

What is Political Incivility?*

Robin Stryker
School of Sociology, University of Arizona
Social Sciences 400
P.O. Box 210027
Tucson, AZ 85721-0027
(520) 621-3531

Bethany Conway
Department of Communication, University of Arizona
1103 E University Blvd
P.O. Box 210025
Tucson, AZ 85721
(520) 621-1366

J. Taylor Danielson
School of Sociology, University of Arizona
Social Sciences 400
P.O. Box 210027
Tucson, AZ 85721-0027
(520) 621-3531

*We presented an earlier version of this paper at meetings of the National Communication Association, November 20-22, 2014. We thank the anonymous NCA reviewers for their constructive comments on this earlier version. We thank Richard Serpe, Erin Leahey and Ross Matsueda for helpful advice on various technical details of survey sampling and data analysis.

What is Political Incivility?

Abstract

We used 23 novel indicators and a 1,000+ sample representative of the full undergraduate population of a large southwestern university to examine: 1) whether political incivility is a unidimensional or multi-dimensional latent construct; and 2) how much consensus there was about perceptions of the incivility/civility of various general categories of speech or behavior. Confirmatory factor analysis suggests perceived political incivility is a multi-dimensional construct. Insulting utterances, deception, and behaviors tending to shut down inclusive ongoing discussion, though correlated, can be treated as distinct, underlying aspects of incivility. More than 75% of respondents viewed all categories of speech/behavior examined except issue-oriented attacks as very, mostly or somewhat uncivil, suggesting political incivility may be a problem even for youth, who prior research suggests are more tolerant of incivility than their elders. If such levels of consensus are replicated on a representative national sample, standardized indicators of political incivility should be constructed and routinely employed in national surveys of political attitudes and behavior.

Introduction

Americans generally dislike mean-spirited political campaigns and they presume the absence of civil discourse in American politics is a major problem. Results from a representative survey published in 2011 show that 82% of Americans agreed strongly or somewhat agreed that “[s]ome negative advertisements are so nasty I stop paying attention to what the candidates are saying” (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011, p. 314). The same survey showed that 72% of Americans found that “mean-spirited commercials attacking the opponent [were] inappropriate,” and 82% percent said the same about ads featuring personal attacks (p. 314). A 2010 poll found that “[e]ight-in-ten Americans [said] the lack of civil discourse in our political system [was] a serious problem” (Public Religion Research Institute, 2010).

Researchers have linked incivility with numerous ills including reduced trust in and legitimacy of political candidates and government, reduced capacity of elites and citizens to engage in reasoned discussion without emotional manipulation, extreme political polarization, the impossibility of reaching bipartisan compromise on urgent policy issues, and the specter of total policy gridlock (Ansolabere & Iyengar 1997; Jamieson, 1992; Massaro & Stryker, 2012; Mutz, 2008a; Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). However, survey researchers have not constructed standardized indicators tapping general types of speech or behavior that Americans perceive as uncivil.

The University of Arizona’s National Institute for Civil Discourse argues that “excessively hostile political discourse threatens democratic values and effective democratic governance” (Massaro & Stryker, 2012, p. 379). At the same time, the United States Constitution provides strong—though not infinite—protection of free speech, especially political speech, including uncivil political discourse (Massaro & Stryker, 2012). Constitutional protection for

free speech precludes establishing *legal* rules requiring civility, but does not hinder adopting strong *social* norms favoring civil discourse.

Commentators and scholars disagree about whether observers can come to consensus on what constitutes political incivility (Massaro & Stryker, 2012). Researchers themselves have defined incivility somewhat differently, and even when they define it similarly, they have operationalized it in different ways (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Coe, Kenski & Rains, 2014; Fridkin & Kenney, 2004, 2008, 2011; Jamieson & Falk, 2000; Massaro & Stryker, 2012; Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Mutz, 2007; Papacharissi, 2004; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011; Uslander, 2000; Muddiman 2013). Some presume civility equates with politeness and incivility with rudeness (Herbst, 2010; Kassin, 1990); others emphatically disagree (Papacharissi, 2004). Where use of highly emotional speech, including appeals to negative emotions such as hatred, fear, or anger may sometimes be very uncivil (Jamieson, 1992; Jamieson & Capella, 2008; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011), some argue that emotional speech per se should not be equated with political incivility (Massaro & Stryker, 2012).

We build on prior research in communication, history, political science, psychology, sociology, and law to examine how political incivility has been defined and operationalized and to explore further the nature and measurement of perceived political incivility. Given current scholarly disagreements concerning what political incivility is, we argue that researchers and policymakers would be well served by moving toward conceptual consensus and standardized measures of perceived political incivility by the American public. Standardization of indicators in surveys both of the national population and of geographically, demographically or institutionally targeted subpopulations would facilitate accumulation and replication of findings in which we can have confidence and it would support better designed interventions, enhancing

political incivility and problem solving. With citizen attitudes clarified, scholars employing content analyses to examine incivility's incidence in politics and the media would benefit from improved capacity to match content-analytic categories to citizen concerns.

Given our inquiry's novelty and our wish to lay solid groundwork for a subsequent representative national survey, we sampled a convenient but substantively meaningful *population*.¹ Our random sample of undergraduates from a large southwestern university is representative of the full undergraduate population of a public university in which about 90% of undergraduates are less than 30 years old. Given that prior research found less tolerance for political incivility among *older* Americans (Fridkin and Kenney, 2011), high aggregate levels of perceived incivility found for our sub-population are especially noteworthy and the different types of speech and behavior that we investigated *may* well capture at least a substantial part of what many Americans mean when they indict the U.S. political system for its lack of civil discourse. Our investigation of perceived political incivility among undergraduates at a major university also is consistent with burgeoning interest in attitudes and behavior of young Americans and of regional and demographic *sub*-populations of American youth (Kahne, Middaugh & Allen, 2014). In what follows, we first show the degree to which there is—or is not—consensus among our respondents about what types of speech or behavior are uncivil. We

¹ Prior publications in communication journals similarly examine key issues pertaining to incivility on non-national and sometimes non-representative samples. Such studies are judged to provide useful findings and insights. For example, Coe, Kenski and Rains (2012) content analyzed online comments responding to articles in a single newspaper, *The Arizona Star*. The *Star*'s readers do not represent all newspaper readers throughout the country nor do its articles represent all newspaper articles published nationally in medium-sized metropolitan markets. Hmielowski, Hutchins and Cicchirillo (2015) tested a communications model of what leads to online flaming behavior in two attitude surveys, neither of which were national. Unlike our survey, the Hmielowski et al (2015) surveys were *not* representative of—and hence not generalizable to-- *the non-national sub-populations* from which they drew. In the first, “students from a large public university recruited fellow university students to participate in an online survey as part of a course project (N=329). The second survey relied on a self-selected and non-representative sampling of blog readers of 3 of the top 100 highly trafficked blogs (N=303). Our results, though not generalizable beyond the population from which our sample is drawn, *do* represent that population.

then use confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test whether political incivility is most usefully understood as a unidimensional or multidimensional construct.²

What is Political Incivility?

Prior Research

Scholars define and operationalize political incivility diversely, but all agree that civil political discourse pertains to the “fundamental tone and practice of democracy” (Herbst, 2010, p. 3). As Coe, Kenski and Rains (2014, p. 658) put it, though “American political debate has always had its share of incivility,” “commitment to civil discourse...has been central to the effective practice of democracy.”

Defining civil discourse as “the free and respectful exchange of different ideas,” Coe et al (p. 358) investigated markers of its absence in online reader commentary to the *Arizona Daily Star*. These included name calling, aspersion or derision of ideas, disingenuousness or lying, vulgarity and pejorative speech. Investigating political discourse in cable television, talk radio and blogs, Sobieraj and Berry (2011, 2013) categorized multiple kinds of “outrage” speech. These included name-calling, insulting language, misrepresentative exaggeration, character assassination, mockery, belittlement, obscenity, ideologically extremizing language, emotional displays, emotional language, and conflagration.

Substantial overlap exists between conceptual categories identified above, including a focus on name-calling, vulgarity or obscenity, and misrepresentation or lying. As well, like content analysts Sobieraj and Berry (2011, 2013) and Coe et al (2014), experimentalists Brooks

² In another paper, we examine vignette experiments embedded in our survey to research perceptions of incivility in situ, and how these perceptions may vary systematically by the relative power of the speaker and target of the speech. In yet other papers we examine such potential systematic *sources of variable* perceptions of political incivility as race, ethnicity, gender, family income, political partisanship, political ideology, political interest, political knowledge and media consumption. We also examine the degree to which various types of uncivil political discourse are viewed as problems—and what sort of problems—for American democracy, the sources of variability in perceptions of incivility as a problem, and whether or not our respondents see political incivility as necessary or inevitable in American democracy, and why.

and Geer (2007) honed in on name-calling and insulting language as key markers of political incivility. Their uncivil variation on an otherwise civil advertisement criticizing an opponent was: “Education in our communities is suffering today because my *unthinking* opponent has *recklessly* failed to support our local teachers and our schools” (p. 6).

However, conceptual categories adopted by some researchers also contain potentially uncivil behaviors and types of speech absent in others, such as Sobieraj and Berry’s emphasis on emotional language and displays.³ In addition, where content analysts typically identify qualitative boundaries between civil and uncivil discourse, Fridkin and Kenney (2008) who studied citizen reactions to campaign messaging, argued that incivility is most usefully viewed along a continuum, rather than as a sharp qualitative distinction. For these researchers, incivility does not equate with negativity but rather with an absence of stridency, “a more measured and courteous tone.”

At one end, negative information may be presented in a shrill and ad hominem manner, for example, in commercials referring to candidates as “hypocrites,” “reckless,” “liars” or “immoral.” Such references are much different in tone from advertisements that characterize candidates as “career politicians,” “Washington insiders,” “inexperienced or ineffective” (Fridkin & Kenney 2008, p. 699).

Despite suggesting that incivility as perceived by survey respondents typically will be a matter of degree, rather than a sharp qualitative distinction, in a later study requiring content coding of campaign advertisements, Fridkin and Kenney (2011) provided needed line drawing instructions to coders charged with categorizing the advertisements. Allowing for a generous dose of rough and tumble politics, they instructed coders, for example, to refrain from coding an

³ Jamieson and Cappella (2008) likewise highlighted use of belligerent and passionate emotional appeals by talk radio show host Rush Limbaugh as a departure from civil discourse.

advertisement as uncivil unless it included “explicit use of harsh, shrill or pejorative adjectives describing candidates, their policies or their personal traits” (pp. 311-312).⁴

Overall, a pattern of substantial overlap in conceptualization, paired with the absence of full consensus, is common in the empirical literature, and has produced a series of different yet inter-related measures. One common thread uniting many studies is a focus on rudeness in the political arena. Indeed, rudeness has become so strongly associated with incivility that Herbst (2010) gave her influential book discussing the strategic mobilization, benefits and costs of uncivil political discourse the title *Rude Democracy*. Accordingly, in a 2005 experiment designed by Mutz and Reeves, the researchers employed indicators of rudeness to represent civil and uncivil versions of a political debate. The debate text remained the same across conditions, but in the uncivil version, the debaters interrupted each other, sighed, and rolled their eyes.⁵

Although conceptualizing incivility as rudeness suggests a potential starting point for developing a coherent conceptualization of what incivility *is* and how it might be measured, even this association of rudeness and incivility has been contested by authors like Papacharissi (2004), who argued strongly that political incivility *not* be equated with politeness. According to Papacharissi, using strong language or sarcasm or writing in all capital letters in an online comment or exchange would be impolite but not uncivil. Incivility would be reserved for an online comment or exchange that “threaten[ed] democracy, den[ied] people their personal freedoms” or “stereotyp[ed] social groups” (p. 267). Here, Papacharissi is in tune with the large literature on democratic deliberation with its focus on inclusion and sensitivity to inequalities of

⁴ In yet another study conducted by these scholars, Fridkin and Kenney (2004) examined what they termed “mudslinging,” assessing mudslinging by asking campaign managers an open-ended question about themes of their opponents’ campaign. Mudslinging was assumed to have occurred “when campaign managers reported their opponents engaged in ‘smear tactics,’ ‘relentless attacks,’ ‘deceptive messages’ or ‘unwarranted’ or unconscionable criticisms” (as cited in Massaro & Stryker, 2012, p. 424).

⁵ Sighing and eye-rolling also can be considered emotional displays, but these displays signal contempt rather than the belligerence highlighted by Jamieson and Cappella (2008) and Sobieraj and Berry (2011).

status and power and to stereotyping that could censor voices, bias discussion, or shut down ongoing discourse (Chambers, 2003; Dryzek, 2002; Mutz, 2008b; Ryfe, 2005; Thompson, 2008).

Connections across the Literature

Given these scholarly disagreements, how can we unite disparate concepts and even more different measures of incivility into a single conceptual framework that can be examined empirically? To address this question and develop our measures of *perceived political incivility for survey research*, we draw on the conceptual framework of Massaro and Stryker (2012), who emphasized a number of points with which we agree.

First, the concept of civil discourse has two components: civility and discourse. Turning to the latter component first, discourse implies ongoing conversation and interaction. In examining incivility then, we should attend not only to individual one-off utterances, but also to speech and behavioral manifestations of back-and-forth dialogue and interactive exchange, whether fully “deliberative” in line with deliberative democratic ideals or not.

Indeed, though deliberation and civility typically are considered to be analytically distinct concepts, many scholars of deliberation presume either explicitly or implicitly that civility is required for genuine, successful deliberation (Bohman & Rehg, 1997; Chambers, 2003; Guttman & Thompson, 2004; Ryfe, 2005). Civility norms often are equated with showing mutual respect (Chambers, 2003; Guttman & Thompson, 2004; Steiner, 2012). Beyond this, “some scholars...refer explicitly to a concept of deliberative civility, meaning careful listening to, and respect for, all persons as well as the effective consideration of all arguments” (Stryker & Danielson, 2013, p. 8).

Gastil (2013) outlined four key elements of deliberative civility: 1) “appreciation for insight offered by those with professional and practical knowledge;” 2) “arguments that avoid manipulation, fallacies or knowingly inaccurate information;” 3) “consideration of diverse

viewpoints;” and 4) “affirmation of all persons in society and the web of relationships among them.” All four elements might usefully be considered a *subset* of a more complete conceptualization of civility.

Similarly, Steiner (2012) pointed to active listening, engaging with all arguments and representing them accurately, and mutual respect. Stryker and Danielson (2013) suggested that “deliberative civility entails questioning and disputing, but in a way that respects and affirms all persons, even while critiquing their arguments” (p. 9).⁶ Because most civility scholars presume intentional falsehoods, misrepresentations, and exaggerating to obscure the truth are aspects of political incivility at the same time as deliberation scholars emphasize the importance of truthfulness to achieving authentic and effective deliberation, lying and deception also usefully can be thought of as components of an absence of deliberative civility—a conceptual region in which some—but not all—key elements of civility and deliberation respectively overlap.⁷ In short, deliberation scholarship encourages us to consider how incivility pertains to and manifests in ongoing interaction as well as in one-off utterances.

Second, at the same time as deliberative discourse typically is conceived to involve giving reasons and providing evidence, while also allowing for passionate disagreements about societal problems and political policies, contemporary social, cognitive, and neuropsychological research makes clear that emotions—even negative emotions--provide benefits as well as costs in the political arena. For example, anger and disgust often signal injustice (Massaro & Stryker, 2012; Ost, 2004). More than this, today’s science shows exercising reason is impossible without

⁶ Like some scholars of civility, including Karst (1990), Sapiro (1999), and Harcourt (2012), scholars of deliberation often presume that civility is appropriate in contexts where there is full inclusion of all potential viewpoints and all participants are equal. However, numerous others have shown that when inclusion and equality are absent, civility norms have been used to prevent marginalized groups from participating fully in democratic governance (*see* Stryker & Danielson 2013 for a review).

⁷ While highlighting the dangers of deception as well as of incivility for effective democratic discourse and governance, Kathleen Hall Jamieson has maintained that deception in politics is a distinct construct from that of political incivility (Personal communication to first author, March 4, 2013).

feeling emotion (Lee & Stryker, 2011; Damasio, 1994, 1999; Kahneman, 2011). Thus, some emotional displays might well be seen as part and parcel of civil political discourse.

Third, with respect both to one-off-utterances and ongoing interactions, we agree with those who distance the concept of civil discourse from good manners or politeness. Where it might be bad manners to disagree strenuously and passionately with one's interlocutor, issue- and policy-based argumentation—political conflict—might well be seen as central to political discourse and also *not* uncivil (Massaro & Stryker, 2012, p. 409).

Mindful of all three premises, Massaro and Stryker (2012) suggested eight major categories of political incivility. These categories—for example, disrespectful or demonizing speech, pejorative name-calling, false or misleading speech, and use of racial, sexual, religious or other epithets—all of which can apply to single utterances—overlap substantially with those of other scholars.⁸ Massaro and Stryker (2012) add to categories that likewise could pertain to one-off utterances: use of “speech that is intentionally threatening to political opponents’ physical well-being or that encourages others to cause physical harm to them” (p. 409).

Consistent with our own premises, Massaro and Stryker (2012) also include categories that apply to discourse as well as single utterances. These are: 1) “speech intentionally aimed at closing down ‘spaces of reason’ and ceasing discourse, rather than maintaining speech zones for future consideration of issues and policies,” and 2) “speech that intentionally denies the right of political opponents to participate equally in applicable procedural or political processes or debates, or that denies the legitimacy of their participation” (Massaro & Stryker, 2012, p. 409).

⁸In this paper, we cannot pursue Massaro and Stryker's (2012) suggestion that, depending on elements of context, insults or even vulgar language directed at an idea or institution (as opposed to a person) may *not* be *perceived* as uncivil by some Americans. While we pursue such nuance in additional papers, here we highlight the almost universal scholarly consensus that insulting and/or vulgar language are uncivil. With respect to verbal attacks, Massaro and Stryker (2012) view issue-based attacks as civil and person or character based attacks as uncivil.

In sum, prior scholarship converges to suggest that political incivility is a complex, multi-faceted concept and may be perceived as such. Despite scholarly disagreement about whether to include rudeness per se or emotional speech or displays per se as categories of incivility, there is substantial scholarly agreement on many of political incivility's key categories. Building directly on these categories and on the need to examine perceptions of categories pertaining to the interactional, discursive aspect of political incivility as well as to the individual or "one-off" utterance, we constructed 23 potential categories of *perceived* incivility to be investigated in our survey and proposed the following hypotheses.

Research Hypotheses

Our first two hypotheses concern the extent of consensus in respondents' perceptions of political incivility. As stated previously, numerous scholars, including those constructing valid and reliable content coding schemes for campaign advertisements and discourse across diverse media platforms, have emphasized the difficulty of "line-drawing" between civil and uncivil discourse (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011; Coe et al., 2014; Massaro & Stryker, 2012; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). However, some argue that the consensual specific categories of incivility delineated by researchers may likewise be relatively consensual among members of the American public. On the other hand, consistent with a view of democratic norms as encouraging spirited disagreement about issues, we expected perceptions of issue-based attacks to deviate sharply from this pattern. Therefore, we propose the following:

H1: The majority of respondents will find almost all of the 23 potential types of incivility to be very, mostly, or somewhat uncivil.

However,

H2: The majority of respondents will view issue-based attacks as either not at all uncivil or only slightly uncivil.

We intended that our 23 observable indicators pertaining to potential *specific types* of incivility would also help us measure a more *general latent construct* of perceived political incivility. Here we tested competing hypotheses, the second meant to reflect the difference between one-off utterances and ongoing discourse (Massaro & Stryker, 2012):

H3a: All 23 indicators reflect a one-dimensional latent construct.

H3b: The 23 indicators will form a two-dimensional structure, reflecting the conceptual distinction between utterance incivility and discursive incivility.

Indicators of the latter were hypothesized to include those items that especially reflect the interactional and discursive nature of civil discourse. These included questions pertaining to eye rolling while an opponent is speaking, getting in an opponent's face, interrupting others, refusing to let others speak, refusing to listen to points of view that one disagrees with, verbal fighting or jousting, failing to provide reasons or evidence for one's views, making false or misleading statements, and making exaggerated statements that misrepresent or obscure the truth. We presumed that the rest of our indicators would reflect utterance incivility.

Data and Measures

Our data come from a 2013 online survey administered in two separate waves to a simple random sample of 19,860 undergraduate students at a large southwestern university. We administered the first wave to 10,000 students on September 30, 2013, and the second wave to 9,860 students on November 6, 2013. Of the 19,860 students selected for inclusion in our sample, 1,035 respondents completed the entire survey and 1,218 respondents completed our battery of civility questions, resulting in response rates of 5.2% and 6.1%, respectively. All

respondents received a \$10 gift card to Amazon.com following completion of the survey. To control for differences in cross-national perceptions of civility we omitted international students and restricted our attention solely to those U.S. citizens who completed our civility battery, yielding a final sample size of 1,170 respondents.⁹ In our descriptive analyses, we employed post-stratification weights to account for differences in the probability of selection into the survey across the two survey waves and ensure that our results are generalizable to our full undergraduate university population.¹⁰ However, we also conducted these analyses without weights. Results of the unweighted and weighted analyses are comparable, suggesting the use of these weights did not alter substantive findings.

To determine which actions were and were not perceived as uncivil, our online survey included a battery of 23 items covering a wide range of potentially uncivil actions. For each survey item, we asked our respondents to use a five-point Likert scale ranging from “not at all uncivil to “very uncivil” to rate how uncivil these actions are “in political discussion.” To remove the potential for non-response, we provided respondents the option of stating they had “no opinion” concerning each of the survey items. The original questions for these items and the variable names associated with each question are reported in Table 1.

⁹ Concerned that our low response rate might have introduced response bias, we compared our sample to university-provided demographic data and found our sample indeed was quite representative of the population from which it came. To see if it was representative of college students nationally, we compared our data to that of the 2012 Current Population Survey (CPS) Educational Attainment dataset. We restricted attention to those in the CPS data who had completed “some college” and divided respondents into two broader age groups (18-29 year-olds versus 30 years or older) to examine any key differences between these two groups of respondents. Comparisons of the demographic data from the CPS to our data suggest that African Americans, Caucasians age 30 or older, and male respondents are underrepresented in our data compared to college students nation-wide. Conversely, Hispanic respondents, individuals who identified as members of some “other” ethnic group and were 30 or older, and women were overrepresented in our data. Our results then cannot be generalized to college students nationwide. Finally, to account for the possibility that those individuals who selected into the sample were significantly more interested in politics than their peers we compared our weighted survey data to data from the 2012 Annenberg National Election Study (ANES) web survey. Contrary to our expectations, our respondents were consistently *less* interested in politics than their peers from the ANES data across both age groups.

¹⁰ Post-stratification weights could not be included in our confirmatory factor analysis because it is not allowed with GSEM estimation in Stata; however, we are confident in our findings considering that our sample quite well represented the population from which it was randomly selected.

<Insert Table 1 about here>

Analytic Methods

We used two separate analytic approaches to identify patterns in our civility data. First, we provide information on the distribution of individual responses for each civility item, identifying overarching patterns in individual responses. Previewing our findings, we found that the data supported H1 and that for the majority of our indicator variables the response distributions were either *j*-shaped or heavily negatively skewed, suggesting that the majority of respondents found these actions mostly or very uncivil. Given that the data are so heavily skewed and *j*-shaped data cannot be transformed to approximate a normal distribution, we treat our indicator variables as ordinal and/or nominal indicators in our analyses below.

In our second set of analyses, we identify underlying dimensions that may drive individual item attitudes about incivility. We draw on the theoretical arguments above to perform a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to fit a series of theoretical models to our survey data and to test Ha and H4b. For our CFA models we use the Akaike information criterion (AIC), consistent Akaike information criterion (CAIC), and Bayesian information criterion (BIC) statistics to determine which model specification fits the data best.¹¹

Findings

Perceptions of Incivility

Our most striking finding arises from simple descriptive statistics. On most of our 23 potential indicators of incivility, our respondents exhibited substantial consensus. Indeed, on some items, variability is extremely small. On all items very few respondents—from 1.3% to 3.3%—indicated they had no opinion. The differences in percentages computed from weighted

¹¹ Although the drawbacks of the AIC are well known, and the BIC is long-touted for overcoming such shortcomings (see Kass & Raftery, 1995), we include AIC statistics as well as the BIC.

and un-weighted survey data are minimal. For each of the 23 items provided in Table 1, Table 2 provides the percentages of respondents that fall in each response category. We present results from the weighted data. Because Table 2 does not show the very small percentages of respondents who responded “no opinion” to each item, percentages for the five substantive categories on each item sum to slightly less than 100%.

<Insert Table 2 about here>

Our analysis of the 23 items revealed five exemplary clusters, each of which possesses a distinct response pattern that is shared across those indicators assigned to a given cluster.¹² The cluster column in Table 2 indicates in which cluster a given indicator falls. We also present bar graphs of an exemplary item within the cluster, with those who answered “no opinion” removed, to provide a visual depiction of these results (see Figure 1). The exemplary item for the clusters—except cluster 5, which contains only one item—is that which is closest to the mean marginal distribution for the indicators that make up that cluster. For all clusters, H1 is confirmed. Whereas more than 50% of respondents found issue-based attacks not at all or only slightly uncivil, more than 75% of respondents viewed all other speech and behavior categories as very, mostly or somewhat uncivil, supporting H2.

<Insert Figure 1 about here>

Reading top to bottom in Table 2, the first cluster of items contains three items whose response pattern is very distinct from that of all other clusters—threatening physical harm, encouraging others to threaten physical harm, and using racial, religious, ethnic or sexual slurs. On these items, extremely high percentages of respondents (82% or more) agreed that the

¹² We systematized identification of the clusters by performing a hierarchical cluster analysis. For the full battery of 23 items, within cluster variability is minimized by a 12-cluster solution. For parsimony of presentation, we chose to present the data grouped by the 5-cluster solution. This 5-cluster pattern entails just one level of aggregation beyond the 12-cluster pattern for most of the items, and just 2 levels of aggregation beyond the 12-cluster solution for the remaining items.

activity was very uncivil. Similarly, extremely few respondents (4% or less) viewed these activities as not at all uncivil or only slightly uncivil. Overall, there was minimal response variability and maximal response consensus on these items, with 91% or more finding these types of political discourse very or mostly uncivil.

Cluster 2 contains five items: mocking or making fun of a political opponent, getting in an opponent's face, making disrespectful or demeaning statements, refusing to listen to arguments or points of view with which one disagrees, and making exaggerated statements that misrepresent or obscure the truth. Similar to Cluster 1, most respondents characterized Cluster 2 items as very or mostly uncivil (70% or more) and a small percentage viewed the designated activities as not at all or only slightly uncivil (11.5% or less). The major differences between the items in Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 were: 1) about half as many respondents found the activities in Cluster 2 to be very uncivil, 2) somewhat greater—though still small—percentages of persons found the activity only slightly uncivil, and 3) a substantially greater number of respondents found the activity somewhat uncivil or mostly uncivil.

Cluster 3 comprises seven items: name calling, using insulting language, using obscene or vulgar language, engaging in character assassination to damage an opponent's reputation, intentionally making false or misleading statements, and preventing those with whom one disagrees from taking part in the discussion. Compared to Cluster 2, more respondents in Cluster 3 found the items very uncivil (51% or more). On the other hand, percentages of respondents who found Cluster 3 items to be very uncivil remain substantially less than analogous percentages for Cluster 1 items.

Like Cluster 3, Cluster 4 contains seven items: failing to provide reasons or evidence for one's conclusions, verbal fighting or jousting, shouting at an opponent, attacking an opponent's

personal character or conduct, interrupting those with whom one disagrees, eye rolling, and repeatedly emphasizing an opponent's minor flubs, oversights or improprieties. Patterns in Cluster 4 differ from those in clusters 2 and 3 in that the combined totals of those who found the behavior not at all uncivil or only slightly uncivil are greater (from about 13% for interrupting to about 23.5% for verbal fighting or jousting). In turn, percentages of those who found the behavior very uncivil (36% or less) and the combined totals for very or mostly uncivil responses (ranging from 53% to 63%) are substantially *less* than the analogous percentages in clusters 2 and 3.¹³ Conversely, those finding the behavior to be somewhat uncivil are greater for Cluster 4 (ranging from 19.5% to 23%) than for clusters 2 and 3 (less than 17%).

Cluster 5 contains just one item, that which taps respondents' perceptions of the civility or incivility of attacking an opponent's stand on the issues. Comparing the bar graphs in Figure 1 shows dramatically that the pattern of response on this item is reversed from that of all the other clusters. A small percentage of respondents find it uncivil and a larger percentage find it not at all or slightly uncivil. In short, as hypothesized and as deliberative democratic scholars would hope, a large proportion of respondents distinguished issue-oriented attacks on political opponents from other types of attacks, including those based on personal conduct or character, presuming that the latter were uncivil whereas the former were not. This finding aligns with research on negative campaigning that suggests issue-oriented attacks on opposing candidates—part and parcel of spirited democratic debate—elicit a different response from their audience than do personal attacks (*see* Abbe, Herrnson, Magelby, & Peterson, 2001; Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1997; Fridkin & Kenney, 2004; Lau & Rovner, 2009; Thurber & Nelson, 2000).

¹³ The low for very uncivil in clusters 2 and 3 is about 43% (for exaggerating to obscure the truth) and for very and mostly uncivil combined it is about 73% (for mocking). The high on very uncivil for clusters 2 and 3 is about 63% (for name calling and derogatory language), and for very uncivil and mostly uncivil combined it is 84.4% (for intentionally making false or misleading statements.)

To the extent that respondents presumed both issue-oriented and personal attacks displayed some emotion, contrary findings for these two types of attacks also suggest that, consistent with current science pertaining to the relationship between reason and emotion, it is *not* emotional display per se that signals incivility to the majority of our respondents.

Unfortunately, however, we did not include items that allowed independent examination of perceptions of civility of the *same* speech accompanied by different types of emotional displays vs. absolutely no emotion. This is a loose end to be followed up in further survey research.

With respect to the items in clusters 4, the *minimal* number of respondents who found the activity mostly or very uncivil is about 50.5% (for emphasizing an opponent's minor flubs or improprieties). Across clusters 1-3, the analogous percentages are far higher (from about 70% for mocking to about 93% for threatening harm and encouraging others to threaten harm). If respondents who found the activity somewhat uncivil are added, *all* Cluster 4 items were seen *by more than 75%* of respondents as uncivil. For clusters 1-3, the analogous percentages range from *about 86%* for mocking to *more than 95%* for threatening harm or encouraging others to harm.

We can conclude, then, that there is very large consensus, at least among our youthful sub-population, about the types of political speech and behavior that "count" as political incivility. This finding strongly supports replicating these items in a nationally representative survey to see if such large consensus holds. Since research suggests youth are more tolerant of incivility than their older peers (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011, p. 314)), it might well be that even *larger* percentages of Americans as a whole would concur that, save for issue-oriented attacks, our measures tap a panoply of types of perceived political incivility.

Such findings in turn would show it is possible, at least for our population, to devise highly consensual social norms in favor of refraining from activities in clusters 1, 2 and 3, where,

for our sample, the number of respondents stating the activity was very or mostly uncivil is never less than 73%. If we set the threshold lower to include all activities that at least 75% of our respondents viewed as very, mostly or somewhat uncivil, we encompass *all* our indicators of potential types of political incivility except the issue-based attacks that are part of informed and inclusive political debate.

Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Investigating whether the latent construct of political incivility was unidimensional or multi-dimensional, we examined five different model specifications. After testing a priori competing hypotheses H3a and H3b with models 2 and 3, we constructed models 4 and 5 based on empirical clues provided by our descriptive analysis.¹⁴

To conform to strict hypothesis testing, we first included all 23 indicators in Model 1. But because our descriptive analyses confirmed that a majority of respondents did not find issue-based attacks uncivil, we dropped this item in assessing the dimensionality of political incivility. Because descriptive analyses showed little variability in respondents' perceptions of threatening harm or encouraging others to threaten harm, we dropped these two indicators from our analysis of incivility's dimensionality.¹⁵

¹⁴Our total N for the CFA was 1,101, as compared to 1,170 for our descriptive analyses. This was because some respondents "clicked through" survey items very quickly without paying attention to their responses, e.g., providing responses of "Very uncivil" or "not at all Uncivil" to all the items in our civility battery. Eliminating respondents who fit such highly deviant patterns indicating lack of attention to individual civility items, and also eliminating individuals who answered five or more of the civility items with "No opinion" reduced sample size by only 69 persons. Because the integrity of responses to items in our civility battery is so essential to conclusions drawn about the underlying dimensionality of the latent construct of political incivility, for the purposes of the CFA, we treated these 69 respondents as Non-responders, eliminating them from our CFA.

¹⁵ Ancillary latent class analysis also suggested omitting Threaten Harm and Encourage Harm because these did not significantly contribute to latent class profile structure. Detailed description and results of our latent class analyses are available on request and are included in a paper analyzing predictors of tolerance for political incivility, to be presented in September, 2015 at the Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association. Where most scholarship on political incivility presumes racial, ethnic, religious or sexual slurs are uncivil, only Massaro and

Table 4 provides the fit statistics for our CFA results. We conducted all CFA analyses in Stata using the gsem (generalized structural equation model) function with robust variance estimates. This allows measurement variables to be specified as ordinal and their relationships described by a set of logistic regression equations. We again used the AIC, CAIC and BIC statistics for model selection.¹⁶

<Insert Table 4 about here>

In the one-factor model, most of the loadings for the 20 indicator variables were fairly strong and statistically significant. Nevertheless, the factor loadings for the two-factor model were also highly significant and the AIC and BIC statistics indicated better model fit. Consistent with H3b, aspects of incivility that relate to remarks made by individuals (Utterance) can be separated from actions that strongly imply ongoing discursive interaction but discourage open and reasoned debate (Discursive).¹⁷

Bivariate residuals produced by an ancillary latent class analysis we conducted (results available from authors and presented in our paper on predictors of tolerance for political incivility, to be presented at the 2015 American Political Science Association) suggested our data

Stryker (2012) focused on threats of physical harm as markers of incivility. Thus, we retained the “slur” item, even though there was almost as little variability of response on it as there was for threatening or encouraging harm.

¹⁶ Because our data violate the assumption of multivariate normality, fit statistics typically applied to continuous-level data (RMSEA, CFI, and TLI) are generally not appropriate. However, we replicated all analyses in Mplus and, to obtain traditional fit statistics, also ran the models using weighted least squares with adjusted means and variances (WLSMV). Such estimation is ideal for non-normally distributed ordinal data with larger sample sizes (Lei & Wu, 2012; Kline, 2012). All these analyses indicated an increasingly better fit leading up the final model. We offer traditional fit statistics (RMSEA, CFI, TLI) in the text for our final model. Such statistics are provided for all models Appendix A; but they should be interpreted with caution because our data violate multivariate normality.

¹⁷ Our two-factor model did produce a very high correlation (.91) between the latent variables Utterance and Discursive and our best fitting three factor model produced an analogous correlation of .94. Thus we performed an equivalence test for nested models, in which “the free parameters of one model are a subset of the free parameters of in the second” (Bollen, 1989, p. 291). Specifically, we calculated a model in which the covariance of the two latent variables was constrained to 1. Should this nested model result in a better fit, it would indicate that the two latent variables should not be treated as separate, underlying dimensions of incivility. Based on the results, however, we are correct in treating aspects of incivility that relate to Utterance and those related to Discursive as separate, as the nested model was the worse fitting model. We therefore have sufficient statistical power to distinguish these two dimensions despite the fact that they are closely related. Along with AIC and BIC statistic, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA statistics further support our conclusions (see Appendix A).

may be three-dimensional, with items related to dishonesty reflecting a third latent factor, that of deception.¹⁸ We thus used CFA to examine Model 3, including the items pertaining to making false statements and exaggerating to obscure the truth as observable indicators of the underlying factor Deception. As shown by Table 4's AIC and BIC statistics, a three-factor model allowing exaggerated and misleading statements to load on a third latent variable (Deception), fit the data better than models constructed based on extant literature.

Moving a step further, our final model specified that failing to provide reasons or evidence should load on Deception rather than on the Utterance or Discursive dimensions. We argue that our respondents may see failing to provide reasons or evidence as such a key omission that it is seen as tantamount to deception. As well, this indicator exhibited relatively low factor loadings in all previous models. The AIC and BIC statistics provided in Table 4 suggest that, although the loading did not significantly improve, our final model specification was the best-fitting model for our data.¹⁹ Figure 2 provides visual depiction of our final model, including the different factor loadings for each indicator variable, and correlations among latent factors.

<Insert Figure 2 about here>

In sum, our confirmatory factor analysis strongly suggests that the latent construct of perceived political incivility is three-dimensional. Utterance Incivility, Discursive Incivility, and Deception should be treated as distinct aspects of the underlying construct. But because the CFA also shows sizeable correlations between the Deception latent variable and those for both the Utterance and Discursive latent variables, deception is most usefully viewed as part of an

¹⁸ A block model applied to a matrix of bivariate residuals produced in the latent class analysis also suggested three dominant clusters.

¹⁹ Traditional fit statistics calculated in MPlus using WLSMV estimation support this conclusion and suggest the three-factor model fit the data well ($CFI = .93$, $TLI = .92$, $RMSEA = .93$).

overarching construct of perceived political incivility, rather than as its own completely separate overarching construct.

Conclusion

Based on our survey of a random sample of more than 1,000 undergraduates representing the undergraduate population at a large southwestern university, we found that respondents substantially agreed on what categories of speech and behavior were uncivil and that most respondents did not see issue-based attacks as uncivil. With respect to what is *perceived* uncivil, then, our results suggest a concept that does not focus on negativity or rudeness per se, but distinguishes issue- and person-based attacks. Because respondents are likely to have associated both kinds of attacks with exhibiting emotion, our findings also suggest a majority of respondents did not regard displaying emotion per se as uncivil, even though they did assess multiple types of speech and behavior exhibiting belligerence or contempt as uncivil. Future research should test this assumption more directly with items displaying the same speech, with and without any display of emotion. For example, experimentalists could design a study in which the same speech content is accompanied by different degrees and types of emotional displays to assess whether exhibiting particular emotions, such as zeal or anger, would invariably be perceived as uncivil.

Many of the types of speech and behavior measured by our civility items apply across communication platforms from face-to-face to print to radio and television to online communication. For example, our items include indicators of all categories of online behavior that Coe et al (2014) presumed reflected incivility in online commentary to the *Arizona Daily Star*. A limitation is that we did not include behaviors that take on specific meanings in online interaction (e.g., writing in all capital letters as tantamount to shouting; we did however, include

shouting itself) nor did we include online-specific labels for categorizing hostile or aggressive behavior, e.g., flaming or trolling. Flaming typically is conceived to involve aggressive and hostile online behavior whether in chat rooms, social networking, instant messaging or e-mail, whereas trolling pertains to using deception or baiting or very aggressive language as provocation (Hmielowski et al 2015). Although perceptions of flaming and trolling should be assessed directly and explicitly in future surveys, these labels encompass some behaviors (e.g., deception, person-based attacks) that our items *do* invoke and examine without specifying the media platform context. And while much political communication today does occur in computer-mediated ways, much of it also still occurs off-line

We also found that for our survey respondents, perceived political incivility is an overarching latent construct incorporating three analytically distinct but empirically correlated latent dimensions: Utterance Incivility, Discursive Incivility, and Deception. The first includes speech and behaviors related to personal attacks, insulting language and slurs, the second pertains especially to behaviors tending to shut down or detract from inclusive and ongoing political discussion, and the third focuses solely on deception, including both outright lying and failures of omission. As we stated at the outset, while civility and deliberation are analytically distinct concepts, elements of incivility have been presumed damaging to the quality and effectiveness of ongoing political discourse. That in our data one underlying dimension of incivility encompasses behaviors pertaining especially to ongoing discursive interaction reflects an *intersecting region of ideas pertaining both to civil discourse and to deliberative democracy* (see Stryker & Danielson 2013). That in our data the discursive dimension of political incivility is highly positively correlated with the utterance dimension—the latter containing behaviors virtually all scholars presume reflect political incivility—while both these dimensions also are

highly correlated with deception, is additional evidence that items on all three dimensions should be seen to contribute to the overarching multi-dimensional latent construct of political incivility.

Future research should explore whether and how perceptions of civility are context dependent. In additional papers based on our survey, we analyze vignette experiments to see whether respondents' perceptions depend on the relative power and social status of speakers and targets. Researchers also could examine whether respondents find insults and vulgarity directed at ideas or institutions to be as uncivil as those directed at persons. Future research could assess whether there is more consensus in perceptions of incivility when respondents are asked, as in our survey, to provide a relative ranking of the incivility of different types of discourse than when they are asked to make a qualitative distinction between what is civil vs. uncivil. However, because our findings on aggregate perceived incivility may be *attenuated* compared to what we would find for a representative national sample, the highly consensual nature of our respondents' perceptions and the large number of items on which the combined total of respondents stating the activity was very or mostly uncivil was at least 73% must be taken seriously.

Variability across persons and over time, as well as patterned differences among regional or demographic sub-groups in perceptions of political incivility in the media, in electoral campaigning, and in Congress may well help predict variability in such key aspects of American democracy as political participation, including but not restricted to voting, and trust and legitimacy of government (Kahn & Kenney 1999; Fridkin & Kenney 2011; Mutz 2007; Mutz & Reeves 2005). For these reasons, categories of perceived uncivil political discourse used in survey research also are relevant to how content analysts categorize the civility/incivility of the discourse they examine. To the extent that conceptual categories employed in extant content analyses of media and politics overlap with ours, as they do substantially in the recent work of

Coe et al (2014) and Sobieraj & Berry (2011, 2013), our findings, combined with content-analytic findings on the prevalence of diverse types of political incivility, may be suggestive for Americans' evaluation of, and engagement in, American democracy.

Especially if our key finding of substantial consensus on types of perceived incivility is replicated for a representative national sample of Americans, moving toward standardized measures of types of incivility is both possible and useful for research and practice. As well, promoting generalized civility norms for political discourse will not be quixotic. Here, however, we want to underscore a key distinction: that between standardized indicators used to measure and track characteristics of particular populations or sub-populations and the degree to which any findings based on such standardized indicators are—or are not—generalizable to populations or sub-populations different from those in the focal survey.

Clearly, we cannot generalize our *findings* beyond the sub-population to which they pertain. Future research surveying both broader American sub-populations, e.g., all college students nation-wide, and the full population of Americans 18 and older, is needed to know the extent to which our findings will or will not generalize to these larger populations, such that these populations exhibit equal or different levels of consensus on the general types of behavior constituting political incivility.

Surveying perceptions of political incivility on nationally representative samples is especially important for understanding and evaluating the state of American politics as a whole. Our battery of civility questions provides an excellent starting point for such future inquiry and for working toward standard batteries of questions that can be used to assess variability in perceptions of incivility over time within and across given populations. That our questions were meaningful to—and generated meaningful and structured response patterns for—our sub-

population strongly suggests it is useful to move toward one or more standardized indicator batteries for survey research on perceptions of political incivility. This is a major contribution of our research.

As well, our study yields the important theoretical insight that distinct types of speech and behavior reflect an overarching underlying construct with a three dimensional structure. In short, our study is at least as useful for concept and theory building as other respected recent communication surveys conducted on local samples, some of which—unlike our own—are not representative of any identifiable sub-population at all (see, for example, Hmielowski et al (2015)). In short, the need for more research, including especially on a representative national sample, does not negate the importance of our study.

Finally, even highly consensual empirical results shown for a representative national sample could not settle all conceptual disagreements among scholars of political incivility. Reasons of logical coherence or normative preference may lead some scholars to prefer using different conceptual categories. But to the extent that essentialism is rejected in favor of concepts that prove to have empirical utility, we do well to track categories of, and distinctions among, speech and behavior that are meaningful beyond the scholarly community to the American public and/or various regional, demographic and institutional sub-populations. .

References

- Abbe, O. G., Herrnson, P.S., Magelby, D. B., & Peterson, K. (2001). Are professional campaigns more negative? In P. S. Herrnson (Ed.), *Playing hardball: Campaigning for the US Congress* (pp. 70-91). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- Ansolabehere, S. & Iyengar, S. (1997). *Going negative: How political advertisements shrink and polarize the electorate*. New York: Free Press.

- Bohman, J., & Rehg, W. (1997). *Deliberative democracy: Essays on reason and politics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Bollen, K. A. 1989. *Structural equations with latent variables*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Brooks, D. J., & Geer, J. G. (2007). Beyond negativity: The effects of incivility on the electorate. *American Journal of Political Science*, 51, 1-16.
- Chambers, S. (2003). Deliberative democratic theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6, 307-326.
- Coe, K, Kenski, K, & Rains, S. 2014. Online and uncivil? Patterns and determinants of incivility in newspaper website commentary. *Journal of Communication*, 64, 658-679. doi: 10.1111/jcom.12104.
- Damasio, A. (1994). *Descartes' error: Emotion, reason and the human brain*. New York, NY: Putnam Publishing.
- Damasio, A. (1999). *The feeling of what happens: Body and emotion in the making of consciousness*. New York: Harcourt Inc.
- Dryzek, J. S. (2002). *Deliberative democracy and beyond: Liberals, critics, contestations*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Fridkin, K. L., & Kenney, P. J. (2004). Do negative messages work? The impact of negativity on citizens' evaluations of candidates. *American Politics Research*, 32, 570-605. doi: 10.1177/1532673X03260834
- Fridkin, K. L., & Kenney, P. J. (2008). The dimensions of negative messages. *American Politics Research*, 36, 694-723. doi: [10.1177/1532673X08316448](https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X08316448)

- Fridkin, K. L., & Kenney, P. J. (2011). Variability in citizens' reactions to different types of negative campaigns. *American Political Science Review*, 55, 307-332. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-5907.2010.00494.x
- Gastil, J. (2013). "Good arguments: Modern adventures in the theory and practice of deliberative democracy." Presentation at the National Institute for Civil Discourse, March 8, 2013.
- Guttmann, A. & Thompson, D. (2004). *Why deliberative democracy?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Harcourt, B. (2012). The politics of incivility. *Arizona Law Review*, 54, 345-373.
- Herbst, S. (2010). *Rude democracy: Civility and incivility in American politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Hmielowski, J.D., Hutchens, M. J. & Cicchirillo, V.J. (2015). Living in an age of online incivility: Examining the conditional indirect effects of online discussion on political flaming. *Information, Communication & Society* 17(10), 1196-1211. doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2014.899609.
- Jamieson, K. H. (1992). *Dirty politics: Deception, distraction and democracy*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jamieson, K. H. & Cappella, J. N. (2008). *Echo chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the conservative media establishment*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jamieson, K. H., & Falk, E. (2000). Continuity and change in civility in the House. In J. R. Bond & R. Fleisher (Eds.) *Polarized politics: Congress and the president in a partisan era* (pp. 96-108). Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly.
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

- Kahn, K. F. & Kenney, P. J. (1999). Do negative campaigns mobilize or suppress turnout? Clarifying the relationship between negativity and participation. *American Political Science Review*, 93, 877-889. doi: [10.2307/2586118](https://doi.org/10.2307/2586118)
- Kahne, J., Middaugh E. & Allen D. (2014). Youth, new media and rise of the participatory politics. Youth & Participatory Politics Research Network Working Paper 1, March 19, 2014.
- Karst, K. L. (1990). Boundaries and reasons: Freedom of expression and the subordination of groups. *University of Illinois Law Review*, 95-149.
- Kass, R. E., & Raftery, A. E. (1995). Bayes factors. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 90, 773-795. doi: [10.2307/2291091](https://doi.org/10.2307/2291091)
- Kline, R. B. (2012). Assumptions in structural equation modeling. In R. H. Hoyle (Ed.), *Handbook of structural equation modeling* (pp.111-125). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Lau, R. R., & Rovner, I. B. (2009). Negative campaigning. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12, 285-306. doi: 10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.071905.101448.
- Lee, J. W. & Stryker, R. (2011). Classical rhetoric, contemporary science and modern civil discourse. *University of Arizona National Institute for Civil Research. Research Brief No. 4*. Available at http://nicd.arizona.edu/research_briefs
- Lei, P., & Wu, Q. (2012). Estimation in structural equation modeling. In R. H. Hoyle (Ed.), *Handbook of structural equation modeling* (pp.164-180). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Massaro, T. M., & Stryker, R. (2012). Freedom of speech, liberal democracy and emerging evidence on civility and effective democratic engagement.” *Arizona Law Review*, 54, 375-441.

- Muddiman, A. R. (2013). *The Instability of Incivility: How News Frames and Citizens' Perceptions Shape Conflict in American Politics*. PhD Dissertation, University of Texas-Austin.
- Mutz, D. C. (2007). Effects of "in-your-face" television discourse on perceptions of a legitimate opposition. *American Political Science Review*, 101, 621-635.
- Mutz, D. C. (2008a). How the mass media divide us. In P.S. Nivola & D.W. Brady (Eds.) *Red and blue nation? Vol. 1. Characteristics and causes of America's polarized politics* (pp. 223-248). Washington DC: Brookings Institution.
- Mutz, D. C. (2008b). Is deliberative democracy a falsifiable theory? *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11, 521-528. doi: [10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.081306.070308](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.081306.070308)
- Mutz, D. & Reeves, B. (2005). The new videomalaise: Effects of televised incivility on political trust. *American Political Science Review*, 99, 1-15. doi: [10.1017/S0003055405051452](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055405051452)
- Ost, D. (2004). Politics as the mobilization of anger: Emotions in movements and in power. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 7, 229-244. doi: [10.1177/1368431004041753](https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431004041753)
- Papacharissi, Z. (2004). Democracy online: Civility, politeness and the democratic potential of online discussion groups. *New Media and Society*, 6, 259-283.
doi: 10.1177/1461444804041444
- Public Religion Research Institute. (2010, November 10). *Americans Say Elections More Negative than Past, Lack of Civility As Major Problem*. Available at <http://publicreligion.org/research/2010/11/americans-say-elections-more-negative-than-past-lack-of-civility-as-major-problem>.
- Ryfe, D. M. (2005). Does deliberative democracy work? *Annual Review of Political Science*, 8, 49-71. doi: [10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.032904.154633](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.032904.154633)

Sapiro, V. (1999). Considering political civility historically: A case study of the United States.

Unpublished manuscript on file with the Arizona Law Review.

Sobieraj, S., & Berry, J. M. (2011). From incivility to outrage: Political discourse in blogs, talk radio, and cable news. *Political Communication*, 28, 19-41.

doi: [10.1080/10584609.2010.542360](https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2010.542360)

Sobieraj S. & Berry, J. M. (2013). *The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility*. Oxford UK: Oxford University Press.

Steiner, J. (2012). *The foundations of deliberative democracy: Empirical research and normative implications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stryker, R. & Danielson, J. T. (2013, September, 7). Deliberative democracy and civil discourse.

University of Arizona National Institute for Civil Discourse, Research Brief No. 10.

Available at http://nicd.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/research_briefs

Thompson, D. (2008). Deliberative democracy theory and empirical political science. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11, 497-520. doi: 10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.081306.070555

Thurber, J. A., & Nelson, C. J. (2000). *Campaign warriors: Political consultants in elections*.

Washington DC: Brookings Institution.

Uslaner, E. M. (2000). Is the Senate more civil than the House?" In B. A. Loomis (Ed.) *Esteemed*

colleagues: Civility and deliberation in the US Senate (pp. 32-56). Washington DC:

Brookings Institution.

Figures

Figure 1: Distribution of individual responses for exemplary items from each question cluster

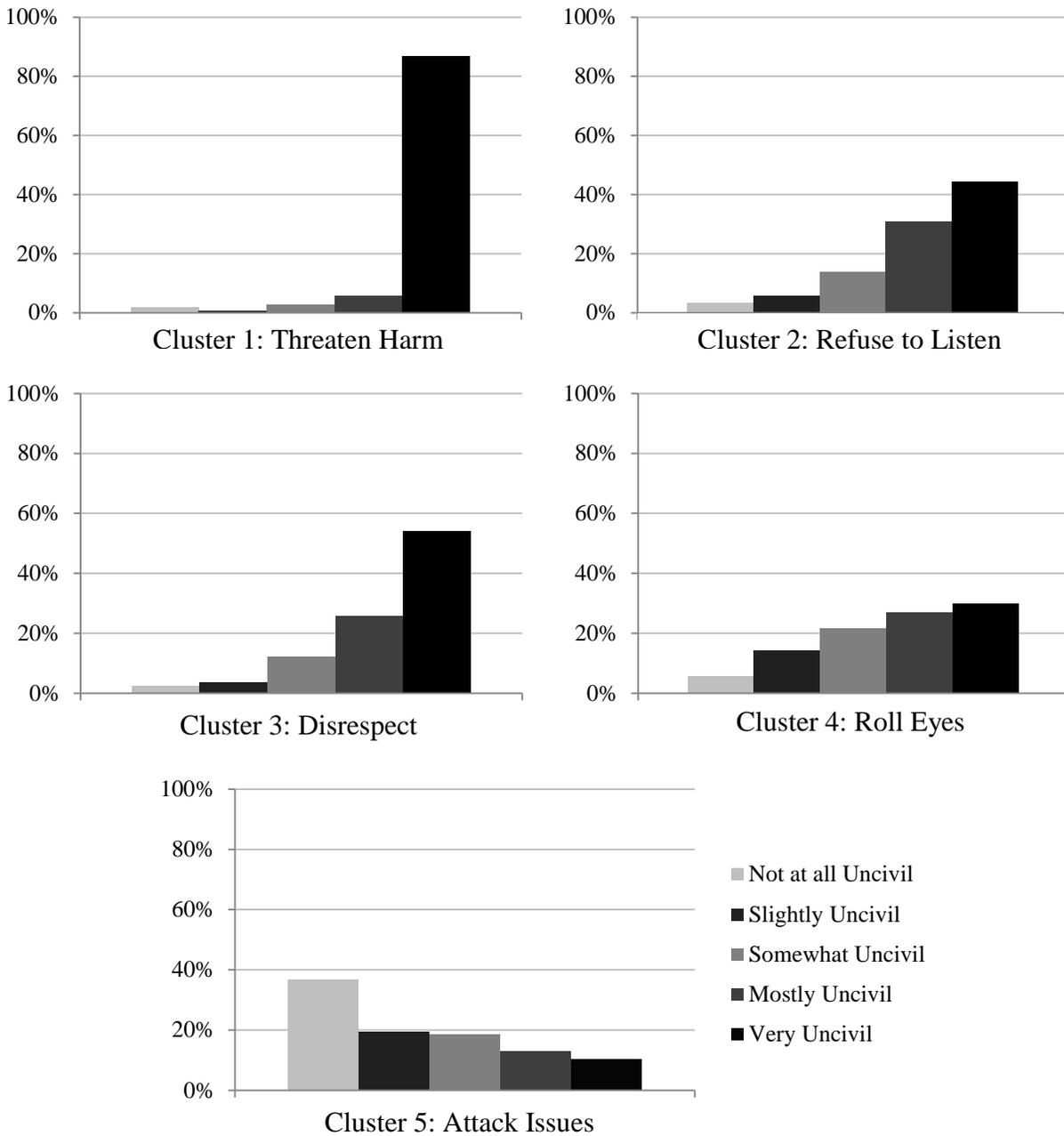
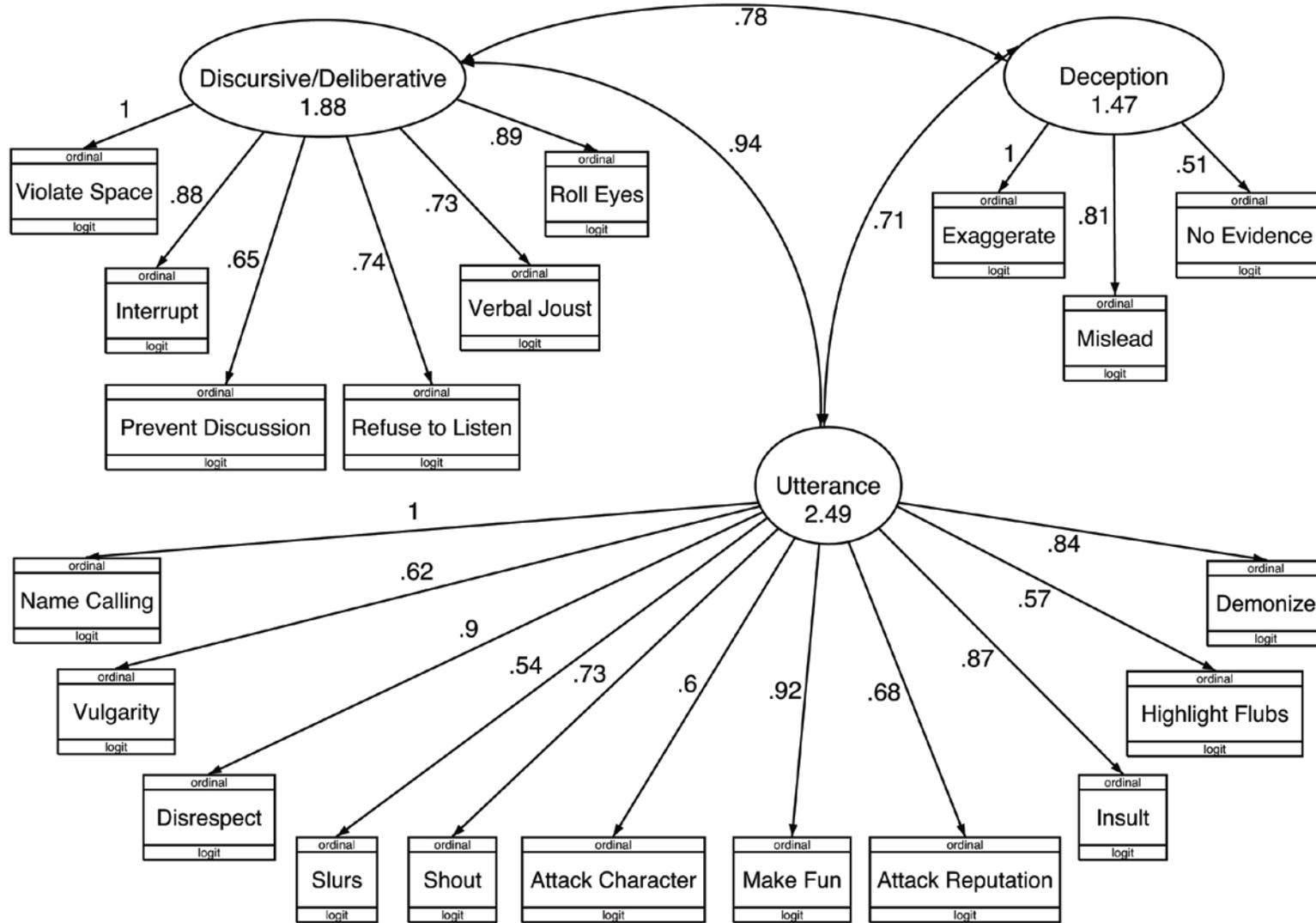


Figure 2: Diagram of best-fitting three-factor model with factor loadings



Note: Standard deviation of latent variables displayed below variable names.

Tables

Table 1: Incivility survey measures

Original question	Variable name
Use of obscene or vulgar language in political discourse	Vulgarity
Making disrespectful statements in a political discussion	Disrespect
Use of racial, sexist, ethnic, or religious slurs in a political discussion	Slurs
Interrupting those with whom one disagrees in a political discussion	Interrupt
Name calling or using derogatory language to express distaste or contempt for one's political opponent.	Name Calling
Threatening others with physical harm in a political discussion.	Threaten Harm
Encouraging others in a political discussion to inflict physical harm on individuals.	Encourage Harm
Intentionally making false or misleading statements in a political discussion.	Mislead
Refusing to let those with whom one disagrees take part in a political discussion.	Prevent Discussion
Shouting at a political opponent.	Shout
Attacking a political opponent's personal character or conduct.	Attack Character
Attacking a political opponent's stand on the issues.	Attack Issues
Failing to provide reasons and evidence to support one's opinion in a political discussion.	No Evidence
Making exaggerated statements that misrepresent or obscure the truth in a political debate.	Exaggerate
Mocking or making fun of one's political opponents.	Make Fun
Engaging in character assassination in a political discussion to make an opponent look bad.	Attack Reputation
Using insulting language in a political discussion.	Insult
Repeatedly emphasizing minor flubs, oversights, or improprieties of a political opponent.	Highlight Flubs
Verbal fighting or jousting with a political opponent.	Verbal Joust
Rolling one's eyes while a political opponent is speaking.	Roll Eyes
Getting in an opponent's face during a political discussion.	Violate Space
Demonizing an opponent during a political discussion.	Demonize
Refusing to listen to argument or points of view with which one disagrees in a political discussion.	Refuse to Listen

Note: The prompt for the above questions read: "Recently there has been much talk about the nature of political discussion among political media elites and among ordinary citizens. Some people think political discussion has become uncivil. Others think it is civil. For each of the following statements, please consider whether it is civil or uncivil and mark the response that most accurately reflects your opinion."

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for civility indicators

Cluster	Indicator	Not at all uncivil	Slightly uncivil	Somewhat uncivil	Mostly uncivil	Very uncivil
1	Slurs	2.36	1.27	3.60	8.77	81.68
	Threaten Harm	1.87	0.63	2.63	5.71	86.93
	Encourage Harm	2.27	0.86	2.34	5.51	86.93
2	Exaggerate	2.78	6.06	17.03	29.60	42.91
	Make Fun	3.02	7.90	16.32	26.12	44.07
	Demonize	2.72	4.92	14.88	31.22	44.33
	Refuse to Listen	3.32	5.90	13.73	30.99	44.44
3	Violate Space	3.85	7.76	14.09	26.32	46.34
	Vulgarity	4.20	8.59	12.86	21.49	51.20
4	Attack Reputation	2.02	4.96	11.45	27.71	51.52
	Insult	2.63	3.83	12.55	26.79	52.84
	Disrespect	2.45	3.68	12.37	25.65	54.25
	Prevent Discussion	2.57	2.65	9.56	23.23	60.49
	Mislead	1.89	3.37	8.05	23.73	60.63
	Name Calling	1.60	3.53	8.57	21.20	63.22
	Highlight Flubs	5.00	13.31	27.56	31.34	19.47
5	No Evidence	11.30	10.80	22.26	26.74	26.13
	Roll Eyes	5.69	14.28	21.62	26.95	29.90
	Interrupt	2.23	10.53	22.77	32.37	30.55
	Verbal Joust	10.66	13.09	21.53	20.20	32.63
	Attack Character	5.36	8.50	21.50	26.69	36.34
	Shout	3.09	13.19	19.42	25.30	37.73
5	Attack Issues	36.76	19.43	18.60	12.94	10.56

Note: Results are displayed in percentages.

Table 3: Model selection statistics for confirmatory factor analyses

	-2LL	BIC	AIC	CAIC	# of parameters
All variables included ($n = 996$)					
One-factor model	44972.73	45752.85	45198.73	45865.85	113
Threaten Harm, Encourage Harm, and Attack Issues omitted ($n = 996$)					
One-factor model	41141.30	41831.68	41341.30	41931.68	100
Two-factor model	41044.75	41742.03	41246.75	41843.03	101
Three-factor model No Evidence loaded on Utterance	40950.00	41661.08	41156.00	41764.08	103
Three-factor model No Evidence loaded on Deception	40855.70	41566.78*	41061.70*	41669.78*	103

Note: * indicate the best-fitting model specification. Deviators and respondents who provided a “don’t know” response were omitted from the data.

Appendix A: Goodness-of-fit statistics for confirmatory factor analyses

	X ²	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	# of parameters
All variables included (<i>n</i> = 996)					
One-factor model	1886.23	.89	.88	.92	113
Threaten Harm, Encourage Harm, and Attack Issues omitted (<i>n</i> = 996)					
One-factor model	1459.37*	.90	.89	.91	100
Two-factor model	1303.53*	.91	.90	.92	101
Three-factor model No Evidence loaded on Utterance	1191.23*	.92	.91	.92	103
Three-factor model No Evidence loaded on Deception	1034.06*	.93	.92	.93	103

Note: * The chi-square value for WLSMV cannot be used for chi-square difference testing in the regular way. Further, we suggest the above statistics be interpreted with caution due to the violation of multivariate normality Table B2: Goodness-of-fit statistics for confirmatory factor analyses

