

# EXAMINING POLITICAL COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

by

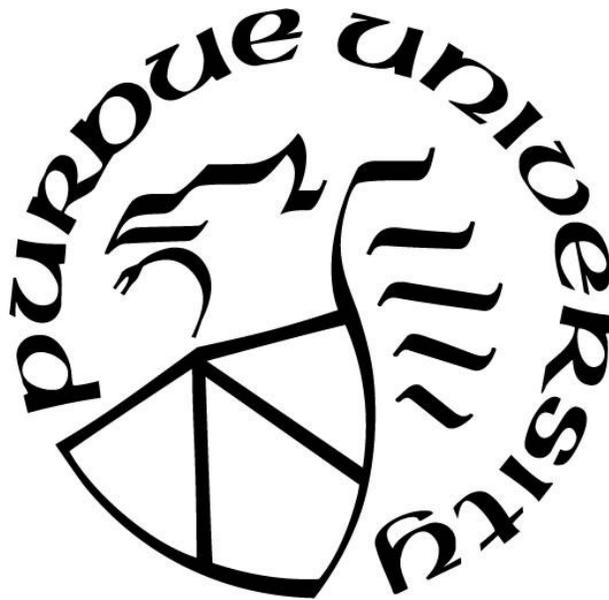
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*For my parents, who promised they would read my thesis upon its completion.  
This is payback for all the times I had to water the backyard in Reno.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Increased partisan apathy, affective polarization, and purposeful selection of homogenous political discussion groups are of growing concern as politics within the United States becomes more contentious. While previous work has considered when political discussions occur, if discussions are deliberative, and whether discussions affect democratic outcomes, this study focuses on the process someone undergoes when determining whether to participate in a political discussion. This paper examines political communication apprehension by considering how personality predispositions and uncertainty reduction influence the expectancy-value judgments made when determining if participating in a certain political discussion situation is worth the cost. Factors of political communication apprehension were determined through an exploratory factor analysis of a battery of questions designed to capture elements of political communication apprehension. Findings indicate that even if people are not very attached to their political parties, their political communication apprehension is largely informed by expectancy value judgements based on information they have learned from the political world.

## INTRODUCTION

“Politics” has become increasingly social and emotional as evidenced by the rising number of protests advocating for a variety of social issues, less peaceful political events (such as storming of the United States Capitol in 2021), and the growing amount of rhetoric that vilifies and glorifies political figures (Erichsen et al., 2020; Kelly, 2020). Opinions and perceptions of people outside of one’s own political party have become increasingly negative as partisan antipathy continues to rise (Pew Research, 2019b). In fact, people are beginning to use apolitical cues to help reduce contact with opposing party members in social situations that are not necessarily political in nature (Lee, 2020). Recent scholarship has discovered that people are also making active choices when selecting political discussion partners (Settle & Carlson, 2019). These choices include which topics will be discussed and with whom—as people select like-minded others to have discussions with intentionally, instead of circumstantially (Settle & Carlson, 2019). This has not always been the case, as previous scholarship examining in-person political discussion group formation found that unintentional choices, such as geographic sorting and cultural overlap from geographic sorting, rather than intentional sorting created like-minded political discussion networks (Lang & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2015; Sussell, 2013; Tam Cho et al., 2013). While changes in partisan policy preferences might partially explain the development of active and intentional sorting, there is much debate as to whether people’s policy preferences are truly becoming more extreme (see Abramowitz, 2010 and Fiorina & Abrams, 2008) or if people’s dislike and distrust of an opposing political party, known as affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2019), is contributing to intentional sorting.

Another reason why people might be intentionally sorting into homogenous political discussion networks is to prevent or reduce anxiety relating to political communication. For example, some individuals may be apprehensive to share their political opinions or discuss various political topics with people from opposing political parties. People may also choose to withhold disclosure of their political party membership in certain political discussion conditions because they fear conflict will occur if this information is revealed. Anxiety triggered by actual or anticipated communication is known as communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1977). This apprehension can be trait-based or situational, meaning that apprehension can be general or related to certain speaking formats, audiences, or topics (Cole & McCroskey, 2003). While there has been

an abundance of scholarship examining the existence of affective polarization and the relationships between emotions and affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2019; Huddy et al., 2015; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015), there has been little work examining what contributes to anxiety and expectations relating to intra-party and cross-party communication. These insights could help explain why people are intentionally sorting into like-minded political discussion groups.

Political communication apprehension has been conceptually defined as “the fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication about politics with another person or persons” (Jones-Carmack, 2019, p. 75). This definition is helpful in coining and understanding a potentially overlooked area of situational communication apprehension. As of yet, political discussions have been studied in three major ways: (1) the likelihood of them occurring and when and where they occur; (2) how deliberative these discussions are and how often people are exposed to differing political views, within the discussions; and (3) how political discussions affect democratic outcomes (Eveland et al., 2011). Findings in political discourse literature have hinted at the existence of political communication apprehension. For example, people whose heart rates increased the most when anticipating a political discussion within a lab setting were more likely to have homogenous political discussion networks in the real world (Carlson et al., 2020). In other work, people who participated in a lab group political discussion featuring politically diverse members perceived more conflict within their discussion than participants who were assigned to a politically homogenous group (Price et al., 2003). Moreover, in political group deliberations, high perceptions of disagreement correlated with participants categorizing political deliberation as uninteresting, less enjoyable, and more confusing than participants who perceived less disagreement (Woicieszak & Price, 2012). A potential step forward in studying political discourse can be achieved by focusing on the process a person undergoes when determining if they will participate in political discussions, as anxiety relating to real or anticipated political communication may help explain why people avoid participating in political discussions generally or forgo participation for some discussions, but not others. Moreover, considering the communicative process of potential political communication and political communication allows for emotions, such as anxiety, personality predispositions, and social attachment to political party to shape substantive outcomes, such as political communication networks and political discourse even when discussion does not occur.

Political discussions are often intimidating conversations for many, as politics is a vast subject with personal ties and decisive views (Skitka et al., 2005). Whether a person chooses to participate in a political discussion after they factor in how apprehensive they feel in the present discussion context is likely a function of their existing expectations of the pending interpersonal interaction and the value the discussion might eventually bring, known as an expectancy-value evaluation (Eccles et al, 1983; Wigfield, 1994). Because political parties and their members can create expectations of how in-party members should behave and out-party members will behave, these groups likely influence people's expectations for cross-party interactions—which in turn might be why people are starting to select politically similar individuals within and outside of socially political contexts.

Moreover, affective polarization and social attachment to political party may reveal how strongly people hold the expectations constructed by their party through the social identity process, as research on affective polarization has largely been influenced by social identity theory (Huddy et al., 2015; Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Mason, 2015). If individuals avoid cross-party discussions because of expectations created by party memberships, these individuals must then rely on what they know about out-group partisans from information conveyed by their party organization rather than personal experience. Subsequently, affective polarization may bias the evaluations made by a person who is trying to determine the cost and value of participating in a cross-party political discussion, especially if their political party has characterized discussions with the other side as being futile. As a result, emotional, or affective, elements of partisanship that are gained through processes described by social identity theory may be a helpful lens in understanding why people have apprehension when it comes to discussing politics with members of political out-groups, as social attachment to partisanship may be a way in which individuals reduce uncertainty in a pending political discussion.

Although some evaluations created in the expectancy-value process are informed by knowledge gained from being a member of a specific political party, it is unlikely that this information is the only thing influencing discussion participation. Personality predispositions are also important to consider when examining why certain evaluations are made, as predispositions have been shown to influence various types of communication in the past (Sims, 2017; Ruben & Ruben, 1996). As such, the concepts of interest in this study include trait-like communication apprehension, willingness to self-censor, need for cognition, political efficacy, and social

attachment to political party. Those with severe trait-like communication apprehension will likely have high political apprehension because they fear speaking in certain contexts generally. For those who have medium to mild communication apprehension, anxiety may result from knowing the political party preference of a pending discussion partner due to learned stereotypes. These stereotypes likely originate from social group processes that occur within a person's political party, which can be explained using social identity theory (Smith, 1999; Tajfel, 1969). Because conflict and disagreement make political discussions less appealing (Woicieszak & Price, 2012), perhaps pending perceptions of what will occur in certain political discussions induces anxiety, which in turn may cause people to opt-out of these discussions. Willingness to self-censor may also reveal this, as people with high willingness to self-censor typically do so when they perceive that their audience does not agree with them (Hayes et al., 2010), which would suggest they only have political communication apprehension within certain communication circumstances. Meanwhile, familiarity with the political topic being discussed, which can be considered as an element of one's feelings of internal political efficacy and need for cognition, could influence political communication apprehension because of one's confidence in their own knowledge on a specific topic or ability to participate in political tasks. As a result, those who have overarching communication apprehension are likely to face anxiety when discussing politics due to negative evaluations, but even those who do not have overarching communication apprehension may experience anxiety due to specific discussion parameters related to political discussions or other personality predispositions.

This study proposes that political communication apprehension is influenced by expectancy-value evaluations, which are influenced by personality differences and reductions in uncertainty that come from one's experiences and attachments to a political party. This research considers political communication apprehension using data collected from a questionnaire aimed to measure several latent constructs. Analysis was conducted from an exploratory approach framed by several hypotheses and research questions based on existing literature. This approach was taken due to the small amount of research that currently exists on political discussions from a communication apprehension perspective. Moreover, attempting to understand the underlying facets of political communication apprehension could prove useful to the eventual development of a political communication apprehension measure. Such a measure could prove useful to the fields of communication and political science, as political communication apprehension levels may relate

to one's comfort level with cognitive dissonance since individuals with low political communication apprehension may be more comfortable with facing diverse realities proposed in heterogeneous political discussions. It could also help explain why a virtuous cycle exists between political efficacy and political discussions (Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). Moreover, political communication apprehension could help scholars understand why heterogeneous political discussions can cause people to change their attitude strength in some circumstances (see Klar, 2014 and Levendusky et al., 2016). Ultimately, studying political discussions from a communicative view may provide new insights into political discourse literature and political discussion networks.

## **REVIVEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Expectancy-Value Theory and Uncertainty Reduction Political Discussions**

Expectancy-value theory is a useful framework for studying political communication apprehension because the theory can accommodate both the miscellaneous evaluations a person develops when deciding whether they will participate in a particular political discussion and their general evaluations regarding hypothetical political discussion scenarios. Expectancy-value theory originates from the social science disciplines and is inclusive of various sub-models that assume people cognitively evaluate both the likelihood and desirability of impending consequences from a decision they might make (Chen & Fang, 2008; Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). Typically, people select actions they expect to manifest the maximum number of positive outcomes (Fishbein, 1967). This theory not only permits people to make evaluations about individual events but allows people to maintain an overarching appraisal of an activity broadly (Dietrich et al., 2019). In the case of political discussions, a person can make expectancy-value judgments based on the parameters of an immediate political discussion, while holding judgements of political discussions broadly.

Because political engagement is motivated by both reasoning and psychological behaviors (Jung et al., 2011), some people may find political discussions highly valuable while other individuals will tend to avoid them due to a lack of perceived value. From a communication standpoint, those who expect political discussions to be illuminating and perform well in political discussions should be more likely to participate in any given political discussion. This is because these individuals have determined the activity to be enjoyable or valuable while concurrently perceiving the task as having a low or reasonable level of personal cost. On the other hand, people who find political discussions to be draining or cognitively complex are probably less likely to participate in a political discussion because participation is neither valuable nor positive while demanding a higher level of personal cost.

Expectations for success, intrinsic value, attainment value, utility value, and cost ultimately motivate a person's choice to participate in a task and impact task performance (Eccles et al., 1983). Expectations for success considers how good an individual is at the specified task or how well they have performed previously when completing the task, as discussed previously. Intrinsic value is the enjoyment obtained from doing the task (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). For example, politicians

or students who major in political science likely enjoy political discussions more than people in other professions or students from other majors. Attainment value and utility value are considered extrinsic motivators (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic value typically comes from personal choice and/or compliance with external entities (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Attainment value is the importance of doing well on a task, which is typically related to whether an individual sees the task as central to their sense of self, or a way to confirm or express self (Wigfield et al., 2009). In the case of political discussions, how well an individual feels they need to perform during a discussion might relate to political career goals, their desire to be an issue activist, how emotionally attached they are to their political ideology, their need to “win,” or how intelligent they want to appear. Utility value is closely related to attainment value, as it is conceptualized as how useful completing the task is in helping the individual progress in some capacity or how the completion of the task might help the individual in the future (Wigfield et al., 2009).

Cost is understood as what an individual must give up to complete a task and the amount of cognitive and physical effort a task will take to complete (Eccles et al., 1983). Cost is multidimensional and is typically seen as the influence that subtracts from an individual’s overall evaluation of whether they participate in a specific task at hand (Flake et al., 2015). In the case of political discussions, cost could include physical activities a person could be doing rather than having a political discussion in addition to the potential social and emotional costs that originate from any given discussion. For example, conflict and tension might occur between family members who are of different political beliefs after attempting to have a conversation about relevant political topics (Doherty, 2020). Conflict and disagreement may make this type of political discussion have a higher social cost than a discussion with like-minded individuals. Young adults are less likely to participate in political discussions with their friends or parents if they perceive these potential discussants as having more distant political views (Levinsen & Yndigegn, 2015). A different study seeking out why people avoid political discussions, participants indicated that they would need to be paid more to have a discussion with a cross-partisan than a co-partisan regardless of if the discussion was political in nature (Settle & Carlson, 2019).

All values assigned to completing tasks are subjective, as people will assign different values to the same task for a variety of reasons (Wigfield et al., 2009). Moreover, individual motivations behind liking and disliking political discussions, or whether one feels political communication apprehension, varies across individuals. For example, one person may not enjoy

political discussions because they feel they are not qualified to participate or have not done well during political discussions in the past, while another person's distaste for political discussions may stem from fear of causing contention amongst their peers or family members. Expectancies and values, along with indicators of performance on a task, begin developing in childhood and both strengthen and stabilize as children become adults (Wigfield & Gladstone, 2019). As such, it is logical to examine how personality predispositions can possibly contribute to political discussion expectancy and value judgements as part of a communicative approach to understanding political discussions. Of interest in this study include trait-like communication apprehension, social political party attachment, willingness to self-censor, political efficacy, and need for cognition because these differences are entangled with intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, utility value, and cost. These relationships will be examined in their respective sections later within the literature review.

It is also important to note expectancy and value judgments are sensitive to situational differences (Dietrich et al., 2019). Although people are likely to have a preconceived conception of what a political discussion is and a corresponding value to participating in what they understand to be a political discussion, their conceptualizations are likely to be different across individuals. Especially when considering how people tend to define the term "political" in ways that correspond to sociopolitical differences (Fitzgerald, 2013). As individuals are given more information, or they in some other way reduce uncertainty about political discussions, their expectancies and values should adjust in accordance with their personality predispositions and the information they have gained through political socialization. Uncertainty has been shown to generate cognitive stress (Peters et al., 2017) and prevents people from creating what they believe are accurate expectancy-value evaluations. To cope with this stress, people will strategically reduce uncertainty in early and initial communication interactions so they can accurately predict other people's behaviors and actions in current and future interactions, known as uncertainty reduction theory (Berger, 1979, 1986; Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

In the context of political discussions, reducing uncertainty can be achieved by learning more about one's discussion partners. A person can also reduce uncertainty by projecting her expectations on a person who is a member of a group with which she has previously interacted before, such as a political party, even if this method is inaccurate. For example, she may expect a political discussion on gun control to go well when discussing the topic with a fellow Democrat,

but she may expect a political discussion on this topic with a Republican to go poorly. In fact, not knowing a conversation partner's political preferences can create uncertainty and may influence whether individuals choose to talk about politics or how they approach the discussion of politics. Pew Research Center (2019b) recently found that approximately 45 percent of people were not too comfortable or not at all comfortable talking about Donald Trump with a stranger. (This type of uncertainty reduction will be addressed within the social identity section of this paper). It is important to note that although people reference what they have learned from their political experiences during uncertainty reduction, the implementation of uncertainty reduction is a communicative practice implemented in various interpersonal settings, including conversations about healthcare (Sheer & Cline, 1995), during times of crisis (Son et al., 2020), and in business practices (Deng et al., 2019). As such, uncertainty reduction theory should be considered a tool that is native to an individual's role as a communicator in a variety of contexts, even though reductions in uncertainty may be informed by political knowledge and experiences within political discussions.

Therefore, expectancy-value theory is an appropriate framework for studying political communication apprehension, as it explains why people have expectations for political discussions and how people ascribe different values to participating in political discussions. These expectations and value perceptions originate from an individual's perceived expectations for success, attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost, which are influenced by people's roles as communicators and participants in the political process. And perhaps most importantly, expectancy-value theory allows for apprehension and changes in value to originate from what people have learned from their political experiences and how they approach communication.

### **Applying Communication Apprehension Literature to Political Discussion Expectancies**

Communication apprehension is likely an important factor in understanding political communication apprehension, as it potentially influences the expectancy-value evaluations a person makes regarding political discussions. Trait-like communication apprehension takes various types of oral communication into account and is not topic-specific (McCroskey, 1986). Situational communication apprehension is anxiety in response to certain communication contexts or situations (Booth-Butterfield & Gould, 1986). These contexts may include when a topic has been specified or a specific audience has been revealed. Political communication apprehension

itself is a type of situational communication apprehension. As such, someone with trait-like communication apprehension may also have political communication apprehension, while someone with low levels of trait-like communication apprehension may have political communication apprehension generally or in certain contexts. As discussed previously, communication apprehension can be understood from a trait-like perspective and a situational perspective, but both perspectives cause anxiety.

Trait-like communication apprehension is understood as a personality predisposition that exists across several communication contexts; people who have generally high communication apprehension have anxiety in communication situations even when there is no rational reason for this anxiety to exist (McCroskey, 1986). While people may not have a rational reason for why the anxiety exists and contributes to their high levels of communication apprehension, individuals can still make evaluations as to whether experiencing anxiety is worth speaking out on particular topics, such as political issues, or in specific speaking situations.

Voluntarily participating in political discussions is probably unlikely for those who have high communication apprehension, because there is a high cost (i.e., high levels of anxiety) to participation. Moreover, those with higher levels of communication apprehension will likely perceive themselves as performing poorly in a hypothetical political discussion, as there is a negative relationship between communication apprehension and communication skill (Allen & Bourhis, 1996). This is important, as expectancy and value perceptions impact task performance (Eccles et al., 1983). Additionally, previous work has indicated that a person feels less communication apprehension when they encounter a form of communication more frequently and feel it is important to participate in (Pederson et al., 2008), which indicates that people with high levels of communication apprehension may not find high attainment value in political discussions, which could create a cycle of avoidance. As a result, trait-like communication apprehension should be positively related with political communication apprehension to some extent, as people with high levels of trait-like communication apprehension are likely to be anxious when communicating, regardless of what topic they are discussing with others, where people with lower levels of communication apprehension could have a various levels of political communication apprehension. Moreover, considering trait-like communication apprehension while trying to understand what positively correlates with political communication apprehension allows individuals to be examined as communicators in a political realm.

*H1: Trait-like communication apprehension is positively related to political communication apprehension.*

## **Political Communication Apprehension as a Form of Situational Communication Apprehension**

Various communication situations could also play a role in political communication apprehension, as trait-like communication apprehension can only predict different types of situational communication apprehension, such as political communication apprehension, to a certain extent and is especially sensitive to variabilities and contingencies (McCroskey & Beatty, 1984). For example, the commonly used communication apprehension measurement is better at predicting communication apprehension when people do not know others in a communication situation (Parks, 1980). Someone without trait-like communication apprehension or even low levels of trait-like communication apprehension may choose to avoid political discussions for reasons that are subject to expectancy and value perceptions. Beliefs and evaluations of outcomes within expectancy-value theory are often unstable and may depend on context (Babrow & Striley, 2015). Therefore, expectancy-value evaluations for political discussions should change depending on the context and what personality predispositions a person has. For example, a person who does not have trait-like communication apprehension may evaluate some political discussion contexts as positive or may experience situational apprehension during certain types of discussions. As such, examining political communication apprehension in the context of expectancy value theory is also important to understanding political communication apprehension, as a person may not have trait-like communication apprehension, but still have political communication apprehension in certain situations or contexts.

For example, spiral of silence theory postulates that because people fear social isolation, they will not speak out on certain topics when they perceive their opinion to be different from the opinion of the majority (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Fear of social isolation can be considered a cost to participation from an expectancy value angle, while the perception of whether their opinion is in the minority can be considered an uncertainty reduction practice. In a study pertaining to the 2016 election cycle, fear of isolation contributed to a decrease in willingness to express opinions supporting either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump in both online and offline contexts (Kushin et

al., 2019). In a cross-cultural study, participants who had higher levels of fear of social isolation were less likely to express candidate support in heterogenous offline political networks but were more likely to express candidate support in homophilous offline political networks (Chan, 2018). If a person opts out of a political discussion because they perceive they are in the minority or because the other individual they are having a conversation with has a different political view, they allow their discussion partner(s) to assume the group has shared views and the risk of social isolation is lower. Similarities between individuals reduce relational uncertainty, where dissimilarities increase relational uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). This false similarity allows for a reduction of uncertainty and possibly conflict, which may allow for the silent individual to be better liked by the group or person with whom they are having a political discussion. In one study, state-based political communication apprehension was negatively related to open discussion strategies and positively correlated with avoidance strategies when participants were asked how they would participate in a political group conversation about the possibility of the United States invading Iraq (Neuwirth et al., 2007).

Although spiral of silence theory indicates that individuals in the perceived minority will remain silent, the minority is not always entirely silenced often due to people having various individual differences. Some studies have shown that those who *believe* their opinion to be congruent with the majority are more likely to share their opinion. This may be a result of perceived personal costs of being in the minority are low for some individuals. There are also many reasons why people speak out, even if they are in the minority, some of which deal with uncertainty reduction in other aspects of a political discussion (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). A previous study found that differing levels of social-psychological factors, such as trait communication apprehension, news media use, fear of isolation, and perceptions of where public opinion is headed, predicted whether individuals chose to speak or stay silent in a study that had participants imagine a political discussion on gay marriage (Ho & McLeod, 2008). How confident a person is or how great a conviction a person has about a particular attitude, known as attitude certainty, can also play a role in the expression of minority political opinions (Tormala & Rucker, 2018). There is evidence indicating that those with low and moderate levels of attitude certainty are affected by their group opinion climate perceptions, but those with high attitude certainty will express their attitudes regardless of whether they perceive the group to be hostile toward their opinion (Matthes

et al., 2010). Moreover, diversity in social identity between two people has also been shown to influence whether someone expresses their opinion or withholds it (Jeffres et al., 1999).

In order to understand why some people fit the specifications of spiral of silence theory, while others do not, the willingness to self-censor construct was developed (Hayes et al., 2005a). Willingness to self-censor is a personality predisposition that is heavily influenced by the parameters of a discussion, usually due to uncertainty reduction. Those who score moderate to high on the willingness to self-censor scale typically use their perception of the group's opinion climate to determine whether they choose to speak (Hayes et al., 2010). Thinking back to the Pew Research Center (2019b) findings, those who approved of Trump and lived in counties where Trump won by a decisive margin were more willing to share their views on Trump at a hypothetical small dinner party with a politically diverse group of individuals. Willingness to self-censor also helps explain why not all individuals fit under the spiral of silence expectations (which is when people stay silent because they are in the minority), because those with low willingness to self-censor scores are willing to confront people who have different opinions than their own or feel comfortable standing out in a group (Hayes et al., 2005a; Glynn et al., 1997). In essence, those who score higher on willing to self-censor likely look at group dynamics in their expectancy and value evaluations of participating in a political discussion, while those who score lower on willingness to self-censor may not if they do, do not find diversity in audience members to be a deterrent in speaking out.

Ultimately, uncertainty reduction through creating a perception of the group's collective opinion is likely correlates with whether a person participates in a particular political discussion for those who are more prone to self-censoring. In fact, willingness to self-censor may moderate political communication apprehension levels at lower levels of trait-like communication apprehension. While a person may have generally low communication apprehension because they do not fear speaking to others, they may still have political communication apprehension because they are wary of an audience climate featuring conflicting opinions or opinions that are different from their own. For example, someone who has moderate to mild communication apprehension and is prone to self-censoring may choose not to share their opinion in a political discussion about student loan forgiveness if they perceive that their fellow discussants have opposing opinions. However, a person with moderate to mild communication apprehension, who is not prone to self-censoring may not be deterred by opposing opinions. Willingness to self-censor can help explain

why people with mid to low trait-like communication apprehension experience political communication apprehension while allowing people to use their skills as communicators while utilizing information they have learned within their role as a political participant.

*H2a: Individuals with a high level of willingness to self-censor will show a positive relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension.*

*H2b: Individuals with a low level of willingness to self-censor will show a negative relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension.*

### **Party Membership as an Influencer of Political Discussion Expectations**

Information gained from knowing a discussion member's political party membership can be used to help navigate expectations and overall value of a particular political discussion, as relevant information learned through a person's political experiences would likely be activated. People typically apply stereotypes to other groups of people, even though people themselves are not always rational or accurate in their assessments of others (Jussim et al, 2015). Using stereotypes to reduce uncertainty about a pending political discussion partner is likely, as it can help a person envision how the discussion might go and determine if they will feel anxious prior to or during the discussion. The expectations, experiences, and attachments created through political party membership likely influence expectancy and value perceptions of how one feels generally about political discussions or when faced with a pending political discussion, because expectations for success, attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost are probably influenced by social identity. If an assigned discussion partner was from the opposing political party, a participant's actions or feelings would be motivated by the perceptions they have of the out-group party and how the out-group party views them. Affective polarization influences these expectancies. For example, both Republicans and Democrats have been shown to dislike and dehumanize each other equally, but they also perceive that the opposing party dislikes and dehumanizes them twice the amount that the opposing party reported (Moore-Berg, 2020). This perception may increase communication apprehension because a participant perceives that their pending discussion partner is someone who will already dislike them even though they have not met.

Because American political parties have created clear boundaries between in-group and out-group members, individuals have certain expectations of people who claim to be members of

either political party, which affects their expectancy of pending political elaboration. As pointed out by Prentice and Miller (1996), “distorted social reality can arise in the presence of, and because of social comparison information” (p. 290). People cognitively represent groups as a combination of related perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that make the group and its members similar to each other but distinct from those outside of their group—known as prototyping (Turner, 1987). Furthermore, depersonalization occurs when a person views another as having attributes of a prototype (Hogg, 2011).

Holistically, uncertainty should be reduced when a person knows the political party of their discussion partner because their partner can be assigned to a prototype that has been learned through a person’s role as a political participant. This reduction of uncertainty is probably a relief for those who anticipate having a political discussion partner from their own political party, as there is inter-group attractiveness and understanding due to a shared social identity. However, anxiety likely remains for those who are discussing politics with someone outside of their group because they expect higher levels of conflict (i.e., the conversation will cost more). Although talking with someone with whom you disagree about politics does not mean that disagreement will occur and speaking with those you agree with does not mean disagreement will not occur, people might not assume this to be the case. Prototypes typically describe “ideal” group members, who are polarized from qualities that define the out-group rather than depicting the average member of the group (Hogg, 2011). When people envision holding a discussion with someone from an opposing political party, they are likely envisioning an ideal group member. While the definition of an “ideal” political party member is subjective, at minimum an ideal member would likely be perceived as someone who supports the party’s platform.

The development of stereotypes and judgements can come from a variety of sources. Viewing partisanship from a social identity perspective can help explain why political communication apprehension may occur under certain political discussion contexts, as this theory details ways in which a person may have reduced uncertainty about their potential political discussion partner through their own group membership experiences and their perceptions of the out-group. Social identity theory states that the groups people belong to are important to their self-esteem (Tajfel, 1978). Social-psychological groups also have implicit or explicit membership norms, which allows members to identify who belongs to their group and who does not belong to their group. Membership in a political party can also be understood as a form of group membership,

as partisan social identity measurements have been found to predict political party ratings, ideology, and party activities (Greene, 2004). Although these reductions of uncertainty are often biased by group sorting and norming processes, people will continue to use this knowledge when making expectancy and value evaluations for a political discussion.

### **Parameters of Social Identity Theory in a Political Party Context**

According to social identity theory, there are three ways individuals assign others and themselves into in-groups and out-groups: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Understanding these sorting parameters of social identity theory is important because they can help explain why some people may be more attached to their social partisan identity and how group influence can create certain expectations of in-group and out-group interactions. For example, those with homogenous political discussion networks exaggerate the ideological distance between Republicans and Democrats (Butters & Hare, 2020). Moreover, people who overestimate political polarization between the Democrat and Republican parties reported that they had previously participated in political group activities, such as making campaign contributions or have tried to sway other's political beliefs (Westfall et al., 2015).

Social categorization is the process of sorting oneself and others into social groups. Sorting oneself into a political party is an ongoing process for many and the present outcome of sorting often arises through a combination of direct ideological thinking and social influences beginning in childhood. The process of ascertaining one's political ideology can be considered a form of motivated social cognition, as people can examine their beliefs and what they know to be true, then sort themselves into a corresponding belief system (or political party) to satisfy psychological needs, known as the "bottom-up process" (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). Alternatively, people can determine if ideological packages that are created by political elites correspond to their beliefs, known as the "top-down" process (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Thus, group belonging in a political party is achieved through deliberative cognitive effort under this circumstance. However, it is unlikely that people have only thought about political parties through belief examination because they have been part of a political system since birth.

Influences on self-sorting often begin in childhood (Searing et al., 1973). Parents are still considered to be one of the strongest influences on children during the political socialization

process, as parents pass on ideas, socioeconomic status, political elitism, and genetics. Parents' education can also influence the political worlds of their children as it frames life outside of politics because parents use their civic skills in other realms, such as their professional career, nonpolitical organization, and religion (Burns, 2012). These social groups can also influence political party preference, especially for those who are Republicans (Mason, 2016; Mason & Wronski, 2018). This suggests that one's self-categorization may not be based purely on ideological thinking, but also through other social influences. One does not need to think ideologically to sort themselves into a political party and to feel as if they belong to the group.

Trait-like factors also can play a role in political social categorization. For example, the need for cognitive closure can also affect ideological predisposition, as those who have a higher need for cognitive closure tend to be more politically conservative due to political conservatism's resistance to change (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Meanwhile, individuals who are high in need for cognition are often more politically liberal than those who are low in need for cognition (Ksiazkiewicz et al., 2016). Because how one arrives to their group identification is so diverse, the extent to which an individual identifies with their political party can also vary. Attachment may influence political communication apprehension as those who feel that their political beliefs are integral to their self may feel under attack when others suggest that there are alternative to their beliefs or imply that their political beliefs are wrong, which would give people a reason to avoid cross-cutting interactions.

Social identification is the process of adopting the norms of a group to which they have a membership. Typically, those with strong social ties to a group find value and emotional significance in belonging to that group (Hogg, 2011). Thus, those who are a member of a political party find value and emotional significance in their party membership to some extent. Because group norms exist and within-group comparison often occurs in social groups (Festinger, 1954), members of political parties should have a general idea of what a fellow party member believes, which reduces uncertainty in initial and subsequent interactions. Furthermore, being part of the same group creates a sense of comradery and increased interpersonal attractiveness (West & Iyengar, 2020), which might be why people prefer to build like-minded discussion groups.

However, the value and emotional significance each person ascribes to their membership within their political party varies. For example, those who participate in partisan organized political activities probably have a greater attachment to their party because they are experiencing

identity fusion, than those who do not participate in said activities. Identity fusion is when a person sees their personal identity and social identity as equally important, which causes them to take radical action for the group; where those who are less attached will follow orders from leaders and see other group members like themselves as interchangeable (Swann et al., 2009). Moreover, identity fusion predicts prosocial giving within political parties, as those who experience greater identity fusion within their political parties are more likely to give (Misch et al., 2018). High levels of social identity fusion may also affect attainment value perceptions of political discussions, as people may feel the need to do well to represent an important part of themselves. Those who are more involved with their party may also see a higher utility value in participating in political discussions because it may be advantageous to them in the future.

Because membership in a group is only one part of the “self” exhibited in the social world by those not experiencing identity fusion, people within a group are not exactly alike, as each person is influenced by different social factors and traits (Spreckles & Kotthoff, 2009). Some examples of these factors and traits include socioeconomic status, education, gender, race, ideology, etc. Differences not only exist between personal and social identities, but also between different types of social identities (Deaux et al., 1995). As a result, groups can be diverse within themselves and commitment of members within the group can also vary depending on the relevance of the group in general or during a specific point in time. For example, both Democrats and Republicans who are not extremely partisan fluctuate in the internalization of their political identities within their parties, but consistently have strong feelings against the out-group party (Groenendyk et al., 2020; West & Iyengar, 2020).

Group norming can be achieved in part by encouraging social comparison. Social comparison can be understood as the process of comparing oneself and the respective groups they belong to, to members of an out-group or the out-group in general to maintain or increase self-esteem (Oakes & Turner, 1980; Tajfel & Forgas, 1981). Groups often undergo membership norming when external threats arise or as prevalent societal issues make the group more salient (Hogg & Turner, 1987). For example, political polarization has been found to increase as an election grows closer (Stroud, 2010). Social comparison is especially relevant to political parties because parties often present logical forms of constraint when it comes to political issues (Converse, 1962). For example, Democrats favor more government oversight, while Republicans prefer less government oversight. Capitalizing on group differences is helpful for political elites,

as it creates dislike for the opposing party (Banda & Cluverius, 2018). Affective polarization has been shown to contribute to the probability that citizens vote in accordance with their values and priorities (Pierce & Lau, 2019), which might mean that increasing affective polarization is an advantageous practice for political elites.

In fact, if individuals become immersed in media narratives that emphasize the battle between parties, they are more likely to see aggressive political behavior as an acceptable way to participate in the political system—this is especially so when individuals perceive aggressive behavior as being a viable tactic to preventing the opposing political party from winning (McLaughlin, 2019). External threats may do a better job at increasing party unity than messages from in-group elites (Nicholson, 2012). As political parties become more aggressive with their campaigning tactics toward opposing candidates, it is the general threat posed by the other party that contributes to increasing positive in-group feelings and negative out-group feelings.

Affective partisanship also brings extreme evaluations to in-groups and out-groups (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). Pew Research (2019a) found that a majority of respondents described members of the opposing party to be “closed-minded.” Additionally, a majority of Republican respondents claimed Democrats to be unpatriotic and immoral. Both Democrats and Republicans who are affectively polarized have been shown to dehumanize members of the other party (Martherus et al., 2019). In 2016, Pew Research also found that a majority of highly engaged partisans within their sample claimed that the opposing party made them feel afraid, angry, and frustrated. Conflict also tends to increase out-group homogeneity, which causes people to attribute group-level stereotypes to individual members and to assume that out-group members behave like the out-group members a person has met previously (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Hibbing and Theiss-Moore (2002) wrote that “while face-to-face interaction is likely to heighten positive emotions such as empathy, it is also likely to heighten negative emotions” (p. 191). A reason why positive or negative emotions may occur could largely depend on the extent to which one socially identifies with their party and project the differences they have learned onto out-group members.

Viewing attachment to and experience with political parties through social categorization, social identification, and social comparison is helpful to understanding political communication apprehension. Social identity theory helps explain how expectations of in-group and out-group of behavior emerge. Because political parties are in direct competition with one another, ideological and group boundaries are often made clear by these entities, in order to gain voters during elections,

which may contribute to affective polarization, in part. Comfort with conflict has previously served as a moderator in one's willingness to talk about their political views (Pew Research, 2019a). Furthermore, various samples surveyed by the Pew Research Center showed that 46 to 53 percent of people found it stressful to talk politics with people they disagree with (Pew Research, 2018). Thus, people discussing politics with someone who has a form of shared identity should feel less communication apprehension about a pending political discussion than those who are having a discussion with an out-group member.

However, attachment to one's political party may also play a role in whether one feels political apprehension when having discussions with an out-party member. It is likely that party attachment is correlated with political communication apprehension in some manner, since those who have high levels of party attachment could view their political party membership as part of the "self." Political party attachment may be positively correlated with political communication apprehension, as those who perceive their political identity as part of their social identity might perceive attacks on their political opinions and party as attacks on the self, which makes them apprehensive to participate in out-party discussions because they perceive that little value will come from the discussion and participation in the discussion will be high. Meanwhile, those with low attachment to their political party may be less apprehensive about having political discussions because their conception of self is not rooted within their membership. If their party or beliefs that are aligned with a party is attacked by their fellow discussant, a person with low attachment may not feel as personally attacked as a person with high attachment. Thus, the cost to participate in discussions with out-party members is lower for these individuals.

On the other hand, trait-like communication apprehension may be curvilinearly correlated with strong social party attachment may embolden individuals to have cross-party political discussions, because their attachment allows them to believe that their way is the "right way" regardless of what others believe. Thus, trait-like communication apprehension for those with the highest levels of attachment would be low. Concurrently, those with low party attachment might assume that people in the opposing party are more similar to them than different because they could be less likely to be influenced by aggressive party rhetoric or do not care whether their beliefs are attacked, which would suggest that they may have lower levels of political communication apprehension. Those who are moderately attached to their political party could have higher levels of political communication, as they may see some beliefs as part of the self but

are not emboldened by their moderate attachment. In this case, attachment may have a positive curvilinear relationship with political apprehension. Considering that there are several ways in which social identity can influence attachment and change expectancy-value evaluations, the relationship between political communication apprehension and social attachment to political party could be linear or curvilinear.

*Research Question One: Does political communication apprehension decrease as social attachment to political party increases? Or does social attachment to political party and political communication apprehension have a curvilinear relationship?*

### **Political Efficacy: Increasing Self-Efficacy and Lowering Political Discussion Costs**

Because politics covers a variety of issue topics, people may be less apprehensive to have political discussions on issues they already know about because the cost to participate is lower and participation may contribute to self-efficacy. College students have previously cited their lack of political knowledge as a major reason why they have low political participation (Kaid et al., 2007). Moreover, political knowledge is positively associated with political participation, in both electoral (Jennings, 1996; Kaid et al., 2007; Lassen, 2005; Verba et al., 1995) and nonelectoral (Jennings, 1996; Kaid et al., 2007; Verba et al., 1995) activities. As a result, uncertainty about a pending conversation can possibly be reduced through issue familiarity, as people might have less anxiety about whether they should participate in a political discussion if they know enough on a particular topic to feel like they can participate effectively. Previous research has suggested that those who engage in cross-party political discussions often have more dense knowledge structures that include general political knowledge, issue stance knowledge, and relational knowledge between political facts than those who participate in politically similar discussion groups (Hively & Eveland, 2009).

Anxiety relating to knowing “enough” to have a political discussion on any respective topic is likely low when someone is having a political discussion with an in-group party member because discussing a topic with someone who has similar views would likely be a positive learning experience due to group homophily. Research often finds homogenous political discussions helpful in increasing issue knowledge, political efficacy, and intentions of political participation (Eveland, 2004; Levendusky et al., 2016). Previous literature has also indicated that when a person exposed to partisan news has a discussion with another politically similar individual who was not

exposed to partisan news, the person not exposed to the partisan news will polarize in the direction of their news-viewing political discussion partner's opinion (Druckman et al., 2018). This polarization also exists amongst fellow partisans without media priming (Levendusky et al., 2016). These two pieces of literature, along with the fact that people purposefully select like-minded people for their political discussion groups (Settle & Carlson, 2019) suggests that the cost for political discussions with fellow partisans is low regardless of how much an individual knows.

Internal political efficacy may be a way to understand whether a person feels knowledgeable enough to overcome political communication apprehension. This type of efficacy is often described as one's confidence in their ability to participate and understand politics (Jung et al., 2011). Previous work has shown that those with high attitude certainty will express their opinion regardless of opinion climate (Jeffres et al., 1999). Attitude certainty could possibly come from confidence in oneself to participate in political activities. Political knowledge and political efficacy have been shown to be significant moderators of both online and offline political participation (Jung et al., 2011). Kudrnáč & Lyons (2018) defined political efficacy as being "a motivational factor that shapes political attitudes and behavior and integrates aspects of motivation, information and reasoning" (p. 486). Political efficacy is often considered an antecedent to political discussions, as people must have some level of skill to participate in political discussions, but political discussion experience also helps increase these skills, so scholars often cite a "virtuous" circle existing between the political efficacy and political discussions (Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). As a result, those who have high internal political efficacy are likely to have lower overall political communication apprehension, as they have skills that make the cost of participating in the political discussion lower.

*H3a: Individuals with a high level of internal political efficacy will show a negative relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension.*

*H3b: Individuals with low internal political efficacy will show a positive relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension.*

Need for cognition likely moderates internal political efficacy to a certain extent, as those who have a higher need for cognition enjoy cognitive activities and are more likely to seek out and make sense of information as they try to understand the world (Cacioppo et al., 1996). Political conversations typically involve reasoning behaviors and mental elaborations (Jung et al., 2011). Because those with a high need for cognition enjoy tasks that involve elaborations, they might be

more likely to find intrinsic value in political conversations. These individuals would also be more likely to be confident in having a political conversation with someone on a political topic they are familiar with because they have already sought out relevant information and have likely formed an opinion. A large network of knowledge also may help a person feel as if they know what is going on in the country. As such, the cost of participating in a political discussion is likely lower for people with a higher need for cognition because they may enjoy the task and have a low barrier of cost entry—regardless of whom they are discussing politics with.

*H4a: Individuals with high need for cognition and high internal political efficacy will show a negative relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension.*

Knowing about politics probably does not equate to comfortably participating in political processes for everyone. In fact, a recent article found that those who know more about politics were not more likely to be exposed to heterogeneous networks; on the other hand, those who had high levels of political interest and political participation online tended to seek out heterogeneous networks (Strauß et al., 2020). For example, those with a high need for cognition and low internal political efficacy may have higher levels of political communication apprehension because they are not confident in their ability to participate in political processes even though they enjoy thinking and problem-solving in other domains. A person may enjoy working in their field because they are familiar with how to solve problems in that area, but they are not confident in their ability to solve problems in the political world because they do not have enough information or have not practiced solving problems in the political world. Moreover, if having a high need for cognition is important to an individual's construct of self, participating in a political discussion where they do not have the information they need to appear intelligent could lead to an experience that contradicts their conception of self. Thus, the cost for participating in a political discussion is high for these individuals, which may make them feel more apprehensive toward participating in political discussions.

*H4b: Individuals with high need for cognition and low internal political efficacy will show a positive relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension.*

On the other hand, those with low need for cognition may feel less qualified to participate in political processes and do not enjoy political discussions because they do not feel qualified.

Interestingly, in one study, those with low need for cognition and low internal political efficacy were found to be more susceptible to other people's influence when exposed to social media comments on fictitious political candidate's Facebook profiles (Lee, 2014). Although Lee (2014) does not examine political communication apprehension directly, his work suggests that the need for cognition and political efficacy are likely important in understanding political communication apprehension. For example, if those who have lower levels of need for cognition and internal political efficacy are more easily influenced by others, having a political discussion with a mixed-bag of partisans or out-partisans may be especially overwhelming for these individuals because they may feel pressured to change their existing position or to adopt a position.

*H4c: Individuals with low need for cognition and low internal political efficacy will show a positive relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension.*

Moreover, the social networking site study also found that those with high internal political efficacy and a low need for cognition were less likely to be influenced by those who had high internal political efficacy and high need for cognition (Lee, 2014). This may suggest that those who have high internal political efficacy regardless of their level of need for cognition behave similarly to those who have high internal political efficacy and high need for cognition when it comes to political communication apprehension. While those with high need for cognition and high political efficacy might be confident in political discussions because of their reasoning skills, people with low need for cognition and high internal political efficacy may be confident in the correctness of their opinion, even though they may not have conducted as much research on a topic. For example, people who are active participants in religious that are pro-life may not have completed research on the ramifications of being pro-life or pro-choice but are confident about discussing the issue because an authority they believe in has indicated this as being the correct choice. This individual would have attitude certainty not only because of their skills, but because they perceive themselves to be right. Therefore, high internal political efficacy could originate from parts of self that are not related to need for cognition, and these parts of self could permit the cost of participating in political discussions to be lower.

*H4d: Individuals with low need for cognition and high internal political efficacy will show a negative relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension.*

Social political party attachment could be a part of self that effects political efficacy. This attachment causes people to see their party as part of themselves through social identity (Greene, 2004; Huddy et al., 2015; Bankert et al., 2016; West & Iyengar, 2020), which might make them feel very qualified to participate in politics. Strong partisans may not face as much apprehension when talking about a topic they know about with someone of an opposing political party because they are aware of their party's stance and are unlikely to waver from that stance, which makes them feel confident in their political efficacy. Moreover, they may feel some sort of moral superiority in being a member of their party (Cassese, 2019), which makes them feel confident in their ability to participate in politics because their way is the "right way." For example, Republicans who are strongly attached to their party and are confident in their political efficacy may feel comfortable in claiming that voter fraud occurred in the 2018 election even if they are talking to a group of Democrats. On the other hand, Democrats who are strongly attached to their party may be confident in asserting that people should have access to universal healthcare, even when talking to a group of Republicans. In both these situations, the discussant feels as if they are correct and have the skills to do well in a discussion. As a result, people with high political efficacy and attachment may be less likely to face political communication apprehension, as the cost for them to participate is low because of their knowledge structure and the intrinsic value their party membership brings. Moreover, their political efficacy skills may empower them to defend their beliefs.

*H5a: Individuals with high political party attachment and low internal political efficacy will show a positive relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension.*

On the other hand, those with high political party attachment and low political efficacy might have high political communication apprehension, as attacks against their party may feel like personal attacks against the self to which they cannot defend against because they feel as if they do not have the proper skills to do so.

*H5b: Individuals with high political party attachment and high internal political efficacy will show a negative relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension.*

However, individuals who have low political party attachment may also not have political communication apprehension because they do not have an emotional attachment to the outcome

of the political conversation and a political party is not part of their identity. Those with low party attachment and high political efficacy may be confident in their discussion abilities, which allows them to feel less political communication apprehension and to be more willing to participate in discussions. Meanwhile, those with low party attachment and low political efficacy may not care about political discussions because the political realm is not part of their identity, so there is nothing to lose when they enter a political discussion.

*H5c: Individuals with low political party attachment and low internal political efficacy will show a negative relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension.*

*H5d: Individuals with low political party attachment and high internal political efficacy will show a negative relationship between trait-like apprehension and political communication apprehension.*

The examination of political efficacy as a moderator between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension might clarify why people who have the same trait-like communication apprehension score have different political communication apprehension scores because those with higher political efficacy might face a lower cost when it comes to participating in a political discussion. Moreover, the need for cognition may also moderate political efficacy under certain circumstances, as previous studies have indicated that political efficacy and knowledge are often related. Those who study the most and have high-level political efficacy will likely have less communication apprehension because their cost to participate is considerably lower. Meanwhile, attachment may also moderate political efficacy, as confidence in political ability could come from attitude certainty learned from their social involvement within their political party. Thus, political efficacy motivated by various levels of need for cognition or social political party attachment could explain why some people are willing to participate in discussion groups that are political heterogenous.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Procedure

A survey was administered through a research participation system for undergraduate students enrolled in communication courses at a large Midwestern university. After digitally initialing a consent form, each participant was presented with questions relating to political communication apprehension, communication apprehension, political efficacy, willingness to self-censor, need for cognition, and social political party attachment, followed by demographic questions. The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.0 and macro-program PROCESS 3.4 (Hayes, 2013).

### Variables

#### *Political Discussion*

There are several subtypes of political discourse that correspond to differences in formality, purpose, audience, and length in time (Sheufele et al., 2006). Currently, scholars disagree on how subtypes of political discourse affect an individual's propensity to participate. For instance, political deliberations (where a decision must be made as to how a given problem) have been cited as being disadvantageous to "the timid, quiet and uneducated relative to the loquacious, extroverted, and well-schooled" (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002, p. 203). Evidence of this can be seen in the work of Karpowitz & Mendelberg (2014), who found that when placed in deliberation groups dominated by men, women tend to speak less frequently during deliberation and use fewer words relating to families and children when compared to deliberation groups dominated by women. Political discourse has also been examined by considering political discussions and everyday political talk as forms of interpersonal communication that bridges private and political spheres (Kim & Kim, 2008), which is considered a more informal type of political discourse. Because political discourse is encompassing of a variety of subtypes, it is necessary to define what is meant by the term "political discussion" in this work.

For this study, the term political discussion is, at minimum, a form of interpersonal discussion with an individual or group (size of group is referenced within survey questions). It is important to note that participants were not presented a definition of what a political discussion is

and could assume that a discussion may include a final decision or a “winner,” which would be more along the lines of a formal political deliberation. Although it has been suggested that researchers set specific boundaries as they conceptualize what a political discussion is (Sheufele et al., 2006), this study will not be manipulating this aspect of political discourse, as this study is exploring how variables relating to social identity and political knowledge correlate with political communication apprehension, rather than focusing explicitly on the end-goals of the political discussion. However, this potential cause of apprehension could prove interesting to study in future research.

### ***Communication Apprehension***

Communication apprehension was evaluated by using the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) developed by McCroskey (1977, 1984). The scale includes 24 statements that examine trait-like communication apprehension in groups, meetings, dyads, and in public. These dimensions are argued as the most important when considering communication apprehension (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982), but are not exhaustive. Because communication apprehension is of great interest for this study, all dimensions will be used, even though speaking in meetings and the public may not directly fit with what is being examined here with political communication apprehension—as this measurement focuses on dyads and groups. Despite its use of self-report measurements, the PRCA-24 is consistently successful at predicting communication apprehension (Murphy & Weber, 2019) and has strong statistical validity. Currently, no research on whether these sub measurements are reliable on their own has been conducted.

Items on the PRCA-24 include questions like, “I like to get involved in group discussions” and “While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.” Participants ranked the applicability of these statements on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Additionally, in the results and discussion section, the term “communication apprehension” should be understood as trait-like communication apprehension. Descriptive statistics for all scaled measures are provided in Table 1.

### ***Political Communication Apprehension***

Because part of the research goal for this study is to understand when political communication apprehension is occurring, political communication apprehension was measured by utilizing statements that cover a variety of contexts in which political communication apprehension may occur. These statements are based on aspects of the Personal Report Communication Apprehension measurement and scenarios people may face in pending political discussions. Questions inspired by the PRCA-24 include whether an individual is discussing politics in a group or an interpersonal context—as individuals may feel more nervous in one setting or another—and questions regarding physical reactions a person feels as they decide if they will communicate in a political context. The measurement also includes questions that specify whether a person is having a discussion with an individual(s) who is in the same political party as them, a different political party from them, or if the party origin of the discussant(s) is unknown. Because some individuals may ascertain a difference between political party and ideology both were included throughout the measurement. Respondents used a Likert scale from 1 to 7 to respond to the statements, and response options ranged from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree.” Items were reversed coded before data analysis was conducted. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the underlying dimensions of political communication apprehension. The means of each factor’s items were calculated so the exploratory dimensions of political communication apprehension could be tested in various models as dependent variables. Although averaging items within the factors to calculate an overarching factor score is considered a non-refined method, it is appropriate for this study because the questions used to collect the data are exploratory and have not been tested for reliability or validity (DiStefano, 2009).

### ***Political Party Attachment***

Party identification has often been measured through utilizing the Michigan/National Election Studies (NES) measurement. Respondents are first asked, “Generally speaking, do you usually consider yourself to be a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or other.” Those who selected Democrat or Republican are then asked, “Do you consider yourself to be a strong Democrat (Republican) or not so strong Democrat (Republican)?” Those who select independents were asked which way they lean. While these questions help sort partisans, they may not tell the

whole story as partisanship can relate to partisan attitudes or group belonging (Greene, 2002). Greene asserted that the Michigan method better measures partisanship as group belonging but admits it does so without much depth. As a result, additional questions beyond the seven-point party identification measure were asked to better understand partisan identity.

Previous work attempting to capture partisan identity has asked a series of questions that examine identity fusion to party, reactions to external party threats, and how one defends their party (Bankert et al., 2016; Greene, 2004; Huddy et al., 2015; West & Iyengar, 2020). Political party identity in this study was measured by combining the approaches of Huddy et al. (2015) and West and Iyengar (2020). Participants were first asked: “How much do you agree with the following statements (1–5): The term [Democrat/Republican] describes me well; Being a [Democrat/Republican] is an important part of my self-image; When talking about [Democrats/Republicans] I use “we” instead of “they”; Being a [Democrat/Republican] is an important reflection of who I am; Being a [Democrat/Republican] is an important part of how I define myself.” Participants responded using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Responses were scored from -3 to 3, with 0 representing indifference. Those who had a higher total score were considered to have greater partisan social identity. The attachment score for respondents who selected “independent” or “other” were asked attachment questions for both parties and were assigned the highest attachment score for either party as their overall attachment score, even if this score was negative.

### ***Willingness to Self-censor***

Willingness to self-censor was measured through using the eight statements created and validated by Hayes, Glynn, and Shanahan (2005a, 2005b). Participants responded to statements using a 7-point scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The Willingness to Self-censor scale is designed to show how comfortable an individual is in taking actions that make them stand out from a group and how willing they are to present an opposing opinion to a group of people, which makes it helpful in understanding how individual differences may influence political communication apprehension under certain contexts. Statements in the measurement include: “It is difficult for me to express my opinion if I think others won’t agree with what I say; There have been many times when I have thought others around me were wrong but I didn’t let them know; When I disagree with others, I’d rather go along with them than argue about it; It is easy for me to

express my opinion around others who I think will disagree with me; I'd feel uncomfortable if someone asked my opinion and I knew that he or she wouldn't agree with me; I tend to speak my opinion only around friends or other people I trust; It is safer to keep quiet than publicly speak an opinion that you know most others don't share; and If I disagree with others, I have no problem letting them know it" (Hayes et al., 2005a). Higher scores indicate a greater willingness to self-censor.

### ***Internal Political Efficacy***

Internal political efficacy was measured using a 7-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree using three statements created by Morell (2005). These include: "I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics; I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing out county; and, I think that I am as well-informed about politics and government as most people" (Morell, 2005, p. 60). However, it is essential to remember that both political knowledge and political efficacy are heavily influenced by socioeconomic status since those who have higher socioeconomic status also tend to have higher levels of political knowledge and efficacy (Jung et al., 2011), which is why these demographic questions will be included in the survey.

### ***Need for Cognition***

Need for cognition was measured using a six-item short version of the 18-item Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo et al., 1996; Cacioppo et al., 1984), which was originally adapted from the original 34-item scale created by Cacioppo and Petty (1982). Lins de Holanda Coelho, Hanel, and Wolf (2018) found that this six-item scale has appropriate threshold levels, item-total correlations, and factor loadings that indicate the shorter measurement is a reliable and valid measurement of need for cognition. This scale includes a list of statements that respondents describe the extent to which they agree using a 7-point scale. Responses were scored from -3 to 3, with 0 representing indifference. Those who had a higher total score were considered to have greater need for cognition. Two of the items were reversed scored to ensure that participants are paying attention to the statements. Example statements include, "I would prefer complex to simple problems" and "Thinking it not my kind of fun." Higher scores indicate a greater need for cognition.

## PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH

### Participants and Measurement Checks

The initial sample size for this study was 255 participants. Cases with a survey completion time of under five minutes and cases with missing data for the study variables were omitted, which led to 6.67% percent loss in cases. Cases without political party identification or ideological identification were also omitted from the analysis, as both measurements clarify political communication apprehension when examining the concept from a social identity context (See Table A1 for frequencies). In total, 209 cases were analyzed ( $M_{\text{age}} = 20$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.89$ , 63.5% female, 73.7% white). Descriptive statistics of the variables of interest and their corresponding Cronbach's alpha coefficients can be seen in Table 1. Cronbach's alpha was used to estimate internal consistency on a priori and constructed scales. Coefficients were fairly high (0.76) or higher for all but one variable, internal political efficacy, which had a moderate (0.63) coefficient (Taber, 2018). The mean communication apprehension score of this sample and its standard deviation was similar to another university sample (see Morreale 2021, p.144). Values of skewness (-2 to +2) and kurtosis (-7 to +7) suggested that the variables of interest had a normal distribution (Hair et al., 2010). Given the similarities in means for a priori constructs, Cronbach's alpha values, and skewness and kurtosis levels, the data appeared to have both construct validity and internal consistency.

Because moderation analysis examines the magnitude of the effect of X on Y under certain circumstances this type of analysis can help shed light on which variables interact with communication apprehension to influence its correlation with political communication apprehension. Additionally, probing significant interactions within a moderation model can show where a moderating variable does and does not have an effect on Y. Moreover, moderation model outputs also show direct effects for each variable being tested within the model, which can help provide insight if an interaction between communication apprehension and another variable is not statistically significant. As such, the use of moderation in this study allows direct and indirect correlations between variables of interest to be examined, which makes it an appropriate statistical test within this study.

None of the statistic models were controlled for age, education, income, or gender due to lack of differences within the sample and to prevent overfitting. Age and education were not controlled for, as the sample consisted of college-aged students who were pursuing their education at a large midwestern university. The family income of the sample is also high across the sample, as 72.2% of the sample reported expected family income to be \$55,000 or higher, with 65% of individuals within the 72.2% reporting expected family income as being \$100,000 or higher. Mean differences and standard deviations between women and men were also examined for all independent variables. At a glance, there appeared to be no differences between the scores of men and women for any independent variable (see the discussion section for formal t-testing of variables). As a result, the model did not control for certain demographic variables due to the similarity of the sample.

The implementation of Bonferroni adjustments was considered to reduce the possibility of Type I error but was dismissed. This is due to results not being “more significant” when they pass Bonferroni corrections (Cohen, 1994). Moreover, because this study is more exploratory in nature a  $\alpha < .05$  level of significance is allowable. Within this section, models that displayed alpha-levels below or close to liberal levels of significance include standardized effects and confidence intervals within the results section, which is a suggested alternative practice to using strict alpha-level cutoffs (Cohen, 1994). Implications arising from more liberal levels of significance are interpreted within the discussion section, keeping in mind that Type I errors could be possible.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Scale	Mean	SD	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Discomfort with Ambiguity in Discussant Party Membership*	1-7	3.37	1.41	0.91
Discussion Anxiety*	1-7	2.48	0.49	0.76
Comfort with Friendly Partisans*	1-7	5.33	0.89	0.85
Communication apprehension	24-168	74.24	15.27	0.88
Willingness to self-censor	8-56	30.90	7.26	0.79
Internal Political efficacy	3-18	7.55	1.86	0.63
Need for cognition	-15 -15	4.75	5.29	0.80
Party attachment	-15 -15	-1.30	7.49	0.93

Note. \*Values for political communication apprehension factors were calculated after factoring.

A post hoc power analysis was also conducted using the software package, GPower (Faul & Erdfelder, 1992). The sample size of 209 was used for the statistical power analyses and a 7-predictor variable equation was used as a baseline because of the statistical models that would be tested for Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5. The recommended effect sizes used for assessing power were the thresholds suggested by Cohen (1988) and included in GPower (small ( $f = .02$ ), medium ( $f^2 = .15$ ), and large ( $f^2 = .35$ ). The alpha level used for this analysis was  $p < .05$ . and an adequate power value had to be above .80 (Field, 2013). The post hoc analyses showed that the statistical power for this study was .25 for detecting a small effect, but statistical power exceeded .99 for moderate to large effect sizes. As a result, there was adequate power to find moderate to large effect sizes, but inadequate statistical power to find small effect sizes within the tested models

Subsequently, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the political communication apprehension questions to ensure that the items area somewhat functioning measurement of the latent variable. Before the data was assessed for factorability, the correlation matrix of the items was inspected. Items that did not have a .30 correlation with one or more other items were removed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). If two values had a correlation of .80 or higher, one item was eliminated. After the correlation matrix inspection was completed, 24 of 27 items remained. Normality of the data was also assessed through examining the skewness and kurtosis of the items and through using the Shapiro-Wilk test for each item (See Table A2). Despite all of the variables being statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) for the Shapiro-Wilk test, none of the items were above or below appropriate thresholds for skewness and kurtosis (Hair et al., 2010). As a precaution, principal axis factoring was used to discover factors, as principal axis factoring does not require a normally distributed data; however, generalizing these factors is likely inappropriate until further analysis is conducted.

The principal axis factor analysis was conducted on 24 of the items with oblique rotation (direct oblimin). An oblique rotation was used, as the underlying factors are assumed to be related to each other. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure verified sampling adequacy for the analysis,  $KMO = 0.82$  (which is considered “meritorious” according to Kaiser & Rice, 1974). However, when examining the anti-matrix, two items under the correlation portion of the matrix featured values below .05. As such, these items were removed, and a principal axis factor analysis was conducted on the 22 remaining items. Sampling adequacy slightly improved as the KMO statistic increased to 0.85 and all anti-image matrix correlations were above 0.6. Bartlett’s test of

sphericity was also significant,  $\chi^2(231) = 2040.33, p < .001$ , which suggested that the correlations between the selected items were not too small for factor analysis. In the initial analysis, eigenvalues were obtained for each factor in the data. Six factors had eigenvalues over of Kaiser's criterion of 1 and explained 51.2% of the variation when combined. The scree plot was ambiguous, as it showed inflexions that would justify retaining five or three factors (See Figure A1). A three-factor solution was determined to be appropriate for this study due to the size of the sample and the pattern matrix displaying only two items loading on the fifth factor.

Another principal axis factor analysis was conducted with a forced three factor solution explained 44.78% of the variation. When examining the pattern matrix, it appeared that two more items needed to be dropped due to their communalities falling below 0.4.; however, no additional items were dropped due to cross-loadings because the existing cross-loadings had directionality differences. The final principal axis factor analysis with a forced three-factor solution consisting of 20 items explained 46.53% of the variation, passed the KMO measure ( $KMO = .847$ ) and had a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity,  $\chi^2(190) = 1901.17, p < .001$ . Table 2 shows the factor loadings after rotation. The items that cluster on the same factor suggest that factor one represents discomfort with ambiguity in partisanship, factor two represents discussion anxiety, and factor three represents comfort with friendly partisans. The averages of these three factors were then calculated so that each factor could be treated as exploratory dimensions of political communication apprehension and could be used as dependent variables for hypothesis testing. (Because factor three loaded negatively, the items were reverse coded before being averaged so increases in comfort with friendly partisans would represent an increase of comfort.)

Table 2. Summary of Exploratory Factor Analysis Results (N=209)

Item	Rotated Factor Loadings		
	Ambiguous	Anxiety	Friendly
I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people even if I did not know which political parties they were from.*	<b>.83</b>	-.01	-.11
I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a person even if I didn't know their political beliefs.*	<b>.81</b>	-.01	-.11
I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who were from various political parties.*	<b>.78</b>	-.004	-.22
I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who have diverse political beliefs.*	<b>.72</b>	.02	-.19
Having discussions about politics with people from a different political party than my own does not intimidate me.*	<b>.69</b>	.06	.01
Certain parts of my body feel tense when people start talking about politics and expect me to contribute.	.16	<b>.58</b>	.10
Contributing to political discussions is difficult for me.	.12	<b>.57</b>	.06
Because conflict can occur in political discussions, they make me nervous.	-.17	<b>.57</b>	.06
Participating in political discussions with strangers is nerve-wracking.	-.23	<b>.55</b>	-.10
I would feel uncomfortable participating in a political discussion with a person who has different political beliefs from my own.	-.10	<b>.53</b>	-.23
I would feel uncomfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who have different political beliefs from mine.	-.25	<b>.48</b>	-.27
Discussing politics makes me uncomfortable, regardless of who it is with.	.18	<b>.45</b>	-.09

Table 2. Continued

I dislike getting involved in political discussions with people because it could ruin our relationships with one another.	-.06	<b>.42</b>	-.01
When I am participating in a political discussion, I get so nervous that I forget pieces of evidence that support my view.	.13	<b>.41</b>	.05
Having a political discussion with someone from my political party is an enjoyable experience.*	-.03	-.12	<b>-.85</b>
Taking part in a political discussion with a group of people would be enjoyable.*	.25	-.12	<b>-.71</b>
I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a person who has the same political beliefs as me.*	-.04	.08	<b>-.67</b>
I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who are from my political party.*	.10	-.04	<b>-.62</b>
I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who have the same political beliefs as me.*	.15	.12	<b>-.59</b>
I would not feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a person that is from my political party.	.18	.18	<b>-.51</b>

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Note. \*Items were reversed coded

## Hypothesis Testing

### Communication Apprehension as a Predictor for Political Communication Apprehension

Before the regression models were conducted, preliminary analysis was used to ensure a linear regression model was appropriate for political communication apprehension dimension. An examination of scatter plots showing trait-like communication apprehension and one political communication apprehension dimension each indicated that a linear function would successfully describe the expected value for each dimension based on trait-like communication apprehension. Statistical independence was not a concern as only one predictor was put into each model. The

predictor was checked for normality and the variable appeared to have a normal distribution as the skewness and kurtosis levels of communication apprehension fall between -1 and 1 (See Table A3). The data was also found to have homoskedasticity, as the scatterplots of the standardized residuals for each of the regressions indicated that residuals were equally distributed. As a result, a linear regression model was deemed to be a viable test for all three dependent variables.

The regression models included significant relationships for all three political communication apprehension dimensions, see Table 3. For the discomfort with ambiguity in partisanship dimension,  $R^2 = .19$ ,  $F(1, 207) = 48.77$ ,  $p < .001$ . As communication apprehension increased by one, discomfort increased by 0.04. For the discussion anxiety dimension,  $R^2 = .11$ ,  $F(1, 207) = 26.25$ ,  $p < .001$ . As communication apprehension increased by one, discussion anxiety increased by 0.01. For the comfort with friendly partisans dimension,  $R^2 = .12$ ,  $F(1, 207) = 27.84$ ,  $p < .001$ . As communication apprehension increased by one, comfort decreased by 0.2. These results support H1, which states that trait-like communication is positively related to political communication apprehension. This suggests that trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension move in tandem to some extent. It would not be surprising to find that someone with mild trait-like communication apprehension would also have mild political communication apprehension.

Table 3. Regression Analysis Summary for Communication Apprehension Predicting Communication Apprehension Factors

Discomfort with Ambiguity in Partisanship Factor Regression					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	0.37 [-0.49, 1.24]	0.44		0.85	0.39
Communication Apprehension	0.04 [0.03, 0.05]	0.01	0.44	6.98	<.001
Discussion Anxiety Factor Regression					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	1.67 [1.36, 1.99]	0.16		10.43	<.001
Communication Apprehension	0.01 [0.007, 0.02]	0.002	0.34	5.12	<.001
Comfort with Friendly Partisans Factor Regression					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	6.83 [6.26, 7.41]	0.29		23.55	<.001
Communication Apprehension	-0.02 [0.01, 0.03]	0.01	-0.34	-5.28	<.001

Note.  $R^2 = .19$  for ambiguous factor regression.  $R^2 = .11$  for discussion anxiety factor regression.  $R^2 = .12$  for friendly factor regression.

### Willingness to Self-Censor as a Moderator

To test the hypothesis that willingness to self-censor moderates the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension, a simple moderation analysis was performed with each dimension as the dependent variable using PROCSES 3.4 (Hayes, 2013). Tolerance and VIF levels were also statistically appropriate across the models.

Testing of the discussion anxiety dimension, indicated that the overall model was significant,  $R^2 = .21$ ,  $F(3, 205) = 17.62$ ,  $p < .001$ . The direct effect of communication apprehension on discussion anxiety was significant,  $B = 0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $p < .001$ . The direct effect of willingness to self-censor on discussion anxiety was also significant,  $B = 0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .001$ . The interaction between trait-like communication apprehension and willingness to self-censor predicting discussion anxiety was significant,  $\Delta R^2 = .08$ ,  $F(1, 205) = 20.38$ ,  $p < .001$ . The

standardized slope for the effect of the interaction on discussion anxiety was significant when willingness to self-censor was one standard deviation below the mean ( $\beta = 0.02$ , 95% C.I. (0.02, 0.03),  $p < .001$ ), at the mean ( $\beta = 0.01$ , 95% C.I. (0.01, 0.02),  $p < .001$ ), and but not when willingness to self-censor was one standard deviation above the mean ( $\beta = 0.004$ , 95% C.I. (-.002, 0.01),  $p = .197$ ).

When the discomfort with ambiguity in partisanship factor was tested, the overall model was significant,  $R^2 = .27$ ,  $F(3, 205) = 25.23$ ,  $p < .001$ . The direct effect of trait-like communication apprehension on discomfort was not significant,  $B = 0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p = .111$ . The direct effect of willingness to self-censor on discomfort was also not significant,  $B = 0.09$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p = .069$ . The interaction between communication apprehension and willingness to self-censor predicting political communication apprehension was not significant,  $\Delta R^2 = .001$ ,  $F(1, 205) = 0.32$ ,  $p = .572$ . When examining the comfort with friendly partisans dimension, the overall model was found to be significant,  $R^2 = .16$ ,  $F(3, 205) = 13.05$ ,  $p < .001$ . The direct effect of communication apprehension on comfort was significant,  $B = -0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p = .028$ . The direct effect of willingness to self-censor on political communication apprehension was also significant,  $B = -0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p = .034$ . The interaction between communication apprehension and willingness to self-censor predicting comfort with partisans was not significant,  $\Delta R^2 = .008$ ,  $F(1, 205) = 1.95$ ,  $p = .164$ .

The results did not support H2a or H2b, regardless of which political communication apprehension dimension was being used as the dependent variable. The model featuring the discussion anxiety dimension was the only model that featured a significant interaction between trait-like communication apprehension and willingness to self-censor; however, the interaction between trait-like communication apprehension and willingness to self-censor had a greater positive impact on discussion anxiety when willingness to self-censor was a standard deviation below the mean, rather than weakening the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension. Thus, willingness to self-censor moderates the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension when examining the discussion anxiety dimension, but only at low and moderate levels of willingness to self-censor. At these levels, willingness to self-censor strengthens the positive relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension.

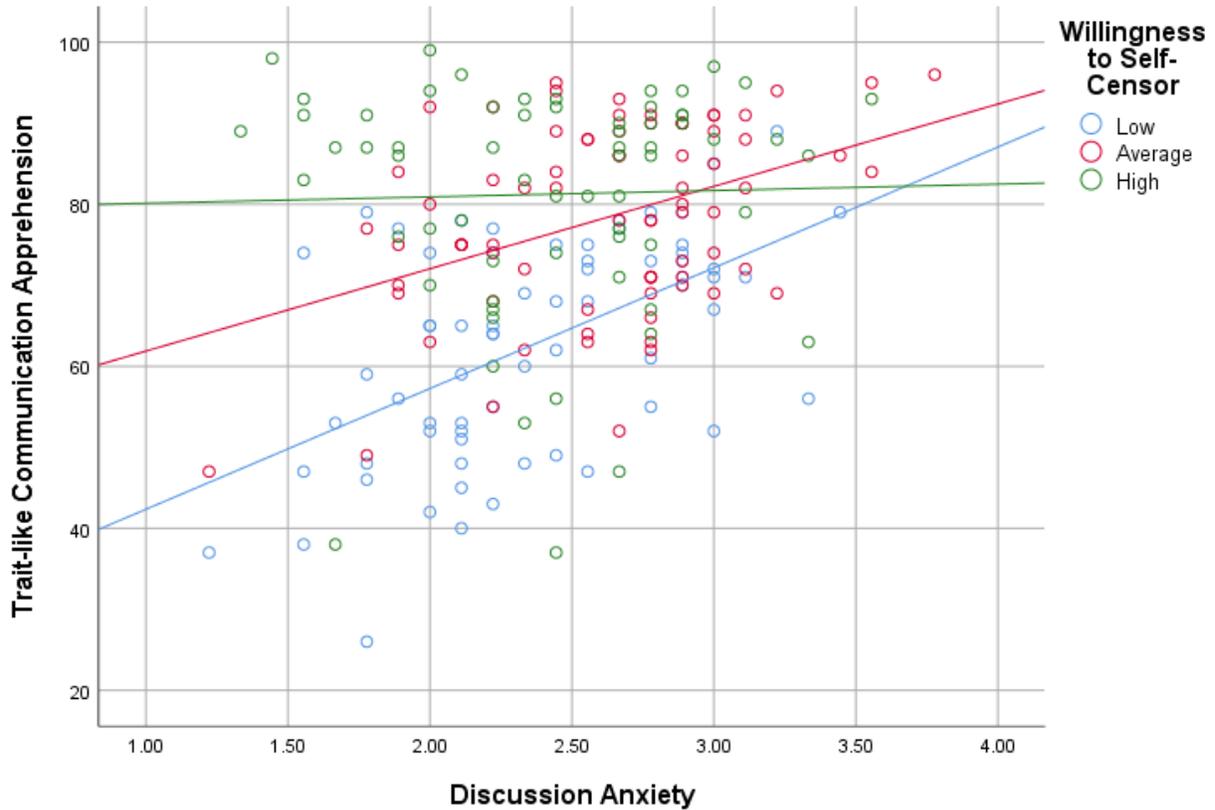


Figure 1. Trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension moderated by willingness to self-censor

### Social Attachment to Political Party and Political Communication Apprehension

To determine if a linear model or non-linear models created a better fit between social political party attachment and dimensions of political communication apprehension, SPSS Curve Estimation was used. Although SPSS Curve estimation features several nonlinear model options, the quadratic and cubic options were selected, as they were theoretically justifiable. Regressions were statistically non-significant for the relationship between social party attachment and the discomfort with partisan ambiguity dimension for the linear ( $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 207) = 0.00$ ,  $p = .989$ ), quadratic ( $R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(2, 206) = 0.98$ ,  $p = .377$ ), and cubic regression models ( $R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(3, 205) = 1.22$ ,  $p = .304$ ). Regression results were also statistically non-significant for the relationship between social party attachment and the discussion anxiety dimension for the linear ( $R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(1, 207) = 1.46$ ,  $p = .228$ ), quadratic ( $R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(2, 206) = 2.54$ ,  $p = 0.08$ ), and cubic regression models ( $R^2 = .03$ ,  $F(3, 205) = 1.89$ ,  $p = 0.13$ ). However, all three regression models proved to be

statistically significant for the relationship between social political party attachment and the comfort with friendly partisans dimension, see Table 4.

The results of the linear regression for the comfort with friendly partisans dimension significantly explained 6.9% of the variance ( $R^2 = .069$ ,  $F(1, 205) = 15.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The quadratic regression significantly explained 10.8% of the variance ( $R^2 = .108$ ,  $F(2, 206) = 12.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ) with the social party attachment variable squared as being a statistically significant predictor,  $\beta = .201$ ,  $p = .003$ . The cubic regression also explained 10.8% of the variance,  $R^2 = .108$ ,  $F(3, 205) = 8.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ; however the social party attachment variable cubed was not a statistically significant predictor within the regression model ( $\beta = 0.0001$ ,  $p = .877$ ), which suggests that the quadratic regression fits the data better than the cubic regression. Moreover, the change in  $R^2$  from the linear regression to the quadratic regression was statistically significant ( $p = .039$ ), and greatly improved R-squared. Although the change in R-squared from the quadratic regression to the cubic regression was also statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), the change was rather small and the social party attachment variable cubed is not statistically significant, which suggested that the quadratic regression model fit more appropriately (See Graph A?). As a result, there is evidence that a curvilinear correlation exists between political communication apprehension to an extent. However, the relationship is quite small and only exists in one dimension of political communication apprehension, but this model indicates that those with high and low party attachment are more comfortable with friendly partisans than those who have mean levels of social party attachment.

Table 4. Exploratory Non-Linear Regression Results for Comfort with Friendly Partisans  
Factor

Linear Regression					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	5.37 [5.25, 5.49]	0.06		88.34	<.001
Attachment	0.03 [0.02, 0.05]	0.01	0.26	3.92	<.001
Quadratic Regression					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	5.22 [5.07, 5.38]	0.08		66.63	<.001
Attachment	0.04 [0.02, 0.05]	0.01	0.29	4.47	<.001
Attachment <sup>2</sup>	0.003 [0.001, 0.005]	0.001	0.20	2.99	.003
Cubic Regression					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	5.22 [5.07, 5.38]	0.08		66.43	<.001
Attachment	0.03 [0.001, 0.07]	0.02	0.28	2.01	.046
Attachment <sup>2</sup>	0.003 [0.001, 0.01]	0.001	0.20	2.99	.003
Attachment <sup>3</sup>	<0.001 [0.000, 0.000]	0.000	0.02	0.16	.877

Note.  $R^2 = .069$  for linear regression.  $R^2 = .108$  for quadratic regression.  $R^2 = .108$  for linear regression.

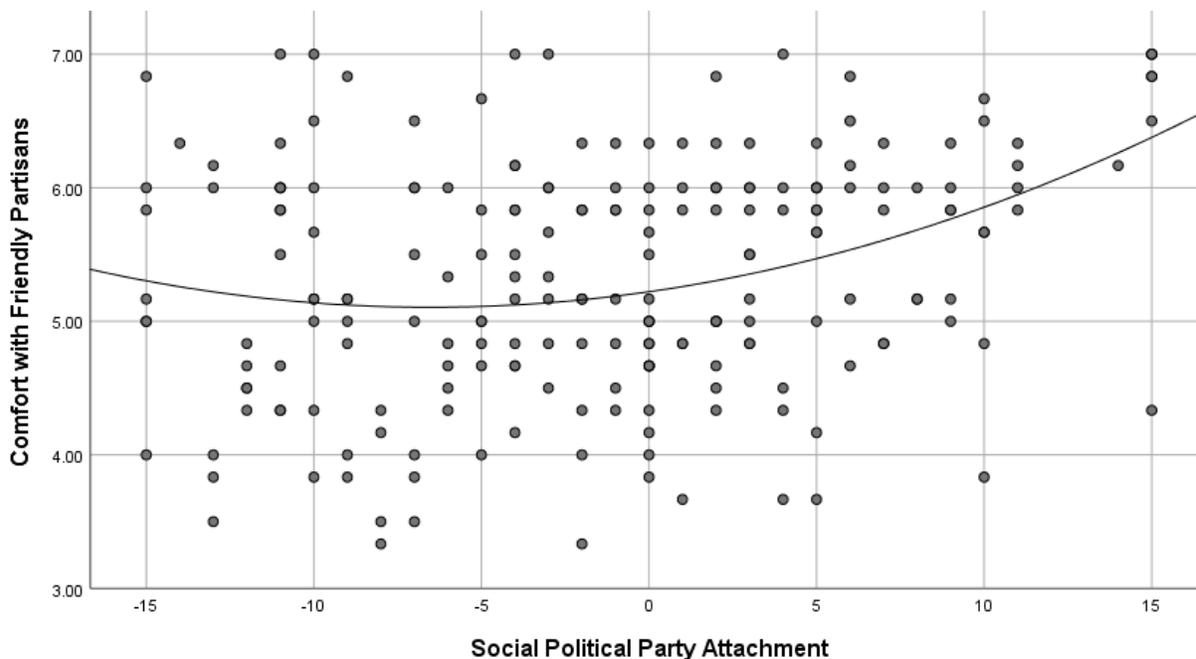


Figure 2. Comfort with friendly partisans and social party attachment curvilinear model

### Internal Political Efficacy as a Moderator

Similar to the previous moderation, preliminary analysis to examine whether internal political efficacy could be a moderator of the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension dimensions included an examination of Tolerance and VIF levels, which proved to be appropriate for all three models. The models that used discomfort with partisan ambiguity ( $R^2 = .26$ ,  $F(3, 205) = 25.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and comfort with friendly partisans ( $R^2 = .41$ ,  $F(3, 205) = 47.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as dependent variables were both statistically significant overall, but neither model featured significant interactions. Internal political efficacy had a statistically significant direct effect on comfort with friendly partisans ( $B = 0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p = .004$ ), but did not have a statistically significant direct effect on discomfort with partisan ambiguity ( $B = -0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p = .084$ ), see Figure 3. Communication apprehension did not have a statistically direct effect on the dependent variables in either model.

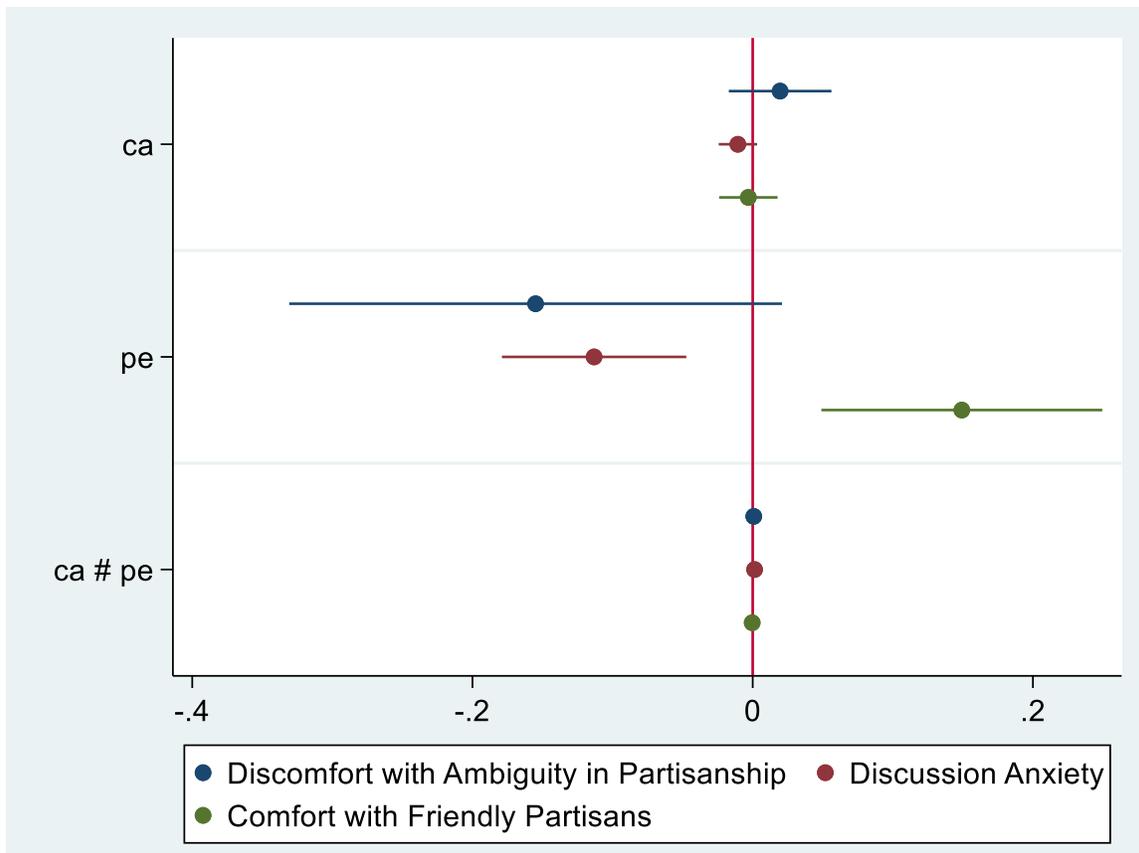


Figure 3. Forest plot of political efficacy as a moderator to the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension

The model with the discussion anxiety dimension as a dependent variable was significant overall,  $R^2 = .16$ ,  $F(3, 205) = 13.41$ ,  $p < .001$ . The direct effect of communication apprehension on discussion anxiety was not significant,  $B = -0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $p = .129$ . The direct effect of internal political efficacy on discussion anxiety was significant,  $B = -0.11$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .001$ . The interaction between communication apprehension and internal political efficacy predicting discussion anxiety was statistically significant,  $\Delta R^2 = .04$ ,  $F(1, 205) = 9.21$ ,  $p = .003$  (see Figure 4). The standardized slope for the effect of the interaction on discussion anxiety was not significant when internal political efficacy was one standard deviation below the mean ( $\beta = 0.002$ , 95% C.I. (-0.004, 0.01),  $p = .475$ ), but was significant at the mean ( $\beta = 0.01$ , 95% C.I. (0.003, 0.01),  $p < .001$ ), and one standard deviation above the mean ( $\beta = 0.003$ , 95% C.I. (0.009, 0.02),  $p < .001$ ).

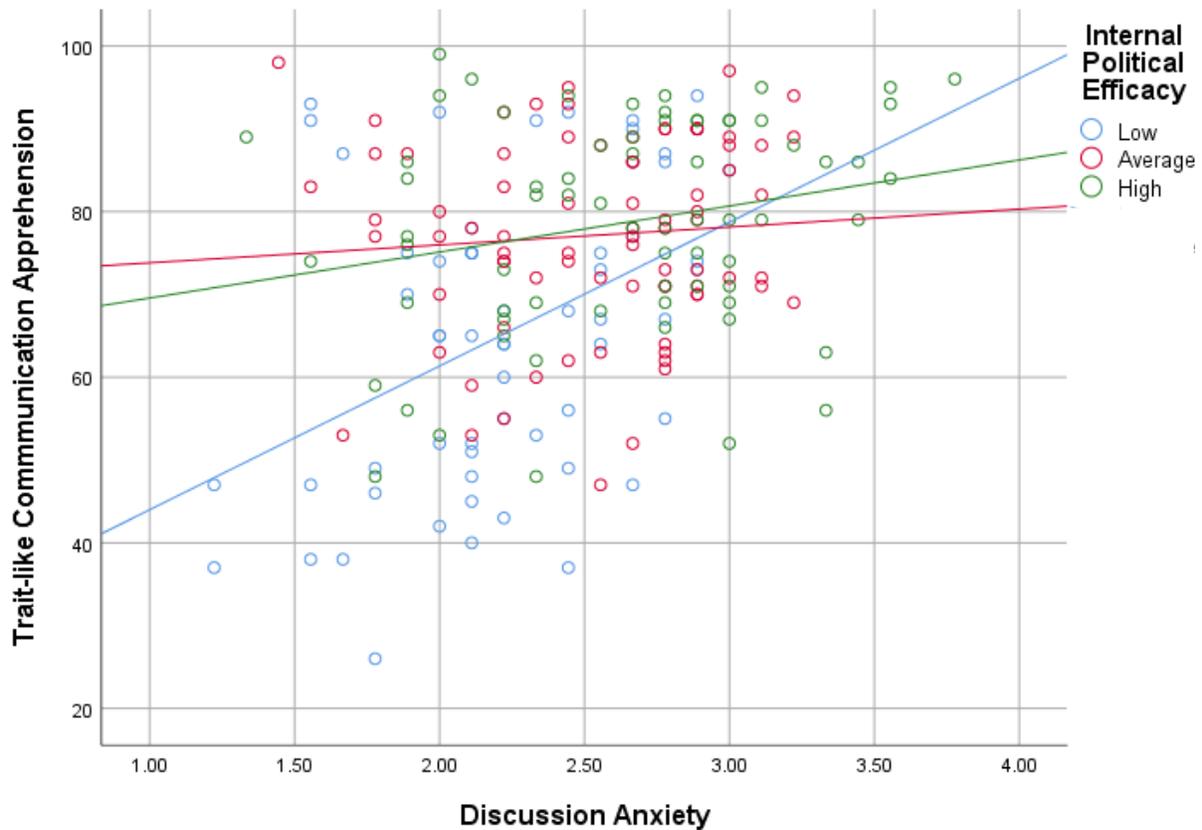


Figure 4. Trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension moderated by internal political efficacy

These results do not support H3a, which suggested that those with low internal political efficacy will show a positive relationship with trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension, because internal political efficacy can possibly weaken the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and discussion anxiety at low levels due to the variable being statistically non-significant and the confidence interval including a potential negative effect, see Figure 3. The interaction between communication apprehension and internal political efficacy in this model had a greater impact on discussion anxiety when internal political efficacy was at the mean or a standard deviation above the mean. Moreover, there was not support for H3a when the other two political communication apprehension were used as dependent variables. The results also did not support H3b, which suggested that individuals with high internal political efficacy will show a negative relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension, regardless of which dimension was

being used as a dependent variable. As a result, political efficacy moderates the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension when examining the discussion anxiety dimension, but only at moderate and high levels of political efficacy. At these levels, political efficacy strengthens the positive relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension. Political efficacy is not a successful moderator for the other two dimensions; however, these models also showed that political efficacy can have a direct effect on some dimensions of political communication apprehension.

### **Need for Cognition as a Moderator to the Internal Political Efficacy Moderator**

To determine if internal political efficacy was moderated by need for cognition in the models examining the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and each political communication apprehension dimension, Model 3 was run in PROCESS 3.4 (Hayes, 2013). The VIF and Tolerance values were appropriate for each model. Both the model with discussion anxiety as a dependent variable and the model with comfort with friendly partisans as a dependent variable were statistically significant overall; however, neither model had statistically significant high-order interactions, see Table A4. For the discussion anxiety model, none of the direct effects or lower interactions were close to being statistically significant. The model featuring the comfort with friendly partisans dimension also did not have direct effects or lower order interactions that were close to being statistically significant, with the exception of need for cognition,  $B = -0.38$ , 95% C.I. (-0.79, 0.03),  $p = .066$ .

The model with discomfort with partisan ambiguity as the dependent variable was significant overall,  $R^2 = .28$ ,  $F(7, 200) = 11.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ; however, the highest order interaction between communication apprehension, internal political efficacy, and need for cognition was not significant. The direct effect of trait-like communication apprehension was statistically significant,  $B = 0.06$ , 95% C.I. (0.001, 0.11),  $p = .047$ , but there were no other statistically significant direct effects or lower order effects, see Table 5. The lower interaction between trait-like communication apprehension and need for cognition was close to being statistically significant,  $B = -0.01$ , 95% C.I. (-0.02, 0.004),  $p = .061$ . However, because the highest interactions for each model were statistically non-significant, the results do not support H4a, H4b, H4c, or H4d. Thus, need for cognition does not moderate political efficacy.

Table 5. Need for Cognition as a Moderator for Discussion Anxiety

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	0.08 [-4.42, 4.57]	2.28	0.03	.973
Communication Apprehension	0.06 [0.001, 0.11]	0.03	1.99	.047
Internal Political Efficacy	0.03 [-0.28, 0.33]	0.15	0.18	.854
Communication Apprehension x Internal Political Efficacy	-0.001 [-0.005, 0.003]	0.002	-0.67	.501
Need for Cognition	0.71 [-0.001, 1.42]	0.36	1.96	.051
Communication Apprehension x Need for Cognition	-0.01 [-0.02, 0.004]	0.004	-1.89	.061
Political Efficacy x Need for Cognition	-0.04 [-0.08, 0.006]	0.02	-1.70	.090
Communication Apprehension x Internal Political Efficacy x Need for Cognition	0.0005 [-0.0001, 0.001]	0.0003	1.55	.122

Note.  $R^2 = .28$ ,  $F(7, 200) = 11.32$ ,  $p < .001$

### **Social Political Party Attachment as a Moderator to the Internal Political Efficacy Moderator**

Similar to the previous models, Model 3 was run in PROCESS 3.4 to determine if the internal political efficacy moderator was moderated by social political party attachment in the models examining the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and the political communication apprehension dimensions (Hayes, 2013). The VIF and Tolerance values were appropriate for each model. The model featuring discussion anxiety as the dependent variable was statistically significant,  $R^2 = .18$ ,  $F(7, 201) = 6.49$ ,  $p < .001$ , and included several statistically significant direct effects and one statistically lower order interaction. Trait-like communication apprehension ( $B = -0.02$ , 95% C.I. (-0.03, 0.001),  $p = .042$ ) and internal political efficacy ( $B = -0.01$ , 95% C.I. (-0.22, -0.07),  $p < .001$ ) had direct effects in this model. The interaction between trait-like communication apprehension and internal political efficacy was significant,  $B = 0.002$ , 95% C.I. (0.001, 0.003),  $p = .001$ .

The model with discomfort with partisan ambiguity as a dependent variable was significant,  $R^2 = .27$ ,  $F(7, 201) = 10.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ; however, no direct effects, lower order interactions, or higher order interactions were statistically significant. The model utilizing comfort with friendly partisans as the dependent variables was significant,  $R^2 = .44$ ,  $F(7, 201) = 22.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ; however, no direct effects, lower order interactions, or higher order interactions were statistically significant. Because the highest interactions in each of the models were found to be statistically non-significant, the results do not support H5a, H5b, H5c, or H5d. Thus, social attachment to political party does not moderate political efficacy, which only served as a moderator in the model featuring the discussion anxiety dimension (See H3a and H3b).

## **SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND OUTCOMES**

### **Discussion**

This project aimed to examine if political communication apprehension is influenced by differences in expectancy value evaluations, which are influenced by personality predispositions and reductions in uncertainty that originate from experience and attachment to political parties or political knowledge. Several variables intended to measure latent constructs representing exploratory dimensions of political communication apprehension were used as dependent variables in various regression analyses. It was expected that trait-like communication apprehension, willingness to self-censor, internal political efficacy, need for cognition, and social political party attachment would help explain political communication apprehension dimensions. However, neither need for cognition nor social attachment to political party had statistical significance as moderating variables in the highest interaction of their respective regression models. Fortunately, the factor analysis of the battery of political communication apprehension questions showed evidence that expectancy value judgements are being made based on information learned through social identity.

### **Trait-like Communication Apprehension and Political Communication Apprehension**

In line with H1, trait-like communication apprehension is positively related to political communication apprehension to some extent. This hypothesis intended to follow the approach set out by Eveland et al. (2011) where people are looked at as communicators first rather than political participants first when examining political discourse. The R-squared values of the regression models ranged from .11 to .19, which is decent in terms of variance explained. Although there is no previous literature that has used the PCRA-24 to predict situational communication apprehension, at least to my knowledge, correlations between this measurement and a measurement of situational communication apprehension have been examined. For example, one study examined the correlation between trait-like communication apprehension and a situational communication apprehension context involving a person talking to their supervisor was .24 at the .05 level of significance, giving it a moderate correlation (McCrosky, Richmond, & Davis, 1986).

It is not surprising that the R-squared value between trait-like communication apprehension and the dimensions of political communication apprehension are not higher in this study, as the PRCA-24 measures trait-like communication, not situational communication apprehension—which is the intended function of the political communication apprehension dimensions. If the R-squared value was very high between the variables within this study, multicollinearity issues could exist between the pairs of measurements, which would suggest that there is no difference between trait-like communication apprehension and the political communication app

rehension dimensions. This in turn might indicate that a political communication apprehension measurement is not necessary, as the PRCA-24 could be used to measure political communication apprehension. However, there seems to be an adequate difference between the trait-like communication apprehension measurement and the political communication apprehension dimensions, as the battery of questions designed to measure latent constructs within political communication apprehension included interpersonal and group scenarios, which are integral to the sub scores of the PRCA-24, but as seen in Table 2, the political communication apprehension items did not factor along these interpersonal and group scenarios. Instead, the battery of questions factored along situational variables relating to political parties (i.e. discomfort with ambiguity in partisanship, discussion anxiety, and comfort with friendly partisans). This finding is consistent with past literature that discusses how trait-like communication apprehension can only predict situational apprehension to a certain extent and is sensitive to variabilities and contingencies (McCroskey & Beatty, 1984).

Additionally, the negative loading factor for political discussion situations with fellow partisans is also in line with communication apprehension literature that has shown the PRCA-24 being better at predicting communication apprehension when people do not know others in the communication situation (Parks, 1980). Because of in-group familiarity, as described by social identity theory, people are likely to feel as if their fellow partisans are on their side, which makes having political discussions less anxiety-provoking. As such, this helps explain why trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension are different, but also how trait-like communication apprehension should be correlated political communication apprehension factors to an extent.

## **Willingness to Self-Censor as a Moderator**

Willingness to self-censor behaved differently than expected, as only the discussion anxiety model contained a significant interaction that did not support either hypothesis. This model showed that low levels of willingness to self-censor had a greater impact on the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and discussion anxiety than high levels of willingness to self-censor, as high levels of willingness to self-censor was not statistically significant. This is likely because those who have low levels of willingness to self-censor are only apprehensive of certain audience contexts and do not have personality predispositions that influence willingness to self-censor and communication apprehension at the same intensity as those who have a high willingness to self-censor. In fact, those with average and low levels of willingness to self-censor exist all along the spectrum of trait-like communication apprehension (see Graph 1), which may allow for willingness to self-censor to have a greater impact when examining the strength of the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and the political communication apprehension dimensions. Additionally, a reason why low levels of willingness to self-censor strengthens the positive relationship between communication apprehension and political communication apprehension is because these individuals are likely to say something within a political discussion. Despite there being a low cost to standing out or confronting conflicting opinions, people may feel anxiety that is related to the communication abilities. This could also help explain why willingness to self-censor only served as a moderating variable for the discussion anxiety dimension.

Previous literature has found willingness to self-censor being negatively related to willingness to express support for a political candidate or party publicly (Chan, 2018), as either scenario is likely to occur in a discussion. At first examination, it was interesting to find that high levels of willingness to self-censor influences the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension the least and insignificantly; however, this became less surprising after considering that self-censors tend to be more anxious in social situations and more apprehensive in social situations (Hayes et al., 2003, 2005). These personality predispositions also lead to high levels of communication apprehension, so it makes sense that those with high willingness to self-censor tend to have high communication apprehension scores and political communication apprehension scores, as seen in Graph 1. As a result, there is less influence of willingness to self-censor on the relationship between trait-like communication

apprehension and discussion anxiety because the cost to participate for an individual in this category is high on several accounts, which is why the consideration of willingness to self-censor only strengthens this relationship slightly.

However, it was strange that the discomfort with ambiguity in the partisanship model did not have a significant interaction effect between trait-like communication apprehension and willingness to self-censor, as willingness to self-censor was created to be sensitive to a person's willingness to make themselves stand out in a group or to oppose the majority (Hayes, 2005a). But this might be because the discomfort with ambiguity in partisan political communication apprehension does not feature items that deal with pending hostility that comes from sharing a different belief, while the discussion anxiety dimension does. As a result, willingness to self-censor may not moderate the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and discomfort with partisans because, in scenarios with diverse partisans, individuals can choose to self-censor as a way to remain in whatever majority "group" that emerges out of the ambiguous partisans. This dimension might not go well with trait-like communication apprehension when considering willingness to self-censor, because people can just censor themselves and not participate in the discussion. Similarly, willingness to self-censor also does not influence the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and comfort with the friendly partisans likely because there is little need to censor one's opinions. Meanwhile, willingness to self-censor strengthens the relationship between communication apprehension and discussion anxiety, because these items focus on the act of participating in a discussion and it is the actual act of participating in the discussion along with the context.

It is also likely that willingness to self-censor should be tested as a direct predictor for both the discomfort with ambiguity in partisanship and comfort with friendly partisan factors in the future, as the direct effect of willingness to self-censor was nearly significant in the discomfort in partisan ambiguity,  $B = 0.09$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p = .069$ ., and was statistically significant in the comfort with friendly partisan model,  $B = -0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p = .034$ . The negative direct effect on willingness to self-censor on comfort with friendly partisan might indicate that self-censoring occurs to some extent because people have diverse political beliefs within their own groups; however, more statistical testing would need to be conducted to be certain of what direct effects exist. Ultimately, the inclusion of willingness to self-censor helps explain why people with the same level of trait-like communication apprehension have different levels of discussion anxiety,

especially when there are fewer personality predispositions relating to both trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension are present. However, willingness to self-censor does not do a good job of significantly affecting the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and discomfort with ambiguous partisans, nor does it do well at affecting the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and comfort with friendly partisans.

### **Internal Political Efficacy as a Moderator and Moderated Variable**

Contrary to the hypothesized association, high levels of political efficacy did not change the association between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension. Because previous literature has suggested that political efficacy and political discussion create a virtuous cycle, (Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017), it was predicted here that those with high political efficacy would have less of a cost to participate in political discussions, which would theoretically weaken the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension. In essence, someone with high political efficacy might be able to overcome some elements of their trait-like communication apprehension due to their confidence in their own internal political efficacy. However, this was not the case, as the interaction between trait-like communication apprehension and political efficacy was not statistically significant in two models. Moreover, in the discussion anxiety model, which featured a statistically significant interaction, average and high levels of political efficacy strengthened the positive relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and discussion anxiety.

It was also surprising that low levels of political efficacy did not strengthen the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and discussion anxiety, as these individuals should theoretically have a high cost to participate effectively and may be more prone to be swayed in a group if they do not have high attitude certainty (Lee, 2014). If people do not care about the results of the political discussion or doing well in the discussion, it may make sense that low levels of political efficacy do not strengthen the relationship between communication apprehension and political communication apprehension dimensions, as their need to do well in a political discussion might be low already, so their apprehension is not greatly amplified by their feelings of internal efficacy. In the model featuring discussion anxiety as an independent variable and a successful

interaction between trait-like communication apprehension and political efficacy, the positive standardized effect was not statistically significant, as the confidence interval indicated that low political efficacy levels could weaken the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension.

Perhaps the reason why high levels of internal political efficacy strengthen the relationship between communication apprehension and political communication apprehension in the discussion anxiety dimension is that the need to do well in a political discussion makes a person more nervous. Perceived importance and perceived situational frequency have been shown to reduce communication apprehension (Pederson et al., 2008), which would suggest that if those with high political efficacy see political discussions as being important, they would be less apprehensive. It is possible that individuals with high political efficacy are not participating in political discussions frequently, especially in cross-party ones, which is consistent with the literature (Lee, 2020; Settle & Carlson, 2019). The questions measuring internal political efficacy in this study did not focus on specific political activities, so people in this sample who have high political efficacy may feel confident in their ability to participate in activities like voting or protesting, but not political discussions. This may be why high levels of political efficacy strengthen the relationship between communication apprehension and political communication apprehension. These individuals may feel internal efficacy to participate as a citizen in certain ways, but not in political discussions, which is causing the moderator to behave differently than hypothesized.

However, it is also important to note that internal political efficacy also had a significant direct effect within the comfort with partisans and discussion anxiety models. Although the direct effect of internal political efficacy was not significant in the discomfort with partisan ambiguity model ( $p = .084$ ), this could be because there was not enough power in the sample to detect what could be a small effect. In the comfort with partisans model, internal political efficacy increased as comfort with fellow partisans increased. Meanwhile, in the other models, political efficacy decreased slightly as the dimension of political communication apprehension increased. This suggests that when trait-like communication apprehension and internal political efficacy are not considered as an interaction, political efficacy and political communication apprehension have a negative relationship, which would fall more in line with the theory that political efficacy and political discussions have a virtuous cycle, as those with higher levels of political efficacy would

likely have lower levels of political communication apprehension. These lower levels of political communication apprehension would theoretically make it easier for these individuals to participate in political discussions. Additionally, political efficacy increasing as comfort with partisans increases may indicate that people participate in homogenous political discussions not only because these conversations are less intimidating, but because it makes them feel as if they can successfully participate in democracy.

Despite the negative correlation existing between political efficacy and political communication apprehension, the effect is quite small considering that political efficacy decreases by less than .02, or increases by less than .02 in the case of comfort with friendly partisans, and the political efficacy scale is from 3-18 while the political communication apprehension scales are from 1-7. Thus, the effects of political efficacy are quite small and increasing political efficacy should not be seen as the end all be all solution to reducing political communication apprehension. Because political efficacy decreases as political communication apprehension increases it wouldn't hurt to implement practices that have been found to increase political efficacy within political science literature. However, since average and high levels of political efficacy strengthens the positive relationship between trait-like communication apprehension, it may also be important to expose people with these levels of political efficacy to cross-partisan discussions as well in an effort to normalize this communication situation. This practice would allow people to complete the virtuous cycle between political efficacy and political discussions while lowering the cost to future political discussions, as they would perceive themselves as being experienced with political discussions.

### **Need for Cognition, an Unsuccessful Moderator to Political Efficacy**

Need for cognition was also theorized to help alleviate costs of participating in political discussion by increasing the strength of political efficacy at high levels of need for cognition, as political knowledge has been found to be positively associated with nonelectoral activities (Jennings, 1996; Kaid et al., 2007; Verba et al., 1995). Unfortunately, this was not the case within this study, likely because political efficacy has such a weak effect directly or indirectly. but this does not mean need for cognition is not an important independent variable to examine when attempting to understand the underlying influences of the exploratory political communication apprehension dimensions. Although need for cognition does not measure political knowledge

directly, those with higher need for cognition tend to seek information as they try to make sense of the world (Cacioppo et al., 1996) and would likely seek information when going into a political discussion, especially if they do not have some knowledge of the topic already. Moreover, people high in need for cognition might enjoy political discussions to some extent because it is a task that requires high cognition (Jung et al., 2011) regardless of what the topic is on.

In this sample, need for cognition did not strengthen the effect of political efficacy on the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension dimensions, but need for cognition could have a small direct effect on political communication apprehension dimensions in a larger sample or the relationship between other variables and the political communication apprehension dimensions. Especially considering that some models featuring need for cognition as a variable within this study featured nearly significant direct effects or lower-order effects involving the variable. However, these effects may be small in certain models and would need to be detected by a more powerful sample. Although need for cognition did not have a lot of statistically significant effects within the models it was tested, it would be theoretically unwise to not consider it as a variable of interest in future political communication apprehension studies.

### **Social Party Attachment**

The lack of results with the affective party attachment variable is both unexpected and disappointing. This study hypothesized that attachment would be an important piece of the political communication apprehension puzzle, as it might explain why certain levels of political communication apprehension exist through the support of social identity theory and political discourse theory, especially when considering that people, on average, are purposefully choosing homogenous political discussion groups (Settle & Carlson, 2019). This was clearly not the case as evidenced by the lack of a strong correlation between social political party attachment and the political communication apprehension factors in addition to the variable being an unsuccessful moderator with political efficacy. However, the lack of results within this sample should not be generalized, as social political party attachment was low for this sample, which may not be the case for samples that include participants with a greater age range.

Political party attachment had a negative mean for both Democrat and Republican respondents, despite nearly 83.7% percent of the sample leaning or claiming to be part of one party or the other. This lack of party attachment is consistent with other work that finds young people, especially young Democrats, are skeptical of party elites and do not believe that being a member of a political party makes their voice more likely to be heard (CIRCLE, 2018). This may partially be why the R-squared of the curvilinear model between political party attachment and political communication apprehension is so small. It also likely why attachment did not moderate the relationship alongside the political efficacy moderator. If people do not feel socially attached to their party, then it cannot increase their confidence in their ability to participate in their political system even though they do not have knowledge about their topic. A lack of social attachment cannot increase attitude certainty either. Thus, political efficacy must be gained from elsewhere, at least within this sample of respondents.

It is important to note that despite the lack of significant results in the models featuring social party attachment, elements of social identity theory are still influencing the political communication apprehension dimensions. For instance, there is evidence that people are using stereotypes and knowledge they have learned from their political experience to determine whether they will be apprehensive about a pending political conversation, as there is a comfort with friendly partisans dimension and a discomfort with ambiguity in partisanship dimension. Despite not being particularly attached to their political party socially, participants in this sample still show that they are on average less anxious to discuss politics with people who are from their party or have beliefs that are similar to their own when compared to a group of people who have ambiguous political beliefs. This is not surprising, as this finding supports previous research indicating that people purposefully self-select homogenous groups (Settle & Carlson, 2019). It is likely that people perceive speaking with those they agree with as being a pleasant experience, which would make the cost of participating in this political discussion low.

Perhaps it is not one's own affective party attachment in not as important when examining political communication apprehension, but to what extent a person dislikes or fears the opposing party or people with unknown political affiliations? People fluctuate in the internalization of their political identities within their parties but tend to have strong feelings against the out-party (Groenedyk et al., 2020; West & Iyengar, 2020). This approach would also support existing

theories, such as “prototyping” within social identity theory (Turner, 1987) and the study that found that people perceive greater polarization when they estimate the attitudes of people in an opposing political party (Westfall et al., 2015). Whether it is fear or dislike, participants in this sample have more apprehension in having a political discussion with ambiguous partisans than they do with friendly partisans, which suggests that conversing with a heterogenous group of individuals is perceived as costing more.

To fully understand social party attachment, a sample featuring older adults may be needed, as older individuals may have greater attachment to their party. But the time in which a new sample was taken could also be important, as political polarization tends to increase as an election grows closer (Stroud, 2010). However, it is likely that even a sample featuring higher levels of social party attachment would still have similar political communication apprehension dimensions as this sample, because the dimensions reflect the tenants of social identity. Regardless of whether a person is socially attached to a political party, they have been subject to the influences of a two-party system since birth or citizenship. Ultimately, social political party attachment may not be helpful as a variable in examining political communication apprehension within this sample; but out-party animosity and fear may still be important in this sample and generally.

### **A Post-hoc Consideration of Gender**

While examining gender as a dependent variable was considered in the early development of this study, its addition would have overwhelmed the author. However, because 63.4% of the respondents in this sample were born female and 62.2% of participants identify as women, a brief discussion of how gender differences might be impacting political communication apprehension has become pertinent. It should be noted that those who identified as trans ( $n=1$ ) were placed with the gender they identified with and those who considered themselves as genderqueer/non-binary or other were not included in this analysis due to an insufficient sample size ( $n=1$ ) to study the group as a different category within gender.

Post-hoc t-testing of the means for the dependent variables across men and women revealed that the mean differences were not statistically different from zero with need for cognition being the exception. Women reported lower levels of need for cognition ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 5.46$ ) than men,  $t(130) = 2.38$ ,  $p = .018$ . According to past literature, this is unusual, as the need for cognition scale

has shown to be invariant across gender (Cacioppo et al., 1996; Lins de Holanda Coelho et al., 2018). However, this difference may be unique to this sample.

For the political communication apprehension dimensions, the only dimension where the mean differences were statistically different from zero was the discomfort with ambiguity in partisanship dimension. Women reported high levels of discomfort ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ) than men,  $t(130) = -3.89$ ,  $p < .001$ . This is consistent with past literature, as women are more likely to avoid interpersonal political conflict than men (Coffee & Bolzendal, 2017). Moreover, women are generally socialized to being conflict avoidant and more sensitive to other's feelings in order to maintain relationships (Ridgeway, 2011). Thus, women may feel more anxious entering political discussions where partisan membership is ambiguous when compared to men because women are generally not rewarded for being combative. This may cause them to gravitate to homogenous political discussion groups more so than men, as the cost of participating in a heterogenous political discussion group is higher.

### **Implications**

This study showed that even if people are not very attached to their political parties, their political communication apprehension is largely informed by expectancy value judgements based on information they have learned from the political world due to the way in which the political communication apprehension questions factored. However, despite trait-like communication apprehension and political communication apprehension being different measurements, both are likely important to the task of helping people become more confident in their political discussion abilities within heterogenous groups. Specifically, the finding that willingness to self-censor moderated the relationship between communication apprehension and discussion anxiety at average and high levels might suggest that some individuals with high levels of political communication apprehension may not only struggle with overcoming apprehension due to political diversity within groups, but also because they are apprehensive of their general communication skills. As such, efforts taken to educate individuals on political discussion practices should include activities and practices that can combat apprehension from lack of communication skills generally and in certain audiences.

A practice to help reduce political communication apprehension could occur through having students discuss political issues in their civics courses. In order to reduce political

communication apprehension, these discussions should have a framework to help reduce the unknown. For example, “no personal attacks when conflict occurs,” or “no strawman arguments.” By creating discussion parameters, students can feel less anxious in certain areas of the discussion, which may help them feel more confident about their abilities. This confidence could grow as they perceive themselves successfully participating in these discussions, which would help lower the cost of future discussions as they may expectancy evaluation judgements in whether they participate in future discussions. Because some areas of the country are homogenous politically, it could be helpful for instructors to assign issue-positions to students or for instructors to take on opposing opinions to help students experience heterogenous discussion groups. Instructors should also work with students to improve their speaking skills on other topics in a variety of settings as well, to help reduce trait-like communication apprehension as well, as this type of apprehension may also influence whether a person chooses to participate in a homogenous political discussion group. Ultimately, decreasing political discussion anxiety and encouraging heterogenous political discussion groups will likely deal with whether one has had positive experiences in these types of discussions and feel as if the cost of these discussions are low.

### **Limitations**

The generalizability of the results is limited by the sample being young, educated, predominately women, and primarily white, which is not representative of the entire U.S. electorate. While the sample is also Western and comes from a democratic society, the exploratory political communication apprehension dimensions were constructed while considering potential social identity expectations that originate from the party system currently present in the United States. This suggests that the political communication apprehension factors would need to be adapted and tested for use in a much more diverse sample of the United States electorate before generalized use. The measurement may also function in other democratic systems featuring political parties; however, this type of use would also need to be tested extensively. Additionally, it should be noted that the statistical power of the sample size in this study only allowed for large and moderate effects. As such, small effects could be present between variables, but would only be seen in a larger sample. Moreover, all models within this study work on the assumption that latent constructs are being measured successfully. Although several of these scales have been tested in multiple samples and are well established in social science literature, the political

communication apprehension factors and the internal political efficacy scale have not, which may be why the political efficacy models behaved unexpectedly. A final limitation to this study is that because there is limited literature to examine regarding political communication apprehension, at least to the author's knowledge, the approach used to examine political communication apprehension may not have been ideal.

### **Future Directions**

Additional research on the factor structure of political communication apprehension would increase the validity of the measurement. Specifically, the political communication apprehension dimensions should be validated through confirmatory factor analysis to test if the relationship between observed variables and the latent constructs exists—especially in non-collegiate populations. There are also other scales that could be used to test the discriminant and convergent validity of the political communication apprehension scale. A few suggested by Jones-Carmack (2019) include but are not limited to: Subjective Political Competence (Reichert, 2010); Political Incivility (Stryker et al., 2016); and Offline and Online Political Engagement (Gibson & Cantijoch, 2013). It is also important to note that there are many variables that may influence the development of political communication apprehension dimensions but were not directly tested in this study. For example, does diversity in political network exposure moderate the relationship between communication apprehension and political communication apprehension? How might peer and family political socialization, gender, political media exposure, and traumatic past experiences with political discussions influence a person's tendency to develop political communication apprehension? These relationships could prove to be interesting and informative in creating interventions to help produce competent, engaged, and political communication apprehension-free citizens.

Although political communication apprehension dimensions were considered as outcome measures in this study, if the items are consistent and confirmed, the factors may prove to be interesting predictors or moderating variables. For example, any of these factors may be a predictor of political discussion network homogeneity. Moreover, low levels of discussion anxiety and discomfort with ambiguity in partisanship could help explain why a relationship exists between political efficacy and political discussions exist for some individuals (Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). Future research could also investigate how individuals with differing

various factors behave in real-life political discourse settings. Does it work well a predicting behavior in both formal and informal political discourse? What about when discourse is taking place synchronously or asynchronously? Online or offline? Ultimately, many avenues still exist for exploring political communication apprehension, but confirmatory factor analysis is of the utmost importance if the dimensions from this study are to be used in further research.

## APPENDIX A. SURVEY

### Examining Political Communication Apprehension

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Start of Block: Research Participant Consent Form

#### RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Examining Political Communication Apprehension  
Jennifer Hoewe  
Lamb School of Communication  
Purdue University

#### **Key Information**

Please take time to review this information carefully. This is a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary which means that you may choose not to participate at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may ask questions to the researchers about the study whenever you would like. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this form, be sure you understand what you will do and any possible risks or benefits. This survey should take between 10-20 minutes to complete.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to analyze underlying factors of political communication apprehension. The findings will be presented in a graduate-level thesis.

#### **What will I do if I choose to be in this study?**

If you agree to participate, you will be given survey questions to respond to regarding your demographics and political communication apprehension level. Questions will be asked online through Qualtrics. The survey should take between 10-20 minutes to complete.

#### **How long will I be in the study?**

The survey should take between 10-20 minutes to complete.

#### **What are the possible risks or discomforts?**

This study contains questions regarding general communication apprehension, political preferences, and apprehension and anxiety relating to political discussions, which may make participants uncomfortable.

Additionally, as in all human subject research, there is a small, but quite minimal, risk of confidentiality risk. We minimize this risk with strict procedures on collection, transferring and storing of data.

In addition, this survey has a number of questions embedded in it as validity checks to ensure that you are not a robot and are in fact fully reading and answering each question. A unique combination of answers to those questions may result in your survey being rejected.

**Are there any potential benefits?**

If you complete the study, you will be awarded extra credit in courses in which you may receive extra credit. Please, check with your professor or check your course syllabus to see which of your courses allows extra credit for research participation before continuing this study.

**Will I receive payment or other incentive?**

If you complete the study, you will be given 0.5 points of extra credit if allowed by your professor.

**Are there costs to me for participation?**

There are no anticipated costs associated with this research.

**Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?**

Your surveys and answers will be kept anonymous. There will be no way for the research team to associate your identity with your survey because your email will not be collected. Your consent form information will be kept confidential as we will store the personal data (such as your signature) in a secure folder. The project's research records may be reviewed by departments at Purdue University responsible for regulatory and research oversight.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

You do not have to participate in this research project. If you agree to participate, you may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. If you wish to have your data removed from the study, contact the PI immediately (see contact information listed below).

**Who can I contact if I have questions about the study?**

If you have questions, comments or concerns about this research project, you can talk to the researcher of the project. Please contact Cassidy Hansen (hanse146@purdue.edu) with any questions.

To report anonymously via Purdue's Hotline, see [www.purdue.edu/hotline](http://www.purdue.edu/hotline)

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in the study or have concerns about the treatment of research participants, please call the Human Research Protection Program at (765) 494-5942, email ([irb@purdue.edu](mailto:irb@purdue.edu)) or write to:

Human Research Protection Program - Purdue University  
Ernest C. Young Hall, Room 1032  
155 S. Grant St.  
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2114

**Documentation of Informed Consent**

I have had the opportunity to read this consent form and have the research study explained. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research study, and my questions have been

answered. I am prepared to participate in the research study described above. I will be offered a copy of this consent form after I initial it.

End of Block: Participant Consent Form

---

Start of Block: Political Communication Apprehension

Next you will be presented with 27 statements, please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you:

-----

I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who are from my political party.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

Taking part in a political discussion with a group of people would be enjoyable.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

My thoughts become confused and jumbled when having a political discussion with someone from a different political party than my own.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who were from various political parties.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

When I am participating in a political discussion, I get so nervous that I forget pieces of evidence that support my view.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people even if I did not know which political parties they were from.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

I would not feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a person that is from my political party.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

Because conflict can occur in political discussions, they make me nervous.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
- 

Contributing to political discussions is difficult for me.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

---

I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who have diverse political beliefs.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

Whether I share my political opinions during a discussion depends on the topic we are discussing.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

I dislike getting involved in political discussions with a people because it could ruin our relationships with one another.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

Participating in political discussions with my family is nerve-wracking.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

End of Block: Political Communication Apprehension

---

Start of Block: Attention Check

ATTENTION CHECK QUESTION: What color is grass?

- Green
- Blue

End of Block: Attention Check

---

Start of Block: Political Communication Apprehension Part Two

I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a person even if I didn't know their political beliefs.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

Having discussion about politics with people from a different political party than my own does not intimidate me.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

Certain parts of my body feel tense when people start talking about politics and expect me to contribute.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

Discussing politics makes me uncomfortable, regardless of who it is with.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
- 

Having a political discussion with someone from my political party is an enjoyable experience.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

---

It is easier to have political discussions with family than friends.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

It is easier to have political discussions with my friends than my family.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

Having political discussions with strangers is easier than having political discussions with people you know.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

Participating in political discussions with my friends is nerve-wracking.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
- 

Participating in political discussions with strangers is nerve-wracking.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

---

I would feel uncomfortable participating in a political discussion with a person who has different political beliefs from my own.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a person who has the same political beliefs as me.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

I would feel uncomfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who have different political beliefs from mine.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who have the same political beliefs as me.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

End of Block: Political Communication Apprehension Part Two

---

Start of Block: Political Efficacy

I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
- 

I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing out county

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

---

I think that I am as well-informed about politics and government as most people

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

End of Block: Political Efficacy

---

Start of Block: Political Party Identification

Generally speaking, do you consider yourself to be a(n)

- Strong Democrat
  - Not so strong Democrat
  - Independent leaning Democrat
  - Independent
  - Independent leaning Republican
  - Not so Strong Republican
  - Strong Republican
  - Other
-

On most political matters do you consider yourself

- Strongly liberal
- Moderately liberal
- Neither, middle of the road
- Moderately conservative
- Strongly conservative
- Other
- Don't know

End of Block: Political Party Identification

---

Start of Block: Republican

How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The term Republican describes me well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being a Republican is an important part of my self-image.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When talking about Republicans I use "we" instead of "they."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being a Republican is an important reflection of who I am.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being a Republican is an important part of how I define myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Republican

Start of Block: Democrat

How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The term Democrat describes me well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being a Democrat is an important part of my self-image.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When talking about Democrats I use "we" instead of "they."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being a Democrat is an important reflection of who I am.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being a Democrat is an important part of how I define myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Democrat

Start of Block: Communication Apprehension

Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I dislike participating in group discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like to get involved in group discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.

Usually, I am comfortable when I have to participate in a meeting.

I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.

I am afraid to express myself at meetings.

Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.

I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.

While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.

I have no fear  
of speaking up  
in  
conversations.

Ordinarily I am  
very tense and  
nervous in  
conversations.

Ordinarily I am  
very calm and  
relaxed in  
conversations.

While  
conversing  
with a new  
acquaintance, I  
feel very  
relaxed.

I'm afraid to  
speak up in  
conversations.

I have no fear  
of giving a  
speech.

Certain parts of  
my body feel  
very tense and  
rigid while  
giving a  
speech.

I feel relaxed  
while giving a  
speech.

My thoughts  
become  
confused and  
jumbled when I  
am giving a  
speech.

I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.

While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

End of Block: Communication Apprehension

---

Start of Block: Need for Cognition

For each of the statements below, please indicate whether or not the statement is characteristic of you or of what you believe.

-----

I would prefer complex to simple problems.

- Extremely characteristic
  - Characteristic
  - Somewhat characteristic
  - Uncertain
  - Somewhat uncharacteristic
  - Uncharacteristic
  - Extremely uncharacteristic
- 

I like to have the responsibility of handling a situation that requires a lot of thinking.

- Extremely characteristic
- Characteristic
- Uncertain
- Somewhat uncharacteristic
- Dislike a great deal
- Uncharacteristic
- Extremely uncharacteristic

---

Thinking is not my idea of fun.

- Extremely characteristic
  - Characteristic
  - Somewhat characteristic
  - Uncertain
  - Somewhat uncharacteristic
  - Uncharacteristic
  - Extremely uncharacteristic
-

I would rather do something that requires little thought than something that is sure to challenge my thinking abilities.

- Extremely characteristic
  - Characteristic
  - Somewhat characteristic
  - Uncertain
  - Somewhat uncharacteristic
  - Uncharacteristic
  - Extremely uncharacteristic
-

I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems.

- Extremely characteristic
  - Characteristic
  - Somewhat characteristic
  - Uncertain
  - Somewhat uncharacteristic
  - Uncharacteristic
  - Extremely uncharacteristic
-

I would prefer a task that is intellectual, difficult, and important to one that is somewhat important but does not require much thought.

- Extremely characteristic
- Characteristic
- Somewhat characteristic
- Uncertain
- Somewhat uncharacteristic
- Uncharacteristic
- Extremely uncharacteristic

End of Block: Need for Cognition

---

Start of Block: Willingness to Self-censor

For each statement, indicate whether you strongly disagree with the statement, disagree with the statement, neither agree nor disagree with the statement, agree with the statement, or strongly

agree with the statement. Don't spend too much time on any question. Simply answer with your first impression.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
It is difficult for me to express my opinion if I think others won't agree with what I say.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There have been many times when I have thought others around me were wrong but I didn't let them know.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I disagree with others, I'd rather go along with them than argue about it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is easy for me to express my opinion around others who I think will disagree with me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I'd feel uncomfortable if someone asked my opinion and I knew that he or she wouldn't agree with me.

I tend speak my opinion only around friends or other people I trust.

It is safer to keep quiet than publicly speak an opinion that you know most others don't share.

If I disagree with others, I have no problem letting them know it.

End of Block: Willingness to Self-censor

---

Start of Block: Demographics

How do you describe yourself?

- Male
  - Female
  - Trans Male/Trans Man
  - Trans Female/Trans Woman
  - Genderqueer/Gender Non-Conforming
  - Different Identity
- 

What sex were you assigned at birth, such as on an original birth certificate?

- Male
  - Female
- 

What is your age?

18 28 38 49 59 69 79 89 100 110 120

Click to write Choice 1



What was the last year of school you completed?

- Some high school or less
  - High school graduate
  - Some college
  - College graduate
  - Postgraduate
- 

What, if any, is your religious preference?

- Protestant
  - Catholic
  - LDS/Mormon
  - Jewish
  - Muslim
  - Other
  - No preference / No religious affiliation
-

How active do you consider yourself in the practice of your religious preference?

- Very active
  - Somewhat active
  - Not very active
  - Does not apply/ Prefer not to say
- 

What is your current employment status?

- Self-employed
  - Employed by someone else
  - Unemployed
  - Homemaker
  - Retired
  - Student
-

Are you

- American Indian / Native American
  - Asian
  - Black / African American
  - Hispanic / Latino
  - White / Caucasian
  - Pacific Islander
  - Other
- 

Are you presently

- Married
  - Divorced
  - Separated
  - Widowed
  - Single
  - Living with a partner
-

What do you expect your 2020 family income to be?

- Under \$25,000
  - \$25,000 - \$39,999
  - \$40,000 - \$54,999
  - \$55,000 - \$69,999
  - \$70,000 - \$84,999
  - \$85,000 - \$99,999
  - \$100,000 - \$149,999
  - Over \$150,000
- 

Do you consider yourself to be

- Heterosexual or straight
- Gay or lesbian
- Bisexual
- Other

End of Block: Demographics

---

## APPENDIX B. ADDITIONAL TABLES AND FIGURE

### Tables

Table A1. Frequency Distribution of Political Party Identification and Ideology

Party Identification		
	Frequency	Percent
Strong Democrat	32	15.3
Not so strong Democrat	29	13.9
Independent leaning Democrat	33	15.8
Independent	23	11
Independent leaning Republican	26	12.4
Not so strong Republican	29	13.9
Strong Republican	26	12.4
Other	11	5.3
Total	209	100

Ideology		
	Frequency	Percent
Strongly liberal	36	17.2
Moderately liberal	57	27.3
Neither, middle of the road	35	16.7
Moderately conservative	47	22.5
Strongly conservative	29	13.9
Other	5	2.4
Total	209	100

Table A2. Tests of Normality on original 27 Political Communication Apprehension items

	Skewness	Kurtosis	Shapiro-Wilk		
			Statistic	df	Sig.
1. I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who are from my political party.*	1.31	2.34	.820	209	<.001
2. Taking part in a political discussion with a group of people would be enjoyable.*	0.37	-0.87	.924	209	<.001
3. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when having a political discussion with someone from a different political party than my own.	-0.25	-0.35	.859	208	<.001
4. I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who were from various political parties.*	0.58	-0.49	.914	209	<.001
5. When I am participating in a political discussion, I get so nervous that I forget pieces of evidence that support my view.	-0.01	-0.37	.855	209	<.001
6. I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people even if I did not know which political parties they were from.*	0.40	-1.03	.907	209	<.001
7. I would not feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a person that is from my political party.	0.24	-0.51	.867	209	<.001
8. Because conflict can occur in political discussions, they make me nervous.	-0.20	-0.64	.857	209	<.001
9. Contributing to political discussions is difficult for me.	-0.01	-0.67	.875	209	<.001

10. I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who have diverse political beliefs.*	0.56	-0.5	.917	209	<.001
11. Whether I share my political opinions during a discussion depends on the topic we are discussing.	0.29	-0.79	.870	209	<.001
12. I dislike getting involved in political discussions with people because it could ruin our relationships with one another.	-0.10	-0.69	.871	209	<.001
13. Participating in political discussions with my family is nerve-racking.	0.26	-0.64	.868	209	<.001
14. I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a person even if I didn't know their political beliefs.*	0.33	-1.06	.912	209	<.001
15. Having discussions about politics with people from a different political party than my own does not intimidate me.*	0.43	-0.99	.903	209	<.001
16. Certain parts of my body feel tense when people start talking about politics and expect me to contribute.	-0.01	-0.61	.874	209	<.001
17. Discussing politics makes me uncomfortable, regardless of who it is with.	-0.01	-0.69	.872	209	<.001
18. Having a political discussion with someone from my political party is an enjoyable experience.*	0.31	-0.57	.934	209	<.001
19. It is easier to have political discussions with family than friends.*	0.04	-1.04	.939	209	<.001
20. It is easier to have political discussions with my friends than my family.*	0.02	-0.88	.942	209	<.001
21. Having political discussions with strangers is easier than having	-0.39	-0.72	.926	209	<.001

political discussions with people you know.*					
22. Participating in political discussions with my friends is nerve-racking.	-0.20	-0.50	.867	209	<.001
23. Participating in political discussions with strangers is nerve-racking.	-0.05	-0.71	.878	209	<.001
24. I would feel uncomfortable participating in a political discussion with a person who has different political beliefs from my own.	0.14	-0.47	.857	209	<.001
25. I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a person who has the same political beliefs as me.*	1.02	2.23	.862	209	<.001
26. I would feel uncomfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who have different political beliefs from mine.	-0.16	-0.37	.857	209	<.001
27. I would feel comfortable participating in a political discussion with a group of people who have the same political beliefs as me.*	0.99	1.86	.856	209	<.001

Table A3. *Tests of Normality for Variables included in Regressions*

	Skewness	Kurtosis	Shapiro-Wilk		
			Statistic	df	Sig.
Communication Apprehension	-0.64	-0.21	.953	209	<.001
Willingness to self-censor	-0.56	-0.22	.968	209	<.001
Political Efficacy	-0.27	0.02	.960	209	<.001
Need for Cognition	-0.73	-0.06	.944	208	<.001
Attachment	0.14	-0.65	.979	209	.004

Table A4. Need for Cognition as a Moderator for Discussion Anxiety and Friendly Partisans

<i>Need for Cognition as a Moderator for Comfort with Friendly Partisans</i>				
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.88 [1.20, 4.55]	0.85	3.38	<.001
Communication Apprehension	-0.005 [-0.02, 0.02]	0.01	-0.46	.643
Political Efficacy	-0.08 [-0.20, 0.02]	0.06	-1.56	.118
Communication Apprehension x Political Efficacy	0.001 [-0.0002, 0.003]	0.001	1.67	.096
Need for Cognition	0.15 [-0.11, 0.42]	0.13	1.14	.255
Communication Apprehension x Need for Cognition	-0.002 [-0.005, 0.002]	0.002	-1.01	.315
Political Efficacy x Need for Cognition	-0.006 [-0.02, -0.01]	0.009	-0.76	.450
Communication Apprehension x Political Efficacy x Need for Cognition	0.0001 [-0.0002, 0.0003]	0.0001	0.47	.633
<i>Need for Cognition as a Moderator for Comfort with Friendly Partisans</i>				
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	5.78 [3.22, 8.35]	1.30	4.44	<.001
Communication Apprehension	-0.03 [-0.06, 0.01]	0.02	-1.52	.132
Political Efficacy	0.03 [-0.14, 0.20]	0.09	0.33	.742
Communication Apprehension x Political Efficacy	0.001 [-0.001, 0.003]	0.001	0.88	.379
Need for Cognition	-0.38 [-0.79, 0.03]	0.21	-1.84	.068
Communication Apprehension x Need for Cognition	0.004 [-0.001, 0.01]	0.002	1.66	.098

Political Efficacy x Need for Cognition	0.02 [-0.003, 0.05]	0.01	1.73	.084
Communication Apprehension x Political Efficacy x Need for Cognition	-0.0003 [-0.001, 0.0001]	0.0002	-1.5	.136

*Note.* For Discussion anxiety,  $R^2 = .19$ ,  $F(7, 200) = 6.71$ ,  $p < .001$ . For Comfort with Friendly Partisans,  $R^2 = .42$ ,  $F(7, 200) = 20.76$ ,  $p < .001$

**Figure**

**Scree Plot**

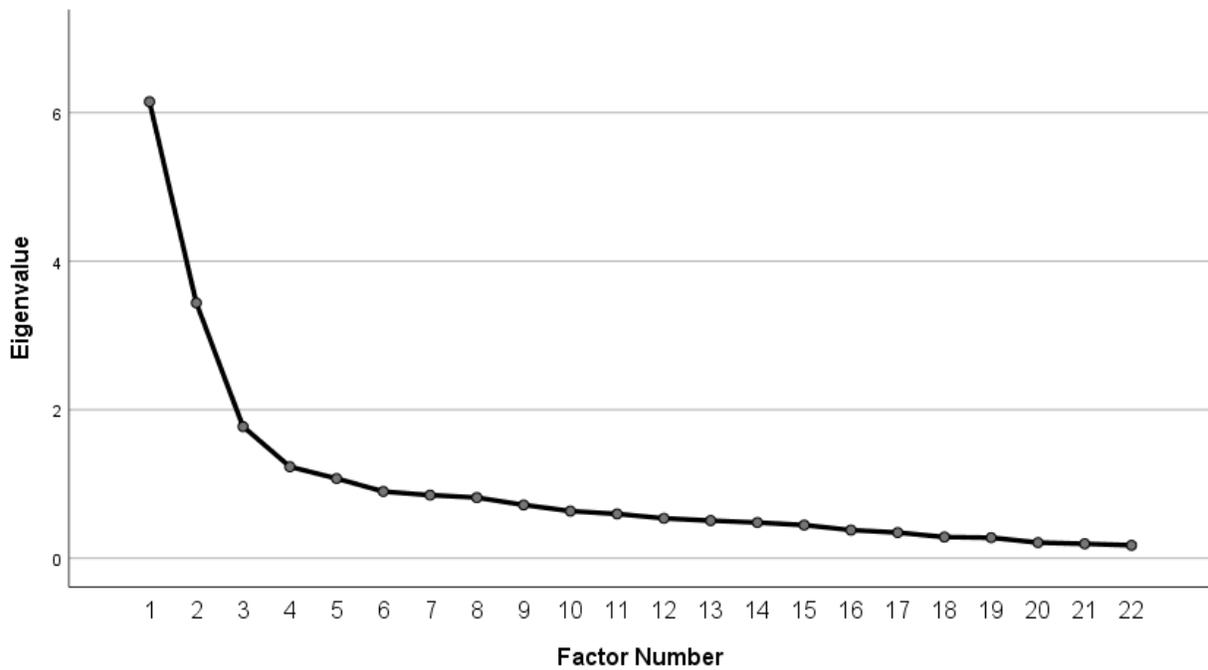


Figure A1. Scree plot for principle factor analysis

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