number of discussants who support party x)			
N Conservatives	0.151 (0.042)**	0.395 (0.037)**	0.378 (0.040)**
N Labour	-0.290 (0.037)**	-0.086 (0.033)**	-0.239 (0.036)**
N Lib Dems	-0.194 (0.072)**	-0.042 (0.064)	-0.118 (0.068)+
R ²	0.122	0.166	0.175

Appendix 2: Codings for the control variables

Partisan identification: Dummy variables were created for Conservative, Labour, Liberal (etc.), and 'other party' partisans. The comparison group was individuals who reported no partisan loyalties.

Strength of partisanship: Dummy variables were created for very, fairly and not very strong partisanship, with no party ID as the control group).

Interest in politics: In 1987 and 1992 this was measured by self-reported interest in politics (indexed here by a dummy variable contrasting those who reported caring about the election outcome – coded 1 – with those who said they did not care – coded 0). In 2014 the concept was measured by the amount of attention respondents felt they generally paid to politics (coded from 0 for 'pay no attention' to 10 for 'pay a great deal of attention');

Highest educational qualification: Educational qualifications were divided into four groups: degree-level qualifications; post-school qualifications below degree level; school-level qualifications; and no formal qualifications. Dummy variables were constructed for the first three, and the last group served as the comparison group.

Social class: In 1987 and 1992, class is measured using respondents' Heath-Goldthorpe class, categorised into five groups: the middle class salariat; routine non-manual workers; the petit bourgeoisie (small business owners); foremen and supervisors; and manual workers (the first four are each given dummy variable, and the last serves as the control group). In 2014, the equivalent class variable is available for only part of the sample, so we employ individuals' self-reported class affiliation, which is split into four groups: working class (the comparison group); middle class; other class; and no class.