EXPLORING POLITICAL INTEREST AS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONCEPT

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ABSTRACT

A politically interested citizenry is vital to a healthy democracy and an informed society. Political interest is highly correlated with important expressions of political engagement, such as voting or taking part in a political discussion, as well as seeking out knowledge about politics. Despite these vital linkages, scholars disagree over what actually constitutes political interest. Scholars have variously defined political interest as one’s attentiveness to political matters, an intrinsic motivation, a feeling of concern or curiosity, or treat political interest synonymously with political involvement. Unsurprisingly, these disparate definitions have produced a diverse array of operations to measure the concept. This study argues that political interest is a multi-dimensional concept and employs a multi-method approach to investigate those dimensions. The results indicate political interest is an umbrella term with two distinct dimensions: enjoyment and motivation. The thesis concludes by discussing implications for future political science research.
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George I Riddle
To my parents
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“Being interested is clearly a recognizable experience, as anyone knows who has ever been unable to put down a detective story or been bored to tears at a cocktail party. Given any two activities, we can frequently tell at once which is the more interesting for us”

_The People’s Choice_, 1968

Fundamental to participatory democracies is an interested public. Citizens who are interested in politics learn about government and civic affairs and are often motivated to get involved to various degrees in the political process. This is a commonly cited finding in the political interest literature, and it makes intuitive sense as well. Those who are interested in politics may discuss these matters with their friends and family. They might join a community group to take action on an issue important to them. Interested citizens often follow news about politics on one or many of the media outlets and devices available to get information. They might even donate money or time to political campaigns. Political Science research has demonstrated all of these relationships and more over the past century. If the feeling of being interested is as obvious as the quote from Lazarsfeld et al. (1968) indicates and the outcomes of being interested are so established, then why study political interest? The answer, simply put, is that despite these findings the concept of political interest is still not well understood (Prior, 2010).

On its surface, the concept is a straightforward self-evaluation. How interested are you in politics? However, upon further examination this concept becomes more complicated than the simplicity of the question belies. A simple demonstration of the distinct conceptual dimensions of political interest is found in the different meaning of the two sentences: “What does it mean to be interested in politics?” and “What does it mean to be politically interested?” These differences were encountered immediately in writing the present study while trying to vary
language usage and realizing that each sentence had distinct implications. The first seems to be asking about the respondent’s curiosity or fascination with politics, while the second refers to the individual’s investment in political process.

Political scientists have employed a wide range of conceptual definitions to describe political interest over the years and have used a similarly diverse range of operationalizations to measure these concepts. Disagreement between definitions persist to the current day as researchers and theorists fail to reach consensus on what political interest is, and how best to measure it. This confusion extends to other disciplines as well. Scholars in psychology recognize the important role interest plays in learning, engagement, vocational selection, and motivation yet fail to agree on a common definition. Psychology research has examined interest as an emotion or psychological state, as well as a personality trait (Silva, 2006). The latter notion is now regarded as inaccurate given a growing body of research that demonstrates interest can be developed, and can fade (Renninger & Hidi, 2015).

Perhaps the difficulty in establishing a consistent understanding of political interest can be found in the Latin roots of the word interest, *inter esse* which mean “to be between” (Silva, 2006). The nature of the concept is between the individual and their beliefs, behaviors, and motivations. The goal of this study is to shine the light of inquiry on political interest and uncover its constituent parts. In doing so, this study will offer insight to the question, what does political interest mean to the mass public?

R₁: What does political interest mean to the mass public?

H₁: Political interest is a multidimensional concept composed of two dimensions: enjoyment and motivation.
A more robust knowledge of political interest will lead to better understanding of individuals’ political behavior. From a normative perspective, participation in the political process is a desirable outcome in a democracy, yet why individuals do or do not participate has perplexed social scientists for decades. Chief among the explanations has been the elusive concept of political interest which has been largely unexamined and under-conceptualized. This work seeks to add to the extant literature a deeper understanding of political interest from a conceptual perspective and through improved measurements.

**Plan for the Thesis**

The next chapter outlines how political interest has been conceptually defined by scholars in political science and some of the ways it has been used in research. I then explore the ways interest has been described and researched in psychology literature. The next section examines how these conceptual understandings have translated to operational measurement by looking at several of the standard ways political interest has been measured. The chapter concludes with an outline of the theoretical framework which serves to underpin the proceeding analysis.

Chapter three describes the multi-method approach utilized to examine political interest. The method begins from the ground up by collecting qualitative responses to the Defining Political Interest survey (DPI). These data are analyzed using Q method which is described in detail. Findings from the Q method serve to provide conceptual organization for the next phase of analysis which attempted to replicate earlier work on political interest conducted by Debra Horner (2007). For this final phase, an original survey was fielded on American’s media use, engagement, and political interest. Items from the Political Interest, Engagement, and News Personalization Survey (PIENP) survey were used to build indexes of political interest.
representing the two hypothesized dimensions of enjoyment and motivation and test whether or not they are better able to predicts political outcomes than the traditional single item measure of political interest.

Chapter four reports the findings from the previous chapter. Analysis of DPI survey responses to an open-ended question about political interest revealed ways individuals describe political interest. Some defined political interest by its antecedents often describing factors that motivated their interest in government and public affairs such as concern for the welfare of the country or personal preference for the topic. Others defined political interest by its outcomes, e.g. various forms of engagement or information-seeking behaviors. Analysis of the Q method results told a similar story. The factor analysis demonstrated widespread agreement on statements about the power of political decisions to shape the future and the importance of knowing about governmental affairs and political actors. These items seemed to represent individuals’ motivations for their interest in politics. The sample was divided on matters of preference with one group of participants expressing high agreement on items about enjoying politics, political discussions, and sharing personal political views with others. The other group of participants reported strong disagreement with these affective statements. These items point to the psychological state of enjoyment (or its opposite) reflected in individuals’ preference for political subjects. Two dimensions were created to capture these elements, motivation and enjoyment. The final analysis utilizes the PIENP survey to test these two and Horner’s three dimensions. Factor analysis finds stronger support for the two factor solution. The indexes for enjoyment and motivation were compared with a common single item measure of general political interest in ability to predict online and offline political participation and political
knowledge. Enjoyment was the best predictor of online and offline participation, while motivation was the best predictor of political knowledge.

Chapter five discusses these findings and explores some of the implications for political science research which seeks to include political interest as either an exogenous or endogenous variable. The chapter concludes by suggesting next steps in studying political interest and what this research might mean to the citizenry.
CHAPTER II: DEFINING AND MEASURING POLITICAL INTEREST

Political interest is a fascinating topic to explore. On its surface it seems simple and straightforward like the round opening to a cave, yet the deeper one looks, the more complex it becomes as hidden chambers and tunnels are discovered. For instance, research from political science has variously defined political interest as an intrinsic motivation (Prior, 2010), an action (Van Deth, 2004), an attitude (Schoen & Steinbrecher, 2013), a series of dispositions such as a psychological engagement (Brady et al., 1995), and a trait (Silva, 2006), among others. In political philosophy, politics is often referred to as the “arena wherein diverse interests compete for recognition” (Benditt, 1975: 245). Colloquially, the noun interest can mean the state of wanting to know or learn about an object, as in, “He developed an interest in art.” Interest is also used to connote a personal stake in something, as in, “It is not in my interest to stay up late tonight.” In its verb form, interest can mean to entice or “excite the curiosity of attention” of someone such as, “Can I interest you in a cup of coffee?”

Despite the wide range of meanings interest can take, the outcomes of those who report high levels of political interest are often apparent and easily demonstrable. Empirical research finds strong connections between political interest and a diverse range of desirable political behaviors such as voting, volunteering, informing oneself about news and political events, and being politically active (Verba et al., 1995). Della Carpini and Keeter (1996) find that politically interested people are more knowledgeable about politics than the uninterested and knowledge is an important precursor to participation. Despite these connections, scholars have struggled to clearly articulate the nature of political interest and translate that into a common definition.
Historical Background of Political Interest

Recognition of political interest as an important component of a democratic society far predates modern social science. The ancient Greeks understood the need for an interested and informed citizenry. Pericles, in his famous funeral oration boasted:

All Athenians are interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well: even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics—this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a man who take no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all (Thucydides, 1972: 74-75: stanza 40).

Alexis de Tocqueville had much to say on what he referred to as “self-interest well understood.” Tocqueville described with awe the ubiquity of this principle in Americans. Americans, he claimed:

…show how the enlightened love of themselves constantly brings them to aid each other and disposes them willingly to sacrifice a part of their time and their wealth to the good of the state. (Tocqueville, 2002: 502).

More recently, a large body of political science research also notes the importance of political interest to a well-functioning democracy. Berelson (1952) notes:

The electorate is required to possess a certain degree of involvement in the process of political decision, to take an appropriate share of responsibility. Political democracy requires a fairly strong and fairly continuous level of interest from a minority, and from a larger body of the citizenry a moderate-to-mild and discontinuous interest but with a
stable readiness to respond in critical political situations. Political disinterest or apathy is not permitted, or at least not approved. (316)

Like any foundational concept in a democracy, a lively debate surrounds the question of whether more political interest on behalf of the electorate should be desired. An elitist view of democracy holds that due to the general populace’s lack of informed or sophisticated opinions it is preferable to have a less politically interested citizenry. Noting the lack of interest of a large portion of the electorate and outsized role of political parties and other governing elites, James Fishkin (1991) lamented the “forced choice between politically equal but relatively incompetent masses and politically unequal but relatively more competent elites” in our contemporary democracy (quoted in Held, 2006: 234). Due to the lack of an informed and interested citizenry, the elitist view holds that an educated and interested elite class should guide the democracy making rational decisions on behalf of the apathetic masses. Other proponents of this view hold that “a sizeable bloc of apathetic persons became an advantage, for it provided a “cushion” for elites against the actions of highly interested, intense partisans. Apathy gave political decision-makers lee-way to bargain and compromise” (Bennett, 1986: 28). An opposing view is found in the theory of deliberative democracy and the related arguments of Jürgen Habermas, which contend that an interested citizenry that actively participates in reasoned public deliberation holds the potential to “expose the one-sidedness of partiality of certain viewpoints which may fail to represent the interests of the many” (Held, 2006: 237). More politically interested eyes and stakeholders involved in the process can provide greater oversight of the government and governing elites.
But what do we mean when we say someone is interested in politics? In the course of describing many of the responses scholars have given, this chapter will demonstrate how challenging the task of answering this question is. The first section begins with a brief introduction to the theoretical and empirical approaches researchers in the past employed to examine political interest. The next section outlines how modern researchers and theorists from political science conceptually define political interest. The third section examines how scholars in psychology have understood and defined interest, paying particular attention to recent work which has refined previous models. The fourth section discusses some of the many ways political interest has been empirically measured, focusing on the most prominent survey questions used to tap political interest, as well as alternate means some scholars have employed to measure this concept. The final section discusses implications of the lack of conceptual consensus in definitions of political interest and outlines the theoretical framework used as the foundation for the empirical analysis described in chapter three.

*Changing Epistemologies, Changing Theories*

Epistemology matters in how researchers approach problems. By the middle of the twentieth century, behavioralism had firmly taken root in the social sciences. Characterized by a belief in discoverable uniformities which could be confirmed by empirically rigorous tests (Easton, 1985), this mode of thinking is evident in the ways researchers approached political interest. During the behavioral era, much of social science focused on cognitive motivations for individuals’ choices; emotional and affective explanations were disregarded as invalid or unreliable motivations (Easton, 1985). This is famously seen in Downs’ *An Economic Theory of Democracy* 1957) and other rational choice models which claimed people made political
decisions using a kind of economic reasoning based on available information and resources. People factored in their own rational self-interests and weighed costs and benefits before making a decision. Seen in this way, those who were interested in politics performed actions, they were engaged, they followed the news, they volunteered etc. Political scientists sought to understand these phenomena through better methods of observation and measurement. The postbehavioral movement looked to incorporate normative elements, judgement, and social issues into the profession of political science (Rici, 1984). These shifts in epistemology have shaped modern political science; however, the current understanding of political interest has changed relatively little. Researchers remain divided today in how to describe political interest. Some scholars in political psychology describe political interest as an attitude like civic duty or party identification (Schoen & Steinbrecher, 2013) while others use dispositional descriptions such as motivation (Prior, 2010) or curiosity (Van Deth, 2004). Still others define the concept in behavioral terms such as attentiveness (Zaller, 1992). The following section outlines the different conceptual definitions used by political scientists to describe political interest.

**Conceptual Definitions of Political Interest**

*Concern*

In their important study, *Voice and Equality*, Verba et al. (1995) describe political interest as a characteristic of citizens who, "follow politics, who care about what happens, and who are concerned with who wins and loses" (345, emphasis added). The use of concern in this way evokes a feeling approaching anxiety or gravity when one understands that political decisions have implications for one’s lived life. This notion of concern is sometimes called attitude importance (Boninger et al., 1995). Attitude importance is the sense of concern, caring, and
significance an individual attaches to a subject which can drive the feeling of interest in that topic. This perspective recognizes that political interest and concerned self-interest are conceptually related e.g. an elderly person hearing of changes to their Medicare plan, will have a strong sense of concern for the issue which may translate into political interest. Concern in this way can be seen as a prerequisite for democratic participation (Van Deth & Elff, 2004) as people are moved to action as a result of their concerned self-interest, though research has also noted the impact of altruistic concern on political participation (Fowler & Kam, 2007).

Curiosity

Political interest has also been described in the cognitive terms of curiosity about political and governmental affairs. The most notable definition of this sort comes from Campbell et al. (1954:33) who define political interest as, “the degree to which politics arouses a citizen’s curiosity.” Van Deth (1990; 2004) in his several works on political interest and others settle on the broad definition of political interest as a general curiosity about politics (Neundorf et al., 2013). This approach is not without scholarly backing. A significant body of psychology research on interest treats interest and curiosity as synonyms for the same concept (Silva, 2006). Others make distinctions between these two; for example, Reeve (1996) suggests that, “interest is a positive state motivating approach, whereas curiosity is an aversive state motivating its own reduction, an epistemic itch to be scratched” (190). Defining political interest as curiosity about politics appropriately explains what it often feels like to be interested, however, it fails to account for the more long-term stable form of interest that does not manifest itself in active information-seeking behaviors.

Motivation
Another line of thought defines political interest as not quite attitudinal and not quite behavioral. This work often relates political interest to some kind of action, but defines the concept itself as a motivational component for those actions. Prior (2010: 747) in his work examining the stability of political interest over the life course, defines the concept as an “intrinsic motivation” for civic and political engagement. Similarly Boulianne (2011) describes interest as a “precursor and necessary condition for engagement” (147-148). Seen in this way, political interest is the thing that moves people to action in the political realm. Interest often acts as a motivation to “encourage people to engage with new and complex aspects of the world” (Silva, 2006: 29). Strombach et al. (2012) also view political interest as a motivational factor, specifically one that drives individuals to consume news and information. This is considered a more sophisticated approach by some who hold that, “interest is a measure of the degree of motivation for political participation, and the word involvement should suggest this motivational linking of attitudes and behavior” (Van Deth, 1990: 277). Indeed, “conceiving of interest as a motivator or a ‘structure of orientation’ does not represent it as an idea or judgment or feeling, but as an impulse to act” (Horner, 2007: 26).

Others who take this view describe political interest as a “psychological engagement” to politics. Lazarsfeld et al. (1948: 40) defined political interest as the, “extent to which [respondents] were psychologically involved in the political events preceding the presidential election.” This psychological involvement was measured by the respondents’ subjective evaluation of interest in the 1940 election. Similarly, Brady et al. (1995: 271-272) refer to political interest as a “standard measure of psychological engagement in politics” and puzzle through, as others have, whether or not political interest is a cause or result of political activity.
Interest as Involvement

Political interest is frequently equated with some kind of action, often termed “involvement” (Van Deth, 2004) and conceptualizes political interest in terms of its behavioral expressions (Van Deth, 1990). This view is found in Walter Lippmann’s (1922: 305-306) observation, “there are at least two meanings to the word interested. You can use it to mean that a man is involved, or that his mind is occupied.” Political interest as action can sometimes take the form of information seeking behaviors like following news about politics on TV. Defining interest in this way shares a logical connection to interest as attention or awareness outlined below, and is often measured in the same way, by frequency of following news about politics. Horner (2007: 27) notes that some researchers will include political interest in a list of more concrete political behaviors such as reading the newspaper, discussing politics, and even voting. For others, political discussion is used as a proxy for political interest (Lupia & Philpot, 2005).

Most authors who use these actions as a proxy for political interest are quick to note that they are not the same thing. Instead they take the approach that the difficulty in conceptually defining political interest can be overcome by measuring its recognizable outcomes. This approach is akin to adopting the “I know it when I see it” description of pornography given by Justice Stewart in Jacobellis v. Ohio (Gewirtz, 1995).

Attention

A related concept to curiosity used to describe political interest is attention or awareness about politics. This definition is often tied to the amount of attention paid to news media and knowledge about government and public affairs (Oskarson, 2007). One proponent of this view is Zaller (1992: 18, 19) who defined political interest in terms of “political awareness” and
“attentiveness to politics.” While some treat simple attention to politics as a measure of political interest, Zaller set a high bar arguing that individuals should not only pay attention to politics but have an understanding of the information they encounter. Political interest in this way, “is closely related to both political awareness and political competence: individuals cannot be curious about things they do not perceive” (Torcal & Maldonado, 2014: 680). Political interest is highly correlated with political knowledge, but not perfectly so. If this were the case then those with the most knowledge would be the most interested. One can think of numerous examples of individuals whose knowledge of political processes, institutions, actors, and policies is minimal and yet consider themselves interested in politics such as the young person taking his or her first civics class which sparked an interest that is not yet fully developed. Political interest and political knowledge exist in a feedback loop where one contributes to the other (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Defining political interest as awareness of politics makes the difficult, but not unfounded, argument that the presence of knowledge assumes the antecedent of interest.

Similarly, Lupia and Philpot (2005: 1122) in their study on the Internet’s impact on political interest define political interest as a citizen’s "willingness to pay attention to political phenomena at the possible expense of other topics.” This view recognizes interest by identifying individuals’ priorities. Time and attention are limited resources, therefore the subjects which receive the most attention, are the objects of interest. While there is an intuitiveness to this reasoning, it is overly reductive.

The first clause of Verba et al’s (1995) definition of political interest directly addresses the concept of attentiveness, stating that politically interested citizens are those who, "follow politics” (emphasis added). This is a common refrain among scholars; in order to be interested,
one must first have a basic awareness that is periodically updated through any number of means of getting information about politics. By this line of reasoning, those who follow politics more closely are more interested in politics. However, this definition fails to take into account those who are not enamored with political news, yet consider themselves interested in the outcomes of the political process. Another potential problem that arises from equating attention to politics with political interest is the tendency for individuals to over-estimate their level of awareness and even attention to news (Scharkow, 2016). Despite this concern, conceiving of political interest as attention to political topics has, as Horner (2007:23) notes, “important explanatory power for interpreting the findings in research on the relationship between political interest and political knowledge (Luskin, 1990; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996), as well as research about reception of political knowledge (Zaller, 1992).”

Another attitudinal conception of political interest equates it with a personal taste or idiosyncratic preference. Politics is often presented as a spectacle which appeals to a particular taste or preference. Verba et al. (1997) concluded that observed gender differences in political interest were due to men’s greater aggressiveness and taste for conflict. Modern interpretations of these observed gender differences ascribe them to learned behaviors and attitudes derived from social cues (Burns et al., 2001). The modern media environment with its penchant for horse race political reporting, ubiquitous debates, and 24 hour news cycles which report any salacious tweet from a political figure as “breaking news” may warrant further investigation as larger audiences are drawn to the drama of politics. Perhaps this phenomenon could be termed the “Donald Trump effect” whereby there is increased attention to news about politics from those who generally prefer entertainment programming because the actors in both genres overlap so
thoroughly. Supporting this notion, Klingeman (1979: 264) noted, “A subjective expression of high political interest does not necessarily imply political motivation; a person may well be interested in the political drama for totally unpolitical reasons.”

Conditions for Interest

Another line of research on political interest looks at the antecedents or conditions for political interest. Horner (2007: 30) refers to this as a “contextual approach” to political interest which “…emphasizes that people’s interest(s) in politics are contingent on other people, and that the pattern of social interaction has a significant impact on how people perceive themselves or describe their interest and corresponding actions.” Reports of political interest are known to be highly correlated with factors such as, “the intensity of campaigns, the temporal proximity of Election Day, and difference in campaign discourse” which can produce changes in how individuals think about politics (Kam, 2003, quoted in Horner, 2007: 31). A growing body of research examines political interest as a kind of linkage that performs a moderating role between variables. Bimber et al. (2015) find no consistent effect of political interest on the relationship between digital media use and behavior but instead political interest has a moderating role that changes depending on the circumstance. Torcal and Maldonado (2014: 679) examine the impact of political interest on citizen deliberation and find that, “The results indicate that political discussions, specifically those involving disagreements, can produce a lower level of interest when citizens are less informed, are strongly partisan, or hold strong social ties with those they disagree with.” Further complicating our understanding of what political interest is and where it comes from, these works suggest that political interest is often a product of environmental
factors (Renninger & Hidi, 2015) such as whether or not one’s parents were politically active, socioeconomic factors, or the diversity of one’s social contacts.

Political interest is also known to be related to demographic factors like age, gender, and educational attainment at the micro level, and economic development at the macro level (Van Deth & Elff, 2004). Bennett (1968: 25) remarks that two decades prior to his work Lazarsfeld et al. (1968: 45) had discovered that, “the person most interested in the election is more to be found in urban areas among men on higher levels of education, with better socio-economic status, and among older age groups” and his findings were little changed. Van Deth and Elff (2004: 479) further put forth the idea that one’s level of interest is potentially tied to how salient political issues are to one’s life circumstances claiming, “Political interest among individual citizens can also be the consequence of the apparent saliency of societal and political arrangements, whereas poor performance or invisibility of these arrangements produces less interest in politics.”

Further, youths do not typically think politics are as important to their lives as adults do, a concept known as psychological aging (Van Deth, 1990). Horner (2007) identifies an “empirical puzzle” of gender differences in political interest. For instance, Bennett and Bennett (1989) identify that despite similar voter turnout rates between men and women (in fact women report having voted more than men in every election since 1964 (Center for American Women and Politics, 2015)) women often lag behind men in political interest. Others have taken up this question and found evidence that the disparity disappears when there are female candidates for high office (Verba et al. 1997). Research into the persistence of gender difference, especially in a global context, continues with popular theories positing the sexual division of labor which
diminishes a woman’s individual resources available to direct toward political issues as key causal mechanisms for the divide (Verge Mestre & Marin, 2012).

Concluding remarks from political science.

Frequently, contemporary scholars include political interest as a key independent variable but fail to offer any kind of conceptual definition for the term. These works assume a kind of shared or consensus understanding of the term, but as the preceding literature has demonstrated, there is anything but a clear consensus among scholars on how to define political interest. Studies which fall into this category often use the most simplistic measure as well, relying on a single item which asked some variation of “How interested in politics are you?” with a limited range of options. Failure to define the concept adds to the confusion of what is being measured, and how to interpret the results.

Psychology

The concept of interest has a robust literature in psychology. Dating back to the earliest theorists, researchers in psychology recognized the importance and power of interest. Over the past century research into interest generally fell into one of two fields: “(1) interest as a part of emotional experience, curiosity, and momentary motivation; and (2) interest as a part of personality, individual differences, and people’s idiosyncratic hobbies, goals, and avocations” (Silva, 2006: 4). These constructs largely aligned with the commonly used categories states and traits, though more complicated and less easily classified models have been proposed. In response to some of these complicated models, Silva (2006) proposed the simpler shorthand of interest and interests as more concise and effective labels for the different conceptions of interest. This parsimonious typology held sway in psychology until recently. Renninger and
Hidi (2015) review current research in psychology and neuroscience that convincingly demonstrates the misconception of interest as a trait. The authors note that unlike a static trait, interest, “…emerges in relation to the support and challenges of the environment, it also can fall off when this support is not present” (Renninger & Hidi, 2015: 25). In light of the above overview of how political science has come to conceive political interest, it is important to see the genesis of work in psychology which led to the present understanding. The following provides a brief overview of the major theories proposed to define and understand interest.

**Interest as an Emotion.**

Psychology research which examined interest as an emotion has done so in a variety of ways. Some studies looked at the physiological expressions of interest such as facial or vocal expressions (e.g. Izard, 1971; Langsdorf et al., 1983), though with inconclusive findings (Silva, 2006). Other studies on the subjective experience of interest suggest it is a positive emotion, characterized by elevated feelings of pleasantness, self-assurance, impulsiveness, and tension (Izard, 1977: 216-222), and that “interest was most closely related to the emotions of enjoyment and surprise” (Silva, 2006: 20). Izard (1977) wonderfully describes the conscious experience of interest:

> At the experiential level, interest…is the feeling of being engaged, caught-up, fascinated, curious. There is a feeling of wanting to investigate, become involved, or extend or expand the self by incorporating new information and having new experiences with the person or object that has stimulated the interest. In intense interest or excitement the person feels animated and enlivened. It is this enlivenment that guarantees the association between interests and cognitive or motor activity. Even when relatively
immobile the interested or excited person has the feeling that he is “alive and active.”

(Quoted in Silva, 2006: 20)

Psychology has noted the conceptual closeness of interest and enjoyment. Though related, these concepts have distinctly different antecedents. Aitken (1974) asked people to rank randomly generated polygons based on how interesting and how enjoyable they found each shape. The study found people ranked simple polygons as more enjoyable and complex ones as more interesting. This has important implications for political interest, because the object, politics, is a highly complex subject that is continually evolving as new events bring to the public consciousness new agendas. Yet the complexity of politics is often lost in the media translation and many enjoy consuming this simplified version of the political landscape.

Further, psychological research on the emotion of interest found interest enables the development of competence. Those who are interested in an object will “…expose themselves to diverse situations and persist longer at activities….In turn, enriched knowledge and skills should promote feelings of competence and expectations of successful performance” (Silva, 2006: 174). In short, feelings of interest are often reciprocal with feelings of self-efficacy.

Interest and Personality

A common approach to studying interest as a state, or individual personality trait, views interest in the same conceptual space as curiosity. Both are seen as stable dispositions which influence a person’s behaviors (Silva, 2006). Research into the characteristics of interest as a trait examines underlying components which make up interest for different people and includes work on depth and breadth of interests, sensation seeking, boredom proneness, and openness to
experience (Silva, 2006). Studies in these areas focus on these individual facets which form the skeleton of the interested personality.

There has been significant debate among psychologists about whether interest is an enduring personality trait, part of the so-called “generic structuralism” of personality, or a unique interest in the realm of a hobby (Silva, 2006). Other researchers sidestep the debate and examine traits related to interest such as curiosity, intrinsic motivation, openness to experience, and sensation seeking (Silva, 2006).

The functions of interest have also been widely studied, particularly the connection to motivation. “Interest motivates exploration and learning, and guarantees the person’s engagement in the environment” (Izard and Ackerman, 2000, quoted in Silva, 2006: 21). Another suggested function of interest is the broaden-and-build model (Fredrickson, 2001) in which interest serves long-term developmental goals by attracting people to new possibilities. In this way interest serves to support the growth on an individual by ensuring broad experiences that may come in handy at another time. Silva (2006) notes that while plausible, this theory does not yet have empirical support.

**Current View of Interest**

Modern psychology has largely reached consensus that interest is not a static personality trait (Renninger & Hidi, 2015). The key evidence used to demonstrate this assertion is the growing body of research demonstrating that, unlike a personality trait which is baked into one’s genetic make-up, interest can be developed. This finding does not negate previous research which examined interest as a trait, but does reimagine it in light of the current understanding of
interest as part of a phased developmental process. Those who appear to exhibit interested traits are a product of “well-developed individual interest” (Renninger & Hidi, 2015: 8).

Renninger and Hidi (2015) put forth a modern definition of interest with dual meanings though they are quick to stress the interrelation of the two elements. Interest, as they define it, “…refers to the psychological state of a person while engaging with some type of content (e.g., mathematics, bass fishing, music) and also to the cognitive and affective motivational predisposition to reengage with that content over time” (Renninger & Hidi, 2015:8). They further explain, “Interest is a psychological state and a motivational disposition that exists in, or is the product of, the interaction of people’s characteristics and their environment” (8). In this definition, interest is how you feel while engaging a subject and the driving force to return to that subject over time.

Renninger and Hidi (2015:9) define the psychological state of interest as characterized by, “…increased attention, effort, concentration, and affect during engagement.” The psychological state of interest can be triggered by any number stimuli from one’s environment. In their definition, the motivational component of interest is divided into shorter-term situational interest, and longer-term individual interest. It is individual interest that motivates reengagement with a particular subject over time. Situational interest on the other hand is a reaction to some content or activity and is often short-term. An example of this is the widespread interest in college basketball during March Madness which trails off for most after the tournament. Situational interest can be characterized by two factors, structural characteristics like novelty, surprise, complexity; and content features like intensity, personalization, and life themes (Renninger & Hidi, 2015).
Interest is a complex and dynamic concept that has proven difficult to model using variables. Suzanne Hidi’s (1990) early model distinguished two types of interest: *situational* and *individual* (Silva, 2006: 551). Personal interest was developed slowly over time, and had lasting effects on a person’s knowledge and values, such as a long-term interest in literature. Situational interest was a response to environmental factors, often coming on suddenly and lasting only a short time. Continuing research led to the current four phase model of interest development proposed by Renninger and Hidi (2015: 13). Phase I, triggered situational interest, is defined as the “Psychological state resulting from short-term changes in cognitive and affective processing associated with a particular class of content.” Phase II, maintained situational interest, is the “Psychological state that involves focused attention to a particular class of content that reoccurs and/or persists over time.” Phase III, emerging individual interest, is the “Psychological state and the beginning of relatively enduring predisposition to seek reengagement with a particular class of content over time. The final phase, well-developed individual interest, is the “psychological state and a relatively enduring predisposition to reengage a particular class of content over time.” This model is supported by a growing body of empirical research and conceptually has important explanatory power for interest, and by extension, political interest.

*Uniting Psychology and Political Science*

The goal of any interdisciplinary work is to unite two fields which address a similar topic but from different perspectives. The present work seeks to add the insights of psychology research in understanding the development of interest to the present understanding of political interest. Political interest is not easily categorized, even in the four phase model. While political interest can be inserted into each phase, there is the confounding factor of feeling responsible or
obligated to be interested in politics as part of one’s civic duty. There are certainly those who do experience the kind of triggered individual situational interest characteristic of someone who discovers a passion for botany or photography, however, for others, interest in politics is the product of duty over time (Riker & Ordeshook, 1986). To make matters more complicated, the contentious nature of the subject of politics can galvanize some against politics in response to negative perceptions of the topic.

*Interest as Multidimensional*

It is clear that political interest is a concept with many facets and interpretations, but rarely has its multidimensionality been the focus of study in the field of political science. Research in psychology finds interest to be a complicated and nuanced subject dating back to some of the original theorists such as Dewey who noted in 1913 the differences between direct and indirect interest on a child’s motivation to pursue educational goals. Strong’s (1943) important work, *Vocational Interests of Men and Women*, forcefully argued for a multidimensional definition of interest. In it Strong identifies four qualitative attributes of interest: 1) persistent attention; 2) a feeling of liking for an object; 3) direction that steers a person toward or away from an object; and 4) activity that is in response to an object. Silva (2006) argues that the concept of interest can be succinctly divided into *interest* and *interests* which correspond with the more common categories in psychology of states and traits. Renninger and Hidi (2015) also posit dual meanings for interest: a psychological state and motivational disposition. However, political science has failed to note these advancements in understanding in its treatment of political interest. The primary exception to this rule is Horner (2007) who found political interest to be an umbrella concept with three dimensions. This study
builds upon Horner’s work by applying the insights of Renniger and Hidi (2015) to argue that political interest contains two dimensions: enjoyment and motivation.

**Horner’s Dimensions**

Debra Horner’s (2007) work is the most thoroughgoing effort to identify the unique dimensions of political interest in the field of political science. Her study found political interest to be comprised of three distinct categories: 1) taste for politics; 2) a desire for oversight; and 3) having a stake in the political process.

*Taste*

The first dimension that emerged from Horner’s analysis was a taste for politics. In this dimension were people who enjoy political discussion and who get an intrinsic excitement from taking stands on political issues. These individuals likely watch political news and debates. They generally get a feeling of enjoyment from politics which may be natural or culturally cultivated, such as the child who follows politics because his or her parents are politically active. Taste is likely the most obvious interpretation of the concept and akin to what Lazarsfeld had in mind when he quipped about interest being a “clearly recognizable experience.” However, answers to the question of what is interesting are often more complicated than they would seem. The seminal answer in psychology comes from Berlyne (1960) who argued that an object was interesting based on its evaluation for complexity, novelty, uncertainty, and conflict. Those who have a personal taste or preference for politics will find that related topics score high across these variables and thus arouse their curiosity.

*Oversight*
Horner’s second dimension, oversight, is “closely related to concepts of external efficacy and civic duty” (2007: 76). Horner finds that those whose responses fall into this category mentioned a feeling of responsibility to monitor what is going on in government as a way to prevent corruption. This dimension contains strong citizenship norms in which citizens bear the responsibility to act as watchdog over their government, ensuring it lives up to the highest expectations. Verba et al. (1995: 290) note that rational choice theories do a poor job of predicting political participation, and one of the explanations for why may be that, “Contrary to the logic of the theory, many people vote and join organizations even though they cannot possibly hope to recoup their costs through their gains to self-interest” and that they do so for the “psychic benefits” of the satisfaction of doing one’s civic duty.

*Stake*

The final dimension Horner finds is a stake in the political process and its outcomes. This dimension reflects a feeling of personal investment in the outcomes of political issues sometimes referred to as issue salience (Epstein & Segal, 2000). This dimension is based on the feeling or cognition that politics impacts people personally. The feeling of personal investment in the political process can originate from a multitude of sources, such as a member of a minority group who feels marginalized and has personal experience with discriminatory legislation, or the business executive who is seeking advantageous tax regulation for her business.

**Measuring Political Interest**

It should come as no surprise that the multitude of conceptual definitions of political interest translated to a wide range of operational measures. Most of the variation comes from alterations in question wording and does not represent wholesale differences in the essence of
what is being asked. Research on or including political interest often employs an iteration of the question which asks respondents to rate their level of political interest on a Likert scale with categories ranging from not very interested to very interested. Anecdotal observation suggests the variation in these items is a result of researchers compiling items as they build their survey instruments and including whichever measure of political interest is most handy into the group of “usual suspects” their model will control for such as age, gender, race, education, income etc. Therefore, it would not prove fruitful to examine every variation in question wording. Instead, this section will follow Horner’s (2007) lead and look at what have become the standard measures, those on the American National Election Studies (ANES), The General Social Survey, and studies by the Pew Research Center.

American National Election Survey

In 1948 University of Michigan researchers Angus Campbell and Robert Kahn launched the pilot study of the Survey Research Center which would give birth to the American National Election Study in 1952 (http://www.electionstudies.org/history/ANES_timeline.htm). For nearly seven decades the ANES has asked a general interest in public affairs question. In 1960 and 1962 the question read:

We'd also like to know how much attention you pay to what's going on in politics generally. I mean from day to day, when there isn't any big election campaign going on, would you say you follow politics very closely, fairly closely, or not much at all?

In 1964 the question was updated to:

Some people seem to follow (in 1964 the question used “think about” instead of “follow” subsequent years used “follow”) what's going on in government and public affairs most
of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested.

Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all? (source: http://www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab6d_5.htm)

This language is still used for this item. Since 1952 the ANES has also asked about current interest in election campaigns and whether or not a respondent cared who won a presidential campaign (in 1966 the ANES added a similar item about congressional elections).

*The General Social Survey*

Based out of the University of Chicago, the General Social Survey (GSS) was conducted annually from 1972 to 1994 and semiannually from then on. The GSS has asked some form of political interest question in seven nonconsecutive surveys throughout its history. The first time the GSS asked about political interest the same item used by the ANES was employed. The question wording evolved to, “How interested are you in politics and national affairs? Are you very interested, somewhat interested, only slightly interested, or not at all interested?” in 1987. The current wording was adopted in 1990 which asks:

How interested would you say you personally are in politics, very interested, fairly interested, not very interested, or not at all interested?

*The Pew Research Center*

Going back to 1985 the Pew Research Center has asked a political interest item. The current question asks:

Would you say you follow what’s going on in government and public affair most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?
Interestingly, prior to 2010 Pew utilized question wording identical to the ANES. In 2010, Pew conducted a wording experiment on the political interest item asking half the respondents the question with the above wording and asking the other half:

Some people seem to follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there’s an election or not. Others aren’t that interested. Would you say you follow what’s going in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?

The experiment revealed no significant differences between the questions and as a result Pew has shifted to the less complicated wording (Pew Research Center, 2014a). The Pew Research Center also has an interest question in which respondents are asked about their interest in nine topics (health, politics, science/technology, religion, sports, community events, entertainment, business, and art/theater) and asked to rank the three items which interest them the most (Pew Research Center, 2014a).

Generally, single items used in studies of political interest utilize one of these two approaches. In the ANES and Pew items, the concept of interest is measured through the lens of attention to political affairs, much in the vein of Zaller’s “political awareness.” The item from the GSS is a more straightforward subjective evaluation of an individual’s interest in politics.

In the 2006 Pilot Study, the ANES tested three new political interest variables to determine if a better measure could be found. The items appeared in a split sample experiment where half the respondents received the new measures and the other half the standard measure. The new measures asked:
1. How interested are you in information about what’s going on in government and politics? Extremely interested, very interested, moderately interested, slightly interested, or not interested at all?

2. How closely do you pay attention to information about what’s going on in government and politics? Extremely closely, very closely, moderately closely, slightly closely, or not closely at all?

3. How often do you pay attention to what’s going on in government and politics? All the time, most of the time, about half the time, once in a while, or never?

Shani (2012) examined the effectiveness of the new items in comparison with the older items tapping interest in political campaigns and following government and public affairs. Shani notes the new measures have three distinct advantages: 1) five response categories instead of four; 2) more specific language referencing “politics” instead of “public affairs;” and 3) the items reference information about what’s going on rather than the more opaque interest, attempting to “gauge the motivation to learn about politics as distinct from the motivation to participate in politics” (Shani, 2012: 138). Using regression and correlation analysis Shani finds that, despite these advantages, the new measures do no better than the old in accounting for political participation and information gains. One interpretation of these findings is that although political interest is theoretically rich and nuanced, the standard umbrella items perform adequately in measuring general motivation. Another is that Shani’s findings of lower correlations between some of the new items and her test variables, actually represent a closer approximation to reality that the older blunt instruments were not able to capture.
Adding to this work, Galias et al. (2014) compared two different types of questions that measure relative political interest: one that compares respondents’ rating of interest in various domains, including politics; and one that has respondents rank order various interests. Galais and colleagues find that, “presenting interest in politics along with other valid and worthy domains does not necessarily yield lower levels of reported political interest” (9) and conclude that relative measures of political interest do not perform significantly better than do absolute ones.

A related line of research in social cognition examines the impact of question order effects on the level of political interest. Bishop et al. (1984b) found that the level of political interest varied based on whether the question was asked before or after a difficult knowledge question. Those who were first asked their level of political interest reported higher level of interest than those who first confronted a difficult knowledge question followed by an assessment of their political interest. Bishop and colleagues (1984a) found similar results when respondents were first asked whether or not they had voted. The sequence of the questions influenced the respondents’ self-perception of their own level of political interest by presenting a concrete referent. For those asked the knowledge question first, they weighed their subjective level of political interest with the fact that they may not have known the answer to a political question and tended to report lower levels of interest. Those who were asked the political interest question prior to the knowledge rated themselves as more interested because they had not experienced anything to cause them to doubt their intuition. The authors conclude that individuals were not conducting an exhaustive analysis of their own history and interactions when responding but instead, “the evidence indicates that they respond largely with the first
thing that comes to mind from their most relevant, recent experience” (511, emphasis in original). This is similar to the finding of Zaller (1992) that respondents often answer survey question with “top of the head” information. In a similar experiment, Lasorsa (2003) found levels of political interest differed significantly based on whether the political interest item came before or after a knowledge question. Though Lasorsa also found a “buffer” effect when a filler question was placed between the knowledge items and the political interest measure. Those given the buffer rated their level of interest moderately higher than those who were not. These studies indicate that subjective evaluations of political interest are volatile and sensitive to the context of the evaluation.

Alternate Means of Measuring Political Interest

Others have foregone one of the traditional measures and have attempted to assess political interest by creating indexes of related concepts. One of the more thoughtful is the index created by Van Deth (1990). Van Deth constructed a scale of six items: 1) subjective statement of political interest; 2) degree of observed interest; 3) reading about politics in the newspaper; 4) discussing politics with friends; 5) attending a political meeting; and 6) party identification. This index was intended to measure, “how “far” people are prepared to go in satisfying the curiosity about politics” (Van Deth, 1990: 286). On some of the surveys used in this study there was an item in which the interviewer noted the participant’s level of engagement. This is the perhaps the only measurement of political interest that includes an observational component. Adding the observational element is also in keeping with results of psychology studies that find facial expressions of interest (Tompkins, 1962) though the number of studies is limited. Van Deth’s analysis used the scale to compare political interest across three countries and found the scale to
be more reliable and valid compared with the traditional single item measure of political interest. This finding suggests that a single item is potentially too blunt a tool to measure a complex concept like political interest.

Lupia and Philpot (2005: 1132) likewise elected to utilize an index of items rather than the traditional single item to evaluate the impact of viewing particular websites on an individual’s level of political interest. Their three-item additive index tapped a respondent’s willingness to pay attention to politics at the expense of other endeavors and was composed of the items: “[site] makes me want to learn more about politics; [site] makes me more likely to talk about politics with others; and [site] makes me more willing to vote in the November election.” Conceptually, this index touches on the domains of curiosity and political participation in the form of political discussions and voting. The index performed well in their analysis of the ability of particular websites to increase youths’ political interest. Another common way of measuring political interest is by combining an individual’s interest in local or community politics and national affairs and politics as in the studies by Brady et al. (1995) and (Verba et al., 1997).

Indexes like these are useful tools to measure complex concepts; however, the operational measure is only as good as the items used to construct it. If these items do not cover the full spectrum of the concept then the measure is lacking key explanatory power. However, in measuring political interest there is a paradox of specificity. A general interest item may be so broad as to obscure the motivations it is measuring, while more specified measures may overly restrict the measure and exclude valid motivations. Political interest items which reference some kind of “following” or “attention” may bias the results in favor of those who find the topic personally intriguing because of an individual taste for the topic and consume the information at
higher levels. This kind of measure may not fully capture those who are interested out of civic
duty or some other motivation but to not follow news about government affairs at the rate of
those who personally enjoy the subject. In common parlance, this kind of measure is may
skewed toward political wonks. The question wording of following government and public
affairs may also exclude those who find the topic odious, yet understand the importance of the
outcomes to their personal or community interests.

Conclusion

It is genuinely difficult to succinctly and accurately define political interest. As this
review of work on political interest has shown, scholars have thought deeply about this concept,
and many have come to different conclusions. An unfortunate trend in political science is to
define political interest as conceptually monolithic; it is either curiosity, or a psychological
engagement to politics, or an intrinsic motivation, or any of the other definitions described in this
chapter. Rarely is political interest defined as a multifaceted concept which includes some or all
of these definitions, and rarer still is it measured in this way. On the other hand, empirical and
theoretical work in psychology has identified nuanced dimensions of interest and built strong
theoretical foundations around these findings.

Conceptually restricting the definition of political interest has resulted in measurement
instruments that perform an opposite function, they are functionally broad, often acting as a
catch-all variable for positive political feelings (or their lack). The approach of using a single,
broad item to measure political interest may lack in conceptual discrimination of a complicated
variable, however, empirical observations using the single item find that political interest
measured this way is 1) remarkably stable over time; and 2) not impacted by variations in
question wording. These findings beg the question: if the single item works, why change it? This study examines individuals’ conception of political interest to determine if single item measure effectively captures their views, or if the stability of these measures is an artificial result of the scope of these broad measures that may be better specified. The following chapter describes the method Horner utilized to examine political interest and the mirrored approach of this study. This study replicates Horner’s findings and test the hypothesis that political interest is a concept with two dimensions: enjoyment and motivation.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the multi-method approach employed to answer the research question of what political interest means to the mass public and test the hypothesis that political interest is a concept with two dimensions, enjoyment and motivation. The approach is divided into three phases. The first phase entails identifying people’s subjective opinions about what it means to be interested in politics. This step accomplishes two important tasks. First, it acts as an initial validity check of the main supposition that people have different conceptions of what it means to be interested in politics not captured by the traditional single interest item. Second, these descriptions from individuals provided the seed information to create statements that were sorted in the second phase. The second phase consists of applying Q method to quantitatively analyze the data from phase I. This study utilizes Q Method as specified by Brown (1980) and updated by McKeown and Thomas (2013) to measure subjectively held opinions on political interest. The third phase has two stages. During the first stage, an original survey was fielded to test the validity of Horner’s dimensions. In the second stage, two new dimensions of political interest are created and tested.

The methods used in the present study loosely parallel Horner’s method. Phase I of this study differs somewhat from Horner who used in-depth interviews and rhetorical and semiotic clustering analysis to derive her dimensions. However, the aim of work is the same: to identify the subjectively held beliefs about political interest from individuals in an organic way and systematically analyze that data for underlying constructs.
Phase I: Qualitative Data Collection

The goal of phase I was to collect descriptions of political interest in natural language which could be used in the Q sort in phase II. To accomplish this, a survey was fielded utilizing the online platform Survey Monkey. The Defining Political Interest (DPI) survey was administered to a convenience sample of graduate students and alumni from a private East Coast university. The survey was open for fifteen days during the spring of 2016 and collected 119 responses. 68% of respondents were female and 32% were male. 49% of respondents were age 21-29, 29% were age 30-39, 17% were age 40-49, and the remaining 5% were age 50 or older. Respondents were asked the open ended question, “In your opinion, what does it mean to be interested in politics?” They were then given a blank text box and allowed to type any length response into the box. Responses ranged from short, two word responses e.g. “engaged citizen” to longer multi-part responses such as,

To actively seek information about or participation in elections, elected office, and/or the decisions made by those in government, including judicial and regulatory decisions. To have an opinion about these matters and seek to educate one’s self on current issues and controversies facing governmental officials.

Respondents were then asked a single item measure of subjective political interest, “How interested would you say you are in politics?” and given a standard four point Likert scale response options ranging from not at all interested to very interested. 34% of respondents identified themselves as very interested in politics, 52% identified as somewhat interested in politics, 13% identified as not much interested in politics, and 1% rated themselves as not at all interested in politics. This sample skews slightly in favor of the interested end of the spectrum.
with the largest disparity between this sample and nationally representative samples in the not at all interested category.²

Responses to the open ended question were collected and analyzed for common themes and trends. These statements were then sorted thematically and served as the data for the initial investigation of subjective opinions about political interest. From this rich body of qualitative data, 39 single sentence statements were created, plus the eight survey items developed by Horner, for a total of 47 statements, which represent the full array of sentiments expressed in the corpus (See Appendix for the complete list of statements). These items were used in the development of the concourse and Q sample described in phase II.

The online survey was selected instead of in-person interviews as a means of acquiring more data in a shorter period of time. Additionally, social desirability and interviewer bias are common in assessments of concepts highly associated with social norms. Heerwig and McCabe (2009: 676) describe social desirability bias as a phenomenon that “occurs when individuals provide answers they believe to be more socially desirable, rather than revealing their true attitudes, preferences, or beliefs” or are not in line with “social norms” (Galais et al., 2013). The anonymity of the online survey may provide respondents with greater freedom to answer the question honestly.

**Phase II: Q Method**

Q methodology provides a foundation for the systematic study of subjectivity, a person’s viewpoint, opinion, beliefs, and attitudes (Brown, 1993). As a technique, Q method incorporates the benefits of qualitative and quantitative research in assessing subjectivity (Dziopa & Ahern, 2011). The theoretical and statistical foundation for Q method were first developed by William
Stephenson in 1935 in a letter to the journal *Nature* (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Q method has since been used in hundreds of studies across many disciplines.

In Q method it is the individual, not the researcher who identifies the categories, and in this way it is a useful method in assessing how individuals conceive of topics with fewer artificial limitations. Q method is predicated on the supposition that subjective opinions are operant, meaning they are often in the form of functional rather than logical distinctions (Van Exel & De Graaf, 2009) and that they are communicable (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). Stephenson states “A crucial premise of Q is that subjectivity is communicable, because only when subjectivity is communicated, when it is expressed operantly, it can be systematically analyzed, just as any other behavior (Stephenson, 1953; 1968).” Operant subjectivity is an important concept in Q method. Brown (1980) defines operant to mean “existing naturally” and subjectivity to mean an individual’s viewpoint. Measuring subjective feelings is a difficult, though not impossible task. Lazarsfeld et al. (1948), struggling with how to measure the political interest of respondents found that a subjective evaluation to be the simplest and best approach stating, “It is not surprising that people’s self-rating on interest stands up well under a series of tests of consistency and validity. For being interested is a clearly recognizable experience” (41).

Q method is valuable in analyzing subjectivity because it has a large number of tests completed by a small but representative sample. In this way the Q sort is able to identify common and statistically significant subjective viewpoints and is thus the most appropriate method for answering the research question. Analyzing how people abstractly think about political interest will provide insight into whether or not scholarly conceptual definitions and measurements of political interest effectively capture these views.
Q method contains four main steps as outlined by Brown (1993) and Van Exel and De Graaf (2009) and McKweon & Thomas (2013): 1) definition of the concourses; 2) development of the Q sample; 3) selection of the P set; and 4) Q sorting. The following outlines the procedures followed during each of the steps.

Defining the Concourse

During this phase the conceptual limits of the concept are established in order to encompass the breadth of opinions on the subject. This is known as the concourse (Van Excel & De Graaf, 2009). There are many ways to accomplish this task including taking statements from scholarly and popular literature, art, news media outlets, interviews, surveys, essays etc. This study relied on scholarly literature and the online DPI survey. Statements on political interest were culled from scholarly literature to establish the theoretical bounds of the concept as it is addressed by researchers with special emphasis placed on the work of Horner (2007). The conceptual and operational definitions of political interest described in the literature review were grouped by similarity and used as markers for the concourse. For instance, curiosity about politics (Campbell et al., 1954; Van Deth, 1990, 2004), attentiveness to political matters (Zaller, 1992; Lupia and Philpot, 2005), psychological engagement to politics (Verba et al., 1995), and intrinsic motivation for citizen involvement in political and governmental affairs (Prior, 2010) were used to establish the theoretical boundaries for the natural language statements developed in phase I. These broad categorizations as well as Horner’s three dimensions of taste, oversight, and personal stake were used as the central organizing elements for the concourses.

To ensure the Q sample is drawn from a representative selection of opinions about political interest, the concourse should be informed by the widest array of views on the topic as
possible. For this reason the online survey described in phase I was conducted and all 119 responses were considered in developing the concourse.

*Developing the Q Sample*

The Q sample (sometimes referred to as the Q set) is a selection of opinions and statements identified in the concourse and chosen by the researcher based on theory (Van Exel & De Graaf, 2009). This study relied on the conceptual definitions outlined in the previous section to provide the structuring criteria. Ideally, the Q sample is, “composed of statements that are “natural” in the language of the parties to the concourse and “comprehensive” in their representation of the subjective phenomena and viewpoints possibly implicated” (McKeown & Thomas, 2013: 18). These responses from the phase I survey questionnaire provided the raw source of opinions to draw from; however, they first had to undergo standardization prior to inclusion in the Q sample. Once the representative sample was selected, short declarative statements were drafted. These statements were kept in a natural language format and every attempt was made to preserve the spirit, and often the content, of the original survey responses. Framing the statements appropriately is an important aspect of the Q sample. All statements for the Q sample were written in the positive direction about political interest to avoid confusion. For instance, if the statement, “I enjoy watching political debates” were worded “I don’t enjoy watching political debates” then a negative rating in the Q sort would register a positive feeling and vice versa leading to confusion in analysis. Further, wording the questions positively ensured that they were about political interest as opposed to the opposite concept, political apathy or alienation. Horner’s eight survey items (see Figure 3.1) were also included in the Q sample. Generally the Q sample consists of 40-50 statements (Van Exel & De Graaf, 2009), the
present study created 39 original statements to represent the full array of sentiments expressed in the corpus. In addition, the eight survey items developed by Horner to measure her dimensions were included for a total of 47 statements (See Appendix for full list of statements) to be used in the Q sort.

The survey fielded for phase I may be fairly critiqued for the low number of cases, the demographic skew in favor of those with advanced degrees, and the lack of ability to follow up or ask for clarification from responses. In reviewing the data, the number of repeated responses e.g. following or attentiveness to political news, indicate that basic trends were identified. In response to the critique that the sample is skewed, this is an acknowledged limitation of the data. However, these data were strictly used to create the Q sample and not for purposes of generalization.

Selecting the P Set

The participants who sort the Q sample are referred to as the P set. These individuals are purposely selected to represent the various viewpoints which emerged during the development of the Q sample (Van Exel & De Graf, 2009). In Q method no particular effort is made to achieve broad representation in the sorters because, “the purpose is to explore the attitudes in a population—a task obviously antecedent to ascertaining the numerical incidence and demographic correlate of such opinions” (McKeown & Thomas, 2013: 32). This is because unlike in R correlational analysis, Q is used to describe a population of viewpoints, and not a population of people (Risdon et al., 2003). However, the researcher should strive for as much variability in the population sampled as is feasible.
The population utilized as the P set in this study were graduate students from a private East Coast university with a wide range of self-identified interest in politics. To ensure multiple perspectives on political interest were included, participants in the P set were asked the ANES standard measure of subjective political interest, “Some people seem to follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there’s an election going on or not. Others aren’t that interested. How interested would you say you are in what’s going on in government and public affairs on a scale from 1-7 (this is an expanded response scale), with 1 being not at all interested and 7 being very interested?” Individuals were selected for the P set based on their response to this question ensuring at least one representative from the disinterested (0-3), neutral (4), and interested (5-7) categories. Frequency distributions can be found in Figure 3.2. In total, 23 individuals comprised the P set.

**Q sorting**

During the Q sort participants in the P set rank or score each statement on a given continuum according to some specified rules. This provides the empirical representation of the individual’s viewpoint which can subsequently be statistically measured (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). Sorts are often performed in-person, though numerous modern software allow for the research to conduct a Q sort online. In this study, the sorting phase was conducted in person. Individuals in the P set were given a deck of randomly ordered cards. Each card was numbered on one side and had a single statement from the Q sample on the other. At the start of a sort all participants were read the same script. To begin the researcher read:

Before you are a series of statements that people use to describe what it means to be interested in politics. I’m asking you to sort these into three categories, agree, disagree,
or neutral in how these statements describe your personal feelings on what it means to be interested in politics.

In an effort to reduce social desirability bias sometimes found in studies of political interest, the sorter was then read the following statement:

You may agree with the ideas behind a concept yet find that it does not match your idea of political interest, don’t worry about this, the goal is to gauge your personal opinion, which means there are no right or wrong answers.

All the items in the Q set were positive declarations which could tempt the sorter to place a card in the agree category because they assent with the concept e.g. politics is about justice, when the statement does not accurately reflect their opinion of what it means to be interested in politics.

The sorter was also told that the number of statements in each category did not need to be equal, this is referred to as an unstructured approach. The researcher then left the sorter with the statements. The sorter read the statement on each card and placed it into the appropriate category (agree, disagree, or neutral) based on their feelings about whether or not it matched their conception of what it means to be interested in politics. This is referred to as the initial sort.

When sorters finished the task the researcher returned and gave instructions for the next phase. The sorter was shown a grid (See Figure 3.3) created on a table where they would further rank the statements. The grid had columns that ranged in values from -5 (labeled most disagree) to 5 (labeled most agree) with 0 labeled as neutral. The sorter was told that this table was meant to add nuance to their broad categorizations. Sorters were instructed to retrieve the cards from the agree category from the initial sort and to begin placing them on the grid with those they agreed with more placed in higher value columns. The sorters were then instructed to do the same
procedure with the cards in their neutral and disagree categories. This is referred to as the final sort. Further instructions were given that they could place as many cards in each column as they desired, however, they were reminded that this was a study of their subjective views and asked to make distinctions between the statements. Sorters were told that the difference between a “2” and “3” or a “-3” and a “-4” may not seem obvious, but were encouraged to “go with their gut” and place the card in the value they felt most appropriate. The researcher left the sorter alone while they completed this task.

This study elected to conduct an unstructured sort which allowed the participants to organically sort as many items into each column as they chose. However, they were instructed that each column must have at least one statement in it. Some criticize the unstructured method because it does not discriminate between underlying factors as well as a structured method which forces more decisions. While valid, a drawback of the structured approach is that the decisions made under the constraints may be an artifact of the rules imposed and not accurately represent the participants’ viewpoints. Therefore this study accepted the possibility of less discrimination in the results in favor of truer representation of opinions.

The Q sort contains an experiment nested in the Q sample. Horner’s eight survey items were mixed randomly in the Q sample given to participants to sort and were not distinguished from the other statements in any way. The goal of this experiment was to: 1) determine if participants group the individual items of each dimension together, as validation of the reliability of each dimension, and; 2) determine if participants would distinguish between Horner’s dimensions, a confirmation of the separateness of the dimensions.
Once all cards were placed on the board the researcher returned and asked if the sorter was happy with his or her decisions and gave them a final opportunity to change how cards were placed. When they were satisfied, the researcher conducted an exit interview asking the sorter to explain his or her thought process while placing the cards, what decision rules they found themselves making, and anything they struggled with during the exercise. The researcher took notes while the sorter explained their reasoning. At the conclusion of the exit interview the sort was completed. The researcher then recorded the data for each participant which constituted their personal political interest profile. Each session lasted approximately 15.

**Q Sort Analysis**

The unique ranking of the Q sample creates a personal profile (Brouwer, 1999) of the sorter that can be statistically measured and compared with the profiles of the other participants. Correlation between these profiles indicates similar viewpoints (Brown, 1993) on the topic, in this case political interest. Factors which emerge from analysis then represent functional clusters of subjective viewpoints (Van Excel & De Graaf, 2009).

A principle components factor analysis and multidimensional cluster analysis were performed on the data to identify groups of statements (described in detail in the following chapter). These groups were analyzed for common themes which bound the statements together in the minds of the sorters. This study utilized a parallel method to Horner’s semiotic clustering to distil theoretical dimensions from the statistical groupings. The findings from the second provided another measure of support for the argument that political interest is a multidimensional concept and supports moving to phase III, fielding a new survey and testing Horner’s dimensions.
Technique Critiques

Q Method has numerous detractors who criticize the lack of consistency in application of the technique. Dziopa and Ahern (2011) offer a systematic critique of studies employing the Q-technique and find significant deviations from standard Q method protocol. Another criticism raised against Q method is that the subjective nature of the data is of unknown reliability, calling into question the generalizability of the results (Thomas & Baas, 1992). Stated in another way, if the data participants sort is of poor quality, the output will likewise be untrustworthy—garbage in, garbage out. Finally, another common critique is the “forced choice” nature of some Q method studies which require participants to arrange the Q sample into a set number of categories.

The present study overcame these limitations by adhering to the standard Q method protocol as outlined by Van Exel and De Graaf (2009) and McKeown and Thomas (2013). The more diverse the P set is, the more confident the researcher can be that the results represent the opinions of the sample population. The ideological diversity of the participants in this study’s P set was determined based on their responses to the general interest question asked prior to beginning the sort. This study addressed the “forced choice” critique by employing an unstructured approach in which participants were allowed to organically sort items with fewer restrictions on their decisions. Finally, the results of Q method should not be generalized beyond the sample population, and this study readily acknowledges this fact. However, phase III utilizes a diverse sample of American adults who use the Internet and can be generalized to online adult populations. Findings from this survey comport with those of the Q sort thus providing support for the Q method’s reliability.
Phase III: Fielding the Survey and Testing Measures

The previous two phases were designed to test whether individuals perceived political interest as a multidimensional concept and if so, to determine what those dimensions are. The data (described in detail in the next chapter) find strong support for the hypothesis, therefore the dimensions should be tested in a representative survey instrument. This process has two stages. In the first stage the survey is fielded and the data are used to evaluate Horner’s three dimensions for reliability. In the second stage, two new dimensions of political interest are created and validated.

An original survey was fielded of American adults’ political interest, media use habits, and political participation. The Political Interest, Engagement, and News Personalization Survey (PIENPS), conducted by the Georgetown University research team of Diana Owen, Molly Crain, and G. Isaac W. Riddle, is a national study of eligible U.S. voters. Subjects were recruited using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online workplace platform, and received a stipend for their participation. Survey takers were screened to fit the profile of adult Americans online based on their gender, age, and education. Female respondents are slightly underrepresented in the study, but the age and education demographics correspond closely to the online population. The survey was in the field from March 31 to April 5, 2016. A total of 808 respondents completed the entire survey—an additional 50 respondents completed the political interest section of the study.

This survey included the eight items in Horner’s three dimensions as well as the ANES general interest question (see Figure 3.1 for full question wording separated by dimension). The survey questionnaire also included an extensive battery of online and offline political participation behaviors (see Appendix for full list of questions). Data from this survey were first
used to validate the three dimensions Horner hypothesized. The results from this analysis indicate two factors, termed enjoyment and motivation, as opposed to three. In the final stage the new dimensions were validated and tested. The predictive ability of the dimensions was compared with the single traditional interest item to determine if the new models have better explanatory power. The results indicate they do, though with some surprising findings.

Conclusion

Identifying the underlying dimensions in an elusive variable like political interest is a challenging task. The methodological approach described in this chapter is designed to meet these challenges by collecting high quality qualitative data, and a phased quantitative analysis. The following chapter describes the analysis in greater detail and discusses the results for each phase.
CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

The data collected from the DPI survey and the Q method were utilized to understand what political interest means to the mass public. If responses to the survey were largely homogenous and the Q sorts similar, then the hypothesis that political interest is a multidimensional concept in the minds of the mass public would be discredited. The wide range of motivations captured in the DPI survey provide the first evidence that the mass public conceive of political interest in different terms. The results from the Q method similarly indicate a diverse range of opinions but statistical correlations are identified which suggest agreement on broad dimensions associated with political interest. The final phase replicated Horner’s study of political interest by administering her same interest items in the PIENPS survey. A factor analysis of the items did not produce her hypothesized three dimensions; instead two dimensions, enjoyment and motivation, emerged as distinct factors. Correlation and regression analysis of these two dimensions indicate they are distinct from general interest and differently predict participation outcomes and political knowledge.

Horner’s (2007) pioneering work on political interest approached the question in a two-step fashion similar to the method employed in this study. First, she conducted 43 in-depth interviews from a sample of 312 individuals who previously had responded to the 2000 Detroit Area Study (DAS). Horner then performed a semiotic clustering analysis from the qualitative data she collected during these interviews. Eleven common expressions emerged (enjoying the campaign/scandals, having time to waste, being informed, watching news/reading newspapers, volunteering/local activity, voting, it’s what good citizens do, caring about broad issues/outcomes, guarding against wrongdoing, caring about issues that affect me, and having...
political ambitions), from which she distilled five connotative meanings (entertainment, knowledge, action, responsibility, self-interest). Horner further condensed these into three conceptual meanings: taste, oversight, and personal stake. From these three conceptual dimensions Horner created eight survey items to measure the concepts (see Figure 3.1). Horner then tested the new measures for reliability and compared their ability to predict political activities with the traditional single item measure of political interest. Curiously, Horner’s insights seem to have been largely ignored by political science as most studies continue to employ single item measures. Though it may be the case that researchers, aware of the findings, chose to employ the single item general interest measure for practical purposes or because the broad item more fully captures the concept at the macro level.

I employ a similar methodology in an effort to replicate Horner’s findings and provide evidence to further test whether the multidimensional hypothesis should be ignored or incorporated into the discipline’s understanding of political interest. The first section describes the results of the Q sort and the associated interviews. The second section examines data from an original survey which included both the traditional ANES measure of general political interest as well as Horner’s eight items representing her three dimensions. This section will retest her hypothesis using factor analysis of the hypothesized dimensions using a larger data set from the PIENP survey. The final section tests how the predictive ability of the new measures compare to the single political interest question.

**Phase I Results**

Phase I was designed to collect and analyze qualitative data. The phase began with fielding a brief online survey of American adults who were asked to describe in their own words
what it means to be interested in politics. These data were initially analyzed using the NVivo qualitative analysis software. This software counted word frequencies from the text which are displayed in Figure 4.1. Common words e.g. the, a, as etc. were excluded as were the words “politics” and “interested” as these were generally used in restatement of the question. Forms of words such as ‘follow’ ‘follows’ ‘followed’ are included in the count for each word. The data displayed are words with ten or more occurrences in the 119 responses and together represent the top thirteen most common words used by respondents.

From this array of word frequencies, several themes emerged (see Figure 4.2). When people answered the question they often referenced items that motivated their political interest such as various issues and policies and knowledge about the government, elections, and candidates; a common refrain is that these topics warrant interest due to their importance. This theme was repeated in the multiple references to the necessity of being informed about candidates in order to provide oversight and prevent corruption. This manner of describing interest is similar to Strong’s (1955) “steering” component of interest that directs or motivate an individual’s interest. The second trend which emerged was the repeated reference to specific actions that respondents felt were the hallmark of someone who is interested in politics. This method of describing political interest by the actions the concept inspires is similar to political scientists who equate interest with involvement (Van Deth, 1990). The last trend identified in the word count analysis was the emotional component of political interest. Though less prominent than the others, affective or emotional language cropped up in multiple responses. These items often referenced caring about the future we leave our children or the impact of social justice both nationally and internationally.
These qualitative data suggest a diversity in how people think about and describe what it means to be interested in politics. Being interested in politics is often a personal matter, galvanized by or driven by a diverse field of circumstances and motivations.

**Phase II Results**

Data collected from the Q sort were entered into the PQMethod software developed by Peter Schmolck of Bundeswehr University in Munich, Germany. The basis for analyzing the data of Q method studies has been described as “inverted factor analysis” (McKeown & Thomas, 2013) because unlike traditional factor analysis which examines correlation between variables, Q correlation compares individuals (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In this way, the Q Method uniquely allows the researcher to quantitatively identify trends in subject-based evaluations that previously eluded analysis. The PQMethod software offers significant flexibility to the researcher to select the kinds of analysis to conduct, but is particularly suited to centroid and principle component factor analysis.

Factor analysis of this kind is only as good as the data used, and there are several issues which can be raised with this set. First, the sorters were taken from a convenience sample of graduate students from a private, East Coast university and as a result they are demographically similar. This would be more of a limitation in a traditional survey; however, in Q Method it is more important that perspectives be diverse than demographics. Some variation in perspectives was achieved by including participants with varying degrees of self-reported political interest, though admittedly this is a narrow criteria. All participants were first asked the ANES survey item of general interest with a 1-7 scale. Responses of 1-3 were categorized as not interested, 4 was considered neutral, and 5-7 were considered interested. The distribution of political interest
of the sorters is seen in Figure 3.2. The P set was comprised of two participants from the
disinterested category, three from the neutral category, and 19 from the interested category. The
second issue which could be raised is the quality of the statements used in the sort.
Shortcomings in the sort items were overcome in two ways; first, overlap was built into the
concepts covered to improve the reliability. For instance, multiple survey responses stated
political interest was indicated by some form of following what is going on in the government or
society. Sort items covered several elements of information seeking such as “It’s up to
individuals to educate themselves about how the government works; It’s important to dig deeper
than the headlines when it comes to political matters; or Keeping up with local politics is a
significant way of safeguarding the community” in order to address the range of items in the
survey, and to offer the concept from several perspectives.

To begin the analysis I conducted a principle component factor analysis of the sort data
with varimax rotation. The software can extract up to eight factors in the factor analysis so in an
exploratory analysis all eight were extracted. Eight factors were identified, however, three of the
factors contained only one sorter (indicating no correlation with the sort results of the other
sorters) and three other factors were comprised of one strong component with loading values of
.75 or higher and a secondary weaker component. Due to the relative dispersion and weakness
of the factors from the initial two computations, a final principle component factor analysis was
conducted. In keeping with the hypothesis, and the exploratory factor analysis, two factors were
forced out of the rotations. The results (see Figure 4.3) demonstrate two factors with smearing
across several of the variables (sorters in this case).
The first factor is the strongest with 15 sorters with loading values of .49 or higher and an eigenvalue of 7.3. In factor analysis loading values of .3 and greater are considered strong loading values (Foster et al., 2006). Eigenvalues represent the variances of the factors and are used to help determine the number of factors that should be extracted from a particular set of variables (Owen, 2016a). Factors with eigenvalues greater than one are extracted, but higher eigenvalues indicate higher correspondence between variables and the underlying factors (Foster et al., 2006). Generally, the loading values for the first factor are .60 or higher, but the varimax rotation computation identified several sorters with loading values in the .40 and .50 range to be better suited in the first factor. This factor’s high eigenvalue of 7.3 indicates low variance in the structure of the factor and demonstrates unity in how the sorters arrayed the statements, though there is some smearing into the second factor. The second factor contains eight components though the loading values decrease ranging from .33 to .66. As mentioned, this factor exhibits some smearing with the first factor which indicates correlation with the first factor on some items. The factor has a moderately high eigenvalue of 2.54 which further demonstrates the agreement between the two sorts. In comparison with the other exploratory factor analyses, the two factor solution maintains the highest loading values and gives the most appropriate representation of the data. The two factor solution will be used for the following analysis.

The PQMethod software also gives the researchers z scores for each statement in each factor. A z score (sometimes referred to as a standard score) is a mathematical expression of the distance between a particular absolute score and the mean average score of the measured sample (Watts & Stenner, 2012). The z score allows the researcher to calculate the probability of a variable’s score falling within the normal distribution (Laerd, 2013). This is a useful statistic to
get a sense of the agreement (or lack thereof in some cases) among sorters with statistical confidence. Figure 4.4 displays the statements for the first factor with z scores in the 90% confidence interval or better. The figure displays the statements that had the highest consensus within members of the factor, this includes statements with positive consensus (most agreed) and statements which had negative consensus (most disagreed).

Most of the sorters in factor one agreed that political decisions shape the future, that important things that affect their lives are influence by politics, and relatedly, their concern for the welfare of the country is tied to political decisions. These statements are closely tied to personal investment in the outcome of political decisions. This group was united around a forward looking concern (affect) that is grounded in a cognitive recognition of political impacts. The sorters in factor one also found unity in their distaste for sharing their views generally, or on social media in particular. All four of the top negative consensus items for factor one are in reference to outward expressions or social elements of politics and interestingly are all framed in the first person. Taken together, this group finds agreement that interest is about their personal interests and securing those interests for the future, but they do not want to impose those views on others. Politics is a personal matter.

Sorters in factor two also agreed that political decisions shape the future (see Figure 4.5). However, this factor begins to diverge from factor one in the second statement. Factor two expressed high agreement in finding political issues interesting and enjoying discussions about politics. Additionally, this group agreed on several information-seeking behaviors, namely, the importance of going beyond headlines when it comes to political matters, getting news about national and global issues, and knowing where politicians stand on issues. Finally, factor two
found agreement that it is the basic responsibility for citizens to vote. The sorters in this group enjoy the subject of politics and discussing political matters, but also feel a responsibility to know about issues. There are hints of mistrust to be found in the consensus on the need to dig deeper than the headlines and knowing were politicians stand on issues. Finally, related to the responsibility to know about issues, this group expressed agreement on the citizenship norm of voting. Factor two found common disagreement on a diverse array of topics. They do not like the drama of politics, nor do they believe giving money or volunteering or signing petitions are effective means of making their voice heard, and they do not believe education is solely the responsibility of the individual. The distinction between enjoying politics and political discussion with a penchant for political drama is sharply contrasted in factor two indicating preferences for the subject of political affairs that about more than entertainment.

Sorter Interviews

Interpreting results from a Q sort can be a tricky task. The quantitative analysis of the previous section is a useful tool which brings an empirical rigor to the study of subjective beliefs and opinions; however, a fuller understanding of the results is achieved when the quantitative results are paired with qualitative interview notes.

Factor 1 Sorter Notes

Those in this factor were statistically correlated to statements about political decisions shaping the future, the impact of politics on their life, and a concern for the welfare of the country, and disagreed with statements about sharing their views, especially on social media. The interviewer notes shed additional light on where those in this factor were coming from when they sorted the items. Some were convinced of the responsibility of being informed, “If you
want to complain, you need to know why.” Others thought being informed was important because of their lack of trust in institutions. Another theme in the interviews were expressions of citizenship norms such as voting, and the need to be an informed voter. Several of those in factor 1 expressed strong opinions about the connection between interest and engagement, another voiced a similar sentiment, “action is the biggest expression of interest” but felt uncomfortable prescribing these actions for others. The majority of those in factor 1 were of the millennial generation, yet, contrary to conventional wisdom, there was near unanimity against political expressions on social media. Recent analysis of Millennials’ political expression on Facebook explains that conflict avoidance and perception of negative social norms work to dampen political expression of young people on that site (Vraga et al, 2015). The study found many young people often characterized the political expression on Facebook as “rants” or “drama” and generally the work of online provocateurs looking to stir up trouble (Vraga et al., 2015: 87).

**Factor 2 Sorter Notes**

This cohort coalesced around the statements that political decisions shape the future, and as such it is important to critically follow news about candidates, national politics, and global affairs. They also expressed fascination with the topic of politics and enjoyed discussing it. They disagreed with following politics for the drama, as well as prescriptive behaviors like giving money, volunteering for campaigns, and signing petitions, viewing these as personal choices. Interviews of this cohort revealed similar beliefs to the first cohort about the responsibility of citizens to be informed and follow news, though some believed that the citizen’s responsibility ended there. There was not the same level of cohesion to the views of factor two.
participants as there was among factor one participants which was apparent in the higher loading scores of the first factor. One participant spoke of the communal aspect of politics and expressed excitement about the political process. Another echoed this sentiment stating describing the community aspects of politics. Interviewees expressed interest and enjoyment in political ideas and discussions but rejected media which frame politics as “just a reality show.” One stated, “Drama and satire is not what politics is about” and another stated flatly that “the drama and horserace don’t matter.” Another theme which emerged in interviews with this cohort were statements which equated interest with engagement and involvement. One person claimed “it’s not about the person in the chair, it’s about everyday politics” and another stated, “Politics is about more than the voting booth” adding “it’s about everyday life.” But, as these statements demonstrate, the participants conceive of political engagement more as lifestyle choices than the traditional political actions measured in political science such as donating money to candidates, volunteering for a campaign, or attending a political rally. This finding aligns with work identifying the increasingly individualized nature of young American’s conception of good citizenship norms. Thanks in part to an increased array of engagement opportunities, young people are more likely to “sample from the civic buffet” rather than adhere to a circumscribed set of responsibilities (Thornson, 2014).

**Consensus Statements**

The analysis also identifies consensus statement between the factors as well as statements the factors most disagreed on. These statements and the corresponding Q sort values are reported in Figure 4.6. The concepts the two factors agree upon are the impact of political decisions, and the importance in following news about these issues which include domestic
politics and candidates, as well as global news. This finding is consistent with the information-seeking behaviors that characterized the majority of responses from the qualitative interviews of phase I. Individuals, like researchers, find it easier to define what political interest is, by describing what it does. The agreement statements can be classified in another way, each represents a motivation for involvement in the political process; the future is shaped by political decisions, a feeling of responsibility to provide oversight of the government, a desire to know where politicians stand on issues, and a growing understanding of the interconnectedness of domestic and global affairs. These statements suggest the first dimension which will be examined in phase III, motivation. However, these statements also lend support to traditional measures of political interest like the ANES item which ask straightforwardly about a respondent’s interest in following news about government and public affairs.

The factors sharply diverge when it comes to statements of preference. Factor one and two are almost on the extreme opposite poles when it comes to enjoying political discussions and nearly as polarized in their views on sharing their political views with others. This kind of extraverted political expression is deeply personal. Those who enjoy political debate do so immensely, whereas those who do not have the taste for political discussion feel a strong aversion to it—a finding that comports with recent work on political expression and conflict avoidance (Vraga et al., 2015). The distinction of affective responses to political subjects suggests the second dimension which will be tested in phase III, enjoyment. The polarizing reactions elicited by these items indicate they will discriminate different kinds of interest more so than motivation or general interest.
**Key Takeaways**

In keeping with the lack of definitional consensus identified among scholars, results from the Q sort and interviews revealed a similar incongruence. When I began the research my hypothesis was that I would find two dimensions wholly separate from one another; there would be those who identified political interest with certain behaviors and beliefs and others who were more driven by an individual preference for the topic. The findings were far from this clean. Instead, the results revealed a host of motivations and widespread smearing between the sorts and often outright disagreement. The statistical findings were corroborated in the interviews which expressed a wide array of beliefs. Upon reconsidering these results in light of the theoretical framework, the lack of consensus in the study participants’ views mirrors the difficulty scholars have had in pinning the concept down. The reasons participants sorted the statements in the way they did reflected deeply held beliefs and were the product of their individual circumstances and histories. This is precisely what we would expect to see as particular manifestations of Renninger and Hidi’s (2015) “cognitive and affective motivational predispositions.” Each reason offered for why an individual was interested represent that person’s motivational component which encourages his or her reengagement with the topic over time. The Q sort also revealed evidence of various psychological states associated with individual’s interest in politics. In the course of interviewing the participations, curiosity, excitement, passion, and serious consideration were all mentioned in alongside their motivations. Expressions of enjoyment with politics were reacted to strongly by both those who agreed and disagreed, supporting the decision to isolate this dimension in the next phase.
Challenges

Throughout the Q sort several challenges emerged. Many of the participants seemed to be reacting to the face value of statement and not the concept of political interest. Despite being encouraged to consider whether or not the statements represented what it meant to be interested in politics, participants often confounded the concept of political interest with their own political displays or broader notions of citizenship norms, which were sometimes in conflict. For instance, one participant indicated in an exit interview her struggle of how to rate a statement about volunteering for a campaign, an action she did not perform but accentuated was a behavior of the civically minded. Another challenge was that some focused on the “political” aspect and not the “interest” element of political interest. Some of these challenges are inherent in the difficulty of describing what it means to be interested in politics, others are likely due to flaws in the question wording.

Multidimensional Scaling

Multidimensional scaling (MDS) is a tool used by statisticians to construct a map of objects in terms of their relative placement in multidimensional space (Owen, 2016b). Multidimensional scaling is similar to factor analysis in that both identify the underlying structure of data but each uses different input data. Factor analysis uses correlation between variables whereas multidimensional scaling measures the degree of similarity or dissimilarity between items (Owen, 2016b). The value of multidimensional scaling is that it plots the items in Euclidean Space which provides the researcher with a tool to visualize the data. Multidimensional scaling was performed on the sort items utilizing IBM’s SPSS statistical software package to visualize the factor analysis performed in the Q sort. The results for the two
dimensional solution are displayed in Figure 4.7. The MDS model has a Kruskal’s stress test value of .193 (closer to zero is better) and an R Squared value of .846 (closer to one is better) indicating the model is a good fit for the data. The MDS converged in 4 iterations.

As is often noted, interpreting MDS results is more art than science. From the model of these data, two separate clusters were identified and highlighted with red ellipses. The smaller grouping in quadrant I contain Horner’s (2007) taste dimension as well as an original statement of deriving intrinsic excitement in hearing other’s political opinions and represents this study’s enjoyment dimension. The larger grouping represents the motivation dimension. This cluster contains the majority of the statements with some internal bunching on thematic elements and provides a useful visualization of the diversity of views represented by the motivation dimension. Initial attempts to identify additional distinct groups within the larger cluster were found to be arbitrary distinctions and a single large dimension was assessed to be the most appropriate interpretation of the data.

Horner’s eight items were also included in the sort as a study in a study to test if individuals would identify the statements as having 1) high with-in group correlation; and 2) as distinct as dimensions. Blue circles highlight items in the taste dimension, green circles highlight items in the oversight dimension, and purple items highlight items in the stake dimension. As the figure demonstrates, each dimension was grouped together consistently by the sorters, and each dimension was identified as distinct from the others. The only outlier in Horner’s dimensions was the statement, “following politics helps me safeguard my interests” which was located alone in the fourth quadrant. Sorting these items as highly correlated within the group and highly separate between lends some evidence for Horner’s three dimensions.
However, support for this study’s hypothesis that both Horner’s stake and oversight dimensions are more accurately described as elements of a larger motivation dimension can be found in the failure of the “safeguard my interests” statement to group with Horner’s hypothesized dimension.

The MDS analysis also revealed some statements to be outliers which can be seen in the fringes of Figure 4.7. These statements include: I like to share my views with as many people as will listen, I enjoy participating in the political conversation on social media, I like to share political opinions on social media, it’s up to individuals to educate themselves about how the government works, it’s important that people volunteer for campaigns, and I find the drama of politics entertaining. The two social media statements did cluster with the sharing opinions statement but were outside the scope of the sorters’ beliefs about political interest. It is unclear why the remaining statements did not group with any of the other clusters.

Multidimensional scaling is a useful technique to visualize data which offers another perspective that may aid in interpreting relationships among variables. From this analysis two distinct clusters emerged which closely tracked with the hypothesized multidimensionality of political interest. Sorters grouped together statements about personal preference and enjoyment with politics, with the remaining body of statements falling into a larger dimension representing motivations for interest in politics. These findings from phase II analyses provide compelling conceptual and empirical evidence for moving on to the next phase of the analysis, testing the new dimensions.
Phase III Results

Testing Horner’s Dimensions

If political interest is under-conceptualized as Horner argues, we might expect the effects of the single measure to be over-stated due to the broad nebulous nature of the wording. The bluntness of the measure includes a host of disparate feelings and motivations that should be considered distinct from one another. In this way, reconceptualizing political interest as a multidimensional concept should aid in adding nuance to the results which more accurately match reality. The following section investigates Horner’s findings by replicating her methodology using original data.

Data

To test if Horner’s dimensions are more effective at predicting political participation than the traditional single item measure, I analyze data from the PIENPS conducted in April, 2016. Figure 4.8 displays the descriptive statistics for the survey. See Appendix for complete list of descriptive statistics for the variables measured. These data represent a larger sample than Horner analyzed. Of her 411 respondents, only half received the questions as they are worded here because she administered a split sample test to evaluate whether positively or negatively worded questions performed better. Her analysis revealed the positively worded question to perform best therefore I elected to test positively worded items as well. These data will be used to test the following hypothesis:

$H_1$: Political interest is comprised of two distinct dimensions, enjoyment and motivation.
Method

Horner conducted a principle component factor analysis and found three factors with eigenvalues of greater than one. These factors corresponded with her hypothesized dimensions. I replicated this exploratory factor analysis conducting a principle components factor analysis with varimax rotation in SPSS. According to standard protocols and in keeping with Horner’s method, only factors with eigenvalues greater than one would be extracted. This analysis revealed a single strong factor. All eight components had factor loadings of .70 or higher and factor had an eigenvalue of 4.8. SPSS allows the researcher to establish a set number of factors to extract by force, so in compliance with the three hypothesized dimensions, I set the program to extract three factors. Results from this factor analysis are compared with Horner’s in Figure 4.9.

Several interesting findings emerge from my factor analysis. In my analysis, the first factor is comprised of four items: ‘it’s worth the time to keep informed about political issues,’ ‘good citizens stay informed,’ ‘important things that affect my life are influenced by politics,’ and ‘following politics helps me safeguard my interests.’ The item, ‘good citizens stay informed,’ is conceptually part of the oversight dimension, yet the analysis reveals it loads most strongly with the stake dimension. This differs from Horner’s result which found the three items she hypothesized for the stake in politics dimension to all to load on the first factor. The second factor loads as it should in both analyses with the correct statements for taste: ‘I find politics exciting,’ ‘I usually enjoy discussions about politics,’ and ‘I usually enjoy television or newspaper stories about politics and government affairs,’ all loading together with high values. Horner found the same three items to load together, however, the taste dimension was her third factor. The third factor in this analysis is the single item, ‘I feel responsible for following what’s
going on in politics and government affairs,’ which is conceptually part of the Horner’s oversight dimension. Horner found this factor to also load with the hypothesized item, ‘good citizens stay informed.’ Horner notes the ‘good citizens stay informed’ item did not work as theoretically planned, and similarly was mismatched for this analysis. The normative wording of the question, and the switch from the first person evaluations of the other items to a generalized proscription, potentially caused the aberration in output.

Several issues arise in the new factor analysis that suggest the items need to be rearranged for future analysis. First, contrary to the simple structure of Horner’s components (except for the good citizen item as previously mentioned), there is considerable smearing across factors in the new analysis. ‘Worth the time’ loads on the first factor with a loading value of .75 but also loads well on the second factor at .41. ‘Safeguard my interests’ loads on the first factor at .68 and also loads somewhat well on the second factor with a loading value of .38. The ‘good citizen’ variable loads well on the first factor but also loads somewhat on the third factor at .36. The ‘feel responsible’ item loads on the third factor at .89 and also loads on the first factor at .32. And the ‘enjoy discussions’ .84 and ‘find politics exciting’ .83 items load somewhat on the first factor as well (.32 and .30 respectively). This lack of simple structure is indicative of the initial factor analysis I conducted which identified only one factor among all the items.

The most telling result from this exploratory factor analysis is found in the eigenvalues of the new analysis. The eigenvalue for the first factor is quite high at 4.8, the eigenvalue for the second factor approaches the threshold of 1.0, however, falls just short at .97. The third factor is an unacceptable .56, indicating that this factor should be eliminated from the analysis. These values contrast sharply with the eigenvalues of Horner who found 3.31 for the first factor, 1.44
for the second, and 1.40 for the third, all acceptable values indicating the three factors are reliable in her analysis. Reasons for the different findings are unclear, though the finding may be a function of the different data sets.

A second exploratory factor analysis was performed in which a set number of extractions was not established. Again a principle components analysis with varimax rotation was conducted, but this time the eigenvalue threshold was reduced to .90. The resulting rotated component matrix is displayed in Figure 4.10. This analysis reveals two latent constructs as opposed to the three identified by Horner. The first factor contains all the items from the oversight and stake dimensions. The ‘influence my life’ .80 and ‘good citizens’ .81 load most strongly, followed by ‘worth the time’ .76, ‘safeguard my interests’ .73 and ‘feel responsible’ .67 with the lowest loading value. The second factor identified in this analysis is comprised of the three items created to comprise the taste dimension. All three items load well on this factor, ‘exciting’ loads with a value of .84, ‘enjoy discussion’ .84, and ‘enjoy news’ .86.

This model, though improved, is not without its troubles. Again there is smearing with several of the items in the first factor. ‘Worth the time’ loads on the second factor at .41 as does ‘safeguard my interests’ at .39, and ‘feel responsible’ at .31. In the second factor ‘exciting’ and ‘enjoy discussions’ also smear into the first factor with loadings of .33 and .32. In fact, there is not the desired simple structure in any of the items with some positive cross loading for all the items. The eigenvalues provide the explanation for this result. The model finds one very strong factor and only creates the second factor because of the adjusted eigenvalue threshold. Typically, simple structure is desired when extracting factors, however, the smearing observed in this analysis makes conceptual sense. The variables are intended to represent facets of political
interest, therefore they should be somewhat correlated with one another. They are also hypothesized to be distinct facets so we would expect the factor analysis to discriminate between the two dimensions, and in fact, this is what the results indicate.

Factor analysis is not as rigid in its parameters as some other tests. There is substantial backing in the literature to adjust factors based on theoretical constructs (Foster et al., 2006). In this analysis, the two dimensions which emerge comport with the findings from phase II. Horner’s taste dimension, termed *enjoyment* in politics for this analysis, continue to hold together. The oversight and stake dimensions are found to be part of the same construct, termed *motivation* for this analysis. Finding different factors associated with the interest items than did Horner is not a full repudiation of her findings, but the results are compelling and in keeping with the hypothesized two dimensions of this study and will therefore be retain for the proceeding analysis.

*Creating the New Dimensions*

Additive indexes were created for enjoyment and motivation from the eight survey items. The enjoyment index includes the items, ‘I find politics exciting,’ ‘I usually enjoy discussions about politics,’ and ‘I usually enjoy television or newspaper stories about politics and government affairs.’ This index has a range of 1-13 (mean of 8.37 and standard deviation of 3.14) and a Cronbach’s alpha of .881. The motivation index includes the items, ‘I feel responsible for following what’s going on in politics and government affairs,’ ‘good citizens stay informed,’ ‘it’s worth the time to keep informed about political issues,’ ‘important things that affect my life are influenced by politics,’ and ‘following politics helps me safeguard my
interests.’ This index has a range of 1-21 (mean of 15.32 and standard deviation of 4.16) and a Cronbach’s alpha of .868.

Correlations of the enjoyment, motivation and the single item measure for general interest (Figure 4.11) provide support for the hypothesis by demonstrating the high but not perfect correlation between the variables. Enjoyment and motivation are highly correlated but distinct with a Pearson’s correlation of .660. As expected, the general interest measure is strongly correlated with the two dimensions (enjoyment=.698; motivation=.631) because they are measuring the same concept, yet the different correlation values indicate they are treated as distinct concepts by respondents.

Validating the Measures

To determine if the new dimensions offer greater discrimination in predicting outcomes than the traditional single item measure, the three interest measures were compared in their ability to predict online and offline political participation, and political knowledge. Online and offline political participation have been shown to be distinct forms of political engagement (Oser et al., 2013) therefore they were separated into two indexes for analysis. An index of offline participation was created composed of eleven items which included items such as: discussing politics with family, friends and colleagues, attending a rally or protest, and attempting to convince others to vote. The offline participation index had a range of 0-7 (mean of 3.32 and standard deviation of 1.68) and a Cronbach’s alpha of .746.

An index of online participation was created composed of twenty items which tapped online activities such as: following news about a campaign, participation in election-related discussions, donating to a campaign, creating, posting, and or sharing election related material on
social media, and clicking the “I Voted” button on Facebook. The online participation index had a range of 0-18 (mean of 7.94 and standard deviation of 5.17) and Cronbach’s alpha .907.

Finally, an index of respondents’ political knowledge was created from five questions. The index had three multiple choice questions asking: who has the power to declare a law unconstitutional, what political office Paul Ryan holds, and how much of a majority is required to override a presidential veto. Two open ended questions were also included: which party currently has the most member in the House of Representatives, and which political party is more conservative at the national level. The questions were coded 1 for a correct answer and all other were coded 0. The knowledge index had a range of 0-5 (mean of 3.39 and standard deviation 1.61) and Cronbach’s alpha of .792.

As the literature has demonstrated, political interest is an exceptionally strong predictor of political behavior, specifically political participation and knowledge seeking. One of the goals in identifying distinct dimensions, or latent variables, within the larger concept of political interest is to better understand its relationship to various political activities. This study examines these relationships using the new dimensions of enjoyment, motivation, and the general interest item.

The variables were first correlated (see Figure 4.11) to get a sense of their relationship to one another. Enjoyment is most correlated with online participation, but also highly correlated with offline participation. The relationship dips lower for knowledge. Motivation is most correlated with offline participation, followed closely by online participation. Of the three interest variables, motivation is the most correlated with knowledge. The single general interest item is slightly more correlated with online and offline participation than motivation, but the two
variables are remarkably close. The general interest item is the second highest correlate to knowledge of the interest variables.

Figure 4.12 reports the comparisons of ordinary least square (OLS) regression analyses performed for each of the interest variables as an independent variable and the dependent variables of offline and online participation, and knowledge. Each model controlled for common demographic factors of age, gender, educational attainment, income, and political ideology (see Appendix for question wording) as common items which often impact political participation and knowledge. Political ideology was folded so that conservative and liberal responses coded 1 and moderate responses coded 0 under the assumption that those with stated ideologies will more politically active and knowledgeable about politics than political moderates (Pew Research Center, 2014b). Correlation analysis was performed and multicollinearity was not found among the independent variables.

As expected, the three interest variables explain a substantial portion of the variance in the offline participation index. The enjoyment model has the highest explanatory power accounting for 26% of the variance in offline participation. Enjoyment is also the single strongest predictor with a Beta coefficient of .459. The general interest model is able to explain 21% of the variance in offline participation powered primarily by the general interest measure which has the second highest Beta coefficient .401. The motivation model accounts for 20% of the variance in offline participation likewise driven by the interest measure, motivation, with a Beta coefficient of .389. In all three models political ideology was significant and the second strongest predictor. Of the control variables, age was statistically significant in all models and negative, indicating young people are more inclined to participate than older adults. This is an
interesting finding that contradicts a large body of literature and punditry which suggests young people are apathetic. Gender and educational attainment were not significant in any of the models. Income was a weak predictor and significant in the general interest and taste models and approaching significance in the stake model.

The online participation analysis tell a similar story to offline participation. The enjoyment model is the best predictor of online participation, accounting for 28.1% of the variance. The enjoyment variable also had the highest Beta of any model at .496. The general interest and motivation models are nearly identical. The general interest model accounts for 20.7% of the variance while motivation accounts for 19.5%. The Beta coefficient for general interest is .392 and motivation is .387. Political ideology is significant in all the models but weaker than in the offline participation analysis. Offline political activities require investment of resources e.g. time, money, know-how in order to participate in them. While online participation requires these same resources, these activities may feel more accessible to some who are more comfortable with digital technologies which would account for the higher stronger relationships. Relatedly, the high Beta coefficient of the enjoyment index in the online political participation model may be a result of the online survey sample. The lower predictive power of political ideology in the online participation models indicates that it is not only partisans who are participating online, suggesting a lower barrier to entry to online participation than offline activities. The control variables in these models acted as expected for online participation. Age is significant and the second strongest variable in all of the models. The negative coefficient indicates that younger people are more likely to participate in online political activities than older
adults, confirming a large body of research which finds the same. Gender and income are not significant in any of the models and education is only significant in the enjoyment model.

The interest measures flip in their relationship to the knowledge index. The motivation model is able to account for the most variance in knowledge, 17% followed closely by the general interest measure which accounts for 16.2% of the variance. Again, the Beta coefficients of motivation and general interest are very similar (.305 and .286 respectively). In this analysis, enjoyment is the weakest of the three with a Beta coefficient of .256 and the model accounting for 14.5% of the variation in political knowledge. Political ideology is significant in all models but a weak predictor. The control variables perform predictably for tests of knowledge with age being significant and the best predictor for all models. Education is also significant and a moderate predictor of knowledge. Gender is also significant though weak, with males performing better in all three models. Income is not significant in any model.

**Discussion**

The results of the regression analysis offer important insight into the measures of political interest. First, there is clear support for the two dimensions of political interest, enjoyment and motivation, though less support for the motivation dimension. Interestingly, the general interest measure and the motivation in politics dimension account for similar amounts of variance in each model. Conceptually, this makes sense if political interest is an intrinsic motivation for political engagement as some have suggested (Prior, 2010). The motivation dimension expands on this by providing some of the reasons why an individual may want to follow government and public affairs, but this does not explain the why the general interest item is a better predictor of political participation and the motivation dimension a better predictor of political knowledge. The most
surprising finding is the strength and distinctiveness of the enjoyment dimension as a predictor for political participation. Enjoyment was by far the strongest predictor of online and offline participation. It makes sense that someone who finds politics exciting, enjoys discussion, and consumes media about politics would be more inclined to participate in political activities. However, when it comes to knowledge, enjoyment is not the predictor that general interest and motivation are. One explanation may be that general interest and motivation represent a lasting commitment to awareness about politics because of its perceived importance and enjoyment may be more tied to political events and seasons which spark momentary feelings that do not persist.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The hypothesis that political interest is a multidimensional concept is not new. Most of the scholars who have defined political interest have in the process created multidimensional definitions. The definition given by Verba et al. (1995) exemplifies this. Their claim that citizens who are politically interested are those who, “follow politics, who care about what happens, and who are concerned with who wins and loses” (345, emphasis added), has a behavioral element, following politics requires an action on behalf of the citizen. Further, politics often deals with complicated issues, byzantine processes, and multiple stakeholders, thus the following of politics implies a cognitive element as the citizen seeks to understand the information they are following. Additionally, Verba and colleagues include an emotional element to political interest noting that following politics should also include caring about the outcomes of politics. Lastly, this definition contains an implicit requirement that citizens understand their personal stake in the outcomes of political decisions. From an economic theory of democracy, one is concerned with who wins and loses in politics because of a realization that each candidate’s policies will affect their personal interests. However, conceptual definitions such as Verba et al.’s usually fail to be translated into similarly nuanced operationalizations. The authors measured political interest with two items, one for interest in local community politics, and one for interest in national politics and affairs. These items meet the first requirement of their own definition of political interest by discovering who follows politics, however, no attempt is made to assess the second two requirements of caring about what happens, and being concerned with who wins and loses. This trend is continually repeated in the literature.
One exception to this trend is the work of Debra Horner (2007) who examined political interest and found it to be composed of three dimensions: taste for politics, desire for oversight, and personal stake in the political process. The present thesis drew heavily on Horner’s insights; however, based on the findings of current research in psychology, this work hypothesized that political interest is composed of two distinct dimensions, enjoyment and motivation, not three.

The preceding chapters utilized a multi-method approach to investigate the internal mechanisms and concepts that make up political interest in the minds of the mass public to see if they correspond with the various scholarly definitions. First, the analysis of open-ended survey responses found political interest to have distinct conceptual meanings for individuals, though with some commonalities such as appeals to citizenship norms of civic duty and responsibility, and expressions of concern for the nation. The descriptions of political interest from the DPI survey were used as seed concepts in the construction of a Q sample to represent the scope of beliefs about what it means to be interested in politics. These items were then sorted and quantitatively analyzed using factor analysis and multidimensional scaling and found to contain two distinct components: a feeling of enjoyment in the topic of politics and a broad categories containing the various motivations for individuals’ interest in politics. The next phase replicated Horner’s (2007) findings using original data and found statistical support for the two dimensions. Using correlation I examined the relationships between the interest measures and found them to be related, yet distinct in the minds of respondents. In order to identify whether these measures were not only distinct concepts, but also improvements to the traditional single item measure of political interest, I utilizing OLS regression to compare the ability of the enjoyment and
motivation dimensions with the single traditional political interest measure to predict variation in offline and online political participation, and political knowledge.

Of the two dimensions, enjoyment emerged as truly distinct from the other components of political interest. However, in an initially dismaying finding, the motivation dimension behaved similarly to the single general interest item in all the tests conducted. Despite the greater range and more complex components, the motivation dimension explained no more in the models than the single interest item. On further review, this finding comports with the proposed theoretical framework. People are motivated by a diversity of compelling reasons to be interested in politics. For some it is the desire to provide oversight for government and political officials, for others it is in an effort safeguard their interest. Still others may be motivated by a feeling of civic duty—following the government is what good citizens do, or because the see or perceive the impacts of political decisions on their lives. The reasons are many, but the underlying concept is the same: these are all motivations. This

Implications for Political Science

Despite the variety of conceptual and operational definitions discussed in this study, political interest is often treated monolithically in political science. If political interest is an endogenous variable, the researcher typically selects their preferred conceptual definition e.g. concern, curiosity, motivation, involvement etc. and applies a standard measure during assessment. Often political interest is included in a laundry list of control variables and not defined at all. This work shed light on the diverse range of motivations political scientists are tapping with traditional broad political interest measures, while also demonstrating that political interest is an umbrella concept with at least two distinct dimensions: enjoyment and motivation.
However, this finding comes with an asterisk. Greater diversity in a measure will often provide increased statistical discrimination of a concept. This was not found to be the case when comparing the traditional single item measure of political interest and the more complicated motivation index. The general interest item better predicted online and offline political participation, and performed similar to motivation in predicting political knowledge.

This finding has important implications for measuring political interest. This study found that factors motivating the mass public’s interest in politics are quite diverse, as such, a broad measure is an appropriate method for measuring these motivations. This study also, supports the work of scholars who define political interest as an “intrinsic motivation.” Political interest does comprise feelings of curiosity and concern, and is often associated with behaviors such as following news and information about political affairs and involvement in the process as many of the definitions have suggested. For the mass public, political interest is rarely one of these, and usually consists of many of these categories. The term “motivation” does a better job of including this scope of definitions and is more indicative what political interest means to the mass public.

This similarity of the motivation index and the single interest item has practical implications for political science. Research is a costly endeavor, and researchers look for the most parsimonious method of measuring the concepts on survey instruments. This study finds that researching a broader view of political interest, the traditional item performs nearly as well as more complicated measures, though with some decreased explanatory power as evidenced by the political knowledge results. Future work which seeks to examine political interest as a
dependent variable would do well to include both expanded measures and add their distinguishing power to the analysis.

*Future Research*

If political interest, like interest generally, is a variable that develops through phases, then identifying these phases is important to understanding its impact on other outcomes. Building a developmental model of political interest would offer tremendous insight into the political socialization process. A developmental model which examines how political interest is formed and cultivated could have lasting implications for disenfranchised populations. A developmental model of political interest would also help to distinguish the between those with “well-developed” political interest and those with newly triggered “situational interest” and how this explains their political behaviors.
### Figure 3.1: Interest Items and Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Survey Item:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each statement as it applies to you…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>I find politics exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I usually enjoy discussions about politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I usually enjoy television or newspaper stories about politics and government affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oversight</td>
<td>I feel responsible for following what’s going on in politics and government affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good citizens stay informed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stake</td>
<td>It’s worth the time to keep informed about political issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Important things that affect my life are influenced by politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Following politics helps me safeguard my interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Interest</td>
<td>Some people seem to follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there’s an election going on or not. Others aren’t that interested. How interested would you say you are in what’s going on in government and public affairs?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3.2: P Set Interest Frequencies

General Political Interest (1-7 scale)

- 1: Not at all interested
- 2: Somewhat disinterested
- 3: A little disinterested
- 4: Neither interested or disinterested
- 5: A little interested
- 6: Somewhat interested
- 7: Very interested

Figure 3.3: Q Sort Grid
Figure 4.1: Word Counts from Defining Political Interest Survey

Figure 4.2: Word Count Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivations</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issues</td>
<td>Follow</td>
<td>Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections</td>
<td>Informed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Figure 4.3: Principle Component Factor Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sorter ID</th>
<th>Interest Score</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sorter20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-.59</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>-.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorter22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eigenvalues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>7.31</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.54</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Figure 4.4: Factor 1 Consensus and Distinguishing Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Most Agreed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Z Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political decisions shape the future.</td>
<td>1.37&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important things that affect my life are influenced by politics.</td>
<td>1.22&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My concern for the welfare of the country is tied to political decisions.</td>
<td>1.20&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Factor 1**

**Most Disagreed**

| I like to share my views with as many people as will listen. | -2.46<sup>a</sup> |
| I like to share political opinions on social media. | -2.43<sup>a</sup> |
| I enjoy participating in the political conversation on social media. | -2.09<sup>a</sup> |
| I usually enjoy discussions about politics. | -1.62<sup>a</sup> |

<sup>a</sup> = p<.05.  <sup>b</sup> = p<.10.

### Figure 4.5: Factor 2 Consensus and Distinguishing Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Most Agreed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Z Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political decisions shape the future.</td>
<td>1.42&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political issues are really interesting to me.</td>
<td>1.33&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I usually enjoy discussions about politics.</td>
<td>1.32&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s important to dig deeper than the headlines when it comes to political matters.</td>
<td>1.27&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting news about national and global issues is important.</td>
<td>1.24&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens needs to know where politicians stand on issues.</td>
<td>1.21&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is the basic responsibility of citizens to vote.</td>
<td>1.20&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Factor 2**

**Most Disagreed**

| I find the drama of politics entertaining. | -2.17<sup>a</sup> |
| Giving money to a political campaign is a good way of voicing my support. | -2.08<sup>a</sup> |
| Politics is about justice. | -1.99<sup>a</sup> |
| It’s up to individuals to educate themselves about how the government works. | -1.90<sup>a</sup> |
| It’s important that people volunteer for campaigns. | -1.71<sup>a</sup> |
| Signing petitions is an effective way of making my voice heard. | -1.47<sup>b</sup> |

<sup>a</sup> = p<.05.  <sup>b</sup> = p<.10.
Figure 4.6: Between Factor Consensus and Distinguishing Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Between Factor Consensus</th>
<th>Factor 1 QS Value</th>
<th>Factor 2 QS Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political decisions shape the future.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting news about national and global issues is important.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is the responsibility of citizens to keep up with what is going on in government.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens needs to know where politicians stand on issues.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Between Factor Disagreement</th>
<th>Factor 1 QS Value</th>
<th>Factor 2 QS Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I usually enjoy discussions about politics.</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to share my views with as many people as will listen.</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.7: Multidimensional Scaling of Q Sort Results with Horner (2007) Dimensions
Figure 4.8: Political Interest and Media Use Survey Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>39% (310)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>35.5% (282)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>13.2% (105)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>8.3% (66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 or older</td>
<td>3.9% (31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>14% (113)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>13.8% (111)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College (no degree)</td>
<td>26.8% (216)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>11.6% (93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>36.8% (296)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>10.8% (87)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>74.4% (609)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>7.4% (60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>6.2% (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>7.5% (61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3% (24)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-$9,999 a year</td>
<td>5.3% (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000-$24,000</td>
<td>17.2% (139)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000-$49,999</td>
<td>33.5% (270)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-$74,999</td>
<td>19% (153)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000-$99,999</td>
<td>12% (97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000-$124,999</td>
<td>5.7% (46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$125,000 and higher</td>
<td>5.7% (46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>1.6% (13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>53% (428)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47% (380)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Identification</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>20% (162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>43.6% (353)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>32.2% (261)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something else</td>
<td>4.2% (34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.9: Factor Analysis Comparison Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Factor 1</td>
<td>Factor 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exciting</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>(.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy discussions</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>(.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy news</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>(.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel responsible</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good citizens</td>
<td>(.73)</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worth the time</td>
<td>(.75)</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence my life</td>
<td>(.86)</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safeguard my interests</td>
<td>(.68)</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.10: Interest Dimensions: Two Factor Solution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Item Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Factor 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exciting</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy discussions</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy news</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel responsible</td>
<td>(.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good citizens</td>
<td>(.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worth the time</td>
<td>(.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence my life</td>
<td>(.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safeguard my interests</td>
<td>(.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.11: Interest Dimensions, Political Participation, and Political Knowledge Correlation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Enjoyment Index</th>
<th>Motivation Index</th>
<th>General Interest Single Item</th>
<th>Offline Participation Index</th>
<th>Online Participation Index</th>
<th>Knowledge Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment Index</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation Index</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.660&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Interest Single Item</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.698&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.631&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offline Participation Index</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.460&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.391&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.398&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Participation Index</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.477&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.370&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.381&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.698&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Index</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.246&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.302&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.260&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.089&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>= Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). <sup>b</sup>= Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
### Figure 4.12: OLS Estimates: Interest Dimensions and Political Participation and Political Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Offline Participation</th>
<th>Online Participation</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment Index</td>
<td>.459&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.496&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.256&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation Index</td>
<td>.389&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.387&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.305&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Interest</td>
<td>.401&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.392&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.286&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Ideology</td>
<td>.133&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; .152&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; .154&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.093&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; .116&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; .123&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.072&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; .073&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; .081&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.130&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; -.129&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; -.134&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-.197&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; -.193&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; -.198&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.201&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; .193&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; .189&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.020 -.054 -.018</td>
<td>-.011 -.051 -.026</td>
<td>-.066&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; -.085&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; -.070&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.030 -.036 -.006</td>
<td>-.068&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; -.065&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt; -.038</td>
<td>.117&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; .102&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; .116&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.081&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; .062&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt; .079&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.039 .023 .031</td>
<td>-.008 -.023 -.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.255 .195 .207</td>
<td>.281 .190 .195</td>
<td>.145 .170 .162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beta coefficients are reported.  <sup>a</sup> = p<.001.  <sup>b</sup> = p<.05.  <sup>c</sup> = p<.10
ENDNOTES


2. Data from the 2014 Political Polarization dataset was downloaded from the Pew Research Center on March 28, 2016. Pew’s measure employs a four point Likert scale and uses the wording, “Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs...?” 48.5% reported following what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, 29.1% reported some of the time, 13.8% reported only now and then, and 8.7 reported hardly ever.
APPENDIX

Question Wording

General interest
Some people seem to follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there’s an election going on or not. Others aren’t that interested. How interested would you say you are in what’s going on in government and public affairs, not at all interested, not very interested, somewhat interested, very interested?

New interest items
Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each statement as it applies to you. Five point Likert scale: strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neutral, somewhat agree, strongly agree.

Enjoyment Index
I find politics exciting
I usually enjoy discussions about politics
I usually enjoy television or newspaper stories about politics and government affairs

Motivation Index
I feel responsible for following what’s going on in politics and government affairs
Good citizens stay informed
It’s worth the time to keep informed about political issues
Important things that affect my life are influenced by politics
Following politics helps me safeguard my interests

Offline Political Participation
Have you engaged in any of these campaign activities offline during the 2016 presidential election campaign, yes or no?
--Talked about the election with family, friends, or colleagues
--Researched a candidate, campaign event, or issue
--Volunteered for a candidate's campaign
--Donated money to a candidate, political party, or political organization
--Gone door to door for a political campaign
--Displayed a yard sign, bumper sticker, or button for a candidate
--Attended a political rally
--Wrote a letter to the editor
-- Recruited volunteers to work for a candidate
-- Tried to convince others to vote for or against a candidate
-- Encouraged others to turn out to vote

Offline Political Participation
Have you done any of the following on social media during the 2016 presidential election campaign, yes or no?
--Followed news about a campaign
--Looked for information about a candidate
--Learned about candidates and issues
--Participated in election-related discussions
--Expressed an opinion about a candidate or issue knowing others might disagree
--Followed those with opposing political views to your own
--Been encouraged to donate to a candidate, political party, or political organization through social media
--Donated to a campaign
--Shared or reposted information about the election or a candidate
--Shared or posted an election video or picture
--Shared campaign-related content
--Created campaign-related content
--Watched campaign ads
--Accepted a friend request from a political candidate, political party, or political organization
--Joined a campaign-related group

Knowledge
--Whose responsibility is it to decide if a law is unconstitutional or not, Congress, The President, The Supreme Court, State legislatures, I don’t know.
--Which party currently has the most member in the House of Representative in Washington? Open ended response.
--What political office does Paul Ryan hold, Senate Minority Leader, President, Secretary of State, Speaker of the House of Representatives, I don’t know?
--How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a Presidential Veto, 2/3, 3/4, 3/5, simple majority, I don’t know?
--Which political party would you say is more conservative at the national level? Open ended response.

Q Sample Statements
1. It’s up to individuals to educate themselves about how the government works.
2. I care about who wins and loses in politics.
3. I like to share political opinions on social media.
4. It is the responsibility of citizens to keep up with what is going on in government.
5. I enjoy learning about how the American government works.
6. Signing petitions is an effective way of making my voice heard.
7. It is the basic responsibility of citizens to vote.
8. Giving money to a political campaign is a good way voicing my support.
9. Getting news about national and global issues is important.
10. I enjoy participating in the political conversation on social media.
11. Politics impacts my daily life.
12. Watching political satire is a good way to keep up with politics.
13. It’s important to dig deeper than the headlines when it comes to political matters.
14. Citizens need to be aware about the world they are leaving our children.
15. Attend a rally or protest
16. I find the drama of politics entertaining.
17. Concern for my community drives me to get involved.
18. I like to engage with the ideas of politics.
19. Political issues are really interesting to me.
20. Keeping up with local politics is a significant way of safeguarding the community.
21. It’s important that people volunteer for campaigns.
22. I enjoy watching political debates.
23. We need to know what politicians believe so we can hold them accountable.
24. Political figures are fascinating to learn about.
25. Keeping up with what is going on in government is important to minimize corruption.
26. Politics is about justice.
27. Knowing about state politics is important.
28. I feel invested in the outcome of governmental decisions.
29. As a citizen you need to devote some time to the political process.
30. My concern for the welfare of the country is tied to political decisions.
31. I find politics exciting. (Horner dimension: taste)
32. I usually enjoy discussions about politics. (Horner dimension: taste)
33. I usually enjoy television or news stories about politics and government affairs. (Horner dimension: taste)
34. I feel responsible for following what’s going on in politics and government affairs. (Horner dimension: oversight)
35. Good citizens stay informed. (Horner dimension: oversight)
36. It’s worth the time to keep informed about political issues. (Horner dimension: stake)
37. Important things that affect my life are influenced by politics. (Horner dimension: stake)
38. Following politics helps me safeguard my interests. (Horner dimension: stake)
40. I like to share my views with as many people as will listen.
41. I an intrinsic sense of excitement or interest when hearing other people's opinions on political issues.
42. It is important to have an opinion on political matters.
43. Caring about the political climate in the US means that you follow political news.
44. Part of being a citizen means being actively engaged in the political process.
45. Political activism is an important tool in political change.
46. Citizens needs to know where politicians stand on issues.
47. Political decisions shape the future.
REFERENCES


Thorson, Kjerstin. 2014. “Sampling from the Civic Buffet: Youth, New Media and Do-It-Yourself Citizenship.”


