

ABSTRACT

Title of Document:

INCIVILITY IN MASS POLITICAL DISCOURSE: THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF AN UNCIVIL PUBLIC.

Bryan T. Gervais, Doctor of Philosophy, 2013

Directed By:

Professor Eric M. Uslander, Department of Government and Politics

In this dissertation project, I explore the effect that exposure to uncivil political talk has on deliberative attitudes and behavior. I hypothesize that incivility in political discourse can induce anti-deliberative attitudes among the public, and increases the use of incivility in political talk. I argue that an anti-deliberative spirit among the public helps fuel mass partisan polarization, and limits the positive effects that come from public deliberation.

Using survey data, I find that use of incivility by the public when talking politics has increased. This trend has come alongside changes in partisan polarization and media over the last few decades. A separate analysis confirms the tie between exposure to partisan, uncivil media and uncivil political talk; using panel data, I find that exposure to political talk radio and pundit-based television programming leads audience members with like-minded political views to mimic uncivil language and tactics when expressing their own political opinions.

I use experimental methods to explore incivility's effects more in-depth. Drawing from affective intelligence theory, I hypothesize that political incivility has the ability to induce anger, which in turn reduces deliberative attitudes. In one experiment, I manipulate the amount of incivility in an online message board. I find that uncivil political talk induced feelings of anger in individuals when one's partisan in-group was targeted, and led to an increased use of incivility when the partisan out-group was targeted. When feelings of anger are stimulated in people, they reprimand the uncivil "perpetrator" on the message board, and display anti-deliberative attitudes—including a reduced propensity to consider alternative views and lower levels of satisfaction with interactive online communication.

A second experiment, embedded in a national survey, confirms that disagreeable incivility and like-minded incivility have different effects. Uncivil messages that are disagreeable induce feelings of anger, decrease willingness to compromise, and boost use of incivility. While the connection between like-minded incivility, anger, and anti-deliberative attitudes is less clear, uncivil messages lead like-minded messages to mimic uncivil and anti-deliberative behavior.

My findings show that incivility limits political deliberation. I conclude by noting the consequences of this, as well as directions for future research.

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CONSEQUENCES OF AN UNCIVIL PUBLIC

By

Bryan T. Gervais

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2013

Advisory Committee:

Professor Eric M. Uslaner, Chair

Assistant Professor Antoine Banks

Associate Professor Michael Hanmer

Professor Irwin Morris

Professor Christopher Foreman, Dean's Representative

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Adrian Thomas Gervais and Pamela Loucks Bosward, for their love, selflessness, and dedication to my education.

And to my wife, Kathryn Stead Gervais, who was there for me throughout all the ups and downs of my graduate career, who keeps me motivated, and who inspires me daily.

Acknowledgements

I would like to give my sincere thanks to my dissertation chair, Professor Eric Uslaner, and the members of my dissertation committee—Professor Antoine Banks, Professor Michael Hanmer, and Professor Irwin Morris—for their dedication, patience, and knowledgeable guidance. Their advice and feedback was in-depth and quick, and I benefited greatly from having each of them as a mentor. I am very thankful to Professor Christopher Foreman for his willingness to serve as Dean’s Representative on my committee on short notice and with a busy schedule.

I am additionally thankful to the Department of Government & Politics community, for inspiring (and improving upon) many of the ideas I have incorporated into this project. The idea for this project came to me early on in my graduate career, and was fostered in courses, workshops, and casual conversations; through their participation in each, the faculty and my student colleagues greatly assisted me in developing this project.

I owe much to the patient and competent staff of the Department of Government & Politics—especially Ann Marie Clark, who went above and beyond to help me solve countless issues over my five years in the program (many I am sure I created on my own).

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family and friends, for their advice and encouragement. I am especially grateful to my mother, father, and brother. And to my incredible wife, Kate, whose advice is invaluable, who put up with my moods when things did not go as planned, and whose companionship I value above all else.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There is no shortage of political debate in the United States. We can easily find examples of political talk on television between pundits. Quaint as it sounds, passionate discussions still occur at the dinner table between family members, and in pubs, between friends. And, in the early 21st century, political talk between masses of strangers is a constant occurrence in the fast-changing forums of the Internet. That social media has made it so easy to connect with others who are passionate about politics is nothing short of a marvel. For democracy in America, this should be great news.

The Great American Experiment was founded on the idea that discourse is the lifeblood of democracy; the freedoms of speech, press, and assembly are protected so as to ensure differences of opinion can be expressed. Madison's reflections in *Federalist No. 10* illustrate that the American system of government was designed to benefit from a diversity of views, rather than be hampered by factionalism (Hamilton et al. 1787/1788). Madison is advocating for efficiency, more than anything else—instead of government wasting energy trying to restrict conflicting views that threaten to bog it down or rip it apart, the republican system of the United States would allow differences to be collated and filtered through the democratic process so as to improve society. Sunstein (2009) argues, "...the framers' greatest and most original contribution to political theory [was that]...heterogeneity, far from being an obstacle, would be a creative force, improving deliberation and producing better outcomes." Through discourse, enlightened thought and

better policy could be produced. As Jefferson reflected, “Differences of opinion lead to inquiry, and inquiry to truth.”¹

Although there is much of it, differences in opinion in contemporary American political society are not producing better outcomes. And political talk does not seem to be bringing us any closer to “truth.” Instead, we are witnessing an American politics that is stalemated by factionalism, in the form of partisanship. Partisan polarization in government is nearing historic highs,² and partisan conflict among the electorate has surged since a mid-twentieth century decline (Brewer 2005). With these partisan conflicts has come increased confrontation, and reduced compromise in government (Abramowitz 2011). The 112th Congress (whose term ended three months before the time of this writing, in January 2013) was so bogged down by partisanship, that its legislative output makes the infamous “Do Nothing Congress” of 1947-48 look productive.³

Certainly, the two-party systems that have dominated American politics since the Constitution came into effect have restricted the heterogeneity of views that enter political conversations and are considered in government. Yet avenues through which people can directly communicate with others who differ from them have never been greater. This is a conundrum—if it is getting easier to openly debate politics with people from across the country, why has American democracy been increasingly bogged down by partisan conflict? Why does political heterogeneity serve as a hindrance, rather than a marketplace of ideas from which good policy is drawn?

¹ Jefferson stated this in a letter to Peter Wendover (Jefferson 2012, 340).

² As demonstrated by Poole and Rosenthal’s DW-Nominate scores:
http://voteview.com/political_polarization.asp

³ See Steinhauer (2012).

These questions are less about the origin of contemporary partisan polarization—much research is dedicated to answering that question. I am instead asking what it is about that polarization prevents political talk from becoming deliberation.⁴ My answer to this, and the central contention of my dissertation, is that the presence of incivility in mass political discourse deserves substantial blame. Incivility impedes political discourse from advancing the democratic process. Rather than exchange ideas and update positions in light of new information, incivility leads those most passionate about politics and most willing to discuss policy to reject alternative views and become more dedicated to the views they already hold. Despite all the modes through which we can communicate, and despite all the energy that is put into political talk, American democracy benefits little. In fact, I argue that political discourse, beset with incivility, is currently more harmful than helpful.

Throughout this project, I will present information that demonstrates the negative effects incivility has on political deliberation. I utilize both survey data and experimental methods to show that exposure to uncivil political talk can lead people to adopt incivility into their own political comments. Additionally, I argue that people reduce their willingness to deliberate and hold deliberative values. There are some important caveats—such as whether a political message is like-minded or disagreeable. Questions remain as to how much like-minded incivility affects deliberative values, and more research is needed. Yet what should be plainly clear is that incivility consistently has a negative impact on political discourse. In the next section, I will overview the layout of my dissertation.

⁴ As I will explain in chapter 3, uncivil political talk can be thought of as both a cause and effect of partisan polarization.

Layout of Dissertation

In the next chapter, I will define what I mean by “incivility,” explain how I will operationalize uncivil political talk throughout this project, and lay out a theory that ties exposure to uncivil political talk to feelings of anger. I will introduce research from affective intelligence theory which ties anger to anti-deliberative attitudes, including increased reliance of preexisting views and a refusal to compromise on policy matters. I will present a theory that suggests exposure to uncivil political talk will increase the chances of people using incivility themselves, and I will also argue that incivility can have these effects, whether we identify with the target of an uncivil claim or not.

Based on the theory laid out in chapter 2, I will test three chief hypotheses in the remaining chapters. First, (H1) I hypothesize that use of incivility by the American public when expressing political opinions has increased over the last few decades. This hypothesis is grounded in the substantial empirical evidence of a changing political culture in the United States: over the past forty years, partisan polarization has increased and a disaggregated, hyperbolic media environment much has developed. These trends result in the reinforcement of preexisting views among the public and a reduced respect for the “other side.” Additionally, the rise of the Internet as a communication tool provides increased opportunities for the public to offer and be exposed to uncivil political talk. Using American National Election Studies data, I track the use of uncivil language in describing presidential candidates and the major parties among the public from 1972 to 2004. The results of this analysis are presented in chapter 3.

I also hypothesize that (H2) exposure to uncivil political talk leads to an increased propensity to use incivility when offering political opinions. Mimicking the language and

behavior of the elites one is exposed to is well-established in the political communication literature. Furthermore, work in several literatures suggests that those offended by uncivil attacks on their “side,” retaliate by “returning the favor.” In chapter 4, I use panel data from the 2008 National Annenberg Election Survey to test this. I examine how changes in exposure to uncivil political media affect people’s propensity to use uncivil language when discussing what they like and dislike about the 2008 presidential candidates.

I additionally test this hypothesis in two experiments. In chapter 5, I present results from an experiment in which exposure to incivility is manipulated in an online forum, and subjects are asked to make their own posts. In chapter 6, I present results from an experiment embedded in the 2012 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, in which exposure to uncivil statements said to have been made by a “party leaders” is manipulated, and subjects are again asked their opinion.

The experiments are also used to test two “sub-hypotheses” related to H2. Previous studies have found that incivility can reduce respect for the opposing side, but they do not discriminate between scenarios when the views and politicians one is aligned with are the target of uncivil attacks and when the views and politicians of the opposed side are targeted, leaving a theoretical void.⁵As political incivility often means intensely negative, hyperbolic statements about the out-group, I expect a political comment to affect partisans on both sides. Specifically, I expect (H2A) exposure to disagreeable incivility—in which one’s in-group is targeted by an uncivil comment—induces the use of incivility in retaliation; and (H2B) exposure to like-minded incivility—in which the “other side” is targeted—induces the use of incivility. I explore whether exposure to like-

⁵ Mutz (2007), for example, exposes individuals to a mock debate where individuals of opposing sides attacked each other. Mutz argues that it is the demonization of the other side that reduces respect for the other side. However, experimental subjects also were exposed to uncivil critiques of their own side.

mindful incivility has this effect due to partisans feeling anger upon hearing how “bad” the other side is, or if partisans merely mimic the behavior of like-minded individuals.

I also use the experiments presented in chapters 5 and 6 to test a third hypothesis, which is central to my theory: (H3) when exposed to uncivil political talk, individuals will indicate less deliberative potential. As substantial research links incivility to negative political emotions, and individuals who experience anger are less willing to compromise in political debates, retreat to prior political attitudes, and limit information searches to sources that reinforce these attitudes, there is reason to believe that exposure to uncivil political talk should reduce deliberative attitudes.

Finally, the experiments are used to test two more sub-hypotheses, related to H3. As I expect that exposure to disagreeable and like-minded incivility should affect use of incivility, I also expect that disagreeable and like-minded incivility will both affect deliberative attitudes. Specifically, I anticipate that (H3A) exposure to disagreeable incivility will induce anti-deliberative attitudes; and (H3B) exposure to like-minded incivility will induce anti-deliberative attitudes.

In chapters 6 and 7, I summarize my findings. I conclude in chapter 7 by suggesting future directions for research on uncivil political talk. Two appendices follow chapter 7, which include expanded discussions and additional tables and figures.⁶

Before showing that incivility negatively affects deliberation, an essential question to answer is why it is important for the public to hold deliberative attitudes in the first place. In the next chapter, I discuss the effects that a public holding anti-

⁶ Appendix 1 contains expanded discussions of subjects not included in the chapters. An expanded discussion from chapter 4, for example, is referred to as A1 4-1, indicating it is included in the first appendix (A1), and related to chapter 4 (4-1). Appendix 2 contains additional tables and figures that were not included in the chapters, with the tables coming before figures. An extra figure from chapter 5, for example, is referred to as FigureA2 5-1, indicating it is included in Appendix 2, and related to chapter 5.

deliberative views is likely to have on democratic processes. In addition to examining the theoretical and empirical support for the importance of public deliberation, I detail the theory that informs each of the above hypotheses.

Chapter 2: Incivility, Emotion, and Deliberation

Consider the following scenario. The United States government is broken. The country is crippled with an enormity of issues, including serious debt problems and a poor economy. Frustratingly, the leaders in the nation's capital are incapable of implementing any solutions. Some members of Congress begin to believe that radical changes need to be made if the country is to survive. A new domestic crisis emerges, and the federal government seems incapable of dealing with it, convincing many more that something drastic needs to be done. So the nation's most preeminent politicians, political insiders, and political thinkers agree to meet to discuss the nation's future. There is talk of dramatically overhauling the government in order to make it more efficient.

As the meeting of political elites begins, the discussions are tempestuous, wrought by ideological clashes. Heated debates occur over what the size and scope of the federal government should be, and many refuse to compromise on their principles. Over a period of months, however, compromises and bargains are made. Although no one is completely satisfied with the final result, a massive restructuring of the American governmental system is agreed upon, in order to address the major problems the country faces which threaten to tear it apart.

This anecdote is a true story. As you might have guessed, the "meeting" was the Philadelphia Convention of 1787, in which the American Founding Fathers debated, designed, and passed the United States Constitution, abandoning the "broken" Article of Confederation. To create the Constitution, a group of men, deeply divided on many of the issues they debated, came to agree upon its principles, and completely reorganized American government. Today, many Americans again believe the government is

“broken,” and incapable of dealing with a number of difficult issues that the country faces. Among the most cited reasons for why is that Democrats and Republicans are bitterly divided and refuse to find middle-ground solutions (Mann and Ornstein 2012). The Constitutional Convention saw delegates, also bitterly divided (small states versus large states, the north versus the south, Federalists versus Anti-Federalists), manage to produce the most important document in American history, and the longest lasting constitution in the world. What lessons can we learn from the discussions that produced it? What elements made the Constitutional Convention a political environment conducive for compromise and problem-solving?

An important, oft-repeated lesson for contemporary political debates, and the focus of my project, is the need for civility in political discourse. Incivility in political talk and its purported consequences has become a *bête noire* of sorts for American politicians, pundits, and social commentators alike. From the calls for civility in the wake of the January 2011 shootings in Tucson, Arizona, to a rally on the National Mall hosted by political satirist Jon Stewart to restore “sanity” in politics, the idea that uncivil discourse has harmful effects on American politics has many adherents. As President Barack Obama explained in a speech during the memorial for the victims of the Tucson shooting, “...only a more civil and honest public discourse can help us face up to the challenges of our nation...” (Hayes 2011).

Evidence of this can be found in the way the founding fathers conducted discourse throughout the Convention of 1787, during which efforts were made to keep the debates civil. John Jay reflected that civility was crucial to creating a deliberative environment during the convention, and was the key to divided sides making “mutual

concessions” in various areas (Jamieson and Hardy 2012). When none other than James Madison began to make ad hominem attacks on men opposing his Virginia Plan, Benjamin Franklin proposed a break in debate so as to let cooler heads prevail, and deliberation ensued more smoothly afterwards (Jamieson and Hardy 2012). Many more examples such as these provide anecdotal evidence that civility in discourse was an essential element to the success of the Philadelphia convention. The attitude many of the delegates held was that when discussions became uncivil, agreement and compromise became much more difficult, if not impossible.

In the contemporary era, the deleterious effects of uncivil political discourse among elites are well-known. First and foremost, it produces an environment in which governing becomes more difficult and legislative productivity is reduced (Uslaner 1993; Jamieson 1999, 2011; Maisel 2012). Political scientists argue that it becomes more difficult to recruit and retain individuals to run for office when elite discourse is characterized by incivility (Maisel 2012), and uncivil discourse is responsible for delays in official activities, such as the confirmation of federal judicial nominees (Schraufnagel 2011). This regards elites, of course—the people actually governing. When scholars and social commentators lament an “incivility crisis,” however, they are not just talking about the discourse on Capitol Hill, but also the political discussions among the general public. Why does the public need to be civil? This is the question I attempt to answer in the discussions to follow.

A central claim that I make is that what people say to each other in political discussions—or how they say it—affects how much consideration alternative views are given and how willing people are to adjust their own policy beliefs. Exposure to uncivil

political discourse, I argue, induces feelings of anger in those exposed, and leads them use anti-deliberative behavior. By anti-deliberative behavior, I mean close-mindedness, a refusal to find a middle-ground in policy areas, and the adoption of uncivil tactics. Incivility in political discourse limits the extent to which individuals consider political views alternative to their own, and decreases their respect for these views. This is important for a couple of reasons, which I will expand on later in this chapter: 1) an anti-deliberative public will negatively affect elite negotiations, and 2) the extent to which public deliberation can produce a “wisdom of the majority” which contributes to policy creation is inhibited if members of the public are unwilling to listen to and consider views alternative to their own.

Understanding the connection between incivility and anti-deliberative behavior has become all the more important, as current media trends have added another level of significance to the study of incivility; byproducts of “new media,” such as narrowcasting and interactivity, have created an atmosphere primed for uncivil political discourse at a time in which American politics are already affected by high levels of partisan polarization. The current media environment not only allows individuals to tailor their news exposure to reaffirm and intensify preexisting views, but the increasing presence of social media and interactivity on the web allows for communication between many people with few social repercussions for disreputable behavior. These media trends raise the possibility for commonplace, popular uncivil political discourse to unprecedented levels. If exposure to (and use of) uncivil discourse does produce an anti-deliberative spirit among the public, then a fix for a “broken” government may begin with changing the way the public talks politics.

In the next section, I detail what is known (and, more accurately, what is unknown) about how the presence of incivility affects political discourse. I then present evidence from affective intelligence research that connects negative emotional reactions to information with anti-deliberative behavior, and present existing research which suggests that the presence of incivility in the presentation of political information induces negative emotions. Following that, I detail the effects that a public which holds anti-deliberative views is likely to have on the functioning of government, before providing an overview of the theoretical and empirical support for the importance of public deliberation. I then explain the definition of “incivility” I use throughout this project and introduce the “incivility index” I have designed to identify and operationalize incivility, before offering some concluding thoughts.

How Does Incivility Affect Political Discourse?

The usual argument regarding the need for civil discourse goes like this: when discourse is not civil, political deliberation cannot occur; when discourse is civil, deliberation is possible, from which benefits to society can be derived. Although anecdotal evidence is aplenty, a direct empirical assessment of what effects the presence of incivility has on individuals’ inclination to engage in pro-deliberative behavior⁷ has not been made. The same is true for the claim that uncivil political talk has been increasing over time—for as many who point out we are in the midst of a civility crisis (i.e., Mutz and Reeves 2005; Kamber 2003), there are others who point to the lack of empirical support to back it up (i.e., Sigelman and Park 2007; Herbst 2010).

⁷ For example, keeping an open mind to alternative views, showing a willingness to compromise, and, critically, resisting the utilization of incivility in their own political remarks

The lack of direct empirical support for the effects of uncivil political talk on deliberative processes invites doubt as to whether discourse must be civil in order for it produce positive results. For instance, the argument has been made that ‘civil discourse’ as a democratic norm is not as black and white as sometimes suggested; oftentimes, some activities qualified⁸ as “uncivil,” such as civil disobedience, are necessary behavior in order to defend civil rights and liberties (Chafe 1981; Sapiro 1999; Mendelberg 2009). Simply put, what counts as incivility is entirely subjective and much in the eye of the beholder.

Furthermore, as incivility is context dependent, showing that there has been an uptick in its use is theoretically challenging. Because of this, Herbst (2010) argues that trying to determine what counts as political incivility, if incivility has increased with time, or if incivility is bad for democracy, are not productive initiatives. Herbst goes so far to say that the argument that, “[i]ncivility is destructive and blocks proper democratic debate...is a banal and unsophisticated answer, one that ignores the reality of politics, communication culture, and the social environment of the twenty-first century” (9).

There is reason to believe, however, that incivility in political talk takes some common forms that affect most individuals in a similar fashion—that is, it deters individuals from engaging in constructive deliberation, and instead promotes obstinacy. Experimental research suggests that exposure to uncivil political talk induces emotional reactions in those exposed. Relatedly, research in affective intelligence links feelings of anger⁹ to anti-deliberative behavior. The central goal of my project is to connect the dots and show that incivility restricts deliberation by ways of inducing anger in individuals.

⁸ Often, such actions become qualified as “incivilities” by the repressors.

⁹ While political psychologists do not always make distinction between “anger” and “aversion,” I will primarily refer to the emotion as “anger,” for the sake of simplicity.

The claim I ultimately make is a simple one: that incivility in political talk has increased, and this has negative ramifications for democratic life.

If incivility indeed inhibits pro-deliberative behavior—such as openness to other views and maintaining civility in one’s own remarks—then trends such as the growing presence of polarizing, vitriolic discourse in political media and interpersonal communication should give us pause, and will raise additional questions as to the utility of uncivil talk by elites.¹⁰ It is not clear, however, that incivility does do this. In the next section, I summarize arguments from research on affective intelligence, which explain how emotions affect information processing. I also present some evidence that suggests that uncivil political talk likely induces the type of negative emotions which lead to anti-deliberative behavior.

Incivility, Emotion, and Information Processing

What reduces individuals’ willingness to consider alternative ideas in a democratic society? Within the subfield of political psychology, research in affective intelligence theory has shown that emotions induced through the presentation of information affects how individuals process that information (Marcus et al. 2000; Redlawsk et al. 2007). With political information, appeals to emotion can affect the political behavior of those exposed; Brader (2005, 2006), for example, finds that the type of emotion induced by campaign ads affected how ads were processed and subsequent voting behavior.

MacKuen et al. (2007, 2010) advance the research on the effects of emotions on willingness to deliberate, arguing that two types of idealized citizens exist, both of which

¹⁰ There is debate as to whether uncivil campaign advertising, for example, mobilizes or demobilizes the electorate; see Brooks and Geer (2007).

are necessary in certain circumstances: the deliberative citizen, whose norms include consideration, balance, open-mindedness, and a willingness to collaborate and accommodate; and the partisan combatant, whose pursuit of victory impels citizens to stand fast and reject middle-ground compromises. Each of us are capable of acting like one these two types, and it is the emotions we experience which affects whether we act more as deliberative citizens or partisan combatants in political discussions.

MacKuen et al. detail the specific emotions associated with both modes of idealized citizenship. The citizen “mode” is determined by whether we experience feelings of *anger*, produced through encounters with “known threats,” or feelings of *anxiety*, produced through encounters with conditions of uncertain risk. As MacKuen et al. explain,

When familiar aversive stimuli are encountered, people rely on previously learned routines to manage these situations, just as they do for familiar rewarding circumstances. They often simply ignore uncomfortable information or, alternatively, bolster their own views by seeking conforming information...the kind of citizenship people practice will depend on the kind of negative emotion politics evokes.

When individuals are angered by policy-related content, they practice *anti-deliberative* behavior associated with the partisan combatant, including a reduced willingness to compromise, a withdrawal from open consideration of different views, and a reliance on prior attitudes. Research in political and social psychology shows that anger suppresses the extent to which individual seek out political information (Valentino et al. 2008), and anger felt towards an out-group produces a desire to argue with, oppose, and attack the out-group (Mackie et al. 2000). Alternatively, being made anxious by new and uncommon stimuli leads to *pro-deliberative* behavior associated with the deliberative citizen, including seeking out new information and openness to common ground remedies

and compromise. The key to understanding how to limit anti-deliberative behavior is to understand what about the presentation of political information produces anger.

Incivility as a Negative Political Stimulus

What is not clear from the affective intelligence literature is when negative political information produces anxiety and when it produces anger. Sociologists, however, have made inroads to linking exposure to incivility directly with anger. Focusing on incivility in everyday life (rather than in political discourse), sociologists have found that the most common emotional responses to uncivil behavior are anger and outrage, far outranking fear, disgust, and blasé reactions (Philips and Smith 2004; Smith et al. 2010). Philips and Smith (2004) also find that individuals angered by incivilities attempt to “sanction” the perpetrator of incivility through “retribution”—that is, returning the favor and acting uncivil themselves.

Work in political philosophy also alludes to the idea that incivility in political discourse leads to anger and undermines the deliberative process. Kingwell (1995) argues that the smooth interactions necessary for benefits to be derived from deliberation can only come when individuals act civil to an extent—specifically, when they are willing to hold their tongues and not say any and everything that comes to their minds. Pointedly, he writes, “...a policy of strict truth-telling and truth-seeking is at odds with a life lived among other humans,” (1995, 199-200). That is not to say that it is plain honesty which derails deliberation; dishonest deliberation is anything but helpful and the opposite of what is needed, and etiquette that bars honest discussion is exactly the type of censorship John Stuart Mill (1998/1859) warned against. Rather, by withholding comments that

offend and add little additional information to an idea, attempts at deliberation are more likely to produce positive results. As Papacharissi (2004) explains,

...it is not civility that limits the democratic potential of conversation, but rather, a confusion of politeness with civility. It is adherence to etiquette that frequently restricts conversation, by making it reserved, tepid, less spontaneous. Adherence to civility merely ensures that the conversation is guided by democratic principles, not just proper manners.

I would not go so far as to claim politeness and civility are two distinct things—rather, I would argue that civility in political talk is a form of polite behavior. However, I agree that it is a break from honesty that is the problem, and equating incivility with honesty (or civility with dishonesty) is inaccurate. Comments can be both uncivil and honest, but they can also be civil and honest. But incivility, even when it is honest, poses a threat to deliberation because it generates feelings of anger.

Substantial research suggests incivility in discourse may produce anger. Incivility has been found to heighten arousal and induce negative emotions—for instance, when exposed to uncivil discourse, individuals' political trust in politicians, political parties, candidates, Congress, and the overall system of government is reduced (Mutz and Reeves 2005; Forgette and Morris 2006; Fridkin and Kenney 2008). Exposure to political incivility does more than induce negative emotional reactions towards government and political figures. As Mutz (2006) demonstrates, it affects the utility of deliberation itself; the benefits of exposure to oppositional views (exposure to views different from one's own) are maximized when discussions have a civil orientation.¹¹

This is partly because, as Neblo et al. (2010) find, conflict aversion substantially deters people's willingness to deliberate. Individuals who are uncomfortable with debate and argument are not going to benefit from deliberation. Conflict, to an extent, is intrinsic

¹¹ By civil orientation, I mean discussions that do not completely avoid conflict, but value the maintenance of social harmony.

to deliberation, and the truly conflict averse are likely to never be active participants. But what people are averse to in contemporary political talk is unlikely to be conflict, per se; disagreement on its own does deter people from deliberation (Stromer-Galley and Muhlberger 2009). Herbst (2010) finds substantial evidence that discomfort surrounding political talk is produced by incivility, especially among young people. In a survey of undergraduates in a state university system, a sizable portion of students characterize discourse among people of different political stripes as disrespectful. Open-ended responses reveal fears of verbal assaults when talking politics and a perception that others approach discussions with “arrogance and certainty.” This research suggests it is not debate or argument or even conflict which undermines a willingness to engage in pro-deliberative behavior, but rather the uncivil, anti-deliberative tactics that are employed in discourse.

Theory: Two Modes by Which Incivility Induces Anti-deliberative Behavior

MacKuen et al. (2010) include fidelity to preexisting views, failure to seek and listen to alternative opinions, and a reduced willingness to compromise as examples of anti-deliberative behavior produced through feelings of anger. I argue that exposure to uncivil political talk produces such anti-deliberative behavior, via anger. Additionally, I argue that incivility is further detrimental to the deliberative process in that it propagates even more uncivil political talk. Exposure to incivility breeds more incivility.

There are two modes through which political information can, via anger, induce anti-deliberative behavior and breed an increased propensity to utilize uncivil language and rhetoric: (1) the vilification of views and politicians of the opposing side rallies together partisans of the same ilk in anger, while (2) simultaneously angering and

offending partisans of the other side, who react by retreating to existing views and responding with incivility.

Mode 1: Target Aversion and the “Mob Effect”

Mimicking the language and behavior of the media that one is exposed to is well-established in the political communication literature (i.e., Zaller 1992; Layman and Carsey 2002; Jamieson and Capella 2009). Media elites have a significant influence on the opinions of their audiences, and when commentators target certain individuals, groups, or ideas, this antipathy is relayed to the audience (Barker 2002). As Mutz (2007) argues, incivility creates disdain for opposing views, with more intense incivility correlated with views that the opposing side has insidious motives. A willingness to listen to or actually consider the views of the other side is not like to happen when the views are considered illegitimate (Mutz 2006, 2007), and an end consequence is a refusal to compromise.

Beyond convincing audiences that the opposition is “bad” and that their views should not be weighed, uncivil discourse also legitimizes the use of uncivil language and behavior in political talk—after all, if elites one trusts are engaged in such behavior, it follows that such behavior is acceptable or even necessary. Herbst (2010) argues that incivility is used as a weapon of sorts, to rile audiences up in anger concerning the “other side” by reminding followers how “bad” the other side is; negative words and associations (i.e., “socialism”) are used strategically to mobilize because they are cues the audience understands, and are averse to. By connecting these concepts to opponents, elites create disdain for their targets, legitimize the use of uncivil language and set it as example behavior, all the while mobilizing their followers in anger. I refer to this as the

“mob effect” as individuals are induced to “join in” on the targeting of opposition views and individuals in an uncivil fashion by the demonization of the opposing side by like-minded individuals.

What is not clear is if the “mob effect” is the result of negative emotions, where incivility generates aversion towards a target, or if it simply a mimicking effect, whereby witnessing like-minded individuals utilize incivility legitimizes and inspires others to adopt uncivil language. I call the strong, negative feelings towards a target that are potentially induced by like-minded uncivil comments “target aversion.” I will investigate whether a “mob effect” occurs with exposure to like-minded incivility, and, if so, whether target aversion is the driving force.

Mode 2: Perpetrator Aversion and the “Retaliation Effect”

Partisanship is much a part of many people’s identity (Schuessler 2000), and like any type of personal identity—whether it be gender, race, or geography—blanket insults about partisans of certain stripes are likely to offend, especially when coming from partisans of the other camp. It is not a great leap to expect people who are offended to be unwilling to carefully weigh the claims made, and to reject any notion of finding common ground. This point, though not empirically backed, has been suggested by many scholars; Strahan and Wolf (2012), example, suppose that, “[i]nteractions characterized by challenges, name-calling, disagreements, and interruptions usually lead to entrenched positions rather than compromise. When opponents feel attacked, especially when those attacks are made public, they respond by digging in to defend their own position rather than seeking out common ground.”

It is also not a great leap to expect the offended to respond in kind. Philips and Smith (2004) have found the most common emotion experienced by individuals offended by incivility in everyday life is anger, and that angered individuals react with retribution—perhaps with incivility. Thus, due to its offending nature and ability to induce anger, one uncivil act breeds another. This is not surprising; as anyone who has been insulted by a personal attack or an attack on his or her views knows, there is an impetus to return the favor, not to concede the perpetrator has a point. And, when, conditions are right, it only takes a spark to create a fire. I call the strong, negative feelings towards a person who makes a disagreeable uncivil comment “perpetrator aversion.” When a person experiencing “perpetrator aversion” feels compelled to “return the favor” and act uncivil in kind, I refer to this as the “retaliation effect.”

There is some empirical evidence to suggest this occur when incivility is present in political discourse. Papacharissi (2004), utilizing a natural experiment of politics-themed Internet newsgroups (which are like Internet chat rooms but feature asynchronous responses and thus tend to be more deliberative and thoughtful) finds that discussions of policy are generally civil and polite in the newsgroups, until an uncivil post is made by a discussant. Following this, other respondents react heatedly, utilizing incivility themselves, before the conversation eventually returns to a more civil tone following interventions by members of the discussion.

This “retaliation effect” can be seen at the macro level as well; as Herbst (2010, 53-57) notes, Sarah Palin’s use of incivility on the 2008 campaign trail had the effect of electrifying and bonding supporters (in accordance with the “mob effect”) while simultaneously eliciting angry responses from Democrats. While uncivil language rallies

one side via anger by reminding them how bad those they disagree with are, those whose identify with the “other side” are angered as well by the charges and insults made. The other side, in a sense, is instigated into reacting in an uncivil fashion. Ultimately, aversion to the claims being made, despite who or what the target is, connects the presentation to the political information to the use of incivility in the expression of political views.

Having established what exactly anti-deliberative behavior is, and provided an argument as to exposure to uncivil political discourse might induce anti-deliberative thinking in individuals, the “so what?” question still remains. So what if the public is close-minded? So what if they do not compromise with each other in message boards? Why should we care if they are uncivil to each other and cannot find any middle ground? In the next two sections, I explain that a public with anti-deliberative views will affect the functioning of government, via influencing elites, and restrict the “wisdom of the multitude” that comes about through open deliberation.

Holding Their Feet to the Fire: How an Uncivil Public Influences Elite Behavior

While the public may take its cues from elites (Zaller 1992), less willingness among non-elites (especially active partisans) to compromise with opposing arguments, and even regard them as legitimate, can reinforce these sentiments among elites (or bind them to them). As Jacobson (2000) contends, the “relationship between mass and elite partisan consistency is inherently interactive.” Saunders and Abramowitz (2004) argue that the growing polarization and involvement of active partisans may “reinforce ideological extremism among party leaders...[pressuring them] to support their party’s

ideological principles and to eschew moderation in pursuit of electoral success¹².”

Because the electoral (especially in party primaries and caucuses) and financial support of party activists is needed, polarization among these individuals has a polarizing effect on party politics (Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 2006).

The extent to which partisans in the electorate eschew any thoughts of compromise with the “other side” is problematic should not be understated. Scholars have found that the transparency of debate among elites affects policy decision-making (Chambers 2005; Levy 2005); because representatives feel pressure to placate their partisan base when speaking in public, openness in elite deliberation has been shown to increase partisan polarization. As Stasavage (2007) states, “[p]ublicity of debate may prompt representatives to use their actions or statements as signals that they are being faithful to constituent interest... [and therefore] representatives are much more likely to engage in a free exchange of opinions and information if they express these opinions in private.” Stasavage adds that this does not just apply to elected officials, as all members of government likely have a “more intrinsic need, psychological or other, to retain the esteem of a constituency by adhering to an ideological line.” Thus, public debates are limited in their usefulness. As elites’ efforts to please constituents derail their negotiations with each other, and can potentially make the situation worse, the use of incivility and fidelity to party views by one side to please the base will likely lead to greater polarization on the issue at hand.

The knowledge that the public can influence sensitive negotiations between elites is not new, and attempts have been made to insulate elites from public opinion during

¹² Although they dispute the claim that there has significant polarization among the general public, Fiorina and Abrams also note that more “openness” in government has allowed more ideologically extreme individuals to influence government in new ways.

debates over divisive issues. For example, during the Constitutional Convention, all deliberations were to be conducted in complete secrecy, outside of the public eye (Chambers 2005). Secret deliberations were deemed necessary because the delegates felt honest discourse was needed--and that meant delegates should feel free to offer their thoughts, and change their minds, without fear of rebuke. Today, the public is likely to reject the process of “secret” negotiations, and modern news media and technology enable the public’s ability to do this. The republican system the founders intended, in which the opinions of the public would be “filtered” through their representatives in the government, has over time been replaced with a more direct role for the public in influencing policy. U.S. senators are now directly elected by the public, slates of electors cast their votes for presidential candidates in accordance with the popular vote in each state, and the development (and dramatic growth) of scientific public opinion polls provide a means for the public to give feedback to their representatives in between elections.¹³ In short, the public *expect* their representatives to vote, think, and act as they do, and they have means of enforcing this.

In the summer of 2011, for example, Congress formed a bipartisan “super committee,” charged with reducing the federal deficits by \$1.5 trillion over a decade.¹⁴ Debt talks between President Obama and Speaker of the House John Boehner had failed earlier in the year, resulting in Standard & Poor's downgrading the United States’ triple-A credit rating. Aware that the message of “no compromise” from the bases of both the Democratic and Republican parties had derailed the Obama-Boehner negotiations, the White House hoped that “back-room” negotiations outside of the public eye between a

¹³ As Sunstein (2009) points out, for the first time in human history, something like direct democracy can (and is) occurring, where the public can provide daily feedback and instructions to the government.

¹⁴ See Tama (2011) for report on the “secret” negotiations.

committee of six Democrats and six Republicans could lead to a “grand bargain.” Faced with impending automatic, across-the-board “trigger” reductions if an agreement was not made, much was at stake in the “super committee” discussions. Other lawmakers, lobbyists, and the public were angered by the fact that the discussion were being held in secret, sheltered from public feedback—and a push for much more transparency was made.¹⁵ However, details of the negotiations were leaked¹⁶ and lobbyist and activist groups trying to protect benefits and tax breaks met with members of the super-committee throughout negotiations.¹⁷ When the negotiations ultimately failed, liberal and conservative groups alike hailed it as a triumph, for their side did not “compromise.”¹⁸

“Public Speakers” and Web 2.0

The “super committee” failure teaches us that elected officials conducting important negotiations in secrecy is not going to be a solution for getting around a divided public. Given that some “open government” will occur with such negotiations, whether intended or not, the public will have a role. A polarized public, unwilling to accept compromise, can derail these negotiations by insisting officials on their “side” sticks to their guns. Constituents who reject compromise and middle-ground solutions are expected to hold their representatives in government to these same standards. Obduracy alone among the public puts pressure on their representative to avoid compromise in policy debates; however, when people believe that the views alternative to their own are illegitimate or dangerous, compromise becomes equated with something like treason. To the extent that it induces an anti-deliberative spirit among the public, uncivil political

¹⁵ See Pear (2011) and Riley (2011).

¹⁶ See Parkinson (2011) and Bouldan et al. (2011).

¹⁷ See Pear (2011)

¹⁸ See Herb (2011).

discourse has the potential to significantly limit and complicate elites' negotiations on sensitive, controversial policy matters.

This is especially important given that the constituents most likely to provide feedback to politicians (via the voting booth, letters, and checkbook) are those who are most likely to engage in political discussions (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). It is true that most people do not actively engage in political deliberation. Yet, in the age of the Internet, they become the audience of those who do. If you use the Internet to read news, or utilize a social networking site like Facebook, it is very difficult to avoid seeing other people's political comments. When these comments are imbued with incivility, you become the audience to uncivil political talk.

For example, you could right this moment visit the website of the *New York Times* (nyt.com), the "paper of record," and open up a political opinion piece. Scroll down to the end of the article and look at the comments section. In all likelihood, many of the comments will feature incivility. Twenty years ago, political opinion pieces featured in the *New York Times* probably did not sound or seem too different than the one you just opened; what has changed is the prominence and ubiquity of other people's political thoughts—which more often than not include incivility, ad hominem attacks, and little filter.

The incredible democratization of political communication via Web 2.0 that has redefined the "public sphere" has serious drawbacks. Individual people's willingness to use incivility has extended beyond private conversations, and is now available for public consumption. Hyperbole and uncivil rhetoric are not restricted to the dinner table or muttered among a few like-minded friends at a pub—they are posted on websites of all

types, every day, all of the time. It is not an overstatement to say avoiding uncivil political talk on the Internet is much more difficult to do than finding it, nor is it to say that most political talk on the Internet will involve some incivility.¹⁹ As bad and as plentiful as incivility may be in elite-run political media (and, as I will show, it has a significant role in inducing the use of incivility), a public willing to use incivility, armed with the means to broadcast their political opinions to large audiences, adds some permanence to the connection between political talk and incivility—there is almost no escaping it. Even if you do not respond to any of the comments you see in a *New York Times* opinion piece, you were exposed to the uncivil claims of others. Perhaps most Americans are merely in the audience of nasty online conversations, rather than active participants. Yet if incivility does affect people’s willingness to compromise or whether or not they see legitimacy in views different from their own, then the use of incivility in the political talk of *some* has the power to affect the behavior and viewpoints of many.

The ubiquity of incivility in online political discussions can affect the political behavior of those in the audience--whether it is in the voting booth or with their pocket book. An anti-deliberative spirit amongst a divided electorate, with both sides unopened to compromise and considering the other side’s views, are more likely to send representatives to Washington who share the “no compromise” spirit (Wolf et al. 2012). Mann and Ornstein (2012), addressing the hyper-polarized and dysfunctional Washington climate, write:

Paradoxically, the public’s undifferentiated disgust with Congress, Washington, and “the government” in general is part of the problem, not the basis of a solution. In never-ending efforts to defeat incumbent officeholders in hard times, the public is perpetuating the source of its discontent, electing a new group of people who

¹⁹ Political communication scholars find that incivility in online political discussions is widespread (Sobieraj and Berry 2010; Borah 2013).

are even less inclined to or capable of crafting compromise solutions to pressing problems. “Confrontation” rather than “compromise” has been the spirit of the most recent Congresses, and has been increasing (Abramowitz 2012); however, I disagree with Mann and Ornstein that the driving factor of this is an “undifferentiated disgust” with Washington and politicians in general among members of the public. Rather, it is disgust focused on the politicians and the party opposite one’s own. As Mann and Ornstein point out, the Tea Party Republicans elected to Congress during the 2010 midterm elections were done so in part because they promised to under no circumstances compromise with Democrats and the Obama Administration. The Tea Party’s mantra, more or less, is “no compromise,” and a central goal of the movement is to “defeat” policy initiatives (and politicians) believed to morally wrong and illegitimate.

It is easy to single out the Tea Party as the essence of the problem, but the spirit of no compromise extends beyond (and predates) Tea Party supporters. A public that wishes to see one side defeated rather than problems solved will get what it asks for. And a public that utilizes uncivil tactics in discourse can affect elite behavior even more directly: through the open use of incivility, constituents can disrupt public deliberative forums or compel politicians to avoid them altogether—as was the case with the summer of 2010 health care reform “town meetings” (Herbst 2010).

To the extent that incivility and polarization are both a function of each other, then use of incivility by the electorate has the potential to disrupt, complicate, and prevent negotiations between elites in both parties over issues in which little common ground exists to begin with. If the voting public clamors for red meat, and want their representatives to toe the party line at all costs, politicians will give them what they want.

Furthermore, the public's use of incivility in the rare instances when representative and constituent can directly communicate is likely to lead to representatives avoid direct interactions with constituents—a cornerstone of republican government—and pursue policy without this input. If elite negotiations over important but controversial issues are to be transparent and successful, the public is required to be open to middle-ground policies. Partisans must be open to their representatives compromising with the “other side”—or at least willing to accept instances when their representatives do compromise.

The Importance of Public Deliberation

Public input in policy debates is important—but its quality too depends on civility in discourse. Within the many arguments made by social commentators and academics alike for why civility in political talk is important is the idea that it is good for public deliberation. Scholars have expressed the sentiment that a lack of civility in political discourse can be detrimental to deliberative processes (Kingwell 1995). When norms of civility are adhered to, Jamieson and Hardy (2012) explain, “areas of agreement and disagreement are clarified, the collective understanding of the issue at hand is reinforced, and judgment is based on prejudice, force, or fear.” But why is deliberation amongst non-elites important? Public deliberation, which Luskin and Fishkin (2002) define as “a process of learning, thinking, and talking about policy and electoral choices,” is an essential component for a well-functioning democracy. The idea that the public can collectively produce better public policy through deliberation has a long and illustrious history of supporters, including John Stuart Mill, Jurgen Habermas, and Hannah Arendt. Even Aristotle promoted the idea of public deliberation, arguing in *Politics* that regime

quality is in part based on the extent to which policy is based on superb deliberation—the “wisdom of the multitude” (Wilson 2011).

Perhaps the most influential argument for the importance deliberation was made by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*. Mill (1998/1859), writing that “[a]ll silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility,” worried about the loss of individuality and creativity in the face of collective identity. He makes the case that no opinion should be suppressed, should that opinion actually have merit despite being held by a minority. Mill draws directly from Aristotle and the Athenian experience in developing his argument for wisdom *en masse* (Mansbridge 1999), proposing that when individuality, subjectivity, and creativity are unrestricted, and when the range of opinions are “collated” together, we can expect the best possible collective outcomes to be produced. The American constitutional system was designed with a similar thought in mind, where, through deliberation, a heterogeneity of views and interests would collate together to produce policy “for the general benefit of the whole community,” (Sunstein 2009, 36).

It is from this line of thought that many make the case for deliberation—that true innovation can occur when various ideas and views are openly exchanged and considered. Less abstractly, more practical ends have been attributed to deliberation, namely better citizens and better laws. As Warren (1996) explains, deliberation is a process, “wherein the point is to increase the quality of democratic judgments through widespread citizen participation in multiple public spheres, both within and between the institutions of state, economy, and civil society.” I will briefly go over some of the support for and against the capability of the deliberative process to deliver these democratic goods.

Better Citizens, Better Laws

The concept that “public spiritedness” or active engagement in the public sphere can make citizens “better” is a view promoted by Mill, with roots in the observations of Alexis de Tocqueville (Mansbridge 1999). Contemporary political science research provides empirical evidence that deliberation produces higher levels of political efficacy, more informed judgments, and more participation (i.e., Gastil 2000; Guttman and Thompson 1996). Political sophistication levels of individuals increase when they take part in deliberation, with individuals becoming more consistent in the rationality they apply to political issues (Gastil and Dillard 1999).

If deliberation improves democratic citizens and citizens affect public policy, then it follows that political deliberation can also improve public policy. More informed, reflective participatory citizens make more informed, reflective democratic decisions. In contemporary studies of political deliberation, widespread support has been made for the idea that better public policy is a likely result of deliberative citizens (i.e., Gastil 2000, Page 1996). After analyzing the results of a “Deliberative Polling” event in Britain, Luskin, Fishkin, and Jowell (2002) conclude that “participating in deliberations and other aspects of the event provide the opportunity and some incentive for citizens to spend time working towards their own, more considered opinions. The result, in the aggregate, is a picture of a better informed and more thoughtful public opinion.”

Luskin and Fishkin (2002) claim deliberation produces more sophisticated, tolerant, and participatory citizens, by first helping them to better understand their own interests, providing them with a better understanding of the “public interest,” generating more “public spiritedness,” increasing individuals’ “audible expression of preferences,”

and helping to increase appreciation and support for democratic processes. However, the work of Luskin and Fishkin has received a fair amount of criticism, usually concerning the nature of deliberative polling (i.e., Parkinson 2006), which raises the question of whether people want—or even can—deliberate and improve their political sophistication in the process (Hibbing and Theiss-Moore 2002).

Mutz (2006) notably argues that there are drawbacks to public deliberation. She demonstrates that rather than producing a vibrant, participatory citizenry, exposure to alternative views leads to *less* participation. Mutz shows that when people are cocooned within an environment where their preexisting views are reinforced and the views of the “other side” are portrayed as wrong or illegitimate, their willingness to participate is bolstered by a certainty in the “correctness” of their views. When people are exposed to alternative views, and consider them viable, that certainty is reduced, along with the motivation to participate. Mutz concludes, however, that it is the fear of social repercussions which limits the extent to which individuals speak freely, and that the tension that exists between participatory and deliberative practices can be reduced should norms be developed for handling differences respectfully in discourse (149-150). Integrating civility into political conversations would be a big step towards making the exchange of views more respectful. Additionally, Stromer-Galley and Muhlberger (2009) find that disagreement per se is not related reduced motivation to deliberate. This suggests that another factor—which I contend is the presence of incivility in discourse—is responsible for reducing the motivation to deliberate. Civility in political talk, therefore, may be the key to generating productive deliberation, as well as reconciling a participatory spirit with deliberation.

Becoming politically active via deliberation is meaningful, as participating in a political event once can lead to more habitual participation—although studies have linked habitual participation with casting a vote (Gerber, Green, and Scahcar 2003), talking about politics helps individuals overcome rational ignorance, an informational impediment to participation (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Even if deliberation fails to improve or motivate democratic participation, however, there is an argument that it can still have a positive effect on public policy. In their seminal work on the rationality of collective policy preferences, Page and Shapiro (1992) make the argument for collective deliberation:

... in which the public as a collectivity reasons about policy, and collective public opinion becomes something more than the a sum of it individual parts... Given the limited effort and resources that any one individual can—or would want to—devote to politics, a system of collective deliberation is needed so that people arrive at preferences reflecting the relevant facts and the realities of political causation: that is, preferences for policies that appropriate means to achieve the ends they seek (363)

This point highlights the importance of deliberation in democratic society; if citizen competence is low, public discourse becomes even more necessary to organize and guide collective preferences.

Deliberation can also serve as a means through which policy on controversial issues gets crafted. As Delli Carpini et al. (2004) write,

In an era of great divisiveness over policy issues and partisan positions, the traditional tools of electoral and legislative avenues to collective decision making remain essential. But they have also become deadlocked or have alienated large parts of America. Public deliberation has emerged as a potentially valuable way of breaking (or at least sidestepping) this deadlock.

This last point relates to the discussion to follow: in an era of high partisanship, might public deliberation be the key to compromise when viewpoints are entrenched?²⁰ If

²⁰ Luskin and Fishkin (2002) make a slightly different point that deliberation is a means through which respect can be fostered between individuals with opposing viewpoints. However, that claim rests upon the

discourse is kept civil, might the public be able to encourage and contribute to solutions to the country's gravest problems—such as reducing federal spending deficits—rather than contributing to partisan deadlock? An avenue through which to “fix Washington” may not begin with changing Washington culture directly, but increasing pro-deliberative behavior among the public.

The public's ability to collectively produce “better policy” is limited if the public is largely polarized into two camps and neither is willing to consider what the other camp has to say. In sum, the use of incivility by non-elites inhibits the extent to which “collective wisdom” is produced through public deliberation. If incivility in political talk induces anti-deliberative behavior, then understanding what induces the use of incivility is an important question to answer. First, however, it is necessary to define what is meant by “political incivility,” which I do in the next section.

Defining and Identifying Incivility

What counts as incivility in politics is said to be in eye of the beholder (Herbst 2010). A central issue in works dealing with incivility in political discourse is defining what it means to be uncivil—specifically, the point at which discourse has crossed the line of merely being negative to being uncivil. Sobieraj and Berry (2010) define civil political discourse as “political argumentation characterized by speakers who present themselves as reasonable and courteous, treating even those with whom they disagree as though they and their ideas are worthy of respect.” This vies with the definition used by Mutz (2006) that “a civil orientation [in discourse] is one that does not duck conflict

assumption that true, real deliberation is possible in a hyper polarized society where respect for views opposed to one's own is anemic. As I argue below and show throughout this project, respect seems far more a prerequisite for deliberation than a result of it.

entirely, but that simultaneously embraces the importance of maintaining social relationship,” (75).

Yet, when discourse is “reasonable” and “embraces the maintenance of social relationships” is still subjective. However, as a study on public perceptions of incivility in American politics conducted by Allegheny College shows, the American public is largely in agreement over certain types of claims in political discourse qualifying as uncivil²¹ (Shea 2010). Furthermore, theoretical directions for identifying incivility has begun to emerge over time; a number of studies in the campaign advertising and media and politics literatures have considered the effects of incivility on the electorate, differentiating “civil negative” claims from “uncivil negative” claims. Fridkin and Kenney (2008), distinguishing between “mudslinging” and “legitimate negativity,” define mudslinging as the “presentation of campaign information that is irrelevant to governing, and the presentation of campaign information in harsh, strident, and shrill manner.” Brooks and Geer (2007), distinguishing civil negative claims from uncivil negative claims, define uncivil statements as those which include “claims that are inflammatory or superfluous.” In an experimental test of how exposure to mediated uncivil discourse affects individual’s level of political trust, Mutz and Reeves (2005) operationalize incivility as exchanges that include “gratuitous asides that suggested a lack of respect and/or frustration with the opposition.”

²¹ The Allegheny study asked individuals if they believed various activities to qualify as incivility. The following behaviors were widely viewed as uncivil: Belittling or insulting someone (89 percent), comments about someone’s race or ethnicity (89 percent), personal attacks on someone you disagree with (87 percent), shouting over someone you disagree with during an argument (85 percent), comments about someone’s sexual orientation (81 percent), interrupting someone you disagree with in a public forum (77 percent), manipulating the facts about an issue to persuade others (77 percent), and questioning someone’s patriotism because they have a different opinion (73 percent).

What the public generally seems to believe counts as uncivil political talk is largely in agreement with what has been identified and operationalized as uncivil political discourse in the above studies. Collectively, three common themes emerge from these definitions: uncivil claims must be disrespectful towards their target, must do so in a purposeful, confrontational manner, and must be presented in a hyperbolic nature. Suggesting that you do not have respect for a person or people is the most basic element of uncivil discourse. Making it clear through comments that you do not hold a person or persons in high esteem is not equivalent to disliking someone—it is possible to dislike someone but still respect her or certain qualities she possesses.

Uncivil comments can be thought of as those that cannot be consistent with suggesting respect for the candidate. If a person were to comment that, “the candidate’s policies are bad, and are not what the country needs right now, but I generally respect her, and believe her to generally be an honest, well-intentioned, and reasonable individual,” she is saying something negative about the candidate that is still consistent with the latter part of the sentence that suggests respect. However, if she were to comment, “[t]he candidate is a lying, foolish radical bent on destroying America, but I generally respect her, and believe her to generally be an honest, well-intentioned, and reasonable individual,” the negative assessment in the first part of the sentence is entirely inconsistent with the latter half.

Lacking respect for an individual, in it of itself, does not qualify as uncivil behavior—for a person to engage in uncivil discourse, he or she must be “actively disrespectful.” Incivility is therefore not synonymous with disrespect, as it is possible to disrespect someone but still engage her in a civil manner. Incivility is a particular type of

disrespect in which contempt is made clear through actions, where something disrespectful is done. Being uncivil is not a passive enterprise; if uncivil discourse involves claims that are gratuitous, strident, and inflammatory, then it is expected that the nature of such claims are obvious and deliberate.

Uncivil language is words and phrases that are clearly meant to insult and demonstrate a lack of respect. It is here that the difference between disliking and disrespecting becomes clear—for example, if a person’s response when asked what she likes and dislikes about Candidate A is “nothing” and “everything,” she is suggesting she does not hold a favorable view of Candidate A, but is not saying anything disrespectful about Candidate A. Uncivil behavior is thus different from other types of behavior that are considered disrespectful, such as rudeness—which may be unintentional—and passive aggressive behavior, which may not be obvious and may go unnoticed.

Incivility in political discourse also tends to have a hyperbolic nature. Deliberately saying something bad about Candidate A might suggest you do not like or even respect her, yet it also might be a legitimate point—it could qualify as a claim that is civil negative. With few exceptions, what differentiates a civil negative claim from uncivil negative claim is hyperbole—uncivil talk tends to be an exaggerated, embellished version of civil negative talk and the “disrespectful” element is made clear. For example, claiming “Candidate A lacks many of the qualities necessary to be successful in office, and her policies are not impressive,” is negative but civil. However, adding hyperbole, the claim becomes, “Candidate A is a horrible, lying, bad person who is the worst candidate in the history of the office and has the dumbest policies I have ever seen.” While the central claim that you do not believe the candidate is fit for office and has

unimpressive policies remains intact, just how bad she is has been exaggerated to an insulting and unrealistic extent.

Operationalizing Incivility

While civil negative language has been differentiated from uncivil negative language (Brooks and Geer 2007; Fridkin and Kenney 2008), the methods of operationalizing such have been a matter of debate. Fridkin and Kenney (2006) critique the operationalization of mudslinging by Jackson and Sides (2005), arguing some topics such as references to the Washington establishment and seeming out of touch with voters qualify as legitimate negativity, as long as they are presented in an otherwise civil manner. Sigelman and Park (2007), critiquing the subjective element involved in coders judging a statement as civil or uncivil (specifically the work of Brooks and Geer 2007), use a computer program that functions as a dimensional scoring system to determine whether presidential campaign ads cross the line into incivility by rating the words in ads on how “unpleasant” and “nasty” they are. The method of relying on a computer program to code incivility is considerably limited as it cannot take context into consideration.²² Given my wish to evaluate the opinions of individuals, which are likely to include content far more heterogeneous and dissimilar than campaign ads, accounting for context is all the more important. However, it is accurate to say that the “I know it when I see it” approach is not a rigorous enough test of civility.

Fortunately, studies on incivility provide some theoretical directions for how to identify uncivil discourse by describing specific elements that characterize it. Brooks and

²² By Sigelman and Park’s own admission, their program identifies words deemed “unpleasant” but not negation, a claim such as, “I do not think the candidate has a dishonest bone in her body,” would be deemed uncivil, due to the word “dishonest” being present, despite the fact that the claim was meant to be flattering.

Geer (2007) operationalize incivility by adding pointed insults to civil negative, opponent-focused messages, including “dishonest,” “heartless,” and “cowardly.” Mutz and Reeves similarly operationalize incivility through the addition of gratuitous asides to otherwise civil exchanges. These elements are incorporated into the list of ways civility can be breached in mediated political discourse developed by Sobieraj and Berry (2010).

Table 2-1: Incivility Index

Criteria of Incivility	Example Claim	Type	Example Statement
Criterion 1: “Namecalling, Mockery, and Character Assassination” Additional superfluous adverbs and adjectives which add no new information, but are purposefully insulting, belittling, and condescending	The candidate may not have been completely sincere	Civil Negative	“The candidate has not told the truth to the American people about his voting record.” ⁺
		Uncivil Negative	“The <u>unethical</u> and <u>deceitful</u> candidate has not told the truth to the American people about his voting record.” ⁺
Criterion 2: “Spin and Misrepresentative Exaggeration” Use of a much more extreme, inflammatory word or phrase which makes individual or action seem more radical, immoral, or corrupt	Candidate’s issue positions were out of sync with those of the electorate	Civil Negative	“The candidate had effective and convincing advertisements and more money to spend.”
		Uncivil Negative	“The candidate <u>manipulated the public</u> and <u>essentially bought the election.</u> ”
Criterion 3: “Histrionics” Language suggests individual or group should be feared or is responsible for sadness. Also includes thoughts that are purposefully exaggerated through uppercase letters and multiple exclamation points	Candidate’s election is somewhat worrisome	Civil Negative	“The election of the candidate has me <u>worried about the direction of the country</u> ”
		Uncivil Negative	“I <u>fear</u> for what will happen to this country if the candidate is elected. It will be a <u>sad</u> day for America. -and- “WE SHOULD ALL BE SCARED!!!!!!!”

⁺ The civil/uncivil claims are adapted from an example used by Brooks and Geer (2006); Brooks and Geer used “my opponent” where I put “the candidate.”

Both of the descriptions provided by Sobieraj and Berry (2010) and Mutz and Reeves (2005) include elements that describe visual examples of incivility (i.e., eye-rolling, raised voices, violent waving of the hands, etc.). However, my concern in this study is only with use of uncivil language and emotional displays that are made through text, which is increasingly relevant in the world of new media and social networking. It is therefore sufficient to develop an index to gauge incivility that specifically applies to language. Utilizing the definitions and dimensions of incivility that apply to language developed in these studies, I have developed an incivility index to follow (as well as constrain) when coding statements, which can be seen in full in Table 2.1.

Following Brooks and Geer (2007), I contend that within nearly every uncivil claim exists a civil, central message. What differentiates civil discourse from uncivil discourse is the extent to which certain ideas are stressed or radicalized. Superfluous adverbs and adjectives with the sole purpose of insulting are added into these claims. It's not just *what* people say but *how* they say it which differentiates incivility from civility (Mutz and Reeves 2005; Brooks and Geer 2007). An exception is conspiracy theories (Criterion 4 in my index), which paint an individual in a negative light without any civil negative basis for such a claim; while conspiracy theories have not been included in measures used by other incivility studies, Sobieraj and Berry (2010) note, retrospectively, that they should be considered examples of incivility. A more detailed description of how to identify occurrences of incivility in accordance with each of the criteria is included in the A1 2-1 in Appendix 1.

Conclusion

There is no shortage of issues of concern in American politics. We are also not lacking for discussion of these issues—from cable news programs to online forums, problems like the national debt are debated *ad nauseum*. What is missing, however, is compromise and consideration of views which differ from preexisting ones. My goal is to shed some light on how incivility keeps mass political discourse full of partisan combatants, but few active deliberative citizens. In the chapters to follow, I will explore how the presence of incivility in political talk affects people's willingness to deliberate.

Producing a better understanding of how incivility in discourse affects the deliberative process is worth undertaking for theoretical reasons, but there are practical reasons for this analysis as well. Incivility has come to be utilized more in political discourse among the populace than it has in the recent pasts. Changes in political and media culture are the likely culprits, with polarized parties and hyperbolic, niche political media encouraging the use of incivility among the public. Furthermore, the ability for mass interpersonal communication via the Internet and social networking sites makes an uptick in incivility more important than it has been in previous eras. In the next chapter, I will show evidence of an uptick in the use of incivility in political talk since the 1970s, and discuss the implications of this trend.

Chapter 3: Incivility over Time

The media often report that the public believes civility in politics has declined,²³ and studies indicate that this is largely true (Shea 2010; Herbst 2010). References to a “civility crisis” abound, and communities have taken steps to rectify what they perceive as a civil discourse deficit.²⁴ As Sapiro (1999, 3) explains, a crisis in civility is one in which “civility has declined in such a way as to have unfortunate effects for the functioning of democracy by making members less fit for engaging in democratic politics, and less able to deliberate with each other democratically.” Are we experiencing a “civility crisis”? The first step to answering this question is to determine whether the use of incivility in political discourse has actually increased.

Political scientists also assume that a decline in political civility has taken place, without empirically testing this claim (Sigelman and Park 2007). This is in part because showing an uptick in incivility is an empirically challenging thing to do, due to changes in context and norms over time (Herbst 2010, and Sapiro 1999). Even studying incivility statically poses challenges; as Sapiro (1999) states, “[c]ontemporary social science research on civility practices and perceptions find systematic evidence that what constitutes civility is culturally constructed, contextually driven, and depends on the social standing and placement of those involved.” Similarly, Herbst (2010) contends that strict standards of civility do not exist, and differences in context over time make it

²³ For instance, in a piece by *CNN* news personality Jack Cafferty, a poll indicating that Americans believe civility has declined is presented as evidence of civility disappearing in American politics: <http://caffertyfile.blogs.cnn.com/2011/06/21/why-is-america-becoming-nastier-2/>

²⁴ Howard County, Maryland, for example, recently launched a “civility initiative” in order to encourage civil interactions between citizens (Kelly 2009).

impossible to determine if contemporary American politics is less civil than it has been in the past.

These arguments have merit—demonstrating that American culture in 2012 is more uncivil than American culture in 1812 or 1912 is a very difficult, if not impossible thing to do, and egregious examples of incivility can be found in almost any era of American history. Oftentimes, whether some activity qualifies as “uncivil,” such as civil disobedience or an accusation of racism, is entirely subjective (Mendelberg 2009; Sapiro 1999). Yet an examination of trends in incivility should not be completely abandoned. Specifically, an examination of whether incivility in political discourse has grown more common within the contemporary era can and should be completed rigorously for the following reasons:

1. Trends in party polarization and media narrowcasting in contemporary history provide theoretical expectations for an increase in the use of incivility within the last four decades
2. Empirically assessing whether or not use of incivility when talking politics among the general population has increased within the contemporary era is possible, as modern scientific surveys provide data to test this hypothesis, and contexts such as language are more or less consistent within the era (i.e., terms such as “war monger” and “radical” are as much relevant as negative references in 2012 as they were in 1972).
3. Whether people are more uncivil when talking politics nowadays might matter more than it did in past, thanks in part to the Internet. Interpersonal

communication between many different peoples can be an everyday occurrence for a common person.

In this chapter, I present evidence that incivility in political discourse is on the rise. I describe two trends that that would lead us to expect an uptick in political incivility has occurred, review existing research suggesting incivility has increased, before presenting evidence that the use of incivility among the general population when talking politics has grown over the last few decades. The data I use are respondents' evaluations of candidates and parties from the cumulative time series data file from the American National Election Studies.

Why might incivility among the electorate have increased? I next describe the two trends—partisan polarization and substantial changes in the media environment—that scholars²⁵ suggest may be driving up uncivil political talk among the public.

Party Polarization since the 1970s

In the last four decades, elite polarization has accelerated. Formerly cross-cutting issues have come to be entrenched partisan disputes, and the two major parties have become more ideologically consistent (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Layman and Carsey 2002). Polarization in Congress is now the highest it has been since the end of Reconstruction, as demonstrated by Poole and Rosenthal's DW-Nominate scores.²⁶ This trend in polarization is not limited to officeholders and candidates; activists associated with the parties are moving farther apart and becoming more ideologically extreme as well (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008). Reflecting elite polarization, parties in the

²⁵ See Shea and Fiorina (2013).

²⁶ I reference the scores made available on March 6, 2012, at: http://voteview.com/political_polarization.asp

electorate are also growing more polarized, with the deepest divisions existing between the most politically interested and informed on either side of the political spectrum (Layman and Carsey 2002; Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Claassen and Highton 2009).

Numerous studies find that the growing political divisions between Democrats and Republicans in the electorate began in the early 1970s (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008). Hetherington (2001) shows (using DW-Nominate scores) that increases in the ideological gap between House Democrats and House Republicans began in the mid-1970s, accelerating since that time, with growing polarization among the electorate occurring subsequently. Part of this can be traced back to realignment in Congress-- ideological polarization in Congress sharply began to increase with conservative southern Democrats moving to the Republican Party and liberal northeastern Republicans moving to the Democratic Party. Additionally, Abramowitz (2013) argues that polarization has been augmented by the rise of social issues and the growing racial and ethnic diversity of the base of the Democratic Party.

Incivility in Congress

Given that polarization at the elite level likely triggered polarization among the parties in the electorate, it makes sense to review evidence of growing incivility among the former before examining incivility trends among the latter. It has been said that politics has always been uncivil, at least amongst those who practice it. Political campaigns especially have a penchant for getting down and dirty, regardless of the era they fall in—there is anecdotal evidence of incivility in campaigns throughout American

history (Herbst 2011), and there is a debate as to whether negativity and incivility in presidential campaigns in the contemporary era has been on an increasing trend.²⁷

The day-to-day behavior of elites is another story. Uslaner (1993) finds that by the 1980s, use of incivility within the Senate (which has typically been considered more collegial than the House), had become much more common. Uslaner (1991) argues “...the digeneration of civilized discourse makes compromise more difficult. On issues that are marked by cross-cutting cleavages, statemate ensues. Compromise requires particularly delicate negotiations and willingness to give competing claims their due.” In addition to legislative stalemate, Uslaner points out that inciviliy among members of Congress can result in bad policy, if it is the shrillest voices which get their way. Relatedly, Schraufnagel (2011) finds that the ongoing decline in comity and increase in incivility in Congress leads to delays in the confirmation of federal judicial nominees.

Mann and Ornstein (2012) and Uslaner (1993) argue that lawmakers publicly attacking their colleagues has become common practice since the 1980s, and Jamieson (1999, 2011) finds that attacks on the integrity of the president have been common on the House floor since 1976, which were unheard of beforehand. Jamieson suggests that a change in political campaign culture occurred following the Vietnam War and Watergate—both Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon were considered liars, and Gerald Ford’s pardon of Nixon invited additional questions regarding morality and candor of presidents. Both Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush were marked as liars following the Iran-Contra Affair, and the presidential campaigns of 1988 and 1992 brought about new dimensions of uncivil attacks heretofore not present in contemporary elections: the

²⁷ Geer (2006; 2012) argues negativity in campaigns has increased, while Buell and Sigelman 2008 and Sigelman and Lee 2007 argue that there has not been a linear trend.

questioning of patriotism and accusations of extramarital affairs, respectively. As Jacobson (2012) argues, growing party polarization has increased the propensity of elites in the party out of the White House to regularly challenge the president's legitimacy—each of the last three presidents have faced organized efforts to prove that they in some way “stole” the election that put or kept them in office.

As the head of government and state, an uptick in uncivil attacks on the president is not an innocuous change. For one, as with anything to do with the president, it invites lots of national attention—Arizona Governor Jan Brewer's infamous “tarmac spat” with President Barack Obama and Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC) shouting “you lie!” at the president during a 2009 speech in front a joint session of Congress are prime examples. Incidents like these suggest that a line once though sacred is now regularly crossed, and the changing (or the demise of) norms dictating what is acceptable discourse.

Changes in the Media since the 1970s

Several trends over the last three decades, all of which have grown at the expense of the traditional journalism seen in newspapers and national network newscasts, have resulted in a media environment considerably different from that of the 1970s. Among the changes are the development of cable news, the explosion in popularity of political talk radio, and the revolutionizing effects of the Internet and social media. In the sections below, I explain how each of these media trends have altered political communication and might contribute to increasing use of incivility among the general public. As the subsequent data analyses focus on the public's use of incivility in political talk during presidential election years, I make note of which elections became the first to prominently feature each of these major changes in the media environment.

New Media and Narrowcasting on Television

Mainstream television news has undergone significant changes since the advent of cable television. As Prior (2007) describes it, the broadcast era of television presented viewing audiences with limited choice, and thus indiscriminate viewing of news occurred frequently. However, with increased choice in programming provided by cable television—overwhelmingly entertainment-oriented—individuals gained the ability to create their own individualized media “diet.”

One result of the spread of cable television has been a new political knowledge and participation gap between politically interested “news-junkies” and those with limited interest in politics and current events who prefer entertainment (Prior 2005; 2007). A second consequence, with the launch of the Cable News Network (CNN) in 1984 and the addition of two more cable news heavyweights in MSNBC and the Fox News in 1996 (both presidential election years), has been the emergence of an era of high octane, partisan news. The “fragmentation” of once-large network news audiences into niche populations of news-watchers, often divided by political orientation, has left media figures free to say and do things that they could not do were it necessary to maintain a broader, heterogeneous audience. Furthermore, increased competition in news—as well as entertainment options—pushes television news media to feature uncivil, nasty political commentary because it draws viewers in. This occurs even (or perhaps especially) among those who become angered by what the information presented (Mutz and Reeves 2005, Fallows 1996, Prior 2005, 2007; Delli Carpini and Williams 2001; Sobieraj and Berry 2010; Zaller 1998). Thus, the expansion of television news media allows for selective exposure to programming which align with preexisting views and often give accounts

biased to support these views (Stroud 2008; 2011; Jamieson and Capella 2009), and market factors have pressured these news media to become increasingly vitriolic and uncivil.

Mutz and Reeves (2005) find that opinions of opposing partisans and opposing views become extensively more negative when arguments are presented in an uncivil fashion, and, as I argue in the next chapter, the exposure to uncivil political news induces individuals to utilize incivility when offering their own political opinions. The rise in nasty, uncivil discourse on cable news not only induces incivility, but likely feeds into and increases party polarization; As Mutz (2007b) argues, “uncivil discourse increases party polarization by helping partisans think even less of their opponents than they already did.” Beyond narrowcasting, increases in horse-race and game-centered coverage also have led to perceptions by partisans whose side “lost” an election that the winning side won by illegitimate means (Mutz 2007b). Even if presidential campaigns themselves have not become more negative, increases in the coverage of negative ads in the “new media” have made them far more salient (Geer 2012; Iyengar et al. 2012).

Talk Radio

In 1987, the Federal Communications Commission ended the “Fairness Doctrine,” leading to the explosion and continually-growing popularity of political talk radio over the last 25 years, dominated by conservative talk shows (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2010). The end of the Fairness Doctrine was critical to the rise of the contemporary political talk radio, as it freed media personalities from having to give airtime to the targets of attacks to rebut charges (Barker and Knight 2000). From the

1992 presidential election on,²⁸ political talk radio has played a major role during the campaign season.

Sobieraj and Berry (2010) find that talk radio, along with pundit cable news produce high-levels of “outrage” political content. Exposure to emotionally-charged, hyperbolic political talk radio programming, such as *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, has an influential effect on listeners’ political opinions and political behavior, including visceral reactions to targets of the programs’ hosts by means of ridicule, caustic language, and radicalizing positions of their targets (Barker 1999, 2002; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1998; Jamieson and Capella 2009). As Owen (1997) notes, “[b]ecause of the unique characteristics of the medium, talk [radio] shows are imbued with an exceptional potential to impart information in a manner that is often emotionally charged.” Owen argues that talk radio likely intensifies preexisting abstract feelings into strengthened, emotionally-strident opinions.

In addition, talk radio likely plays a role in imbuing listeners with uncivil rhetoric for reuse; as Barker and Knight (2000) point, out, “...talk radio’s most salient contribution to the national dialogue may be in providing listeners with rhetorical ammunition that can be employed in attempting to win over spouses, friends, and acquaintances. In essence, political talk radio can be thought to serve the same function as earlier media in a 1990s version of the two-step flow of communication.” Listeners use the language and arguments they hear on political talk radio in political persuasion efforts.

²⁸ As noted by Hollander (1999), political talk radio managed to grab the attention of the public, press, and politicians during 1992 presidential election. It marked the first presidential election in which talk radio pundits had large national audiences; Rush Limbaugh’s national program, for instance, began right around when the 1988 presidential election was taking place, but did not draw 5 million national listeners until 1990 (Grossberger 1990).

The Internet and Interactivity

Following changes in television news and the growth of talk radio, an even more revolutionary trend in media would begin in 1990s: use of the Internet. The Internet's potential influence as a political communications and mobilization tool was thought to have been realized during the 2000 presidential election—but observers were left underwhelmed (Schaefer 2002). However, the 2004 election would see the use of blogs and news aggregators (Rainie 2005), online grassroots coordination²⁹ (Best and Krueger 2005), and use of the Internet as source for political information³⁰ (Pew Research Center 2004) all came to a head. The 2004 campaign can be thought of as the first presidential election to witness the Internet “come of age” as an information source and communications tool (Johnson 2004).

Widespread access to the Internet brought about an explosion of choice for the public; for those choosing to use the Internet to browse politics, selective exposure is even more pronounced with a much larger selection of views (including radical views) than are offered on cable news (Bimber and Davis 2003). The “blogosphere” is a particularly notable element of the Internet, as blogs are less professional, more radical, and more uncivil than “traditional” news sources, and create what Lawrence et al. (2010) refer to as “cloistered cocoons of cognitive consonance” where “blog authors tend to link to their ideological kindred and blog readers gravitate to blogs that reinforce their existing viewpoints.” Partisan bias is not limited to obscure, amateur blogs; content

²⁹ In 2004, Online grassroots campaigning was notably utilized by Howard Dean's campaign, and put into practice on websites like Meetup.org (Best and Krueger 2005)

³⁰ As reported by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, over 1 in 5 Americans reported using the Internet for campaign news in 2004, nearly doubling the rate in 2000 (about 11 percent) and seven time the rate for the 1996 election (about 3 percent). In the same poll, 41 percent reporting using of the Internet for general news, a 33 percent increase from 2000, and a 300 percent increase from 1996 (Pew Research Center 2004).

analyses show that online news sites (such as Foxnews.com) and mainstream blogs with large readerships (such as DailyKos.com) present blatantly biased accounts of current events (Baum and Groeling 2008)

Beyond selective exposure, another element of the Internet revolution has become increasingly influential—interactivity. For perhaps the first time in human history, regular interaction with masses of complete strangers from one's own living room is possible. This includes commenting on articles, chat rooms, and news groups, and communicating through social network sites (SNS). The virtual anonymity provided by the Internet leads to much more socially deviant and uninhibited behavior than individuals would attempt in face-to-face interaction (Derks et al. 2008).

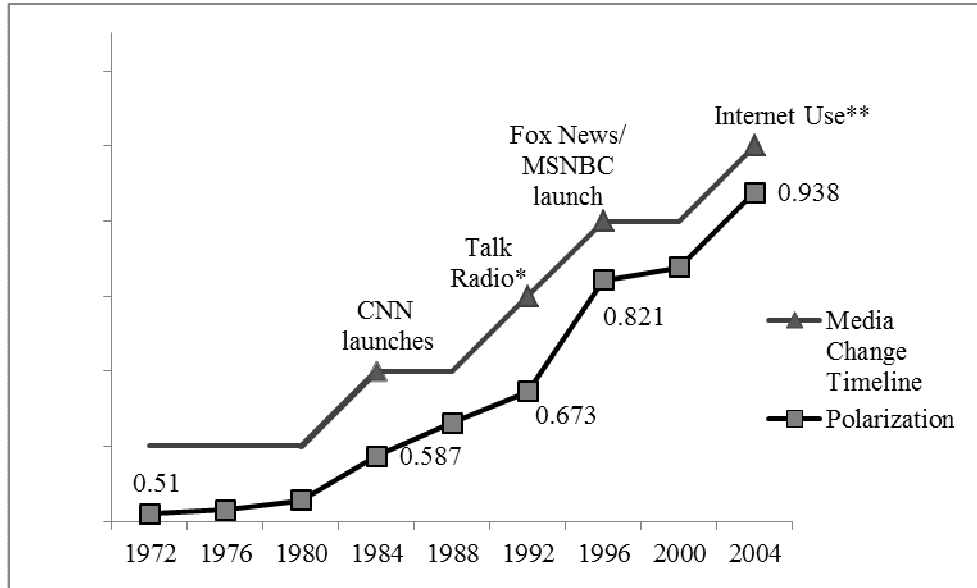
One popular behavior, known as “trolling,” involves the purposeful attempts to anger or rile up others by posting inflammatory claims and use of impolite language. As Chmiel et al. (2011) demonstrate, much of the emotional posting stems “from reactive messages, especially prolonged quarrels between pairs of users with opposing views.” Chmiel et al. note that negative, emotional postings have the effect of raising the emotional “temperature” of discussion boards, fueling others to react similarly. Papacharissi (2004), utilizing a natural experiment of politics-themed Internet newsgroups (which are like Internet chat rooms but feature asynchronous responses and thus tend to be more deliberative and thoughtful) finds that discussions of policy are generally civil and polite in the newsgroups, until an uncivil post is made by a discussant. Following this, other respondents react heatedly, utilizing incivility themselves, before the conversation eventually returns to a more civil tone following interventions by members of the discussion.

With Web 2.0, social media and open-sourcing have added identity to postings. However, social media may also enhance the chance of exposure to nasty politics, even when identity is attached to the posters. As noted by Derks et al. (2008), there is some evidence that negative emotions and uncivil behavior are common on political discussions and postings on Facebook, where individuals are not shielded by anonymity; this may be partially explained by a false sense of anonymity and privacy on Facebook and other social networking sites (Acquisti and Gross 2006), feelings which are not found when individuals interact online through other means, such as email. That is, the impersonal nature of social networking make uncivil behavior much easier than face-to-face interaction (Shea and Fiorina 2012). The ubiquity of camera phones allow for spur-of-the-moment, uncivil actions by politicians (i.e., George Allen's "macaca moment") to go viral, thanks to SNS such as YouTube and Facebook. Events, previously witnessed by few, now live on for perpetuity, and can gain views by the millions (Shea and Fiorina 2012).

Looking at Incivility over Time

The decades since the 1970s have seen increased polarization coupled with major changes in the media environment; in an era when partisans are divided, news exposure is increasingly tailored to reaffirm preexisting views, and in which individuals can interact through online social media with few social repercussions, the possibility for commonplace, popular uncivil political discourse is unprecedented.

Figure 3-1: U.S. House Polarization Gap and Major Media Changes since 1972



* The 1992 election was the first contemporary presidential election in which talk radio was a major source of campaign information

**The 2004 election marked the first time the Internet played a major role as a tool for political mobilization and communication in an election campaign.

Note: The trend lines are not on the same scale, but have been placed side by side to illustrate their covariation over time. The polarization numbers refer to the gap in DW-Nominated scores between the Democratic and Republican parties in the House of Representatives. This measure is taken from the latest Poole and Rosenthal party polarization estimates available at http://voteview.com/political_polarization.asp. The media change timeline displays the growth in new media options by the presidential election year in which they first became relevant.

Figure 3-1 displays these changes, side-by-side, on a temporal scale. The media trend line is a measure of the “new media” changes described above, by the presidential election year in which the change first became relevant. This is not a measure of incivility in media per se, but rather a visual aggregation of all the changes expected to influence mass use of incivility as they occurred over time.³¹ As 1972, 1976, 1980 predate any of these changes, they each score a “0.” The 1984 election receives one point, with the

³¹ Essentially, it is a timeline, except the line moves up the Y-axis as each change occurs, to show how these changes have corresponded with changes in partisan polarization.

launch of CNN earlier in the year, and 1992 receives a score of 2 with the presence of political talk radio joining CNN. The launch of the Fox News Channel and MSNBC in 1996 would fully usher in the cable news era, and earns 1996 and 2000 a 3 on the media scale. Finally, 2004 earns a “4,” having been the first true “Internet election.” The party polarization trend line displays the distance between the two parties in the House of Representatives on the first dimension of DW-Nominate scores over time.³² As can be seen, polarization between the two parties has increased with each Congress since the 1970s, and has grown more rapidly since the late 1980s (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006).

The media trend line and party polarization line correlate together remarkably well; a regression of the house polarization trend on media changes, for example, shows that the polarization gap jumps ten percentage points with each additional change in the media environment (a relationship significant at the 0.000 level). It is unlikely that the changes in both are completely endogenous to each other—for example, the initial growth in party polarization probably had little to do with the launch of CNN, and vice versa. The case can be made (and has been) that each trend has influenced the other over time;³³ for example, polarized elites may encourage narrowcasting, and narrowcasting can encourage the polarization of elites. Determining to what extent the relationship between the two trends is covariational rather than causal is something of a chicken-or-

³² These measures are from the latest Poole and Rosenthal party polarization estimates available at http://voteview.com/political_polarization.asp.

³³ Hetherington (2001) suggests that polarization, stemming from institutional changes, has clarified the parties’ ideological positions, making party positions more salient and selective exposure to media which reinforce party views a tempting option for partisans. However, other research suggests selective exposure is the cause of polarization, or has at least amplified its effects; Prior (2007), for one, argues that greater media choice was the impetus of polarization in Congress. There are many specific examples of narrowcasting contributing to declining bipartisanship, as well; for instance, Baum and Groening (2008) report that the failure of a 2007 immigration bill was attributed to “grassroots conservative revolt incited by one-sided commentary in conservative ‘niche’ media, especially talk radio.”

the-egg scenario, and is outside the scope of this analysis. However, what is important to recognize is that the trends have changed concurrently over time, in a way expected to encourage incivility.³⁴

But has incivility increased? I hypothesize that use of incivility by the general public should have increased over time as a function of these two contemporaneous trends: 1) a rise in partisan polarization, and 2) the increasing presence and availability of partisan, vitriolic news in a media environment that also makes selective exposure and mass interaction possible.

Data

The American National Election Studies survey has asked Americans to provide verbatim responses to questions asking what they particularly like and dislike about the Democratic and Republican parties, as well as the Democratic and Republican nominees running for president. Since 1972, these responses have been coded into the same categories, and, as most analyses of party polarization restrict their analysis mark 1972 as the beginning of the trend, using data from 1972 onwards is appropriate (Layman and Carsey 2002; Hetherington 2001; Abramowitz and Saunders 2008). There have been issues with the coding of these open-ended questions by ANES coders, the concern being different years have had different standards for coding (Krosnick et al. 2008)—the principal investigators went so far as to recall the 2008 data, which, as of February 2013, is currently unavailable. As I am interested in clustering the numerous categories into

³⁴ A Pearson's r correlation produces correlation coefficients of 0.96 between time (measured in years) and both house polarization and media changes, as well as a 0.98 coefficient between house polarization and media changes. Including any two of these variables together in a regression model results in multicollinearity issues; thus, for both theoretical and methodological reasons, it makes sense to estimate the effect that "time" has had on the use of incivility.

large categories--an uncivil category and a civil category--the coding issue is minimized in my analysis.

To identify which response categories qualified as uncivil, I utilized the Incivility Index presented in the previous chapter (Table 2-1); if a category fit any of the criteria in the index, it was marked as uncivil. Table 3-1 displays the response categories identified as uncivil, organized by criterion.

Using the ANES data from 1972-2004 of respondents' "likes/dislikes" of candidates and parties, I created a dichotomous "incivility" variable, which is essentially a measure of whether or not a respondent made an "uncivil" reference in any of their responses. As my theoretical expectation is that an uptick in incivility is a function of increased partisan polarization and changes in media that accentuate the polarization gap, looking at how much incivility is fueled by partisanship makes sense.

One way to see if incivility is more partisan-based in recent elections is to look at the percentage of all uncivil comments that were aimed at the party and the candidates opposite those of the respondents' party identification. Taking the percentage of all uncivil comments that Democrats (strong Democrats, weak Democrats, and Democrat leaners alike) made about the Republican party and its candidate, and the percentage of all uncivil comments made by Republicans (strong, weak, and leaners Republicans) about the Democratic party and its candidate, I created a second dichotomous "attacks on the opposition" variable.

Table 3-1. Uncivil Categories by Incivility Index Criterion

Criterion 1	<p>*Negative, personal, affective terms applied to party--bad/lazy people; lack of patriotism; etc.</p> <p>*Can't trust them; they break their promises; don't know where they stand</p> <p>*Racist/Bigoted/Prejudiced</p> <p>*Unpatriotic</p> <p>*Dishonest/Corrupt government; immorality in government</p> <p>*Unintelligent/Stupid/Dumb</p>	<p>*General reference to him as "a bad man or a bad guy"; heard bad things about him/qualifications; general ability; negative reference to his "personality"</p> <p>*Irreligious; "immoral" (in religious sense)</p> <p>*Negative reference to gender</p> <p>*Racial/Ethnic attribute referenced negatively</p> <p>*Sexual orientation referenced negatively</p>	<p>*Undependable/Untrustworthy/ Unreliable; a man you can't trust with the responsibilities of government</p> <p>*Undignified/lacks dignity</p> <p>*Dishonest/Insincere; breaks promises; no integrity; doesn't mean what he says; tricky; not open and candid; not straightforward</p> <p>*Negative references to candidate's children or extended family</p>
Criterion 2	<p>*Unsafe/Unstable; dictatorial; craves power; ruthless</p> <p>*Pro-Far Right/Birchers/reactionaries; encouraging fascist/police state</p> <p>*Extremist/fanatic/too far out; not too moderate/not a fence-sitter; for change</p> <p>*Controlled by party regulars/ bosses/ machine</p>	<p>*Not humanistic; favor property rights over human beings</p> <p>*Pro-Far Left/radicals/Yippies/ SDS; encouraging anarchy/ guerilla state</p> <p>*Pro-Extremists (No specific direction)/nuts/bomb-throwers</p> <p>*Not independent; run by others; not his own man/boss</p>	<p>*Socialistic</p> <p>*Communitic/soft on Communism/apologist for Communists/dupe</p> <p>*Liberal-radical/Conservative – reactionary</p> <p>*Undemocratic (in non-partisan sense)</p>
Criterion 3	<p>*Will ruin America; last thing America needs</p>	<p>*Bad for country; don't have country's interests at heart; only looking out for their own interests; will not do a good job</p>	

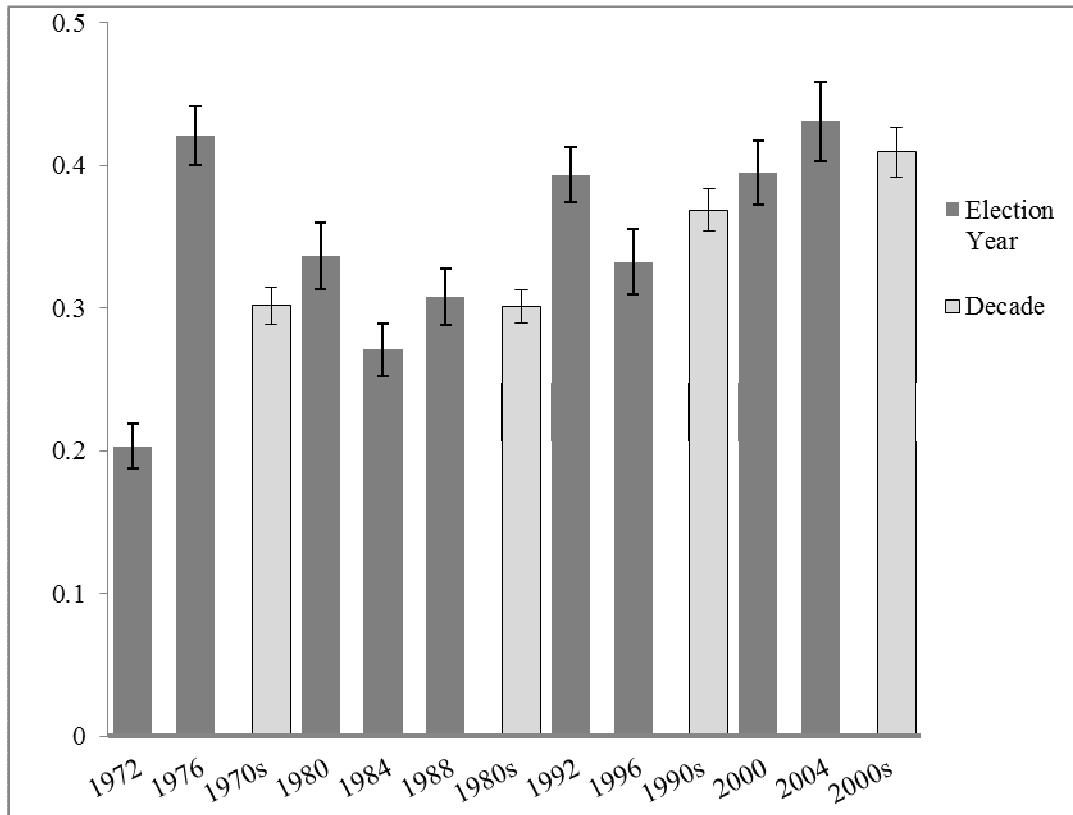
Trends in Incivility among the Electorate

Examining the ANES data in aggregate, some trends become apparent immediately. Figure 3-2 displays the percentage of ANES respondents who offered an uncivil comment when asked about their “likes/dislikes” of candidates and parties by election year. The average throughout all nine elections in the analysis was 33.5 percent. This raw look shows a general increase over time. One year stands out in Figure 3-2; the election of 1976, until 2004, appears to have had the highest levels of incivility among the electorate. However, the 95 percent confidence intervals for each year’s mean, also displayed in Figure 3-2, show that difference in means between 1976 and the means for 1992, 2000, and 2004 are not statistically significant.³⁵ In fact, these four elections appear to be in a class of their own, as each was above average in terms of the percentage of comments featuring incivility, with differences in means statistically significant from the other years in the analysis. The election years of 1980, 1988, and 1996, all featured about “average” levels of incivility among voters, and 1984 appears to have been below-average for use of incivility, with a mean statistically different from all other years (excepting 1988). The 1972 electorate is in a class of its own, with by far the lowest level of incivility use among the electorate.³⁶

³⁵ Bonferroni, Scheffe, and Sidak multiple comparison ANOVA tests confirm that each set of overlapping confidence intervals displayed in Figures 3-2 and 3-3 indicate that the two means are not statistically different from each other.

³⁶The election was uncivil, but not polarized in a partisan manner. This finding is consistent with other accounts of the 1972 campaign (although not the electorate) as being less nasty than elections since. As Iyengar et al. (2012) argue, “Despite its title, Hunter S. Thompson’s (1973) classic account of the 1972 presidential campaign described, at least by contemporary standards, a relatively soft-spoken campaign. By any relevant measure – length of time, amount of campaign finance, scope and reach of television ads, volume of news media coverage – American presidential campaigns have since become more antagonistic and harder to ignore... There can be no doubt about the increased negativity of campaign rhetoric... Virtually every study of campaign advertising documents the steep increase in the frequency of attacks and counterattacks.”

Figure 3-2: Percentage of Incivility by Year and Decade (1972-2004)



Note: The mean percentage of uncivil comments for all years was 0.34, with a standard deviation of 0.47. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals.

Also displayed in Figure 3-2 are averages for the four decades included in the analysis. The average by decade was 34.5 percent. Looking at the trends by decade, the average level of incivility among the public in election years during the 1970s was nearly identical to that of the 1980s, hovering around 30 percent. However, the average jumped up to 37 percent for the two elections in the 1990s, a statistically significant increase from the two previous decades. Use of incivility by the electorate reached 41 percent during the elections of the 2000s, a statistically significant increase from the 1990s average.

This uptick in the average level of incivility over the last two decades, along with the fact that three of the last four elections in the analysis are in the group with above average incivility, (and constituted three of the four total elections in this group) supports

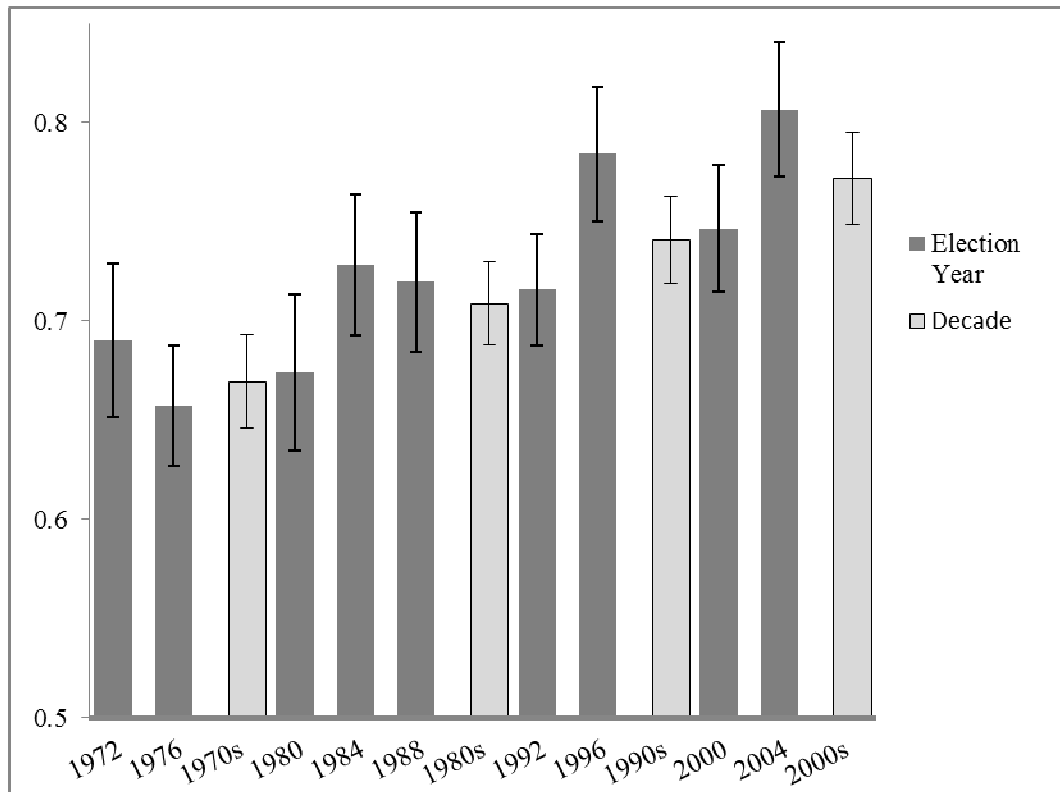
the hypothesis that incivility among the public has increased. The question remains why 1976 had such a high level of incivility, if this hypothesis is indeed accurate. Coming in the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate, 1976 was an outlier election in some notable ways, as it was the only election since 1952 in which the dominant subject of both candidates' campaigns involved personal traits (Vavreck 2009) and it was the first contemporary election (from 1936 on) where dishonesty and lying were central themes of both campaigns (Jamieson 2011, 16).

The inclusion of a “theme” based around the failures of politicians in 1976 opened up the doors for widespread use of terms (such as “lying”) generally considered uncivil. This suggests that incivility in 1976 was less partisan-based, and more an angry reaction to recent political events. This is meaningfully different from partisan-based incivility: an electorate united in anger at elites has much different repercussions for democracy than an electorate divided and angry at those with views different from their own.

To see if this is the case, I look at the extent to which partisanship explains this general trend in increasing use of incivility, using the measure of uncivil attacks on the opposing side. Not only has use of incivility increased in recent elections, but, as shown in Figure 3-3, it has become significantly more partisan. Until 1984, the percentage of uncivil attacks aimed at the opposing party never crossed 70 percent, with 1976 having the lowest percentage of the entire analysis, at just below 66 percent. The smaller samples produce larger margins of error, so not all the differences in means are significant. However, the percentage of uncivil attacks aimed at the out-group has been increasing; the mean for the 2004 election, for example, is significantly different from all other years

excepting 2000 and 1996, the two elections which immediately preceded it. The averages for each decade also provide support for this trend: the 1990s mean is significantly different from that of the 1970s, and the 2000s mean is significantly different from the means of the 1970s and 1980s.

Figure 3-3: Percentage of Uncivil Comments Made Towards Opposing Side



Note: The mean percentage of uncivil comments made towards the opposing side for all years was 0.72, with a standard deviation of 0.45. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals.

As can be seen in Figure 3-3, every election since 1984 is statistically different from 1976, with the exception of 1988, whose interval barely overlaps with that of 1976. The low percentage for 1976 is meaningful, suggesting that the high-levels of incivility among the public in 1976 was a reaction to actual preceding events (Watergate and Vietnam), and not just based on disrespect for the other side. From 1984 to 1992, the

percentage hovered right around 72 percent. However, the percentage shot up in 1996, getting to about 81 percent in 2004. While the 1970s elections' "opposition incivility" constituted about 67 percent of all uncivil comments in those years, the 2000s elections averaged about 78 percent—an uptick of about 16 percent.

Modeling the Change over Time

What the 1976 case highlights is that macro-level effects, such as the idiosyncrasies of the various campaign and election years, can be distorting this trend—presidential scandal, for one, might invite partisans to make uncivil comments about their own side, and could explain why 1976 (coming after Watergate) and 2000 (coming after “Monicagate” and Bill Clinton’s impeachment) have lower percentages of opposition attacks than the elections surrounding them. To address these concerns, I turn to regression analysis.

To produce a more rigorous assessment of the trends in use of incivility, I created a logistic model (referred to hereafter as Model 1) with the election year as the primary independent variable and general use of incivility in the ANES data (again dichotomous) as the dependent variable. To control for factors that varied among the elections that might influence the public’s use of incivility, a number of other variables are included in the model. First, I have controlled for whether an incumbent Democratic president is running for reelection (the years 1980 and 1996) or an incumbent Republican president is running (1972, 1976, 1984, 1992, and 2004), as both the incumbency status (Vavreck 2009) and partisanship (Geer 2006) of candidates are thought to be factors affecting the extent to which a campaign season features negativity.

I also control for a pair of factors that might account for the public being more cynical or negative in certain campaigns--and thus more likely to utilize incivility. Declining economic conditions may anger the public (Conover and Feldman 1986), and thus it is likely that they might react with incivility towards the incumbent party and its candidate. Therefore, I control for whether an election year followed a significant economic decline--both 1980 and 1992 fit this bill (Vavreck 2009).³⁷ As major scandals might increase the likelihood that respondents use uncivil terms like "crook," "liar," et cetera, when evaluating the candidates and parties because there is a grain of truth to the references, I include a measure of whether or not a major scandal occurred during the previous four years involving the incumbent administration. Presidential leadership literature indicates that three elections in my analysis followed what could be considered major scandals: 1976 (Watergate), 1988 (Iran-Contra), and 2000 (Clinton's impeachment) (Simonton 2001).

The final election-level element I control for is the level of negative campaigning in a given election, which could induce incivility. Buell and Sigelman (2009) look at negative campaigning in presidential elections over time and find that there has not been a linear increase in negativity. Their analysis includes measures indicating how "negative" a given election year was, with (from highest to lowest) 1992, 1972, 1988, and

³⁷ Vavreck (2009, 36-38) uses several election forecasts models (which take economic and political factors into account) to sort all Democratic and Republican presidential candidates into to campaign types: "clarifying" candidates, whose election chances are boosted by the state of the economy, and "insurgent" candidates whose chances are hurt by the economy. Only three times during the period of 1972 to 2008 has an incumbent president or member of the incumbent party qualified as an insurgent candidate: 1980, 1992, and 2008. In each of these cases, the candidate from the incumbent party was disadvantaged by significant economic decline.

1984 receiving the highest “negativity” scores among election years in the analysis.³⁸

Controlling for campaign negativity is also necessary in order to distinguish peculiarities of particular campaigns (i.e., close elections might feature more negativity) from the larger trends I am interested in. I used Buell and Sigelman’s measures of negativity for each election year in my analysis.

I also controlled for a series of individual-level characteristics which are understood to be factors which influence political opinions and behavior, including: age (Zukin et al. 2006, Wattenberg 2008), education,³⁹ (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993), and gender (from male to female) (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Kaufman and Petrocik 1999). I also include political interest⁴⁰ and partisan identification⁴¹ in the model, as both are well-established influences on political media consumption and behavior (Zaller 1992; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002).

Additionally, I generated several models to examine if targeting uncivil remarks towards the presidential candidate and party opposite respondents’ partisan identification has increased over time. Model 2 includes the same slate of independent variables included in Model 1, but uses uncivil attacks on the “other side” as its dependent variable. The final model, Model 3, replaces whether or not respondents made uncivil attacks on the “other side” with whether or not they made an uncivil comments about the party or candidate of their own party identification as the dependent variable.

³⁸ To determine the negativity of a campaign, Buell and Sigelman (2009, 245-247) sum up the amount of statements by major party candidates and their surrogates that featured an attack, and divided it by the total amount of campaign statements made.

³⁹ Education is measured on a seven point scale, from “eighth grade or less” to “an advanced degree.”

⁴⁰ Political interest is measured as interest in the presidential election, on a four point scale from “not interested” to “very interested.”

⁴¹ Partisan identification is measured on a seven point scale from strong Democrat to strong Republican.

Table 3-2: Effects of Change in Time on Use of Incivility

Dependent Variable	General Use of Incivility	Uncivil Attack on Other Side	Uncivil Attack on Allied Side
Election Level Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Year	0.02*** (0.002)	0.02*** (0.003)	-0.00 (0.004)
Incumbent Democrat	0.76*** (0.133)	0.66*** (0.144)	0.67*** (0.200)
Incumbent Republican	0.75*** (0.095)	0.62*** (0.103)	0.62*** (0.138)
Incumbent Scandal (last four years)	0.88*** (0.100)	0.67*** (0.110)	0.81*** (0.148)
Economic Decline (last four years)	0.41*** (0.049)	0.25*** (0.054)	0.43*** (0.073)
Campaign Negativity	-0.00 (0.006)	-0.00 (0.007)	-0.01 (0.009)
Individual-Level Variables			
Party Identification (7 categories)	0.09*** (0.009)	0.12*** (0.010)	-0.06*** (0.013)
Ideology (7 categories)	0.03 (0.016)	0.04* (0.017)	0.02 (0.023)
Education	0.23*** (0.010)	0.21*** (0.011)	0.24*** (0.015)
Election Interest	0.45*** (0.024)	0.51*** (0.027)	0.21*** (0.036)
Age	0.01*** (0.001)	0.01*** (0.001)	0.00** (0.001)
Gender (Male to Female)	-0.21*** (0.034)	-0.11** (0.037)	-0.27*** (0.050)
Constant	-41.09*** (4.942)	-50.19*** (5.425)	-0.45 (7.561)
Observations	18,082	18,082	18,082
Pseudo R ²	0.09	0.08	0.04

Entries are logistic regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

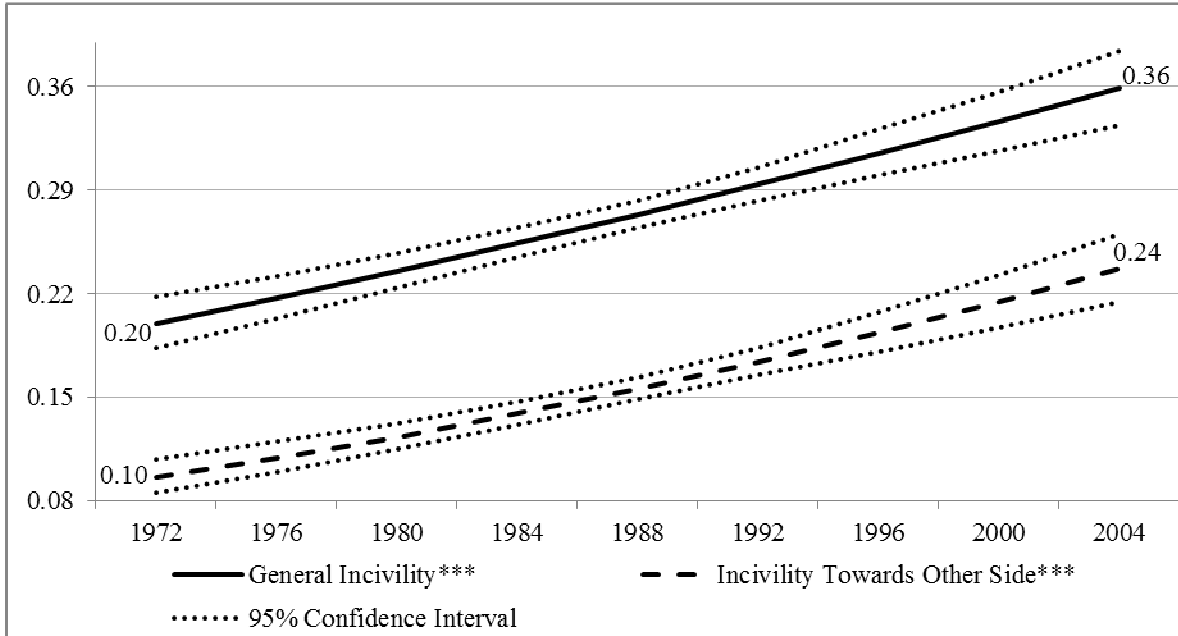
Model Results

Model 1 in Table 3-2 shows that, controlling for election-level and individual-level factors, election years (or time) has a positive, significant influence on use of incivility, indicating that use of incivility among the electorate has increased over time. With the exception of campaign negativity and ideology, the various control variables also reached significance; an incumbent Democratic president in the race, an incumbent Republican president in the race, economic decline within the last four years, and a major scandal within the last four years all have positive effects on use of incivility by the public. Party identification (flowing from strong Democrat to strong Republican), education, interest in the election, and age also have significant positive effects on use of incivility, and gender had a negative relationship—indicating that men are more likely to offer uncivil comments than women.

If the uptick in incivility is a function of partisan polarization and changes in media, then I expect that members of the public have increasingly directed incivility towards the “other side.” Model 2 in Table 2 displays the effect of election years (time) on the change in uncivil attacks on the opposing side, controlling for the same election-level and individual-level factors as in Model 1. As with general use of incivility, uncivil attacks on the party and candidate opposite one’s partisan identification has a positive, significant relationship with time. All control variables are significant in this model, with the exception of campaign negativity; in a change from Model 1, ideology has a significant positive relationship with use of incivility (flowing from “Very Liberal” to

“Very Conservative”). That uncivil attacks on one’s own party have not increased⁴² emphasizes that the increasing use of incivility is largely related to partisanship, where polarization and changes in the media environment together encourage uncivil political discourse.

Figure 3-4: Predicted Probability of Using Incivility by Year



*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Note: Predicted probabilities are calculated using the observed values approach (Hanmer and Kalkan 2012). The 95% confidence interval lines were calculated using the simulation method

To better understand the substantive significance of these results, I calculated the predicted probability of using incivility over time. As displayed in Figure 3-4, the predicted probability of offering an uncivil response about a candidate or party was just about 20 percent in 1972, hovered around 30 percent for the two elections in the 1990s, before rising to just about 36 percent in 2004--an increase of over 80 percent from 1972.

⁴² Model 3 in Table 3-2 shows that there is no significant relationship between time and uncivil attacks on the party and candidates associated with one’s partisan identification; the election year variable, ideology, and campaign negativity fail to reach significance, but all other variables do.

Also displayed in Figure 3-4 are the predicted probabilities of making an uncivil comment towards the opposing side over time. Beginning at about 10 percent in 1972, the probability of using incivility when talking about the “other side” reached the high teens for the two elections in the 1990s, before rising to about 24 percent by 2004—an increase of 140 percent from 1972. Keeping in mind that the propensity to make an uncivil comment about the side one identifies with has not increased over this same period, this trend highlights the intertwining of partisan attacks with use of incivility.

These results lend strong support to the idea that use of incivility by the general public when talking politics has increased—and significantly so. Over a period which has seen growth in elite partisan polarization and a fragmented, partisan, and interactive media environment develop—conditions thought to bring about more incivility in political discourse—the rates with which 1) individuals made uncivil comments about presidential candidates and the major parties and 2) directed the uncivil comments at the out-group have grown tremendously. The probability of utilizing incivility generally when evaluating candidates and parties nearly doubled over the course of the eight elections since 1972, and the probability of making an uncivil comment about the “other side” over this period more than doubled.

Conclusion

There are theoretical reasons for expecting a growth in incivility in contemporary American politics. Growing partisan polarization and massive changes to the media environment have occurred throughout the period of 1972 to 2004 (and correlate strongly with changes in time within this period), and research on both of these phenomena suggest an uptick in incivility is a likely result. Yet direct empirical evidence of an uptick

has yet to be shown. Through use of coded, verbatim responses to ANES questions regarding individuals' feeling towards presidential candidates and parties, I have provided evidence which strongly supports the idea that political talk is becoming increasingly uncivil in the United States.

Collectively, the results presented above provide evidence that there has not only been an uptick in incivility, but that use of incivility has increasingly become entwined with partisanship. From the early 1970s on, when the party polarization gap began to grow and the media environment began to change, use of incivility by the general public in discussing political parties and their presidential candidates has increased quite significantly. Looking at presidential election years over time, the average percentage of comments that featured incivility was about 30 percent in the 1970s and 1980s, but had increased by a third in the 2000s. Perhaps more indicative of the partisan nature of increasing incivility in political talk, the increased propensity to use incivility has been directed at the party and candidate opposite an individual's partisan identification. The average percentage of uncivil comments aimed at the "other side," already high in the 1970s elections, had increased by 15 percent in the years of the 2000s elections, indicating that use of incivility has not only increased, it has become more partisan.

The predicted probabilities based on a logistic regression model show that in 2004, individuals were 80 percent more likely to use incivility generally and 140 percent more likely to use it when discussing the party and candidate of the "other side" than they were in 1972. That the probabilities of utilizing incivility when discussing presidential candidates and parties has increased this much, even while controlling for a number of individual and election-level factors, is not something that should be overlooked—it

speaks to the idea that a cultural change has occurred since the early 1970s, in which incivility in political discourse by non-elites has steadily become the norm, rather than the exception.

Incivility has been a part of politics in some way or another throughout American history, and there likely have been eras when upticks in its use have occurred before, coinciding with growths in party polarization. An argument can be made that increased incivility always brings with it negative ramifications for political discourse, and democratic processes more generally. Certainly, when elites utilize incivility, things like legislative productivity are reduced (Uslaner 1991, 1993; Jamieson 1999; Mann and Ornstein 2012). But non-elites utilizing incivility in their political discussions is problematic, too; for one, incivility is believed to restrict deliberation (Kingwell 1995), and the quality of public policy is dependent on the quality of collective deliberation (Page and Shapiro 1992, 363) Furthermore, while the public may take its cues from elites, less willingness among non-elites to compromise with opposing arguments, and even regard them as legitimate, can reinforce these sentiments among elites (or bind them to them); if the public clamors for red meat, politicians will give them what they want.

What makes this particular period of increasing incivility among the mass public interesting (or disconcerting), however, is the addition of an interactive element to political communication within the last decade and a half, via the Internet. Not only does the Internet likely play a role in inducing incivility, but it makes its use more potent. Anonymity, or at least the false sense of such, encourages individuals to engage in more uncivil political discourse than they would if they had been interacting face-to-face. Furthermore, off-hand, nasty remarks by non-elites can have an audience (sometimes

quite large) in a way that was not possible 25, 100, or 200 years ago—something I will discuss more in chapter 5.

It is difficult to dismiss the current uptick in use of incivility as an innocuous phenomenon, commonly appearing at various points in American history, which will sort itself out over time. Use of incivility by non-elites matters in a way it has not mattered before. Upticks in incivility may not be unprecedented in American history, but in today's media environment, it will likely have unique repercussions for the foreseeable future. The Internet provides uncivil political conversation with an environment in which it can flourish, and partisans with a battleground to keep the fight alive. Incivility now has something of a symbiotic relationship with polarization, rather than being a mere result of it. Should elites wish to dispense with the red meat and vitriol, will the interconnected denizens of political message boards and threads follow suit? Or, induced by uncivil online interactions, will they reject this departure and constrain elites into keeping the rhetoric heated, and thus keep polarization alive? I will attempt to address these questions by examining the role that elites—both in the media and in government—play in inducing uncivil and anti-deliberative behavior in the public. I begin in the next chapter by examining how exposure to uncivil political media influences the propensity with which individuals utilize incivility when talking politics.

Chapter 4: Uncivil Partisan Media and the Use of Incivility in Political Talk

In the previous chapter, I revealed that there has been an uptick in the use of incivility in Americans' political opinions, which has coincided with increases in party polarization and significant changes in the media environment since the 1970s. Party polarization and the explosion of media "choice" are likely to some extent related, with both trends contributing to the rise of uncivil, partisan media. Despite this evidence, the role that the media has played in the mass public adopting caustic, antagonistic, and corrosive language in political talk remains unclear. Does exposure to polarized, uncivil media truly lead to use of incivility by the public?

Research in media and politics has shown that exposure to uncivil mediated political discourse can induce a number of negative political emotions and behaviors. Furthermore, media elites can influence the opinions of audiences through priming, framing, and agenda-setting. My purpose in this chapter is to establish a direct connection between exposure to uncivil political media and use of incivility when talking politics. I use the incivility index (introduced in Chapter 2) to gauge whether or not respondents included elements of incivility in an open-ended survey item asking them to evaluate then-presidential candidates Barack Obama and John McCain. Using panel data regression methods, I show that exposure to uncivil media, specifically pundit-themed cable news and talk radio programming, has a positive effect on the use of incivility, but only when individuals are exposed to "like-minded" uncivil media.

Selective Exposure and Uncivil Political Media

First, I will quickly summarize the reasons presented in chapters 2 and 3 as to why we might believe political and media elites are behind the decline in civil political discourse. Scholars have demonstrated that there has been a decline in civility at the elite level, in day-to-day discourse on the floors of Congress (Uslaner 1993; Mann and Ornstein 2012). Furthermore, many have argued that increased incivility in news media is the product of increased competition for audiences (pushing media figures to say more outlandish and controversial things) and the “fragmentation” of once-large network audiences into niche populations, leaving media figures free to say and do things that they could (or would) not do were it necessary to preserve a more heterogeneous audience (Mutz and Reeves 2005; Fallows 1997; Prior 2005, 2007; Delli Carpini and Williams 2001; Sobieraj and Berry 2010). The result is a partisan “new media” dominated by bias, emotionality, ridicule, and ad hominem attacks (Jamieson and Hardy 2012).

In a move away from the “minimal effects” theories that dominated the early years of mass media research, there has been a reinvigorated debate over media effects. Questions as to whether people advertently choose political media with certain political leanings and what the effects of such exposure are remain unsettled (Bennett and Iyengar 2008; Mutz and Young 2011). Yet, in recent years, numerous studies have found that in the fragmented media environment, viewership of particular cable news networks and talk radio programs are driven by viewers’ partisan and ideological views (i.e., Stroud 2010, 2011; Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Coe et al. 2008).

As prominently argued by Sunstein (2009), selective exposure of this kind is not innocuous. Even if audiences tune into partisan media because it aligns with preexisting views, exposure can reinforce and intensify these “priors.”⁴³ A number of studies utilizing panel data and experimental methods have provided credence for this argument. Among the effects of partisan selective exposure are reduced regard for out-groups and the legitimacy of their views (Stroud 2008, 2010, 2011; Jamieson and Capella 2009; Barker 2002), suggesting that even when individuals self-expose themselves to political media, this exposure affects political opinions and behavior. To the extent that certain messages, knowledge, and affect can be relayed to an audience, it follows that those who tune into uncivil partisan media will adopt some of the uncivil elements and tactics of the uncivil media. In the following, I lay out two ways in which uncivil partisan media exposure might induce the use of incivility in political talk.

Emotion and Information Processing

With political information, appeals to emotion can affect the political behavior of those exposed, and the manner in which they process political information (Marcus et al. 2000; Brader 2005, 2006; MacKuen et al. 2010; Valentino et al. 2008). Media elites have a significant influence on the opinions of their audiences (Zaller 1992), and when commentators target certain individuals, groups, or ideas, this antipathy is relayed to the audience (Barker 2002). For at least the period immediately following exposure to uncivil media, individuals have been found to have negative, visceral reactions towards political

⁴³ As Jamieson and Capella (2009) state regarding the polarized views of Rush Limbaugh listeners, the radio program either directly influences viewpoints, draws in listeners with similar viewpoints and reinforces these dispositions, or some combination of the two. They find evidence that the former occurs more often, but the latter occurs as well.

figures, institutions, and government (Mutz and Reeves 2005; Forgette and Morris 2006; Fridkin and Kenney 2008; Hibbing and Theiss-Moore 1998).

As Mutz (2007) finds, incivility creates disdain for opposing views, with more intense incivility correlated with views that the opposing side has insidious motives. Herbst (2010) argues that incivility is used as a weapon of sorts, to rile audiences up in anger concerning the “other side” by reminding followers how “bad” the other side is; negative words and associations (i.e., “unethical”) are used strategically to mobilize like-minded individuals because they are cues the audience understands and are averse to. By connecting these concepts to opponents, elites create disdain for their targets, and urge audiences to “join in” on the targeting of opposition views and individuals in an uncivil fashion. Uncivil television programs (Mutz 2007) and political talk radio (Owen 1997) are particularly potent in inducing intensified, emotionally-strident opinions in audiences. Talk radio commentators such as Rush Limbaugh have been implicated in attaching negative emotion to their targets by using ridicule, “caustic and primal” language, and by radicalizing their targets’ positions (Barker 2002; Jamieson and Capella 2009). Pundit-dominated cable news and talk radio stand out among other forms of media when it comes to the use (and extremity) of incivility (Sobieraj and Berry 2010).

There is also the possibility that for some, negative political emotions are preexisting, and exposure to uncivil political media does not generate more disdain for an out-group than which already exists. However, the media, through priming, framing, and agenda-setting, can legitimize and promote certain political opinions without altering preexisting attitudes (Iyengar and Kinder 2010). This is especially true of like-minded partisan media (Stroud 2011). If the elites one trusts promote a certain idea (i.e.,

“McCain/Obama is a dangerous extremist”), then repetition of this message must be acceptable or even necessary. Furthermore, recent exposure to an uncivil political message will increase the odds that it is reused (Zaller 1992, 48), and partisan “echo chambers” are particularly effective in relaying messages to audiences for reuse (Jamieson and Capella 2009). Thus, even if it is partisan, politically interested people with preexisting disdain for the “other side” who tune in to uncivil partisan programming, exposure can provide particular phrases, tactics, and arguments to utilize, and will sanction the use of incivility more generally.

In sum, there is strong reason to believe that selective exposure to uncivil political media will affect the way audience members talk politics--whether exposure to uncivil political media generates genuine negative emotions in individuals, spurring them to react with incivility, or individuals are merely receiving “permission” and “instruction” from a trusted, like-minded media elite and uncivil material to mimic--or some combination of both. Distinguishing between these processes—emotional arousal versus mimicry—is beyond the scope of this chapter (but I will address this in chapters 5 and 6), but in each case, audiences are being endowed with something from exposure to the incivility. To this extent the propensity to use incivility should decline when exposure to the media source is interrupted, and increase when exposure begins.

Hypotheses

To recap from chapter 2, my definition of incivility in discourse is the presence of claims that are disrespectful towards their target in a purposeful, confrontational manner, and presented in a hyperbolic nature. I argue that there are two modes through which political information can breed an increased propensity to utilize uncivil language and

rhetoric: (1) the “mob effect,” in which the vilification of views and politicians of the opposing side rallies together partisans of the same ilk. Attacking the “other side” can also simultaneously produce (2) the “retaliation effect,” in which partisans of the other side become angered by the attacks, and react with incivility.

I hypothesize that exposure to uncivil political media leads to an increased propensity to use and exhibit uncivil behavior (namely, language) when talking politics. As previous studies have shown that behavioral and psychological responses to uncivil media can be induced immediately following exposure, I add to this hypothesis that the effect of changes in exposure to uncivil media can lead to uncivil talk in the very short-term. A change in exposure to uncivil media will cause an increase in the propensity to use uncivil language by individuals; likewise, a change in exposure from uncivil media to no uncivil media will decrease this propensity.⁴⁴

(H1): Exposure to uncivil political media leads to an increased propensity to use and exhibit incivility when offering political opinions.

I have previously detailed two modes through which individuals may potentially be induced to use incivility: the “mob effect” and the “retaliation effect.” However, selective exposure limits the extent to which a “retaliation effect” occurs.⁴⁵ In all likelihood, if an individual becomes exposed to uncivil media, it will be uncivil media which does not conflict with their preexisting political viewpoints, and is not cognitively displeasing to hear (Iyengar and Hahn 2009). If selective exposure theories (or even

⁴⁴ While I do not specifically look for the effects of such, it is possible that exposure to other types of ‘civil media’ can reduce the propensity to use incivility; to the extent that political media induces anxiety rather than anger, individuals may broaden their subsequent information searches and view alternative views more positively than they normally would. By increasing positive assessments of alternative views, as well as providing cues for the type of acceptable behavior and language, civil political media might lead to greater levels of civility in discourse.

⁴⁵ I will test the “Retaliation effect” in chapters 5 and 6, however.

agenda-setting theories⁴⁶) adequately explain patterns in media use, then it is unlikely that someone who identifies as a liberal will choose to watch Bill O'Reilly, unless they do not become upset by O'Reilly when watching him—in which case they would not feel the need to retaliate. While I believe that when individuals *are* exposed to upsetting uncivil attacks on their side, they will retaliate with incivility, it is unlikely that many will choose to be exposed to cognitively displeasing political information.

An alternative hypothesis is that tuning into like-minded political programming generates incivility merely by reinforcing preexisting views, and whether or not the program includes incivility does not matter. If partisan bias extends beyond the “opinion” shows to standard news programs on television—and there is evidence it does (Morris and Francia 2010)—and audiences voluntarily tune into these programs because they perceive them to reflect their own views—which they appear to do (Dilliplane 2011; Iyengar and Hahn 2009)—then a comparison between viewership of “uncivil” and “civil” partisan news is possible. Thus, I expect that only exposure to like-minded media featuring incivility will affect the use of incivility.

(H2): Exposure to uncivil like-minded political media will induce the use of incivility when offering political opinions, but exposure to like-minded political media lacking uncivil elements or uncivil discordant media will not induce the use of incivility

Audiences tend to be consistent in their viewership of political media (Dilliplane, Goldman, and Mutz 2012). When changes in exposure do occur, what might account for it? Two scenarios seem likely. One is that a number of idiosyncratic and non-systematic reasons, such as gaining or losing access to cable television, having a change in schedules

⁴⁶ Agenda setting effects likely reflect deliberate choices on behalf of knowledgeable, sophisticated individuals, who seek out political media that aligns with their preexisting political philosophies (Miller and Krosnick 2000).

so certain programs can or can no longer be viewed or listened to, or the attraction to a particular news story (i.e., elections or scandals) affect whether viewers are exposed to uncivil political media. Prior (2007) notes that with the increase in cable television choices, passive exposure to television news has declined, but news viewership “in terms of control and degree of choice...is dwarfed by the Internet... [which can be] customized to a greater extent,” (111-112). Under this scenario, viewers might simply be seeking partisan news (or news in general), and the effect of change in exposure on the propensity to utilize incivility is likely to be significant.

Another possibility is that a psychological jolt (or let-down) increases (or reduces) the motivation to talk about politics and tune into (or tune out) uncivil political media. In this case, when people are in a certain mood,⁴⁷ they are more likely to self-expose themselves to uncivil political media and use incivility when expressing opinions, but the exposure should still reinforce and strengthen the impetus, motivation, and ability to use incivility. In both cases, the propensity to utilize incivility should increase with exposure to uncivil media.

Data

To test my hypotheses, I used data from the 2008 National Annenberg Election Survey Online dataset.⁴⁸ Respondents interviewed for the online dataset were drawn from KnowledgePanel, a random sample of US households who agree to complete periodic Internet-based surveys on a variety of topics, and complete the surveys over the Internet.

⁴⁷ It is not clear what “mood” it is which draws people into like-minded incivility. Would it be ebullience? Or frustration?

⁴⁸ The NAES online panel started in October 2007 with a random probability sample of about 30,000 people. Respondents were re-interviewed another four times throughout 2008, during the primary, election, and post-election periods. Retention rates between the waves averaged about 82 percent.

The 2008 NAES study has a panel component that asks individuals repeatedly throughout the 2008 election season to provide verbatim examples of what they particularly like and dislike about Barack Obama and John McCain.⁴⁹ The NAES questions are beneficial due to both their open-ended nature and the fact a range of answers is possible. An adequate answer does not require an uncivil response, yet some provided one nonetheless. As respondents entered in their own answers for the verbatim questions, the spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in all the answers were completed by the individuals themselves, providing an unfiltered and untainted collection of respondents' views as they intended them.

Furthermore, using panel data is advantageous as an argument can be made for causality over correlation (Allison 2009; Finkel 1995). As I wished to determine if use of incivility in language changed when exposure to uncivil media changed, the panel data allowed me to look at individuals whose exposure changed between waves. The NAES question, defining regular use of media as tuning in within the last month, provides a measure of reported media exposure immediately preceding each wave. Thus, what can be measured is the effect of the *change* in media exposure between waves. While cross-sectional analyses provide estimates of the “changes” in an independent variable on “changes” in the dependent variable based exclusively on inter-unit variations at a single point in time, panel data analysis allows for the direct detection of the determining factors of individual-level variation (Allison 2009; Finkel 1995, 5).

⁴⁹ The exact wordings of the questions were: “Is there anything in particular that you like or dislike about [Barack Obama/John McCain]? If so, please fill in the boxes below.” All respondents who gave a thermometer ranking score for the candidates (on a scale of 0-100) in response to a previous question were asked this question.

The NAES asked panel respondents who claimed to have heard about the presidential campaign from television news or radio programs (which was around 90% of sample) which programs they watched in the last month. This measure, which asks respondents about whether they have viewed specific political programming, has been found to very reliable by Dilliplane, Goldman, Mutz (2012), and generally avoids many of the issues the plague self-reports of media exposure. Respondents are constrained to reporting simply what they have recently watched—and while this may mean significantly more exposure for some than it does for others, it is consistent with my hypothesis that any recent exposure is enough to have an effect. If exposure to uncivil media everyday has more of an effect than exposure once a week, then conflating all those exposed into a single “exposed” category provides a conservative estimate of the effect, given that any exposure has *some* effect. The NAES list of media is nearly comprehensive of national television programming in 2008 likely to feature some analysis of the 2008 election. The list also asks about exposure to nearly every major (and not so major) nationally-broadcast conservative talk radio program.

While there were five waves in all, only waves 2, 4 and 5 asked respondents about their typical media exposure. Wave 2 took place from January 1, 2008 to March 31, 2008, and wave 4 took place throughout the 2008 general election season, with interviews conducted from August 29th through November 4th. Wave 5 took place during the immediate post-election period, from November 5 through January 31. Respondents’ interviews were spaced in thirds, in order to let time pass between wave interviews; a respondent interviewed during the first third of Wave 1, for example, was re-interviewed

during the first third of all subsequent waves. At least a month passed between respondents' wave 2, wave 4, and wave 5 interviews.

Methodology

To make reading through and coding the verbatim responses a feasible task, I randomly selected 15 percent of these observations to use, resulting in 2,514 units and a total of 6,387 verbatim answers included in the analysis.⁵⁰ To control for experimenter's bias, two research assistants and I independently evaluated the open-ended responses.⁵¹ Unlike previous studies of political incivility that have gauged its presence in text and speech, this study is not evaluating campaign materials, candidates' speeches, or media coverage—which are all more or less the polished work of professionals and generally rather homogeneous in scope and topic. Rather, the raw, unfiltered quality of respondents' responses that make the data so compelling also includes misspellings, poor grammar, limited punctuation, and incomplete thoughts. Use of computer programs that cannot take context into consideration is therefore impractical. Human coders can take context into account, however. We used the Incivility Index (Table 2-1) to identify instances of incivility, and calculations of intercoder reliability of the coding indicate substantial agreement concerning what comments qualified as uncivil. The percent agreement between all three coders was 91 percent, and a calculation of Krippendorff's

⁵⁰ As the subsample was random, the panel is unbalanced; as discussed below, this is not a problematic.

⁵¹ The research assistants were told that the goal was to have a conservative estimate and were thus instructed to give the benefit of the doubt to civility—comments they felt were on the borderline should not be marked as uncivil. To ensure that there were three independent analyses of the responses, the research assistants were instructed not to discuss specific responses or types of responses amongst each other or with me during the coding process.

alpha⁵² produces a coefficient of 0.72, which is acceptable, especially considering the heterogeneous and crude nature of the responses (Krippendorff 2004).

If a comment violated one or more of the criteria, it was deemed uncivil. In order to make the process as objective as possible, only comments that clearly and unambiguously qualified as incivility under one or more of the criteria definitions were deemed uncivil. When a comment seemed “borderline,” the benefit of the doubt was given to civility, thus creating a conservative measure of incivility. This is consistent with my definition of incivility, in which uncivil claims must be deliberate and obvious. A description of common uncivil claims by criteria can be found in A1 4-1 in Appendix 1.

Overall, about 20.6 percent of the responses evaluated qualified as uncivil. Having one wave in the analysis take place early in the election year during primary season, a second during the heart of campaign season, and the final after the election raises the questions as to whether there are differences in pre- and post-election tendencies to be uncivil. Perhaps people are less attentive to the election earlier in the year, and, following the election, partisans from both sides begin the “healing process” after the long and bitter campaign. The percentage of respondents who used incivility in each wave suggests there could be some truth to this. In wave 2, about 13 percent of respondents used incivility in their answers. The percentage nearly doubled to 25 percent in wave 4, before dropping to 22 percent in wave 5.

It is also possible that the levels of incivility in political media are not constant throughout the election year. Yet, it is likely that some amount of incivility is constant in

⁵² Krippendorff’s alpha is a conservative estimate of intercoder reliability beyond that which can be ascribed to mere chance. It is appropriate regardless of the number of coders, levels of measurement, sample sizes, and missing data.

certain types of media all of the time, and that individuals exposed to it will react to the incivility with some consistency. Still, while the “uncivil media” effect may be constant, it may also be nonlinear. This might mean that media elites do not produce the same amount and type of uncivil political talk throughout the panel study period, or that those exposed react to it somewhat differently throughout these periods. I cannot rule this out. It is necessary, then, to control for campaign season effects. First, I will explain how I distinguished between “civil” and “uncivil” political media.

Exposure to Uncivil Political Media in 2008

What does the literature tell us uncivil media should look like? Sobieraj and Berry (2010) conceptualize and measure examples of extreme incivility in politically-oriented news media. In doing this, they devised a helpful “road map” to determining if a media source tends to be uncivil, identifying thirteen manifestations in language and behavior, including name calling, misrepresentative exaggerations of views and actions, and mockery.⁵³ Sobieraj and Berry also describe a method for creating an “outrage score” for four types of media (newspapers, television, radio, and blogs) and identify the “most” uncivil current examples for each type of media. The elements used by Mutz and Reeves (2005) in their “recreation” of civil and uncivil mediated political discourse to differentiate uncivil discourse from polite, civil discourse were hostility, rudeness, emotionality, and quarrelsome discussions. Together, these studies provide a theoretical guide to identifying media that include uncivil discourse. For media to include such elements as mockery, hostility, and character assassination, the programming’s host,

⁵³ The thirteen elements include insulting language, name calling, emotional display, emotional language, verbal fighting/sparring, character assassination, misrepresentative exaggeration, mockery, conflagration, ideologically extremizing language, slippery slope, belittling, and obscene language.

hosts, or guests need to have opinions and need to at the very least take a negative view towards some persons, policy, or institutions (as opposed to standard news programs, for example, where news is merely read and very little opinionated commentary is offered).

The Project for Excellence in Journalism⁵⁴ releases annual reports featuring content analyses of different forms of media, including cable television news, network television news, local television news, newspapers, online news, magazines, and radio. The 2009 PEJ report (which reviews media throughout 2008)⁵⁵ reports that prime-time cable news programming was dominated by shows in which “commentators and pundits dissect and magnify the one or two biggest developments that lend themselves to debate and disagreement.” Talk radio programming, dominated by conservative commentators, consisted of hosts attacking policies and vilifying targeted individuals. Among all the comments on conservative talk radio in 2008 made about Hillary Clinton, for example, 30 percent emphasized the idea that she did not have any hard core beliefs, and 15 percent revolved around the idea that she was personally unlikable (Project for the Excellence in Journalism 2009). The report also noted that “prime-time cable in 2008 closely resembled talk radio with pictures” in that both “placed a premium on high-octane opining and polarizing.” The dominance of punditry and polarizing commentary in prime-time cable news and talk radio suggests that these media fit the bill as the quintessential uncivil political programming. This is consistent with the content review of various media by Sobieraj and Berry (2010) which found that nearly all pundit-themed cable news and political talk radio programs consistently include some uncivil “outrage,”

⁵⁴ The PEJ is a non-profit research organization associated with the Pew Research Center.

⁵⁵ As explained below, the data in my analysis are from 2008, so I am concerned with what qualified as uncivil political media in 2008, as well.

and on average contain significantly more incivility than other “opinionated” media, like blogs and newspaper columns.

To make more rigorous distinctions between the various television programs featured in the NAES survey, I utilize two studies which have previously dichotomized the programs into political and non-political categories (Dilliplane et al. 2012) and grouped the programs by partisanship (Dilliplane 2011) (see A1 4-2 in Appendix 1 for more details). For a more nuanced understanding of the effects of exposure to uncivil political media, it is helpful to know if certain formats are more effective than others in inducing the use of incivility.⁵⁶ I initially created seven groupings of television programs: pundit cable news, standard cable news, partisan talk shows, non-partisan talk shows, network news, satirical news, and pure entertainment. The breakdown of programs by category can be seen in Table A2 4-3 in Appendix 2.

To determine whether each type of political programming qualified as uncivil media, I utilized two measures. A full explanation of both measures is included in A1 4-2 in Appendix 1, but I will overview the measures here. The purpose was to simply divide the political media into civil and uncivil groupings, not to compare levels of incivility between uncivil programs, so use of the scores as a continuous or ordinal explanatory is not an option. That is, the measures were meant to divide up political programming by looking for elements likely to be prevalent only in uncivil political media, but not gauge the overall level of incivility in each program,

The first measure involved searching via Lexis Nexis for reports in major world publications of particular types of uncivil incidents occurring on the various programs,

⁵⁶ As previously mentioned, the emotionality and opinion-oriented formats of pundit cable news and talk radio have been found to be particularly effective in inducing reactions in audiences.

which were examples of the modes of incivility found to be most common in political television (Sobieraj and Berry 2010). By tabulating the unique number of uncivil events that made the mainstream news throughout the period during which the panel survey took place and dividing the total by the amount of hours of the program's estimated airtime, a sense of the prevalence of incivility on each program can be made. Eight programs that had scores above average were qualified as uncivil.

There are some problems with relying on "hearsay" to determine if a program is typically uncivil. For one, if a program is usually uncivil, it might not be newsworthy if something uncivil occurs, but it would be if the same event occurred on a typically civil program. Furthermore, this measure does not help to determine if the levels of incivility on programs differed between periods during the election year. Thus, I used a second measure to evaluate the level of incivility in the actual content of the programs during each wave. To do this, I used Lexis Nexis to search the transcripts of the various programs for some common examples of incivility that fell under criteria 1, 2, and 3 of the Incivility Index. Unfortunately, complete transcripts (or any at all) were not available for some of the programs,⁵⁷ including two talk show programs deemed uncivil by the first measure. Nonetheless, this measure allows me to evaluate the accuracy of the "hearsay" measure and determine if incivility in political media varied over the course of the election year.

For each program, I tabulated the occurrences of incivility and divided them by the average amount of words in each transcript per hour of programming, to get a

⁵⁷ Shows perceived to have a conservative bias but did not have full transcripts included FNC's *Fox & Friends*, FNC's *Fox Report with Shepard Smith*, FNC's *Geraldo At Large*, FNC's *Studio B with Shepard Smith*, and FNC's *Your World with Neil Cavuto*. Shows without transcripts perceived to have a liberal bias included *MSNBC Live*, CNN's *Out in the Open*, and ABC's *The View*.

standard score of the amount of incivility per hour. Programs with above-average scores across the waves were marked as uncivil. The six programs marked as uncivil under this measure were the same six (minus the two uncivil talk shows) that were marked as uncivil under the “hearsay” measure. This consistency gives me confidence in the accuracy of the measures.

The averages across programs for each wave indicate that there were differences in the amount of incivility on these programs between waves, with wave 4—taking place during the heart of campaign season, featuring the highest average. Wave 2, which took place during the primaries, had a slightly lower average, and wave 5, which took place in the period following Election Day through January 2009, averaged the lowest level of incivility. Nonetheless, even during the periods in which waves 2 and 5 took place, the programs marked as uncivil were not devoid of incivility, and were consistently the top six “perpetrators” within each period. Thus, exposure to the programs during each period likely had the hypothesized effect. A change from no exposure in wave 4 to exposure in wave 5 will still have an effect--albeit perhaps with not the same potency as a change from no exposure in wave 2 to exposure in wave 4.

Based on these two measures, six pundit cable news programs and two partisan talk shows were marked as uncivil. In addition to the television programs, I designated twelve talk radio programs as uncivil; the listing of these programs is included in Table A2 4-4 in Appendix 2, and the rationale for coding them as uncivil is included in A1 4-2 in Appendix 1. To measure the impact of a change in exposure to these three types of programs, I created dichotomous variables for exposure to *uncivil pundit cable news* and *uncivil talk radio*. Additionally, *uncivil talk shows* may affect incivility use, although this

is not backed by any previous theory.⁵⁸ In addition, I generated dichotomous measures of exposure to *civil cable news*, *network news*, *satirical news*,⁵⁹ *National Public Radio*,⁶⁰ and *entertainment programs*.⁶¹ The only predictors I expect to positively affect the use of incivility are the uncivil media types, although it is possible that exposure to civil programs may have a negative impact on incivility use.

Exposure to Like-minded and Disagreeable Uncivil Media

I also hypothesized that a change in exposure to like-minded uncivil media would lead to an increased propensity to use incivility, but a change in exposure to both like-minded civil media and disagreeable uncivil media would not. To test this hypothesis, I divided the uncivil media programs into “conservative uncivil media” and “liberal uncivil media” sub-groups, utilizing the groupings created by Dilliplane (2011) (programming qualifying as either is indicated as such in Table A2 4-1 of Appendix 1). Then, using respondents’ partisan identification (partisans were those who identified as a strong, weak, or leaner partisan), I identified if they were exposed to media that either aligned with their partisan orientation, contrasted with their views, or was neutral programming. To test the hypothesis, I created dichotomous measures of exposure to *like-minded uncivil media*, *like-minded civil media*, and *disagreeable uncivil media*. Because party identification was measured over time, these measures can take into account how

⁵⁸ These programs can be qualified as “soft media” which have previously been found to be ineffective in influencing political opinions (Prior 2003). See A1 4-2 for more details.

⁵⁹ I separate out satirical news from other partisan media, as such has been found to be effective in generating cynicism about mainstream partisan viewpoints, rather than reinforce them (Baumgartner and Morris 2006; Warner 2007); a more in depth discussion of the satirical news programs is included A1 4-2.

⁶⁰ Specifically, exposure to the program *All Things Considered*. See A1 4-2 for more information.

⁶¹ I initially broke down these variables further: *civil cable news* was divided up into partisan, pundit programs and standard, “neutral” programs, and *civil network news* was divided into standard network news broadcasts, network news magazines, and Sunday morning roundtables. As these smaller groups were insignificant and combining them has little effect on the size and significance of coefficients, I use these larger groupings for the sake of parsimony.

individuals' attachment to party may have shifted over the course of the campaign and panel study. I also created dichotomous measures of exposure to, *disagreeable uncivil media*, *disagreeable civil media*, and *neutral civil media* as controls.

Fixed-Effects Approach

To test the effect of change in exposure to uncivil media between the waves on the propensity to offer an uncivil response, I employed a fixed-effects model. Fixed-effects models are the standard for panel data analysis, as the method can ensure that results are not biased by an omitted variable, and will minimize the chances that the relationship between changes in exposure to uncivil media and changes in use of incivility is misidentified as causal when it is in fact an endogenous relationship (Allison 2009). While questions of spuriousness limit the ability of cross-sectional analyses to establish causality, fixed-effects models focus on the change occurring within individuals, allowing for much stronger cases for causal effects. Time-invariant variables (i.e., gender) are differenced away in such models, as they cannot help to predict a change in the dependent variable⁶² (Greene 2002; Hausman and Taylor 1981). The fixed-effects method instead controls for potential confounding effects of all unobserved time-invariant variables by using each person as his or her own control (Allison 2009).

However, fixed-effects logistic regression results in significant observations being dropped from the analysis when there is a lack of intra-group (or “within-group”) variation (Allison 2009; Hausman and Taylor 1981). Furthermore, fixed-effects methods with limited dependent variable models are less efficient (compared to random effects

⁶² A way around losing these time-invariant covariates in fixed-effects models is to interact them with period effects (i.e., waves). Since the fixed-effects method controls for these factors (by using each individual as their own control), this is unnecessary for most demographic variables.

and GEE models) as between-individual variation is ignored; the focus on within-person can lead to fairly large standard errors, as there is limited variation in dichotomous dependent variables. Allison (2009), however, sees the sacrifice of efficiency to reduce bias as well worth it, as fixed-effects provides the best test for causality excepting experimental methods. The result for my analysis is a focus on individuals who differed from wave to wave, which allows for a test of the hypotheses. As I show below, the stable cases that are dropped have the expected relationship with uncivil political media exposure (the consistently exposed had the highest rate of incivility use, and the consistently unexposed the lowest, with “changers” falling in the middle). Additional information on the inappropriateness of random-effects and lagged dependent variable (or dynamic) models for this analysis can be found in A1 4-3 in Appendix 1.

Results

Looking at the raw means, there is evidence of campaign effects on the use of incivility, but differences persisted among those exposed to uncivil political media in all three waves.⁶³ Among those who were consistently exposed to uncivil media throughout all three waves, the average rate of incivility was 22.3 percent in wave 2, 40.1 percent in wave 4, and 32.7 percent in wave 5. Each of these rates were higher than the rates for all respondents in each wave (12.6 in wave 2, 24.9 in wave 4, and 22.0 in wave 5), and much higher than the rates of those respondents who remained unexposed to uncivil pundit news and talk radio throughout each wave (7.7 in wave 2, 17.4 in wave 4, and 12.8 in

⁶³ For the wave 2 period, a familiarity factor with the candidates and campaign may influence the propensity to offer uncivil comments. A Pew Research Center (2007) study in the fall of 2007, taken two months before wave 2 began, found that only 62 percent could name Barack Obama as a Democratic presidential candidate, and a mere 24 percent named John McCain as a Republican candidate. The visibility of both candidates likely increased throughout the primary season and as the general election began. During the earlier months of wave 2, however, particular ideas about either candidate in the press and in the minds of the public were likely less prevalent than later on.

wave 5). This suggests that a consistent relationship between uncivil media exposure and use of incivility existed across waves, but that overall rates of incivility were the lowest before the start of the general election campaign, and the highest during the time immediately preceding the election.

Among those who were consistently uncivil across the waves, the mean exposure rate to uncivil media was 33 percent—meaning about one-third of the respondents who used incivility across all three waves corresponded were exposed to uncivil political media. The same rate for those whose comments did not feature any incivility across all three waves was 12 percent, less than one 1 in 8. Unsurprisingly, given the theoretical expectations, the rate of exposure for those who varied in their use of incivility throughout the waves fell in between the rate of the two consistent groups, at 21 percent. The differences between each group mean paired together were significant ($p=0.000$).

To further evaluate the relationship between use of incivility, uncivil media exposure, and the wave periods, I conducted a cross-sectional analysis to see if a relationship between exposure to uncivil news existed in the waves independently and in pooled form. Note that these models lack the causal leverage that fixed-effects models (presented below) have, but can provide some insight into the relationship between media usage and incivility within the different waves. I include measures of exposure to the other types of media, as well measures of *age*, *gender*, *education*, and *political interest*⁶⁴ in the models. The results of the logit regression analyses can be seen Table 4-1.

Exposure to both *uncivil pundit cable news* and *uncivil talk radio* had statistically significant positive relationships with use of incivility in waves 2 and 4, and *uncivil*

⁶⁴ The gauging of political interest was part of an optional public affairs profile in which nearly all NAES-Online participants partook in, usually before their wave 1 interview. It ranges from 0 (no interest) to 3 (very interested).

pundit cable news was significant in wave 5 as well—however talk radio was not. In the pooled data, both pundit cable news and talk radio had positive, significant relationships with use of incivility. While talk radio not reaching significance in wave 5 is curious, its performance in the pooled model strongly suggests that a relationship between exposure to its content and use of incivility exists.⁶⁵ *Uncivil talk show* exposure was not significant in any of the wave or pooled models, suggesting these types of (“soft media”) programs have no relationship with the use of incivility.

Additionally, several other media variables reached significance. A pair of media types had positive relationships with incivility: *NPR* in waves 4, 5, and the pooled data, and *satirical news* in wave 4 and the pooled data. Both *entertainment programs* and *civil talk shows* had negative relationships with incivility in waves 4 and the pooled data. Additionally, females (all waves and pooled data), more educated people (4, 5, and pooled), Republicans (4, 5, pooled), conservatives (2, 5, and pooled), and older people (4 and pooled) all were more likely to use incivility. It is important to note, that this cross-sectional analysis suggests that these variables are related to the use of incivility—but it does not provide evidence that exposure to any of these types of media increases the propensity to use incivility.

⁶⁵ Different media effects between the waves may be due to the differences in the degree to which uncivil media was uncivil, and the degree to which audiences became aroused by it, before, during and after the election. For instance, those who were uncivil following conservative talk radio exposure before the election might be less willing to talk about the election at all in wave 5. Differences in may also be to the unbalanced nature of the data, where two-sided censoring results in a slightly different set (and smaller number) of observations in waves 2 and 5 than in wave 4.

Table 4-1: Cross-Sectional Analysis on Determinants of Use of Incivility

Variables	Wave 2	Wave 4	Wave 5	Pooled
Uncivil Pundit News	0.41** (0.211)	0.58*** (0.129)	0.87*** (0.154)	0.63*** (0.087)
Uncivil Talk Radio	0.36* (0.212)	0.50*** (0.133)	0.13 (0.160)	0.45*** (0.084)
Uncivil Talk Show	0.03 (0.204)	-0.00 (0.129)	-0.14 (0.147)	-0.04 (0.086)
Civil Talk Show	-0.22 (0.191)	-0.30** (0.119)	-0.20 (0.134)	-0.25*** (0.079)
Civil Cable News	0.22 (0.209)	0.04 (0.126)	0.05 (0.150)	0.08 (0.085)
Civil Network News	-0.03 (0.215)	0.01 (0.127)	-0.15 (0.147)	-0.08 (0.081)
Satirical News	0.38 (0.234)	0.31** (0.143)	0.20 (0.161)	0.32*** (0.095)
NPR	0.04 (0.263)	0.30** (0.151)	0.32** (0.163)	0.21** (0.094)
Entertainment Programs	-0.24 (0.200)	-0.39*** (0.114)	-0.17 (0.137)	-0.34*** (0.074)
Gender (Male to Female)	0.39** (0.172)	0.28*** (0.106)	0.31** (0.121)	0.26*** (0.067)
Age (18 and up)	0.00 (0.006)	0.01** (0.004)	-0.00 (0.004)	0.01** (0.002)
Education	0.05 (0.054)	0.08** (0.033)	0.08** (0.039)	0.09*** (0.021)
Party Identification (7 cat, R-D)	-0.05 (0.051)	-0.07** (0.031)	-0.09** (0.037)	-0.10*** (0.017)
Ideology (7 cat, C-L)	-0.19** (0.081)	-0.04 (0.047)	-0.11* (0.057)	-0.06*** (0.022)
Political Interest (0-3)	0.39*** (0.119)	0.09** (0.045)	0.23*** (0.069)	0.12*** (0.033)
Constant	-4.55*** (0.757)	-1.82*** (0.313)	-1.52*** (0.355)	-1.87*** (0.192)
Observations	1,773	2,514	2,100	6,387
Adj. R-squared	0.08	0.06	0.08	0.06

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

Note: Table reports unstandardized log-odd coefficients from logistic regression models. Standard errors are in parentheses.

Fixed-effects models, however, allow me to evaluate the relationship between changes in media exposure with changes in the propensity to use incivility, eliminating many spurious associations. The lack of within-group variation for a portion of panel respondents results in those units being dropped from the analysis, and consistency across waves was common; in the fixed-effects models, the number of observations decreases to 2,052 and the number of groups to 752. While this is a smaller sample, the analysis is focused on individuals who underwent some “change” between waves in the variables included in the model, and on how changes in exposure to uncivil news affects use of incivility in political talk. Additionally, I do not find any evidence of this biasing the effects in any way; given that those who remained consistently unexposed to uncivil partisan media had the lowest levels of incivility, and those who were consistently exposed to incivility had the highest rate, the removal of stable cases should underestimate the effect of exposure, if there is any bias at all.

Included in the first fixed-effects model testing the impact of general uncivil media are the dichotomous measures of exposure to *uncivil pundit cable news*, *uncivil talk radio*, and *uncivil talk shows*, as well as measures of exposure to *civil talk shows*, *civil cable news*, *civil network news*, *satirical news*, *National Public Radio*, and *entertainment programs*. As noted, time-invariant demographics (gender, age, and education) do not need to be controlled for in the fixed-effects models.⁶⁶ The NAES, however, asked respondents about their partisan and ideological orientations to politics in each wave, which results in varying identifications over time. As the strength of partisan

⁶⁶ Additionally, including these variables interacted with the waves has little impact on the size and direction of the other coefficients in the model, although some of the significance of the wave variables is sapped. None of the demographic interactions were close to significance.

and ideological orientations impact media habits and opinion change (i.e., Zaller 1992), I include both party identification and ideology in the models.

To control for the differences in the levels of incivility in political media at different points in the election season, as well as reduced interest in the election and politics among the electorate during the wave 2 and 5 periods, I include dummy variables for both of these waves in the model,^{67 68} a technique that can efficiently control for a number of time-varying influences (Dilliplane, Goldman, and Mutz 2012). Because the fixed-effects models analyze only within-group variation, it is unnecessary to make a distinction between when in the wave each interview was conducted. As political interest, which likely varies throughout the campaign, was not continuously gauged throughout the waves, I interact the measure taken before the first wave of interviews began with the waves.⁶⁹

The results of the first fixed-effects model supply strong support for my first hypothesis. Column 1 of Table 4-2 shows the effects of changes in the various types of media exposure, along with party identification, ideology, and controls for waves 2 and 5 on the use of incivility. Both exposure to *uncivil pundit cable news* and *uncivil talk radio* had a significant positive effect on the propensity to utilize incivility. None of the other media variables in the model were close to significance, including, notably, exposure to *uncivil talk shows*. This is not especially surprising—despite the fact that programs like

⁶⁷ Dummy variables for the two waves allow me to gauge the impact of the particular time periods. Wave 4 is left as the baseline wave to avoid collinearity. Including dummies for any two of the three waves has no impact on the other coefficients in the model.

⁶⁸ Additionally, as the strength of partisan identification has been found to fluctuate in response to campaign events (i.e., Gerber, Huber, and Washington 2010; Allsop and Weisburg 1988) the time-varying measures of partisan and ideological orientations may capture the effects of campaigns on attitudes and behavior.

⁶⁹ This measure will essentially gauge how interest in politics before campaign season, likely reflecting “true” interest in politics uninfluenced by the campaign, affected the propensity to use incivility as election season wore on.

The View and *Fox & Friends* feature uncivil partisan displays, both shows are likely best qualified as “soft news” which feature significant amount of apolitical information (see discussion in A1 4-2 Appendix 1), and have been found to have a limited impact on political knowledge (Prior 2003). This idea is supported by the data, in that the size, direction, and significance of the “uncivil” talk show coefficient are very similar to that of “civil” talk shows.

Additionally, *civil cable news*, *NPR*, and *satirical news* exposure were insignificant. While people who watch these programs might use incivility (as reflected in the cross-sectional analysis), changes in exposure do not have an effect on individuals’ propensity to do so. This reflects the fact the civil cable news programs included in the analysis, while partisan at times, feature substantially less emotionality and “example” uncivil behavior to mimic.

Changes in exposure to civil network news and entertainment programs did not have any impact on the use of incivility. The insignificance of network news (as well as NPR) suggests that becoming exposed to more traditional journalism does not induce more civil political talk—although this finding deserves additional analysis. The insignificance of entertainment exposure is not surprising—although it is unclear how this relates to Prior’s (2007) thesis that entertainment viewing is attached to reduced interest in politics.

Table 4-2: Effects of Changes in Uncivil Media Exposure on Use of Incivility

Variables	Column 1	Column 2
Uncivil Pundit News	0.55*** (0.197)	--
Uncivil Talk Radio	0.36* (0.230)	--
Uncivil Talk Show	-0.12 (0.197)	--
Civil Talk Show	-0.27 (0.207)	--
Civil Cable News	-0.08 (0.180)	--
Civil Network News	-0.16 (0.183)	--
Like-minded Uncivil Pundit News	--	0.48*** (0.184)
Disagreeable Uncivil Pundit News	--	0.07 (0.197)
Like-minded Civil Cable News	--	0.08 (0.200)
Disagreeable Civil Cable News	--	-0.23 (0.198)
Neutral Civil News	--	-0.18 (0.183)
Satirical News	0.08 (0.216)	0.10 (0.214)
National Public Radio	-0.12 (0.219)	-0.11 (0.217)
Entertainment Programs	0.07 (0.165)	0.09 (0.166)
Party Identification (7 categories)	-0.03 (0.079)	-0.06 (0.087)
Ideology (7 categories,	0.00 (0.031)	0.00 (0.031)
Political Interest*Wave	0.03* (0.018)	0.03* (0.018)
Wave 2	-0.96*** (0.127)	-0.97*** (0.127)
Wave 5	-0.41*** (0.116)	-0.42*** (0.115)
Observations	2,052	2,052
Groups	752	752

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

Note: Coefficients are unstandardized log odds ratios from logistic fixed effects models, reflecting intra-group impact of change on use of incivility (0-1). Standard errors are in parentheses.

Although campaign effects have been found to influence partisanship, and in turn political behavior and attitudes (Gerber, Huber, and Washington 2010), changes in political orientation did not affect the propensity to use incivility. However, both of the dichotomous wave variables were significant, indicating that respondents were less likely to utilize incivility in waves 2 and 5 compared to wave 4, which took place during the heart of election season. Also significant was the political interest-wave interaction, which had a positive effect on the use of incivility, indicating that having an interest in politics early in the election year influenced the propensity to use incivility as the campaign wore on.

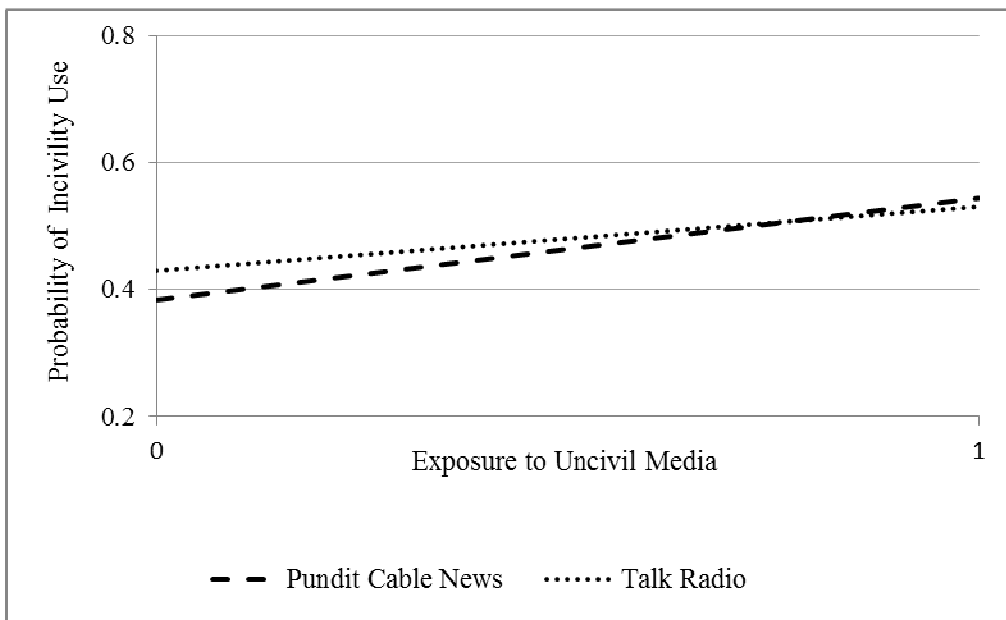
The positive, significant relationships of *uncivil pundit news* and *talk radio* with the use of incivility, and the insignificance of the other media variables, provide support for my first hypothesis. However, it is useful to understand how large an impact a change in exposure to both has on uncivil talk. To interpret the substantive significance of the fixed-effects coefficients, I calculated the predicted probabilities⁷⁰ of using incivility when a change in exposure to uncivil pundit cable news, talk radio, or both took place.

Figure 4-1 displays these changes in graphic form. With exposure to uncivil pundit news, the probability of using incivility increases from about 39 percent to a probability of 53 percent—a change of 14 percentage points. For talk radio, the probability of using incivility increased by 8 percentage points, moving from about 43 percent with no exposure, to 51 percent with exposure. It follows that a change in exposure to both of these types of programs should impact incivility even more.

⁷⁰ I calculate the predicted probabilities using the observed value approach (Hanmer and Kalkan 2013), which involves holding each of the other independent variables at the observed values for each case in the sample, calculating the relevant predicted probabilities for each case, and then averaging over all of the cases.

Displayed in Figure 4-2 is the effect that a change in exposure to both talk radio and uncivil pundit cable news has on incivility use. The effect of this change is indeed quite large, with the probability of using incivility increasing from about 38 percent with no exposure to over 59 percent with exposure. This is a difference of over 20 percentage points, and represents a 53 percent increase in the use of incivility.

Figure 4-1: Effects of Change in Uncivil Pundit News and Talk Radio Exposure on Probability of Using Incivility.



Note: Probabilities reflect intra-group change in the propensity to utilize incivility with exposure to pundit cable news and talk radio (separately).

These effects are significant for a number of reasons. First of all, media effects are notably hard to detect, even with samples significantly larger than the one used in this analysis (Zaller 2002). A larger sample might reveal even larger effects. Furthermore, time-variant exposure to other sources of political incivility—most obviously via the Internet and interpersonal discussions—are not possible to control for with this data, so there may be cases where those who are deemed “incivility” free were being exposed to incivility. Additionally, programs deemed “civil” were not completely devoid of

incivility, meaning exposure to some of these programs could have impacted the propensity to use incivility without exposure to the uncivil programs. Such exposure is still likely to affect the likelihood of using incivility, and a more precise, continuous measure of incivility in media might illustrate an even stronger relationship between uncivil media exposure and use of incivility; the same thing might be said for the levels of incivility in respondents' verbatim comments.

Moreover, the measure of media exposure is accurate but conservative, in that it cannot take into account the effect that the *amount* of exposure has on the use of incivility (Dilliplane et al. 2013)—recent exposure could mean once or twice within the last month, or nightly exposure. On top of all of this, if we assume it is mostly strongly partisan, politically aware people who self-select in uncivil partisan media exposure,⁷¹ the size of the change in probability is even more impressive—given that they are the least likely to have their political attitudes influenced by change-inducing political messages, even when the message is congenial (Zaller 1992, 127-128). What these changes in probability of using incivility reflect is a strong connection between exposure to uncivil political media and the use of incivility.

One question is why talk radio seems to have a smaller impact than pundit news. The small amount of within-person change in talk radio exposure likely makes it difficult to detect the effect--only 18 percent of respondents included in the fixed-effects models (and just 15 percent in the entire subsample) underwent a change in exposure to talk radio throughout the three waves. The measurement of exposure time may be too imprecise (for example, perhaps many talk radio listeners only have brief exposure during a

⁷¹ The descriptive statistics included in Table A2 4-5 in Appendix 2 show that uncivil political media users tend to be more partisan and ideological than non-users, and are overall more politically active, as measured by political interest, campaign contributions, and participation in the 2006 midterm election.

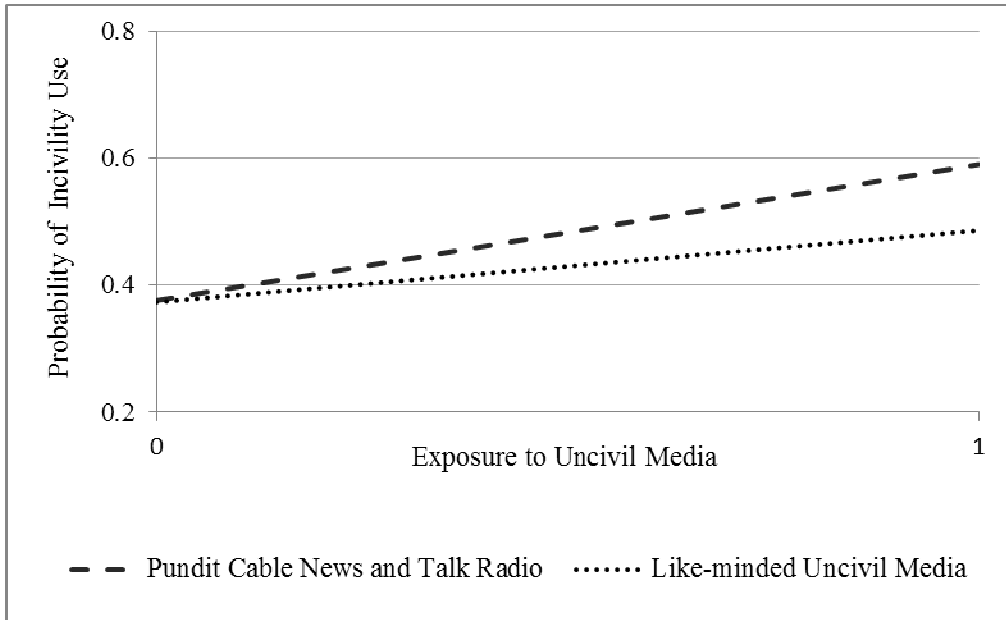
commute), and something may be said for the visual stimuli that are a part of uncivil political television in inducing uncivil reactions (Mutz and Reeves 2005). A larger sample with more precise measurement of exposure might detect a larger effect.

As my second hypothesis states, it should only be exposure to like-minded uncivil political media which affects the likelihood of using incivility, as individuals should select into uncivil media which reinforces preexisting views. Furthermore, a change in exposure to civil like-minded incivility should not have an impact. To test this hypothesis, I estimated the effect that changes in exposure to *uncivil like-minded media*, *uncivil disagreeable media*, *civil like-minded media*, *civil disagreeable media*, and *civil neutral media* all had on the propensity to use incivility. Exposure to *satirical news*, *National Public Radio*,⁷² and *entertainment programs* were also included in this model, as were the time-varying political orientation measures, wave dummies, and political interest interacted with the waves.

Column 2 of Table 4-2 displays the results. Exposure to *like-minded uncivil political media* was the only media measure to reach statistical significance, indicating that becoming exposed to uncivil media congenial to one's partisan identification had a positive effect. This confirms the hypothesis that it is self-exposure to like-minded uncivil political media which influences the use of incivility. The wave dummies were again significant, indicating that early in the campaign season (wave 2) and the post-election period (wave 5) the propensity to use incivility was lower. The coefficient on political interest interacted with the waves was also again significant and positive.

⁷² Including NPR exposure as civil like-minded news for liberals has little effect on the model.

Figure 4-2: Effect of Change in General Uncivil Media Exposure and Like-minded Uncivil Media Exposure on Probability of Using Incivility



Note: Probabilities reflect intra-group change in the propensity to utilize incivility with exposure to general uncivil political media (pundit cable news and political talk radio) and like-minded uncivil media (uncivil media that expresses views in accordance with an individual’s partisanship).

A change in exposure to “civil” like-minded media was not significant at conventional levels, suggesting that reinforcement of preexisting views alone does not lead to a greater propensity to use incivility. This is despite the fact that even the partisan media qualified as “civil” included some incivility by my measures—some more than others. Yet less uncivil behavior to mimic—in both scope and volume—makes exposure to these like-minded “civil” programs less potent in producing incivility as the like-minded uncivil media. Furthermore, it is worth noting that few pundit-themed programs—where the program’s host offers opinion—qualified as “civil” under my measures. It is likely, as previous studies suggest, that the emotionality of political punditry is particularly effective in influencing the opinions and behavior of audiences. As in comedy, the *delivery* of the message matters.

As it is unlikely that individuals choose to be exposed to media that promote views that conflict with their opinions and induce discomfort, the insignificance of a change in exposure to *uncivil disagreeable pundit news* make sense; another context, in which individuals are involuntarily exposed to uncivil attacks on their “side” could provide insight into how individuals react to uncivil political messages about their in-group. As expected, neither, *disagreeable civil cable news* nor *civil neutral news* had a significant effect on incivility use.

The change in the predicted probability of using incivility when becoming exposed to like-minded uncivil political news is shown in Figure 4-2. A change in exposure produces a 32 percent increase in the probability of using incivility, rising 12 percentage points from about 37 percent to about 49 percent. Again, in the context of impreciseness of the exposure measure, the difficulty in detecting media effects in smaller samples, and the consistency in attitudes among politically aware individuals, this change is large. These results provide significant support for the overarching “mob effect” hypothesis, as exposure to like-minded uncivil discourse does seem to spur the use of incivility. Hearing arguments which reinforce preexisting views and which also feature vitriol and vilifications of the out-group seems to affect the use of incivility by the audience. Whether this effect is due to emotional stimulation, mimicry, or both, cannot be determined with this analysis, but previous research suggests both likely occur. I will turn to this issue myself in the chapters to come.

In sum, a change in exposure to uncivil political media increases the probability that a person will use incivility. This occurs, however, only with exposure to like-minded uncivil media. The changes in probability—ranging from 8 to 21 percentage points—are

conservative, to the extent that measures of exposure and levels of incivility are imprecise. Yet these increases can result in significantly higher levels of incivility in political conversations and interactions. Assuming a larger sample and more precise measurements might detect even larger effects, it is clear that exposure to uncivil political media can affect the tone of political talk en masse.

Discussion

The nature of the political programming of the “new media” era, designed to be hyperbolic and intense, and to emphasize conflict and disagreement, allow various shows to compete for ratings in a disaggregated and competitive media market. Such programs aim to stir the emotions of members of their audiences, who tune in in order to receive news and commentary that align with preexisting political views, to maximize the chance that viewers stay tuned and return again to the show. However, the uncivil elements used to do this have effects on the way those exposed talk politics, and the mass interaction capabilities that have come with “Web 2.0” adds significance to how people talk politics. Incivility, as this analysis shows, breeds more incivility. The differences in the use of incivility between when one is exposed to uncivil political media and when one is not are enough to alter the tone of political discourse en masse; if the individuals who experienced a “change” in exposure to uncivil news had avoided these types of media, then any type of political discussion they engaged in would have featured significantly less incivility, resulting in a multitude of political conversations that were more civil, conciliatory, and deliberate.

A divided public utilizing incivility will have negative repercussions for both public and elite deliberation: if smooth interactions are necessary for any benefits to be

derived from political discourse, and if fruitful negotiations among elites require some openness to alternative views among the public, then exposure to uncivil political media does a great disservice to the democratic process. Given the supposition that incivility hinders the pro-deliberative attitudes, polarization is ultimately reinforced and the quality of policy is reduced.

In this chapter, I hypothesized that exposure to uncivil political media induces individuals to utilize incivility when given the chance to offer political opinions. I also hypothesized that it is only like-minded uncivil media exposure which induces the use of incivility, and not disagreeable uncivil media or like-minded “civil” media. To test these hypotheses, I designed an index that included four criteria of incivility, and identified open-ended responses from a 2008 panel data set that included one or more of these criteria. Measuring the effect of within-group changes in media use on within-group changes in the use of incivility, I find support for both hypotheses. That selective exposure to like-minded media results in a greater propensity to use incivility provides support for the “mob effect” hypothesis.

This analysis has some limitations. First and foremost is the question of how much of the change in the propensity to use incivility that exposure alone accounts for. Certainly, most people will not tune into uncivil political media if it does not appeal to their political sensibilities. But, as previous studies of media effects have shown, exposure to uncivil political media can affect attitudes and behavior, including reinforcing and intensifying preexisting views, and framing arguments and issues of concern. Uncivil messages delivered by trusted elites grant them legitimacy, and recent exposure to such makes them readily available for recollection and reuse. All the same,

while fixed-effects methods used are uniquely effective in controlling for spuriousness, it cannot be ruled out that most or all of the impact comes from the stimulation of uncivil “attitudes” by another source, and the resulting change in exposure to uncivil media is largely endogenous to the use of incivility in political opinions.⁷³

Relatedly, this analysis does not take into account the effect that interpersonal political conversations and interactions have on use of incivility—where the “retaliation effect” might be expected to occur. Exposure to (like-minded) uncivil political programming may be a catalyst for a chain reaction of uncivil discourse among the general population, where incivility by some induces others to join in or retaliate in the same uncivil fashion. Furthermore, if use of incivility is indeed impacted by uncivil media, this analysis is unable to determine whether exposure simply legitimizes and increases the salience of uncivil talk, thus leading those exposed to mimic this behavior, or if the use of incivility by those exposed are true emotional reactions—or some combination of both. In the next chapter, I turn to experimental methods to better understand how emotions and interpersonal communication affect the propensity to use incivility.

⁷³ Note, however, that the election does not seem to have influenced viewership of uncivil media. Virtually the same percentage of Republicans (just under 60 percent) and Democrats (just under 40 percent) tuned in to uncivil political media in each wave. This is not to say that feelings about the candidates, the election, and politics did not change with the events of the election—but the election did not appear to systematically affect mass viewing habits.

Chapter 5: Emotional and Behavioral Reactions to Incivility Online

Social media has changed political communication. Historically, it has been a top-down process, with media and political elites disseminating political messages to the public. The interactive elements of Web 2.0 have transformed political communication into a horizontal process, where members of the public can communicate with and influence each other. This development has led scholars to consider the potential possibility of a digital public sphere (Dahlgren 2005; Dahlberg 2001), where the mass public can deliberate on policy and politics from the comforts of the living room.

Indeed, the “infrastructure” for a digital public sphere is sufficient. The various social media platforms through which people can broadcast their political opinions (the comments section under online news articles, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) all provide opportunities for non-elites to interact with mass audiences of complete strangers. These same interactive elements allow everyday people to not only disseminate political information, but to affect the political attitudes and behavior of others. The anonymity and limited constraints on expression that online communication provides results in considerably more uncivil behavior than in face-to-face interactions (Borah 2013; Papacharissi 2002). Limited social cues and a sense that there are no repercussions for one’s behavior means people feel far less restricted in interpersonal communication.

In this chapter, I argue that the presence of incivility in online political expressions by members of the mass public can induce negative emotions and anti-deliberative attitudes. Even if most Americans are merely in the audience of discussions

rather than active speakers in digital political discussions, the ubiquity of incivility in online political discussions can lead to a more anti-deliberative public.

Scholars estimate that the presence of incivility in online political commentary is widespread and common (Sobieraj and Berry 2010; Borah 2013), and experimental studies on incivility in the blogosphere show that exposure to uncivil commentary induces certain attitudinal responses. Borah (2013) and Thorson et al. (2010) find that people view political blog commentary featuring incivility as less credible than civil commentary, and that the perceived credibility of objective news stories is boosted when they are juxtaposed to partisan uncivil blog posts. Borah argues that the uncivil manipulations increase perceptions of hostility, and finds that the presence of incivility in blog posts also reduces political trust and efficacy. These studies establish the power of uncivil political messages in online settings to affect information processing.

In this chapter, I address how exposure to uncivil talk affects people's willingness to use incivility and deliberate, as well as the role that emotions and affective ties play in this dynamic. I employ an experiment in which exposure to an uncivil post on a message board is manipulated, to test a series of questions:

1. Do general feelings of anger increase with exposure to uncivil treatments?
2. What role do affective ties (that is, partisan-based allegiance) to the target of uncivil attacks play in determining people's reactions?
3. Do reprimands of incivility perpetrators increase with exposure to uncivil treatments when the message is disagreeable, and are reprimands induced by feelings of anger directed at the uncivil "perpetrator"?

4. Does the use of incivility increase with exposure to uncivil treatments, and is use of incivility induced by feelings of anger?
5. When the uncivil message is like-minded, is there evidence of anger directed at the target of uncivil comments?
6. Does the potential for deliberation decrease among those angered by the message?

The experiment reveals that the uncivil versions of the post, which attack a policy proposal made by President Obama, lead to increased feelings of aversion and decreased deliberative attitudes among Democrats (exposed to “disagreeable incivility”), while inducing Republicans (exposed to “like-minded incivility”) to increase their use of incivility in their own posts.

Incivility and Deliberative Potential

I have argued that incivility affects the way that individuals process political information, as well as their willingness to engage in deliberation. To the extent that incivility can induce anger and aversion, it will reduce consideration of alternative viewpoints (MacKuen et al. 2010). Additionally, exposure to uncivil political discourse may reduce satisfaction with political discourse more generally. Stromer-Galley and Muhlberger (2009), using an online deliberative experiment, find that higher satisfaction with deliberative exercises increases the motivation to engage in deliberation in the future. Moreover, satisfaction increases the perceived legitimacy of decisions made through deliberation. Dissatisfaction with deliberation is not boosted by the amount of disagreement that occurs; those who report significant disagreement in their political discussions may still find their deliberative experience satisfying and believe that

collective decisions are legitimate. This suggests that another factor—which I contend is the presence of incivility in discourse—is responsible for reducing deliberative potential.

I expect that exposure to incivility can reduce deliberative potential by affecting people's attitude towards deliberation in both of these ways. If a political message angers individuals, I expect that they will act more as “partisan combatants” than they will “deliberative citizens.” If what people see and hear in political discussions largely offends them, it is likely they will be dissatisfied with the discussion. I predict that dissatisfied participants should be less likely to consider alternative views and to want to engage in future deliberative exercises.

Main Hypotheses

MacKuen et al. (2010) find that individuals who experience aversion are less willing to compromise in political debates, retreat to prior attitudes, and limit information searches to sources that reinforce these attitudes. Substantial research links incivility to negative political emotions, but not to feelings of aversion specifically. My goal is to make the connection between exposure to incivility, feelings of aversion, and anti-deliberative attitudes. My overarching hypothesis is that exposure to online incivility will lead to reduced deliberative attitudes and more anti-deliberative behavior.

H1. The presence of political incivility in online interactive settings will induce anti-deliberative attitudes and behavior

To test this overarching hypothesis, I will test the following hypotheses:

H1A. The presence of political incivility in online interactive settings will induce anger

H1B. The presence of political incivility in online interactive settings will induce incivility use and critiques of the messenger

H1C. Those angered by the presence of political incivility in online interactive settings will have lower deliberative potential

As Sobieraj and Berry (2011) argue, in text-based communication, “the deliberate use of uppercase letters, multiple exclamation points, enlarged text, and so on” constitutes “shouting,” and are emotional, common forms of incivility in online political discussions. As emotional displays, these tactics communicate an idea to the reader: the poster really believes in what he is saying. The content of the message is not just uncivil, but the way the message is delivered is uncivil as well. I expect that histrionic, emotionally-charged incivility will be particularly effective in inducing anger, incivility, and critiques of the messenger. The reason for the stronger effect is the addition of displays of emotion, in the form of capitalized words and multiple exclamation points.

H1D. Emotionally-strident incivility is particularly effective in inducing anger, use of incivility, and critiques of the messenger

A nuanced understanding of the effect that incivility has on deliberative attitudes requires that a distinction be made between exposure to disagreeable incivility and like-minded incivility. In the following, I outline my hypotheses in regards to how those exposed to either “type” of incivility should react.

The Retaliation Effect: Disagreeable Incivility and Perpetrator Aversion

The “retaliation effect” assumes that when an individual is exposed to disagreeable incivility—or incivility which targets her or her in-group—she will likely be offended. Sociological research on “everyday” incivility shows that the most common emotional reaction among those offended by incivility is anger. This “anger” is directed

at a specific target: the perpetrator of incivility and his or her actions. I refer to this phenomenon as “perpetrator aversion.”

The uncivil behavior of one person can affect how those exposed to this behavior engage in subsequent interpersonal interactions. Individuals angered by incivility directed at them or their in-group often respond by *retaliating* and *sanctioning* the perpetrator of incivility (Phillips and Smith 2004; Smith et al. 2010). *Retaliation* refers to instances when offended individuals “return the favor,” and act in an uncivil manner towards the person who was uncivil to them. If *retaliation* occurs, this means more uncivil behavior—potentially reducing the chances of any deliberative behavior and further escalating unpleasant situations.

Sanctions involve critiquing or reprimanding the uncivil perpetrator out of anger; they are substantively different from providing a negative evaluation of an argument or comment, because they represent feelings that a comment is not just factually wrong, but ethically wrong.⁷⁴ In political discourse, this means that sanctions can potentially shift the discussion away from the topic at hand to that of the personal characteristics of the messenger. Sanctions can therefore lay the foundation for a discussion that is less about a particular topic and more about the traits and behavior of the people discussing the topic.

As Phillips and Smith (2004) argue:

From the Durkheimian perspective incivility is a breach of the normative order that rends the fabric of the collective conscience. It generates powerful primary emotions such as anger and outrage. These lead in turn to interventions in the

⁷⁴ Confronting individuals about the errors in their behavior and thinking could theoretically be helpful for deliberation—for one, this lets individuals know that their behavior is unacceptable, allowing them to correct their behavior. But it is not guaranteed that sanctions point out the misdeeds of an uncivil perpetrator; the responses can be restitutive, critiquing the perpetrator generally without focusing on his or her use of incivility. For instance, if you tell me that the capital of Kansas is Wichita, I would disagree with you and tell you the correct answer is Topeka. However, if you tell me that the capital of Kansas is Wichita and that I am an idiot if I think otherwise, I am likely to tell you that I think there is something wrong with you.

form of negative sanctions which, no matter how graduated in intensity, at some level express disapproval and exact a restitutive vengeance.

While Philips and Smith are referring to uncivil behavior in face-to-face interactions, there is evidence of these same types of behavioral reactions occurring on the online world, when individuals are uncivil in online forums (Papacharissi 2004; Lee 2005)

If exposure to disagreeable incivility in online political communication does induce perpetrator aversion, I expect that there will be higher levels of anger, increased propensity to use incivility in political opinions, and more sanctions of uncivil perpetrators among those exposed.

H2: Exposure to disagreeable incivility will induce “perpetrator aversion” in which anger, use of incivility, and critiques of the uncivil perpetrator will all increase

Self-reported feelings of anger are one way I can measure whether perpetrator aversion occurs with exposure to disagreeable incivility. Another way is to look at reprimands of the messenger. Critiques of uncivil perpetrators clearly reflect feelings of aversion (you do not critique behavior that you think is acceptable), and should also indicate reduced deliberative potential. I hypothesize that both self-reports of anger and the reprimanding of an uncivil perpetrator should be associated with a decreased willingness to deliberate.

H3: Perpetrator Aversion, as measured by self-reports of anger and reprimands of a messenger, will be associated with reduced consideration of disagreeable messages and satisfaction with discourse

Like-minded Incivility

When people adopt incivility following exposure to a like-minded (or “agreeable”) uncivil political statement, I call this the “mob effect.” Evidence presented

in the previous chapter suggests a “mob effect” exists. What is not clear is if the “mob effect” is the result of negative emotions. When individuals use incivility when they are exposed to uncivil attacks on the “other side,” is this a result of an emotional reaction, in which they become angered upon being “reminded” how bad the other side is (“target aversion”)? Or is it simply a mimicking effect, whereby witnessing like-minded individuals utilize incivility legitimizes and inspires others to adopt uncivil language, without a change in anger? I will briefly overview the theoretical argument for both cases here.

A number of studies look at the “sorting” phenomenon of the Internet age, in which people cocoon themselves into like-minded echo chambers which reinforce their preexisting views (Prior 2009; Sunstein 2009; Jamieson and Capella 2009; Stroud 2008, 2010). Sunstein (2009), reflecting on the pervasive practice of political-oriented Internet sites providing links to other like-minded sites, writes, “[o]ne of the most striking facts here is that when links to opposing sites are provided, it is often to show how dumb, dangerous, or contemptible the views of the adversary really are.” Hearing these arguments may not only reinforce the beliefs you hold, but also reinforce your contempt for the other side by hearing how “bad” they and their actions are. Uncivil rhetoric is very effective in sending this point home. Individuals agree with the commentary of the perpetrator and become “riled” up in anger. For instance, a conservative Republican who tunes into Rush Limbaugh and hears about all the bad things Barack Obama is up to may become genuinely angry with Obama—the target of Limbaugh’s incivility.

Thus, I believe that another type of “anger” may play a role in affecting the dynamics of political discussions, induced through exposure to like-minded incivility.

This anger is not directed at the perpetrator of incivility, but rather the target of the perpetrator's comments. I refer to this phenomenon as "target aversion." My third hypothesis provides a test of the "target aversion" effect:

H4A: Exposure to disagreeable incivility will induce "target aversion," in which anger and use of incivility will increase

One of the factors driving "cocooning," however, is that it is cognitively pleasing for people to hear arguments that reinforce preexisting views and denounce views opposed to their own. A conservative Republican tunes into Rush Limbaugh because he knows that Obama and the Democrats are bad, and hearing Limbaugh reinforce these views is cognitively pleasing. This person may still increase his use of incivility because incivility has been legitimized—that is, a like-minded commenter has made uncivil remarks about Obama, so it must be okay (or even necessary) to repeat these claims. It is unclear if those who identify with the target of an uncivil claim and adopt incivility into their own comments are driven to do this by anger with the perpetrator, or are merely mimicking (or "recycling") language that has been entered into a conversation's lexicon. I pose an alternative hypothesis to H4A:

H4B: Exposure to disagreeable incivility will increase use of incivility but not feelings of anger

If exposure to like-minded incivility does induce anger, this anger should not be directed at the messenger. Instead, it should be directed at the target of an uncivil claim and whatever "bad" activities they are doing. For example, if conservative Republicans become angry while listening to Rush Limbaugh bash Barack Obama, their anger is probably directed at Obama, and not Limbaugh or his comments. They are not averse to

Limbaugh or Limbaugh's behavior, but they are to Obama and his behavior. Affective intelligence theory suggests that when people are averse to political information, they close their minds and adopt anti-deliberative outlooks; however, because individuals exposed to like-minded incivility agree with the message, I do not expect them to become more anti-deliberative—at least for as long as the messages remain congenial. This is a critical distinction—the measurements of willingness to deliberate that I present in this chapter all revolve around feelings towards a particular political message. Exposure to like-minded incivility will therefore not lead to less deliberation.⁷⁵

Study Design

To test these hypotheses, I designed an experiment where three groups would each be exposed to a political post on an online message board. I created three non-credit online workshops, each of which featured a message board containing a different version of the post⁷⁶—one for a control group, and one for each of two experimental groups. The only element that varied between the posts on each message board was the presence of incivility. In the control group, the message took on a civil negative tone, but lacked incivility. I added uncivil elements to the messages shown to the two experimental groups, one of which also featured histrionic elements. I randomly chose⁷⁷ Democrats to be exposed to a disagreeable message, with Republicans exposed to a like-minded

⁷⁵ However, the tolerance for opposing views should be reduced among those exposed to like-minded incivility—I will explore the connection between like-minded incivility and reduced tolerance for opposing views in the next chapter.

⁷⁶ The message boards were generated through platforms designed by the Enterprise Learning Management System (ELMS) Blackboard Academic Suite. Using the ELMS platforms was advantageous for this study in that I could have complete control over who had access to the message board and what information could be seen by subjects.

⁷⁷ I flipped a coin to decide which group would be exposed to disagreeable incivility.

message; I expect the content of the message to appeal less to individuals whom identify with the Democratic Party than to those who identify with the Republican Party.

The study population consisted of undergraduate and some graduate students of at least 18 years of age, enrolled at the University of Maryland. I recruited participants from class rosters of online summer courses (from all disciplines and all majors).^{78 79} I explained to subjects that they were testing ways to incorporate the use of “new media” into online classes, by partaking in a “trial run” of an inter-class message board program run by the university called “No Obstacles Limit Terps,”⁸⁰ or “NOLT.” The instructions I sent to them explained that the purpose of NOLT was to forge campus-wide conversations about issues of national importance, and that each person would be given a chance to put in his or her two cents in a predetermined, random order. The instructions also told subjects that their participation would involve making a pair of posts on the message board, *one of which had to be in response to a previous post*. Afterwards, they would be asked to provide some brief feedback about their experience with the message board.

After agreeing to participate, I randomly assigned 138 subjects to one of three “workshops” (subjects did not know of the workshops other than the one they were assigned to, and could not see who else was in the workshop with them). At this time I asked them to complete a pretest questionnaire within the next 48 hours. Through this survey I was able to gather demographic information—including partisan identification.

⁷⁸ I recruited from online courses to ensure participants had access to and were familiar with the ELMS platform, as well as to minimize the chances that subjects would discuss the experiment with each other.

⁷⁹ Students were recruited through an email listserv created by the University of Maryland’s Registrar office for the purpose of this study. Students were offered a \$5 electronic gift card in exchange for their participation in a “trial run” of a new university communication program. After completing the “trial” in full, redemption codes for the e-cards were emailed to each participant.

⁸⁰ “Terps” is short for “Terrapins,” the mascot of the University of Maryland.

Table 5-1. Experimental Group and Control Group Post Content

<p>Control Group:</p> <p><i>Thread Title:</i> This policy is problematic</p> <p><i>Thread Content:</i> College is expensive, but this policy will likely have a negative impact on economic growth in the long run by adding more to the national debt. I think this proposal is probably a typical election year attempt at trying to mobilize support among undecided voters. The bottom line is that I'm skeptical of its ability to ease Americans' financial burdens, and I think it will probably be more helpful to president Obama in reaching out to young voters.</p>
<p>Experimental Group 1 (E1):</p> <p><i>Thread Title:</i> This policy is <u>ridiculously</u> problematic</p> <p><i>Thread Content:</i> College is expensive, but this policy will likely have a <u>disastrous</u> impact on economic growth in the long run by adding more to the national debt. I think this proposal is probably a <u>shameful</u> election year attempt <u>to trick</u> undecided voters <u>through lies</u>. The bottom line is that I'm skeptical of its ability to ease Americans' financial burdens, and I think it will probably be more helpful <u>as socialist propaganda for</u> president Obama in reaching out to <u>naïve</u> young voters.</p>
<p>Experimental Group 2 (E2):</p> <p><i>Thread Title:</i> This policy is <u>RIDICULOUSLY</u> problematic</p> <p><i>Thread Content:</i> College is expensive, but this policy will likely have a <u>disastrous</u> impact on economic growth in the long run by adding <u>MORE</u> to the national debt!!! I think this proposal is probably a <u>shameful</u> election year attempt <u>to trick</u> undecided voters <u>through lies</u>. The bottom line is that I'm skeptical of its ability to ease Americans' financial burdens, and I think it will probably be more helpful <u>as SOCIALIST propaganda for</u> president Obama in reaching out to <u>naïve</u> young voters.</p>

Following completion of the survey, I sent each participant an email explaining that he or she would be the second person to post on the board (subjects were unaware that the other participants were receiving the same exact message), and that they would

have another 48 hours to make their posts in response to an article made available to read in the workshop. After they made their posts, I instructed participants to complete a brief “feedback survey” about their NOLT “experience.”

The article I posted in the workshops was an edited version of an actual article published online by the media platform *GOOD*.⁸¹ The article concerns a policy proposal made by President Obama to help relieve student debt; I shortened the article from its original version and removed some temporal references (i.e., “end of the year”). Before I told participants it was their time to post on the message board, I added the first “post” (the experimental stimulus) to the discussion board, under a gender-neutral fake name. This post was the only post on the message board respondents were able to see, in addition to their own. Each of the three versions of this post can be seen in Table 5-1. The uncivil elements included in the experimental group message boards are underlined in the text of experimental group 1 (E1) and experimental group 2 (E2) in Table 2 (but did not appear underlined in the actual experiment). In the control group message board (CG), the post consisted of an argument that is negative of both Barack Obama and the student debt relief policy, but lacks any uncivil elements. The “poster” argues that the policy will have a negative impact on long-term economic conditions by adding to the national debt, and that Obama likely sees the policy as a way to mobilize young voters in an election year.

In the first experimental workshop (E1), I added some uncivil elements to this post, falling under criteria 1 and 2 of the incivility index, in an effort vilify and radicalize the policy and Obama. The post now describes the policy as not just having a negative

⁸¹ *GOOD* is essentially an online magazine. It can be viewed here: <http://www.good.is/everyone>. the article was published in October of 2011

impact on economic conditions, but likely to have a *disastrous* impact. No longer just attempting to mobilize young voters, the post characterizes Obama's behavior as a "shameful election year attempt to trick undecided voters through lies...[the policy] will probably be more helpful as socialist propaganda for president Obama in reaching out to naïve young voters."

The differences that exist between the E1 post and the post added to the experimental group 2 (E2) message board are four instances of histrionic incivility (Criterion 3 in my incivility index). Three words have been capitalized ("ridiculously," "more," and "socialist"), and three exclamation points were added to the end of a sentence. The use of words in all uppercase letters and multiple exclamation points have been identified as the digital equivalent to shouting (Sobieraj and Berry 2010). These elements make the E2 post a more histrionic, dramatic presentation of the uncivil claims included in the E1 post. As hypothesis H1D states, I expect the E2 stimulus to be more effective in inducing reactions than the E1 post.

Sample

Methodologists commonly claim that experiments whose samples are comprised of college students have weak external validity, as results cannot be generalized to larger populations (Sears 1986). An increasing amount of research, however, suggests that convenience samples (specifically student populations) are not necessarily problematic for external validity (Druckman and Kam 2011)⁸² if the sample does not differ from the type of people likely to encounter a stimulus in the "real world." My sample is made up

⁸² A Druckman and Kam (2011) argue, if the stimulus treatment effect is homogenous across the population, or if the use of a convenience sample means the experiment has high levels of "mundane realism"—defined by Aronson et al. (1985) as "the extent to which events occurring in the research setting are likely to occur in the normal course of the subjects' lives, that is, in the 'real world.'"

of mostly younger people, and consists of undergraduate students and some graduate students; since political social media users tend to be younger people with at least some college education,⁸³ my sample is appropriate for investigating the effect of incivility in online political discourse.

Of the original 138 recruited, 109 of the subjects completed the pretest survey by the deadline; the remaining participants were dropped from the study. This left 38 subjects in the control group, 34 subjects in the first experimental group, and 37 in the second experimental group. Of the 109 subjects who advanced to the message board stage, 92 completed the “post” assignment and the post-stimulus “feedback” survey.⁸⁴ Among those who completed the trial in full, 33 were in the control group, 30 in E1, and 29 in E2. The average age of my sample was about 23,⁸⁵ and 72 percent were female.⁸⁶ Around two-thirds of the sample identified as a strong, weak, or leaning Democrat, with the remaining third identifying as strong, weak, or leaning Republicans.⁸⁷ More details about the full sample and each group can be found in a table of means (Table A2 5-1) included in Appendix 2.

⁸³ The Pew Internet and American Life Project regularly asks national samples of Americans about their Internet use and their exposure to political content on the Internet. A November 2010 survey, conducted during the 2010 Midterm elections, asked 2,257 adults about what two media they relied upon the most to get information about the campaigns and elections. The survey found that, “[d]emographically, political social media users are younger and somewhat more educated than other internet users. Two in five (42%) are under the age of 30 (vs. 22% for the rest of the online population) and 41% have a college degree (34% of other internet users have graduated from college)” (Pew Research Center 2011).

⁸⁴ A total of 97 subjects completed the “post” assignment, but five of these subjects did not complete the post-stimulus feedback survey.

⁸⁵ The sample consisted of mostly upperclassmen (no freshmen, and only 12 percent of the sample were sophomores), as well as some graduate students. The inclusion of some graduate students produced a much larger age range (18-63) than is typical of student populations, and over 15 percent of the sample was aged 24 years or older.

⁸⁶ As shown below, there was no difference in reactions to the stimuli between males and females, so I do not believe the smaller amount of males in the sample to be problematic.

⁸⁷ Given that recent polling has found the State of Maryland to be the “most Democratic state” in terms of partisan identification, having a sample that is 33 percent Republican is a positive outcome. For more details on the breakdown of Maryland’s partisan identification, see this press Gallup release from February 2011: http://www.gallup.com/poll/146234/Number-Solidly-Democratic-States-Cut-Half.aspx?utm_source=alert&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=syndication&utm_content=plaintextlink&utm_term=Politics.

Methodology and Measures

As with the panel data analysis presented in the last chapter, a research assistant and I independently coded the open-ended responses for incivility. Posts that violated one or more of the four uncivil criteria included in the incivility index were coded as uncivil. We had the same answers for 90 percent of the responses, and a calculation of Krippendorff's alpha⁸⁸ indicates the measure is reliable.⁸⁹ When subjects' original post or response post contained incivility, they were coded as "1" in the uncivil measure. If they did not use incivility in either post, they were coded as "0."

To measure anger, I use an item from the post-stimulus "feedback" survey, which asked participants how angry the other posts they saw on the message board made them feel.⁹⁰ As a manipulation check, I also asked about fear—or how *afraid* the other posts made subjects feel—to ensure that the emotional reactions induced by the stimuli are limited to anger.⁹¹ The scale for both the "anger" and "fear" variables was 0-3, with 3 representing extreme fear or anger. I dichotomize the anger variable into "0" for reports of feeling no anger or a little angry, and "1" for feeling somewhat angry or extremely angry.⁹²

⁸⁸ Krippendorff's Alpha is a conservative estimate of intercoder reliability that measures the level of agreement between coders beyond that which can be ascribed to mere chance.

⁸⁹ The coefficient was 0.732, which is above the acceptable *alpha*.

⁹⁰ For the "anger" question, the options were "Extremely angry," "Somewhat angry," "A little angry," and "Not angry at all." For the "fear" question, the options were "Extremely afraid," "Somewhat afraid," "A little afraid," and "Not afraid at all."

⁹¹ In contrast to feelings of anger, when a message generates "fear" and "anxiety," it can induce openness to alternative viewpoints (Valentino et al. 2008; MacKuen et al. 2010). Thus, it is important to ensure the experimental stimuli did not generate feelings of fear.

⁹² Dichotomizing anger (and fear) in this way makes substantive and methodological sense. By collapsing the four ordinal categories into two—little or no anger versus some or more anger—interpretation of changes in anger with exposure to the stimuli, as well as the effect of anger on other measures, is made easier. Keeping the anger and fear measures to two categories also makes it possible to use parametric difference of means tests, such as the Tukey WSD method. Nonparametric means tests, such as the Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon method and the Kruskal-Wallis test, do not all for comparison procedures between more than two groups.

Relying on individual reports of anger is one way to measure aversive emotional reactions to the stimuli. Another is to look at *how* subjects reacted in their posts. An established anger-induced reaction to incivility is the sanctioning or reprimanding of an uncivil perpetrator (the “original poster,” referred to as the “OP” henceforth). In some ways, this may be a more accurate measure of feelings of aversion than self-reports of anger. Rather than declaring that they are angry, those who reprimand the OP are demonstrating aversion to the OP and his post.

My objective was to identify posts in which a subject’s response was not completely focused on the argument put forth by the OP or the larger topic at hand, but posts in which specific personal qualities, behavior, and traits of the OP were negatively assessed. For example, two subjects made the following statements in response to the OP. The first was made by a subject in the control group, and the second by a subject in EG 1.

- (1) I disagree with you. In fact I think this policy would have the opposite effect. By easing the burden of loans and debt it would allow more Americans to have degrees increasing America's productivity as well as allowing those with degrees to not go under financially. Had this policy been implemented earlier we might have been able to avoid some of the housing foreclosure crisis. People would have naturally had more money to pay mortgages.

- (2) I can't see to well over there is that Mitt Romney??? I know we have freedom of speech but, try not to slander the president, he is still the president. He is not trying to trick young voters, he isn't lying and its (sic) not propoganda. What is propoganda is what you said, for the other camp. You took an issue that was proposed by one side slanted it to look bad for one side and then promoted it. Basic definition of propoganda. Let's try and focus on the issue?

In the first case, the responder expresses disagreement with the OP, and puts forth a substantive defense of the policy. In the latter case, the OP’s behavior becomes the topic of discussion, and is assessed in a negative light. The responder suggests that the OP is

slandering the president, slanting an issue, spreading propaganda, and not focusing on the issues (while also utilizing incivility). In this response, no substantive discussion of the proposal takes place. I expect these sorts of critiques, aimed at the OP himself, to increase with exposure to incivility. In identifying critiques, my research assistant and I were in agreement 95 percent of the time, producing a Krippendorff's Alpha of about 0.81, which suggests the measure is reliable.

I also consider how willing those who use incivility or reprimand the OP are to deliberate. If both these reactions are anger induced, then I expect that the potential to engage in deliberation should be reduced. To measure the potential to deliberate, I recreate measures used in previous studies to capture deliberation. As Stromer-Galley and Muhlberger (2009) find that satisfaction with policy discussions determines how willing people are to deliberate in future discussions, one way to measure deliberative potential is to measure satisfaction with policy talk. Additionally, MacKuen et al. (2010) measure the amount of consideration given to opposing viewpoints⁹³ to determine how deliberative people are being. I created a deliberative potential measure, using two questions from the post-stimulus "feedback" survey, which asked participants how satisfied they were with the points expressed in the "other posts" they saw on the message board, and how much consideration they gave to the other posts.⁹⁴ The scale of the deliberative potential measure ranges from 0-6, with 6 indicating high potential. To borrow from the language of MacKuen et al. (2010), an individual with a score of 6 on

⁹³ To measure consideration of opposing viewpoints in a web-based experiment, MacKuen et al. (2010) look at the number of Internet pages subjects visited that professed a view opposed to subjects' preexisting ones. My measure of consideration is slightly different, as I ask subjects directly how much consideration they gave to the views expressed on the message board.

⁹⁴ For the "satisfaction" question, the options were "Very satisfied," "Somewhat satisfied," "A little satisfied," and "Not satisfied at all." For the "consideration" question, the options were "A lot of consideration," "Some consideration," "A little consideration," and "No consideration at all."

this measure is expected to act as a “deliberative citizen,” while an individual with a score of “0” is expected to act more in line with a “partisan combatant.”

Results

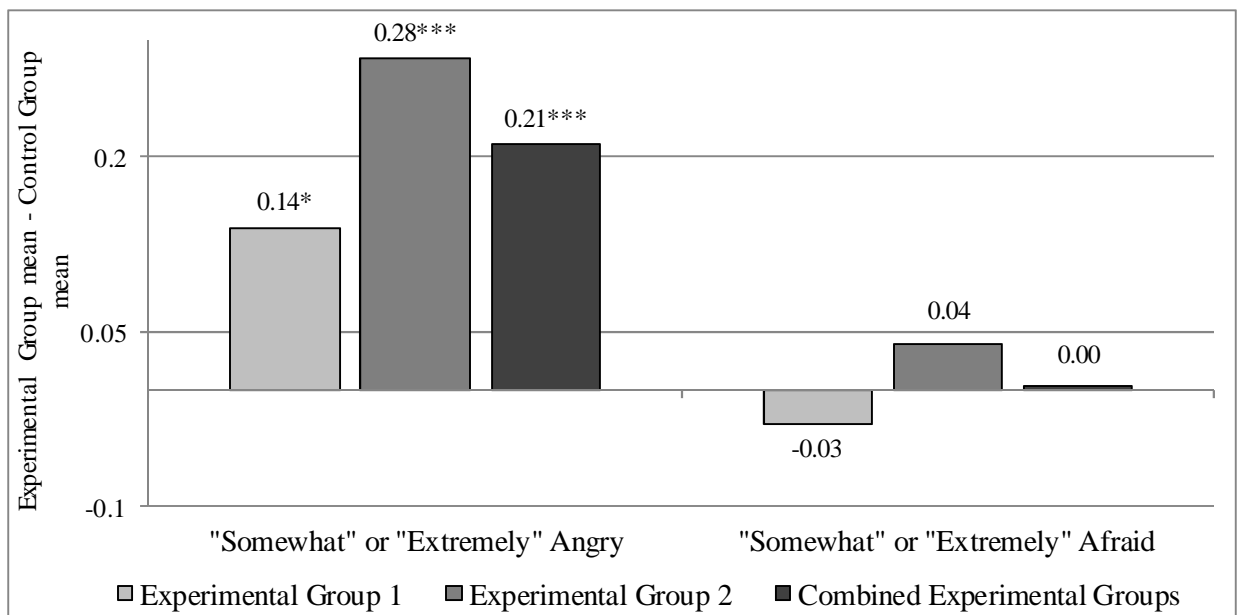
Anger, as I hypothesize in H1A, should be higher among the groups exposed to uncivil messages. Figure 5-1 shows the differences in the mean scores⁹⁵ for anger and fear between subjects exposed to incivility and those exposed to the “civil” control message. The difference between the anger mean (on a scale of 0-1) for subjects exposed to either “uncivil” message and subjects in the control group is 0.21 percentage points (significant at the 0.01 level). However, when I break the experimental subjects into group 1 and group 2, it is the histrionic elements of group 2 which appear to be driving up feelings of anger. The difference in means between experimental group 1 and the control group is 0.14 points (significant at the 0.10 level). The difference between the mean score for those in the histrionic group (group 2) and the control group, however, is 0.28 points (significant at the 0.01 level). That the difference in anger between the histrionic group and the “civil” control group is larger than the difference between group 1 and the control group makes sense, given the emotionally-strident elements included in the group 2 stimulus; this is consistent with the expectations of Hypothesis H1D.

Also featured in Figure 5-1 is a comparison between the fear means between subjects in the “uncivil” groups and those in the “civil” control group. As expected, the

⁹⁵ The significance of difference in means for all analyses in this chapter was calculated using the Tukey’s WSD method, unless otherwise noted. As groups with unequal sample sizes and variances were compared, the significance of differences was confirmed using Student’s t-tests with Satterthwaite’s degrees of freedom.

uncivil posts did not lead to more fear.⁹⁶ Uncivil discourse (particularly the comments featuring histrionics) did make people more angry. This finding, along with the lack of a relationship between the uncivil stimuli and fear, provide support for Hypothesis H1A: the presence of political incivility in online settings generates anger specifically, and not negative emotions more generally.

Figure 5-1: Differences in Means of Reported Feelings Towards Original Post between Control Group and Experimental Groups



*Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.10 level.
 **Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.05 level
 ***Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.01 level
 Note: The significance of differences in means for each comparison was confirmed using Student's t-tests with Satterthwaite's degrees of freedom, due to the unequal samples sizes and variances of groups being compared.

If the perpetrator aversion (H2) and target aversion (H3A) hypotheses are accurate, then feelings of anger should increase for both Democrats and Republicans who

⁹⁶ In fact, fear is (very) slightly higher in the control group than in the experimental group 1, and is less than a percentage point higher in the experimental groups combined, although the differences are not statistically significant.

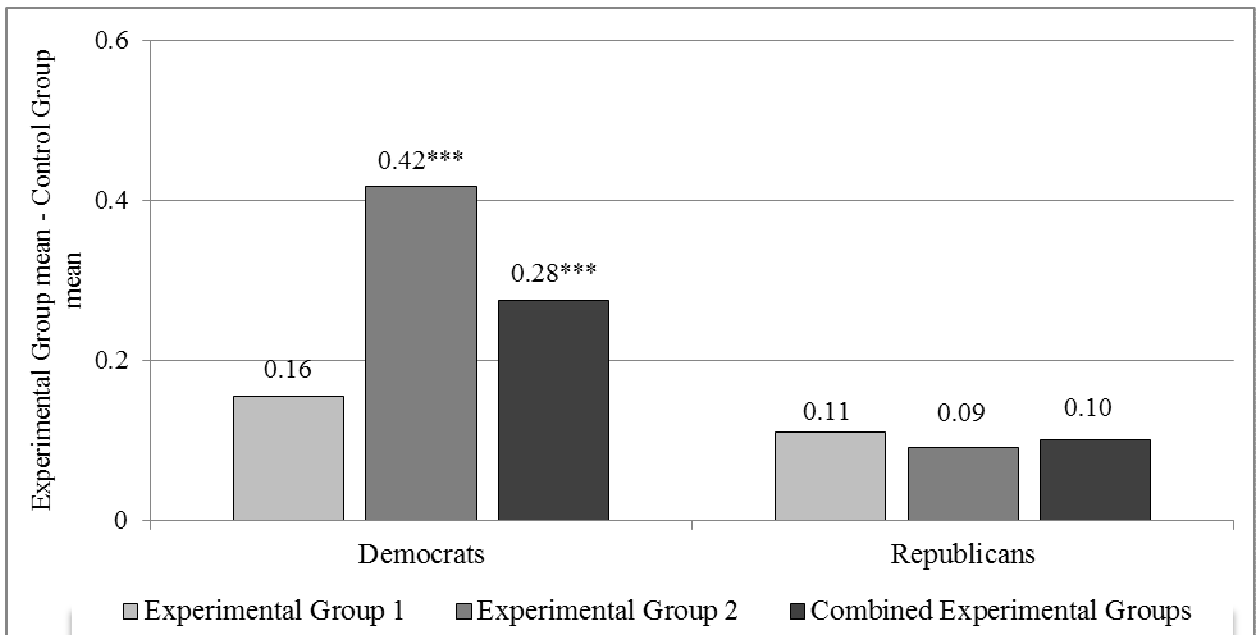
are exposed to uncivil messages. However, anger only increased among Democrats. As they were exposed to a disagreeable message, increased anger among Democrats suggests that perpetrator aversion is occurring.⁹⁷ As shown in Figure 5-2, the difference in means between Democrats in E1 and Democrats in the “civil” control group is 16 percentage points, rising from 8 percent to 24 percent—although this difference does not reach statistical significance. However, the difference in anger means between “histrionic” group Democrats and control group Democrats is 42 percentage points (significant at 0.01). This means that 50 percent of Democrats exposed to the histrionic incivility expressed anger with the message board post.

Among Republicans in the experimental groups, there are not significant increases in anger.⁹⁸ While the means are slightly higher in the experimental groups than in the control group (11 percentage points higher in E1 and 9 percentage points in E2), these differences are not statistically significant. This suggests that target aversion is not occurring, as Republicans’ anger is not increasing as the attacks on the “other side” become more hyperbolic. Hypothesis H3A—which states that anger should increase among Republicans due to increased aversion towards Obama and the policy--can therefore be rejected.

⁹⁷ Had anger increased among Republicans as well, this could indicate Republicans also felt aversion for the perpetrator—even though the message was “like-minded.” If this was the case, however, sanctioning of the perpetrator should also increase among Republicans. Increased anger among Republicans, without an increase in sanctions, would indicate “target aversion” was occurring. As anger did not increase among Republicans (and, as shown below, sanctions did not either), this point is moot.

⁹⁸ As shown in Figure A2 5-1 of Appendix 2, the mean anger score among Democrats was significantly larger than that of Republicans in the experimental groups, especially in E2. An extended discussion of these differences is included in A1 5-1 in Appendix 1.

Figure 5-2: Differences in Means of Anger towards Original Post between Control Group and Experimental Groups, By Partisanship



*Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.10 level

**Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.05 level

***Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.01 level

Note: The significance of differences in means for each comparison was confirmed using Student's t-tests with Satterthwaite's degrees of freedom, due to the unequal samples sizes and variances of groups being compared.

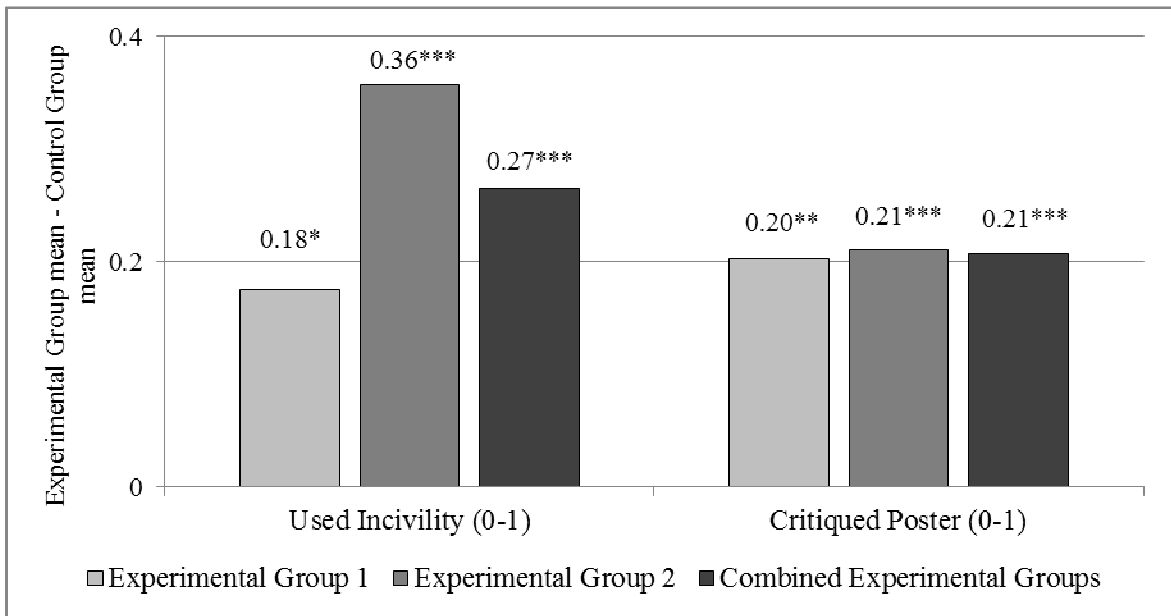
Incivility and Critiques

I also hypothesize in H1B that exposure to an uncivil post will lead subjects to use incivility in their own comments. As shown in Figure 5-3, use of incivility does appear to increase with exposure to the uncivil stimuli. The incivility mean in experimental group 1 is 18 percentage points higher than the control group mean of about 9 percent (significant at the 0.10 level). The difference between the histrionic group 2 mean and the control group mean is, at 36 percentage points, even larger, and significant at the 0.01 level. Overall, the mean for all subjects in either of the “uncivil” groups is 27 points

higher than those in the “civil” control group (significant at 0.01), representing a 200 percent increase.

Also displayed in Figure 5-3 are the differences in the rates of critiquing the original poster (on a scale of 0 to 1) between the “uncivil” groups and the “civil” control group. The means for both experimental groups 1 and 2, as well as the combined experimental group mean, are around 20 percentage points higher than the mean for the control group (with the group 1 change significant at the 0.05 level and the group 2 and combined group differences significant at the 0.01 level). This indicates that reprimands of the original poster increased with exposure to the uncivil messages, and is consistent with the expectations of Hypothesis H1B.

Figure 5-3: Differences in Means of Use of Incivility and Critiques of Original Poster Between the Control Group and Experimental Groups



*Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.10 level
 **Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.05 level
 ***Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.01 level

Note: The significance of differences in means for each comparison was confirmed using Student’s t-tests with Satterthwaite’s degrees of freedom, due to the unequal samples sizes and variances of groups being compared.

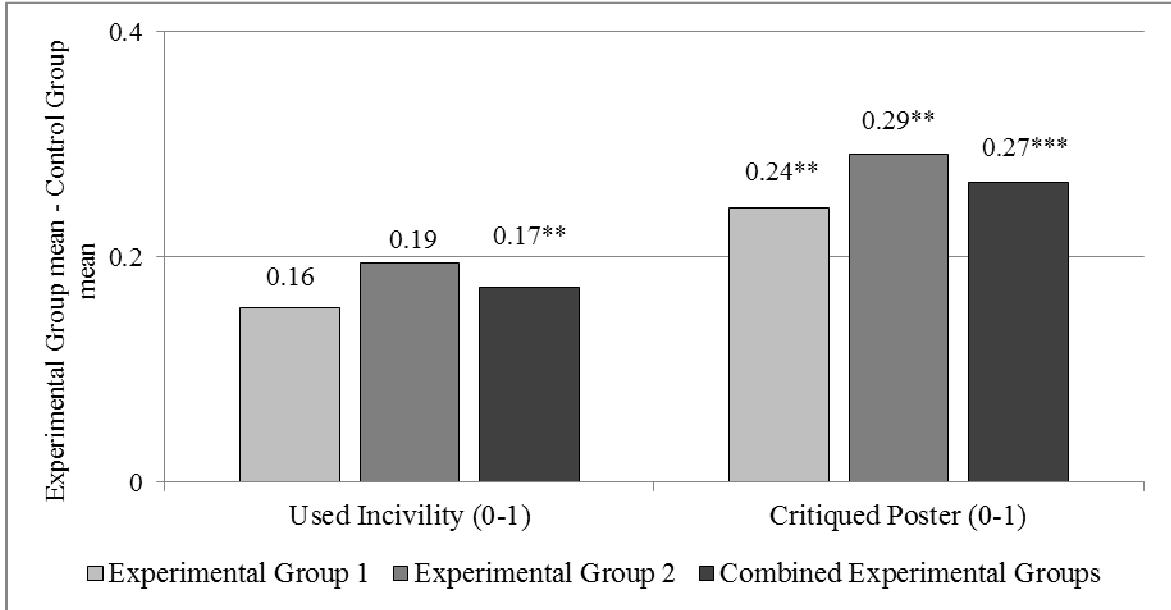
Are the upticks in incivility and critiques consistent across the partisan spectrum? Hypothesis H2 states that Democrats' use of incivility and critiques should increase with exposure to disagreeable incivility. Hypothesis H3B, the "mimicry" hypothesis, states that Republicans' use of incivility should increase with exposure to like-minded incivility, even as their anger levels and critiques of the OP do not.

Figure 5-4 shows the effect of the experimental stimuli on Democrats' propensities to use incivility and critique the messenger. On the one hand, the percentages of Democrats in the experimental groups using incivility (23 percent in group 1 and 28 percent in group 2) are not that much higher than that of the control group Democrats (9 percent). While the E1 Democratic mean is 16 percentage points higher than the Democratic mean in the "civil" control group, and the E2 Democratic mean is 19 percentage points higher, neither of these differences are statistically significant. These differences may perhaps reach significance with a larger sample, and the 17 percentage point difference between Democrats in either "uncivil" group and the control group did reach statistical significance (at 0.05). There is thus a mixed bag, leaving it unclear if exposure to disagreeable incivility stimulates "retaliatory" uncivil comments.

On the other hand, there are significant changes in Democrats' propensity to critique the OP with exposure to the uncivil messages. While 7 percent of Democrats in the control group critiqued the messenger, Democrats in either "uncivil" group had a mean 27 percentage points higher than control group Democrats (significant at 0.01). The group 1 Democratic mean is 24 percentage points higher, and the group 2 (histrionic) Democratic mean is 29 percentage points higher than the control Democratic mean (both

differences significant at 0.05). These results indicate that Democrats are expressing their aversion to the disagreeable incivility, by reprimanding the uncivil perpetrator.⁹⁹

Figure 5-4: Differences in Means of Use of Incivility and Critiques of Original Poster Between the Control Group Democrats and Experimental Group Democrats



*Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.10 level
 **Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.05 level
 ***Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.01 level

Note: The significance of differences in means for each comparison was confirmed using Student’s t-tests with Satterthwaite’s degrees of freedom, due to the unequal samples sizes and variances of groups being compared.

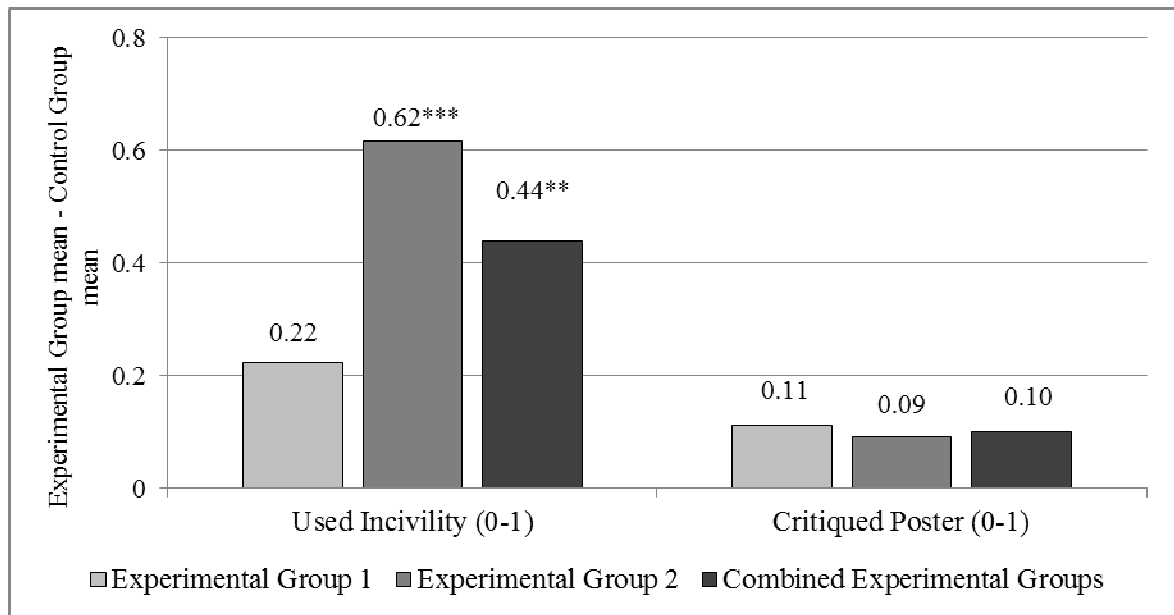
For Republicans, exposure to incivility induced the near inverse when it came to using incivility and critiquing the original poster.¹⁰⁰ Around 33 percent of Republicans in group 1 used incivility, compared to 11 percent of Republicans in the “civil” control group. As displayed in Figure 5-5, this difference of 22 percentage points does not reach

⁹⁹ While a higher percentage of Democrats in the E2 group critiqued the OP than in the E1, the difference between the two means is not significant. This may indicate that the histrionic message, in this case, did not generate more critiques than the uncivil message lacking histrionics. I further discuss the different effects that the E1 and E2 stimuli have on critiques below.

¹⁰⁰ The differences in means between Democrats and Republicans in each group also suggests that Democrats increased their use of critiques with exposure to uncivil stimuli—especially the E2 prompt—while Republicans increased their use of incivility. These differences can be seen in Figure A2 5-2 in Appendix 2, and an extended discussion of these differences is included in A1 5-1 in Appendix 1.

statistical significance. The difference between Republicans exposed to the histrionic uncivil message (E2) and control group Republicans, however, is 62 percent (significant at 0.01). This means that nearly 73 percent—almost two-thirds—of Republicans in the histrionic group used incivility in their posts. Exposure to the histrionic uncivil message—containing the use of capitalized words and multiple exclamation points—seems to be particularly effective in generating uncivil responses among Republicans. Republicans exposed to incivility were not more likely to critique the messenger than those exposed to the civil message.¹⁰¹

Figure 5-5: Differences in Means of Use of Incivility and Critiques of Original Poster between the Control Group Republicans and Experimental Group Republicans



*Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.10 level
 **Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.05 level
 ***Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.01 level

Note: The significance of differences in means for each comparison was confirmed using Student's t-tests with Satterthwaite's degrees of freedom, due to the unequal samples sizes and variances of groups being compared.

¹⁰¹ The differences between Republicans in the experimental groups and control group (11 percentages points higher in E1 and 9 points higher in E2) are insignificant.

Republicans are using incivility more when exposed to the uncivil messages, but they are not becoming angrier and are not critiquing the original messenger. This is consistent with the “mimicry” hypothesis (H4B)—exposure to like-minded incivility increases the use of incivility among Republicans, but did not generate feelings of anger or aversion. If anger had increased among Republicans (and critiques had not), this would be evidence of like-minded incivility generating anger towards the target of the uncivil messages (in this case, Obama and his policy). But the mimicry hypothesis assumes that exposure to an uncivil comment by someone with like-minded views legitimizes uncivil talk—without generating a strong emotional reaction.

Because incivility increased among Republicans, but they did not become angrier, there is reason to believe that their use of incivility is not an emotional reaction. Instead, Republicans are mimicking the uncivil language of the “like-minded” messenger. Evidence of mimicry is found in the verbatim responses of Republican subjects, as well: in many cases, the incivility used by Republican subjects was similar or identical to the uncivil phrases included in the uncivil stimuli. Emotionally-strident incivility, like that included in the group 2 stimulus, was present in only 10 percent of uncivil responses among group 1 subjects, but was present in 28 percent of group 2 uncivil responses.

Probit Models of Incivility Exposure, Anger, and Behavioral Reactions

To better understand the relationships between exposure to incivility with partisanship, feelings of anger, use of incivility, and reprimands of the original poster, I created a series of probit regression models. The first model examines what effect exposure to the experimental stimuli has on the propensity to utilize incivility in the message board comments (with no use of incivility coded as “0” and use of incivility

coded as “1”). I include dummy variables for participation in both the E1 and E2 groups in the model, as well as partisan identification (seven categories, with strong Democrats coded as “1” and strong Republicans coded as “7”). Additionally, age, gender (with males coded as “0” and females coded as “1”), and race (with whites coded as “0” and non-whites coded as “1”) are included as control variables. I also created a probit model which regresses the inclusion of a critique of the OP (with no reprimand in a post coded as “0” and the inclusion of a reprimand coded as “1”) onto the same set of control variables.

As shown in Column 1 of Table 5-2, exposure to the incivility in experimental group 1 and the histrionic incivility of experimental group 2 both have a statistically significant positive effect on the propensity to utilize incivility. Partisan identification is also significant, indicating that being Republican has a positive effect on the use of incivility. Column 2 of Table 5-2 shows that participation in experimental group 1 and experimental group 2 also positively influenced the propensity to critique the original poster, and partisan identification had a negative, significant relationship with poster reprimands, indicating Democratic identification has a positive effect on use of critiques; no other variable, excepting age,¹⁰² has a significant relationship with original poster critiques.

In order to explore the role of emotion in affecting behavior, I created two additional models, which included the same set of variables as well as the addition of reported feelings of anger towards the original post (0-3) as an independent variable. As

¹⁰² Age also has a positive, significant effect, suggesting that as age increased, so did the use of incivility. This perhaps may be due to older individuals being upperclassmen or graduate students, who are more comfortable with expressing themselves in a bold manner on a “university-run” message board having been accustomed to the university, as well as being more sure of their own position on the policy (and on the political spectrum more generally) due to a bit more education and experience than younger students.

shown in Column 3 of Table 5-2, the inclusion of self-reported anger did not have a significant effect on the use of incivility. In fact, the size of the coefficient and its significance remains largely unchanged from the model in Column 1, with exposure to the experimental stimuli, Republican partisan identification, and age all remaining positively associated with the use of incivility. The addition of self-reported anger into the critique model tells a different story. As shown in Column 4, feelings of anger with the original post have a positive, significant effect on critiques of the original poster. Also, the effect of group 2 participation and Democratic Party identification is reduced in Column 4 with the addition of self-reported feelings of anger in the model.

To get a better sense of the connection between feelings of anger among Democrats and the propensity to critique the original poster, I calculated predicted probabilities¹⁰³ of reprimanding the OP, based on the probit model in Column 4 of Table 5-2, for nine categories: Strong Republicans in the control group, group 1, and experimental group 2, Strong Democrats in each of the three groups, and “Not angry” Strong Democrats in each of the groups. By “Not Angry” Democrats, I am referring to Democrats who did not report being “somewhat” or “extremely” angry with the original post.¹⁰⁴

The predicted probabilities for each category are displayed in Figure 5-6. The results show that in each of the groups, the predicted probability of Strong Republicans using incivility is very low,¹⁰⁵ with the differences between the groups not reaching

¹⁰³ I use the observed value approach; see Hanmer and Kalkan (2012).

¹⁰⁴ To model this effect, the dichotomous anger variable was set to “0”, whereas for the predicted probabilities of general Strong Democrats and Strong Republicans, the anger variable was set to its observed value (Hanmer and Kalkan 2012).

¹⁰⁵ The probability of a Strong Republican in the control group critiquing the original poster was miniscule (less than one percentage point), and, the probabilities of Republicans in experimental groups 1 (about 5 percentage points) and 2 (about 6 percentage points) were not much higher.

statistical significance. In the control group, the difference between the probability of Strong Democrats and Strong Republicans critiquing the OP is also not significant. In the experimental groups, Democrats' probabilities of critiquing the OP increase significantly—jumping to 42 percent in group 1 and 43 percent in group 2—and are statistically significant from Democrats in the control group and Republicans in all three groups. This indicates that disagreeable messages that lack uncivil elements—such as the control group message—are not enough to induce reprimands.

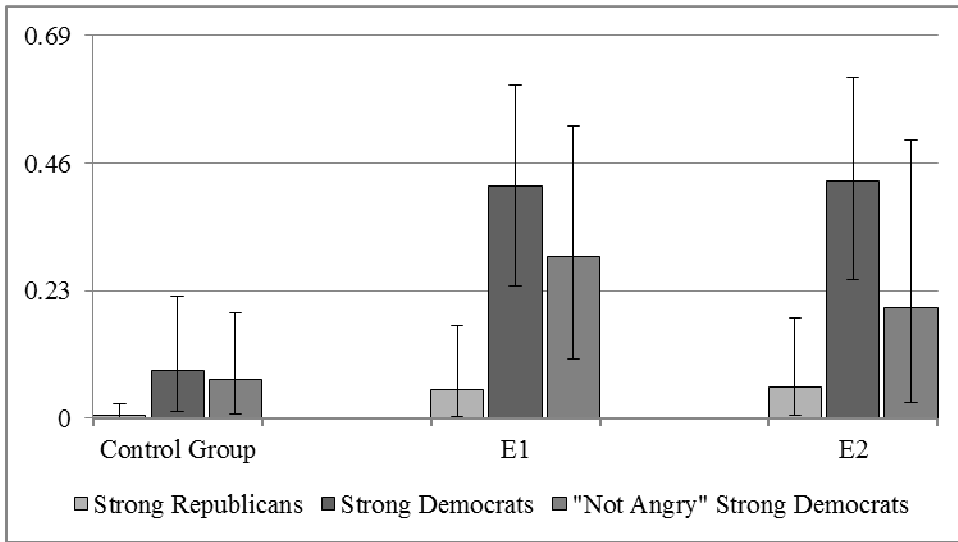
Table 5-2: Use of Incivility and Critiques of Original Poster

VARIABLES	(1) Incivility	(2) Critique	(3) Incivility	(4) Critique
Anger	--	--	-0.28 (0.212)	0.51** (0.218)
Group 1	0.85** (0.416)	1.38** (0.569)	0.89** (0.420)	1.22** (0.583)
Group 2	1.29*** (0.416)	1.40** (0.575)	1.45*** (0.437)	0.99* (0.615)
Age	0.04* (0.022)	0.01 (0.023)	0.05** (0.023)	-0.00 (0.025)
Gender	0.08 (0.355)	0.38 (0.453)	0.14 (0.360)	0.24 (0.478)
Party ID	0.19** (0.082)	-0.29*** (0.108)	0.15* (0.087)	-0.18* (0.114)
Race	0.29 (0.350)	-0.36 (0.394)	0.18 (0.361)	-0.19 (0.425)
Constant	-3.12*** (0.788)	-1.74** (0.826)	-3.11*** (0.789)	-1.86** (0.860)
Observations	92	92	92	92
Adj. R-squared	0.19	0.22	0.21	0.29

Coefficients are probit. Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

Figure 5-6: Predicted Probabilities of Critiquing the Original Poster By Experimental Condition and Party Identification



Note: Predicted probabilities are calculated using the observed value approached (Hanmer and Kalkan 2012). The error bars are 90 percent confidence intervals, calculated through the method of statistical simulation (Herron 1999).

The critical finding, however, is that among Democrats who did *not* report being angry, the predicted probabilities of critiquing the poster are much lower. In group 1, the probability of critiquing the OP among “not angry” Democrats is 13 percentage points lower than all Democrats in group 1. In group 2, the “not angry” probability is 23 percentage points lower (over 50 percent) than all group 2 Democrats. This finding affirms previous research on “every day” incivility which asserts that there is a strong connection between feelings of anger and reprimands; when those exposed to disagreeable incivility did not report being angry with the post, they were significantly less likely to critique the uncivil perpetrator. In fact, the difference in probabilities between Democrats who were not angered by the post and Republicans does not reach statistical significance in any of the groups. Despite the fact that use of incivility did not increase significantly among Democrats in the experimental groups, perpetrator aversion seems to be occurring, as Democrats exposed to disagreeable incivility report higher

levels of anger and had greater propensities to critique the messenger than Democrats in the control group and Republicans.¹⁰⁶

Feelings of Aversion and Deliberative Potential

The results above suggest that perpetrator aversion—anger with the original poster—is occurring with exposure to the disagreeable uncivil messages. Additionally, exposure to like-minded incivility is not inducing feelings of anger or aversion. I expect that, as stated in hypothesis H3, willingness to deliberate should fall among those exposed to disagreeable incivility (Democrats). Expressed feelings of anger provide one measure of aversion, and I expect anger to be associated with lower willingness to deliberate. Moreover, if reprimanding the original poster is more than just a calm response, but represents a display of aversion to the content in the posts, then those who reprimanded the OP should have a reduced willingness to engage in pro-deliberative behavior as well.

I have identified how much consideration an individual gave the original post (on a scale of 0-3), as well as their overall satisfaction with the message board experience (0-3), as measures of deliberative potential. Combining the consideration and satisfaction measures together produces a deliberative potential scale of 0 to 6, with a score of “6” indicating a person is likely to act like a “deliberative citizen,” and an individual with a score of “0” likely to act like a “partisan combatant.” Figure 5-7 displays the differences in means between those who reported being “somewhat” or “extremely” angry with the

¹⁰⁶ Additionally, the connection between self-reported anger and critiques of the OP, as well as the lack of a relationship between anger and incivility, can be seen in Figure A3 in Appendix 2. The figure shows a significant difference in the percentage who critiqued the OP among those who were angry and not angry (35 percentage points, significant at 0.01)—but no significant difference in the use of incivility between the “angry” and “not angry” groups.

original post and those who did not, as well the difference in means between those who critiqued the original poster and those who did not, on the three measures.

The results in Figure 5-7 show that those who reported feeling somewhat or extremely angry gave (very) slightly more consideration to the post than those who did not report feelings of anger--but the difference is not significant. Subjects who felt angered by the original post, however, were less satisfied than those who were not angered (with the difference in means between the groups significant at the 0.05 level).¹⁰⁷ The satisfaction mean among the non-angry is one-third lower¹⁰⁸ than the average score is for those who were angry. When the consideration and satisfaction scores are combined (on a 0-6 scale), anger reduces the potential to deliberate by 0.61 points, a reduction of about 15 percent (significant at the 0.05 level).¹⁰⁹

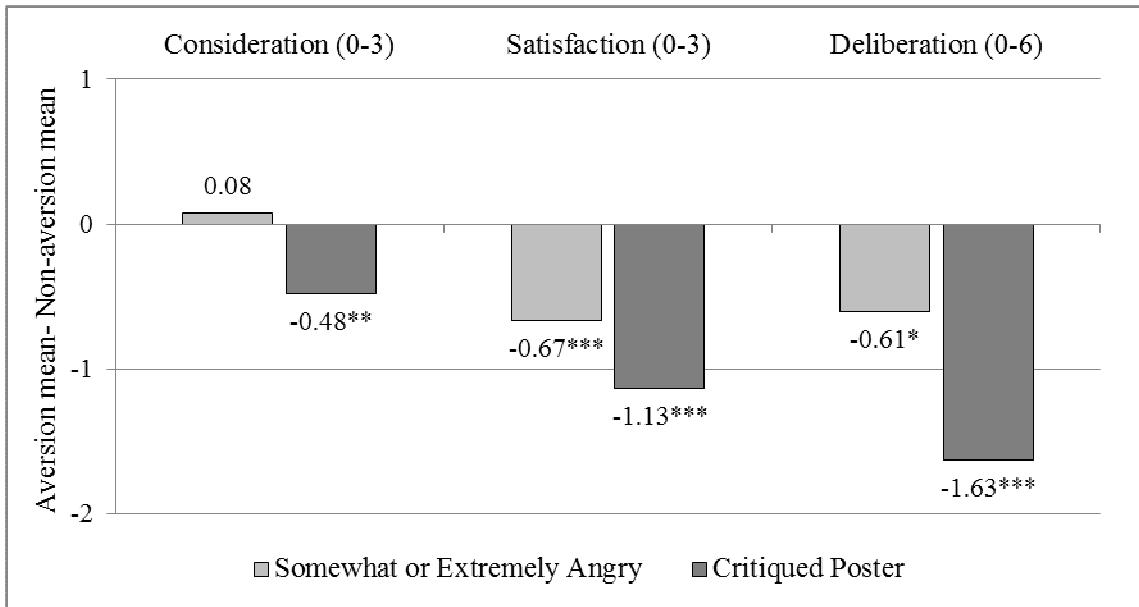
Critiquing the perpetrator, which demonstrates aversion to the content of the original post, had a much stronger negative influence on deliberative potential. Those who critiqued the original poster averaged a consideration score nearly half a point lower (on the 0-3 scale) than those who did not critique the poster, significant at the 0.01 level. Critiquing the OP is connected to an even larger reduction in satisfaction with the whole message board experience, dropping the average satisfaction score from 2.0, to an anemic 0.87—a difference of 1.13 points, significant at the 0.01.

¹⁰⁷ Due to the ordinal nature of each of the deliberative potential measures used, the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine if the difference in means for each measure between individuals who expressed or displayed aversion to the original post and those who did not were significant. Because the independent variables are binary, and the effects of each are analyzed separately, no additional pairwise comparison are necessary.

¹⁰⁸ Subjects who were not angry had a mean score of about 1.95 (on the 0 to 3 scale), 0.67 points lower than the anger mean among those were angry

¹⁰⁹ This reduction in the combined deliberative measure is driven by the effects of anger on satisfaction.

Figure 5-7: Effects of Aversion to Original Post on Deliberative Potential



* The Kruskal-Wallis test determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.10 level

** Kruskal-Wallis determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.05 level

*** Kruskal-Wallis determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.01 level

In the combined deliberative potential measure (the consideration and satisfaction measures put together), the difference between those who critiqued the OP and those who did not was large. The average score among those who did not sanction the messenger was 4.37 points—which is on the high-end of the 0 to 6 scale. The mean falls to 2.73 among subjects who critiqued the poster—1.63 points lower than those who did not sanction the OP. This shows the connection between sanctioning the messenger—a demonstration of aversion to his behavior—and willingness to deliberate. Those who are averse to the content of a message are less likely to engage in deliberative behavior.

Why do critiques have a stronger and more consistent effect on the deliberative potential measures than self-reported feelings of anger? One explanation is that critiques of the poster are clearly directed at the poster, and are demonstrations of aversion to the

poster's behavior. Self-reported feelings of anger can indicate target aversion as well—and perhaps some subjects were indeed reporting anger with the subject of the post rather than the messenger. Another explanation is that critiquing the poster represents an even stronger aversion to the post than reports of feeling angry with the content. After all, it is one thing to say someone has angered you when you think that person is cannot perceive your answer, but it is much more confrontational and extreme to call out that person on that behavior and express your dissatisfaction directly to them—even in a digital setting.

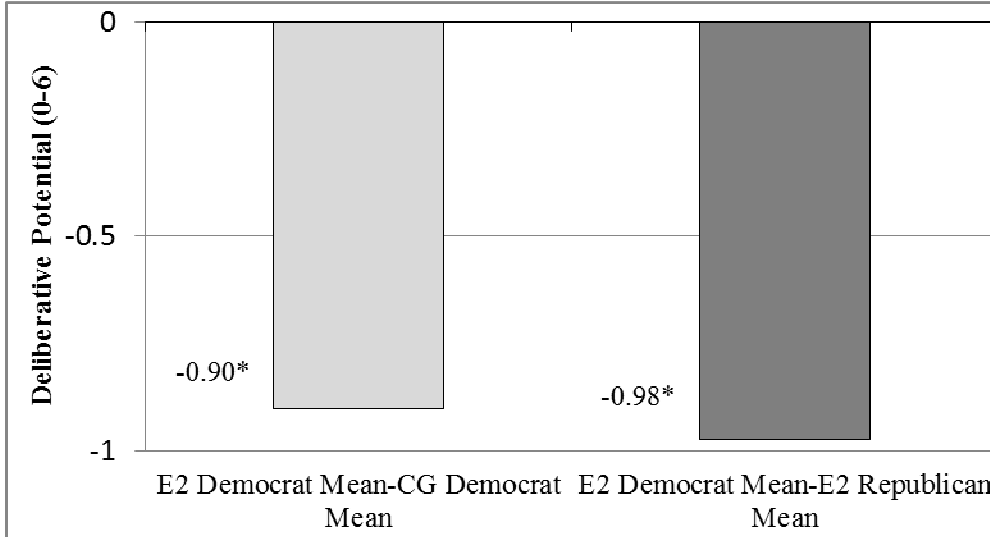
These results show that critiquing the original poster is associated with reduced potential to act as a “deliberative citizen.” Individuals who were angered enough by the post to sanction the OP were less likely to consider the views expressed in the message and were substantially less satisfied by the “discussion.” This means subjects were less likely to consider the content of the message in the original post and recognize it as a legitimate point. Those who reported high levels of anger were also less satisfied with the message board experience than those who reported a little or no anger with the post.

Effects of Exposure to Histrionic Elements

Finally, hypothesis H1D states that emotionally-strident incivility will be particularly effective in inducing the reactions described above. Specifically, I expect the histrionic E2 stimulus to be more effective in inducing emotional and behavioral reactions than the E1 stimulus. The results provide substantial support for this hypothesis. As displayed in Figure 5-1 and Figure 5-2, the group 2 (histrionic) stimulus was far more effective in inducing anger (among Democrats) than the group 1 stimulus. In figures 5-3 and 5-5, the larger effect of the group 2 stimulus in inducing incivility (among Republicans) is shown. In fact, the differences between the means of those in the control

group and those in experimental group 1, as well as Democrat and Republicans, are not even significant at conventional levels for some comparisons.

Figure 5-8: Effect of E2 Stimulus on Democratic Deliberative Potential



* The Kruskal-Wallis test determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.10 level

**Kruskal-Wallis determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.05 level

*** Kruskal-Wallis determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.01 level

Additionally, the probit models displayed in Table 5-2 show that that E2 stimulus induced higher levels of anger, incivility, and critiques (when not controlling for anger) than the stimulus in experimental group 1. The strong connection between exposure to the emotionally-strident E2 stimulus and feelings of anger can be seen in Column 4, as anger usurps some of the predictive power of participation when it comes to critiques of the uncivil perpetrator in the second experimental group, but not participation in experimental group 1 (as shown in Figure 5-1, levels of anger in group 1 were not as significantly different from levels of anger in the control group). Furthermore, as displayed in Figure 5-6, manipulating the levels of anger is particularly effective in increasing or decreasing the probability of critiquing the poster among Democrats exposed to the histrionic uncivil message.

Given that the histrionic E2 stimulus is particularly effective in inducing perpetrator aversion, it follows that the E2 stimulus should have reduced E2 Democrats' willingness to deliberate. Indeed, as displayed in Figure 5-8, the increased feelings of aversion among Democrats in E2 led to significantly lower deliberative potential. E2 Democrats had a mean deliberative score that was 0.90 points lower than control group Democrats, and 0.98 points lower than E2 Republicans. There are not statistically significant changes in deliberative potential among Republicans in the experimental groups or Democrats in E1 from their control group counterparts. As the histrionic stimulus reduced Democrats' deliberative potential by roughly a point on the 6 point scale, I can conclude that the more emotionally-strident stimulus does induce stronger reactions, in support of hypothesis H1D.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results above, I find support for my overarching hypothesis, H1, that the presence of political incivility in online interactive settings induces anti-deliberative attitudes and behavior. I also find that those exposed to disagreeable incivility and like-minded incivility displayed different types of anti-deliberative reactions. In response to exposure to disagreeable incivility, subjects (in this case, Democrats) indicated feelings of anger with the message board post, reprimanded the uncivil perpetrator, and decreased their deliberative potential, all at rates greater than those in the control group and those exposed to like-minded incivility (in this case, Republicans).

When the target of uncivil attacks is not associated with an individual's partisan attachment, there is a different set of reactions. Republicans increased their use of incivility with exposure to the (like-minded) uncivil stimuli in the experimental groups—

indicating a “mob effect” is occurring. Republicans’ adoption of incivility in their own comments seems to be a mimicking effect—as self-reported feelings of anger was not connected to the use of incivility, there is no evidence that target aversion is occurring. This finding is not all that surprising; even though they are being reminded of how “bad” the other side is, attacks on the other side are cognitively pleasing for partisans to hear--perhaps even comforting--as it reinforces their world view. However, respondents were asked if the post made them angry, not if they specifically felt any anger towards the targets of the post (President Obama and his policy). In the next chapter, I will examine experimental data to see if target aversion occurs when those exposed to like-minded incivility are asked about targets of uncivil attacks directly.

The mimicking effect makes sense from a theoretical stand point. Witnessing someone cross the “incivility line,” and not witnessing any admonishments of that behavior, gives license to adopt the language by legitimizing its use. If the language does not bother a person, but is instead cognitively pleasing to hear and she can detect no consequences for using it, then she would be rational to suppose that there is nothing wrong with adopting that language. This means more incivility in political discussions, which means more chances for those who identify with a target (in this case, Democrats) to become angered.

As the uncivil elements in the experimental groups induced reprimands among Democrats, the negative effect that incivility has on political talk is clear: incivility can offend and anger individuals when it is their “side” that is the target. When this is the case, the likelihood of reprimanding a perpetrator of incivility rises, and with that the potential to engage in effective deliberation declines. This indicates that perpetrator

aversion occurs with exposure to disagreeable incivility, and that perpetrator aversion is connected to reduced deliberative potential.

Although exposure to incivility did not induce self-identified Democrats to incorporate incivility into their responses, they were much more likely to become angry and reprimand the OP. The resistance to including incivility in these responses is likely a function of 1) being angered by the incivility, and therefore recognizing it as unacceptable, and 2) being unwilling to use unacceptable language as part of a program trial (which they believed) the university was orchestrating. Additionally, respondents experienced with classroom discussion boards may have also had greater knowledge of deliberative etiquette, and were resistant to retaliating in the same fashion that upset them. This was not without consequences, as deliberative potential was reduced among these individuals.

The emotionally-strident elements that I included in the group 2 stimulus appear to be especially effective at inducing reactions to incivility. For Democrats, whose “side” was targeted by the incivility, this meant more emotional responses. For Republicans, who do not appear to have felt any type of aversion to the targets of the post, exposure to the “histrionic” group 2 stimulus provided additional uncivil behavior to mimic—that is, there is a greater variety of “sanctioned” uncivil behavior to copy. This is evidenced by larger presence of “histrionic” incivility in the comments of those exposed to the group 2 stimulus than among those exposed to the “calmer” group 1 message.

I think there is also something to be said about the ability of emotionally-strident displays of incivility to grab attention. How many more people noticed the uncivil elements when they were in all caps and followed by exclamation points? Much like

shouting, the text-based histrionics ensures people pay attention to what you are saying, and might explain the increased rate of mimicking uncivil behavior with group 2 exposure. Incivility's ability to grab attention is why many elites use it to mobilize supporters (Herbst 2010). However, this comes at a cost—while people may pay more attention to your comments when you make use of histrionics, you are also more likely to induce anti-deliberative behavior within your audience.

My use of the pronouns “you” and “your” in the above sentence is not accidental. In the “YouTube era,” each of us now has the power, through social media, to broadcast our political opinions to large audiences. The ability to do this opens up doors for a digital public sphere. However, as the results I have shown in this chapter indicate, once incivility enters a political conversation, the potential for effective deliberation declines significantly. Consideration and satisfaction are essential elements for effective deliberation. However, there are many ways to measure deliberative potential, and in the extensive, heterogeneous online world, different contexts may produce different results. In the next chapter, I will build on these results, by utilizing some different measures of deliberative potential in another experiment, as well as exposing both Democrats and Republicans to like-minded and disagreeable incivility.

Chapter 6: Like-Minded and Disagreeable Incivility

In the previous two chapters, I presented evidence that exposure to uncivil political media increases the propensity with which people use incivility in political talk, and that when encountering incivility in online settings, people can react by retaliating or sanctioning the uncivil “perpetrator.” There are caveats to these findings, however. So far, the evidence suggests that the use of incivility increases only with exposure to like-minded incivility that targets the out-group. Additionally, the connection between this “mob effect” and emotion is unclear; the results included in the last chapter suggest people are mimicking like-minded incivility, but not reacting out of feelings of anger towards the target of an uncivil attack.

Additionally, the results presented in chapter 5 do not find evidence that those exposed to disagreeable incivility (incivility targeting one’s in-group) retaliate with more incivility. Instead, individuals tended to respond by critiquing of the uncivil perpetrator. Elements of message board experiment setting—such as being part of a “university” project—may have deflated the use of incivility in retaliation. The experiment also exposed one group of partisans (Democrats) to disagreeable incivility, and another group to (Republicans) to like-minded incivility, leaving open the possibility that partisans of different stripes might react to incivility types in different ways. Furthermore, while a connection between feelings of aversion and anti-deliberative attitudes was established in the last chapter, willingness to deliberate can be a tricky concept to measure. Finally, while the chapter 4 findings connect exposure to uncivil elite messages with use of incivility, this finding deserves additional testing through experimental methods.

Conducting another experiment in a different type of setting, with different measures of aversion and deliberative potential, allows me to further assess and expand on my previous findings.

In this chapter, I present the results of an experiment conducted on a large, national sample as a part of the 2012 Cooperative Congressional Study. Exposure to disagreeable incivility and like-minded incivility was manipulated for both Democrats and Republicans. Additionally, the messages that subjects were exposed to were said to actual statements made by elites in both parties. This experiment provides a direct test of the effect that exposure to uncivil talk has on individuals' willingness to compromise, as well as a test of the effect that "elite"-based incivility has on the way non-elites engage in political discourse.

Theory

To briefly recap from previous chapters, political psychology research finds that different emotions determine when people rely on their partisan predispositions, and when they turn away from them and consider alternative views. When partisans feel anxious, they tend to forgo reliance on established partisan convictions and are more open-minded to new information. When people are angry, however, they tend to base their political evaluations more heavily on party identification or preexisting preferences (MacKuen et al. 2007; 2011).¹¹⁰ Additionally, feeling anger towards an out-group leads to a tendency to argue with, oppose, and attack those on the "other side" (Mackie et al. 2000).

¹¹⁰¹¹⁰¹¹⁰ The reactions among angry people are similar to those who feel enthusiastic;

What drives anger with the out-group? Substantial research links incivility to negative political emotions.¹¹¹ When people witness like-minded elites making uncivil attacks on the “other side,” those people tend to have more negative, visceral feelings towards the out-group (Mutz and Reeves 2005; Mutz 2007; Barker 1999, 2002; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1998; Jamieson and Capella 2009; Owen 1997). Additionally, political psychologists have made note of a “boomerang effect”¹¹²—witnessing an attack on one’s in-group by an elite of the other party generates defensive anger and lower esteem for that elite (Just et al. 2007). As an uncivil attack is one that is intensely negative and violates mores, it follows that uncivil attacks on your in-group will be particularly effective in inducing anger.

Hypotheses

Previous findings suggest that when political elites utilize incivility in comments addressing the “other side,” they can generate anger among partisans of both stripes. Like-minded partisans will feel more intense anger towards the out-group—a reaction I refer to as “target aversion.” Likewise, partisans of the “other side” will become angered by the uncivil attacks on their group—which I call “perpetrator aversion.” My first two hypotheses will test each of these:

(H1) Exposure to like-minded incivility induces feelings of anger

(H2) Exposure to disagreeable incivility induces feelings of anger

¹¹¹ Incivility has been found to heighten arousal and induce negative emotions (Mutz and Reeves 2005; Forgette and Morris 2006; Fridkin and Kenney 2008).

¹¹² For a general discussion of the “boomerang effect” within the negative campaigning literature, see Garramone (1984) and Skaperdas and Grofman (1995).

Additionally, I will again test the hypothesis that exposure to uncivil comments by both like-minded elites and elites within the out-group should induce partisans to utilize incivility in their own political comments.

(H3): Exposure to uncivil political talk leads to an increased propensity to use incivility in political talk.

Lastly, I will see if exposure to uncivil political talk negatively affects deliberative attitudes. I expect that anger, induced by the incivility, will reduce willingness to compromise. When elites include uncivil comments about the “other side” in their policy discussions, openness to compromise among both sets of partisans should decline.

(H4) Exposure to uncivil political talk leads to a reduced willingness to compromise

Study Design

To test these hypotheses, I designed an experiment that was embedded in the 2012 Cooperative Congressional Election Study and sent to 1,000 individuals.¹¹³ Subjects were randomly assigned to read one of four short paragraphs (referred to as 1, 2, 3, and 4) that were completely fake, but said to be actual statements made by party leaders. Two paragraphs were made for each side—a negative but civil statement, and an uncivil negative statement. All of the statements address the national debt, and what the “other side” needs to do in order to help debt reduction negotiations to move forwards.

¹¹³ The CCES is nationally-representative survey administered by YouGov/Polimetrix. The experiment was part of the post-election module designed by the Department of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland.

Table 6-1: CCES Experiment Paragraphs

<p>Paragraph 1</p> <p>Recently, a Republican Party leader issued the following statement regarding negotiations to reduce the national debt: “What we need from Democrats is for them to show some willingness to make cuts to some of the social insurance programs that are important to them and their base, and then I think we can move forward and compromise and really address the debt issue. In the past, it’s been tough to work together on this issue because there’s been resistance to reducing what we’re spending on domestic programs—I think we are capable of negotiating and doing what’s best for the country, though, if they are willing to give something.”</p>
<p>Paragraph 2</p> <p>Recently, a Republican Party leader issued the following statement regarding negotiations to reduce the national debt: “What we need from Democrats is for them to show some willingness to make cuts to some of the <u>nonsense social entitlement</u> programs that <u>they use to get reelected by their base</u>, and then I think we can move forward and compromise and really address the debt issue. In the past, it’s been tough to work together on this issue because there’s been <u>a pigheaded resistance on the left</u> to reducing what we’re spending on <u>these socialist</u> programs—I think we are capable of negotiating and doing what’s best for the country, though, <u>when Democrats realize they are hurting America</u> and if they are willing to give something.”</p>
<p>Paragraph 3</p> <p>Recently, a Democratic Party leader issued the following statement regarding negotiations to reduce the national debt: “What we need from Republicans is for them to show some willingness to give up some of the low tax rates for corporations, an issue important to them and their base, and then I think we can move forward and compromise and really address the debt issue. In the past, it’s been tough to work together on this issue because there’s been resistance to increasing any taxes on Wall Street—I think we are capable of negotiating and doing what’s best for the country, though, if they are willing to give something.”</p>
<p>Paragraph 4</p> <p>Recently, a Democratic Party leader issued the following statement regarding negotiations to reduce the national debt: “What we need from Republicans is for them to show some willingness to give up some of the <u>nonsense</u> low tax rates for <u>greedy</u> corporations, an issue <u>they use to get reelected by their base</u>, and then I think we can move forward and compromise and really address the debt issue. In the past, it’s been tough to work together on this issue because there’s been <u>a pigheaded resistance on the right</u> to increasing any taxes on <u>their crooked Wall Street friends</u>. I think we are capable of negotiating and doing what’s best for the country, though, <u>when Republicans realize they are hurting America</u> and if they are willing to give something.”</p>

Paragraphs 1 and 2 were statements said to be released by a Republican Party leader regarding what Democrats need to do to help reduce the national debt. Paragraph 1 was a civil negative statement, while Paragraph 2 was the same as Paragraph 1, but for the addition of uncivil elements. Paragraphs 3 and 4 were said to be statements released by a Democratic Party leader, regarding what Republicans need to do to help reduce the national debt. Paragraph 3 was a civil negative statement, while Paragraph 4 was an uncivil version of Paragraph 3.

The paragraphs can be seen in Table 6-1. In both of the civil statements, the leader makes the case that if the “other side” is willing to make cuts to policies which are important to them and their base (“social insurance programs” for Democrats, and “low tax rates for corporations” for Republicans), then the parties “can move forward and compromise and really address the debt issue.” The leader notes that it has previously been tough to work on the issue because there’s been resistance to changing the policy (“domestic programs” for Democrats, “taxes on Wall Street” for Republicans)—without explicitly saying it has been the left or right that is responsible for resisting compromise. The leader concludes with, “I think we are capable of negotiating and doing what’s best for the country, though, if they are willing to give something.”

The differences between the civil version and the uncivil versions of the paragraphs were designed to be subtle, and not unlike uncivil comments one side typically makes about the other. In the uncivil versions, the leader accuses the other side of using a “nonsense” policy to get reelected by their base, of being “pigheaded,” and claims negotiations can take place once the members of the other party “realize they are hurting America.” In the uncivil paragraph delivered by the “Republican leader,” the

policies that Democrats are trying to protect are referred to as “entitlement” programs (replacing “social insurance”) and are called “socialist” (replacing “domestic”). In the uncivil paragraph delivered by the “Democratic leader,” Republicans are tied to “greedy” corporations and are said to be resistant to increasing taxes on “their crooked Wall Street friends” (replacing “Wall Street”).

Conditions

Based on their partisanship and the paragraph they were assigned to read, subjects fell in one of four conditions: civil like-minded, civil-disagreeable, uncivil-like-minded, and uncivil-disagreeable. Table 6-2 displays the conditions produced by each partisan-paragraph combination. Democrats exposed to Paragraph 3 and Republicans exposed to Paragraph 1 fell into the civil-like-minded condition. Democrats exposed to Paragraph 1 and Republicans exposed to Paragraph 3 were in the civil-disagreeable condition. Democrats exposed to Paragraph 4 and Republicans exposed to Paragraph 2 were in the uncivil-like-minded condition. Finally, Democrats who saw Paragraph 2 and Republicans who saw Paragraph 4 were in the uncivil-disagreeable-condition.

Table 6-2: Conditions by Partisanship-Paragraph Combination

	Civil Like-minded	Civil Disagreeable	Uncivil Like-minded	Uncivil Disagreeable
Democrat	Paragraph 3	Paragraph 1	Paragraph 4	Paragraph 2
Republican	Paragraph 1	Paragraph 3	Paragraph 2	Paragraph 4

Measures

To measure anger, I asked respondents how angry the debate over reducing the national debt made them feel. The wording of the question and the multiple choice options that respondents had to choose from are standard in affective intelligence studies.¹¹⁴ Increased anger among those exposed to a like-minded uncivil message, compared to those in the civil conditions, will provide a test of Hypothesis H1. Likewise, higher anger among those exposed to a disagreeable uncivil message, compared to those in the civil conditions, will provide a test of Hypothesis H2.

To test Hypothesis 4, I constructed a “willingness to compromise” score nearly identical to that used by MacKuen et al. (2010), which takes into account respondents’ answers on three items. Two of the items were multiple choice questions; subjects were asked what they think should happen regarding debt reduction, from both their own point of view and from the point of view of everyone else.¹¹⁵ For those exposed to the statements from the Republican viewpoint (Paragraphs 1 and 2), the options include indicating support for Democrats fighting to keep the entitlement programs in place, support for both sides finding a compromise solution, or support for cutting entitlement programs with taxes not being raised on corporations under any circumstances. For those exposed to the statements from the Democratic point of view (Paragraphs 3 and 4), the options include indicating support for Republicans fighting to protect low tax rates for corporations, support for both sides finding a compromise solution, or support for low tax

¹¹⁴ The exact wording of the first question was, “Thinking about the statement you just read, how do you feel about the ongoing debate to reduce the national debt? Would you say the debate makes you feel: VERY angry; SOMEWHAT angry; NOT VERY angry; NOT AT ALL angry?”

¹¹⁵ The question wording to measure willingness to compromise is borrowed directly from MacKuen et al. (2010). The exact wording of the first question was, “From your own point of view, as well as the general principles involved, which of these options would you prefer happen?” The second question read, “Now, taking into account everyone’s view, as well as the general principles involved, what should happen?”

rates for corporations being eliminated with no cuts to entitlement programs under any circumstances.

The third item in in the compromise measure was whether subjects indicated willingness to compromise on their own. Following each paragraph, subjects were asked to state, verbatim, their overall thoughts regarding the debt reduction debate.¹¹⁶ The open-ended answers appear just as the respondents typed them in, providing (as in the previous analyses included in chapters 4 and 5) an unfiltered look at respondents' thoughts as they intended them.

Like MacKuen et al. (2010), responses in which an individual offered, or expressed a desire to find an alternative solution to the two polarized positions were coded as being in support of compromise. In my experiment, nearly all responses coded as compromise solutions fell into one of two categories: respondents made clear they preferred some specific mix of tax increases and spending cuts, or expressed that they wanted the two parties to “come together” (or “work together”) and find a compromise solution.

In the measure used by MacKuen et al. (2010), respondents' answers were only categorized into two types: indication of compromise, and no indication of compromise. In reading through the results of the CCES experiment, it became apparent to me that using only these two categories was not the most optimal way to code the responses, in that there were two clear groups who fell into the “no indication of compromise” group: those who clearly sided with one of viewpoint, and those who were neutral about the whole debate. For instance, a couple of common refrains were that both sides were

¹¹⁶ The exact wording was, “Thinking about the statement you just read, what are your overall thoughts on the ongoing debate to reduce the national debt? Please type your answer in the box below.”

responsible for the debt mess (often stated in more colorful language), and that the subject did not care enough about the debt debate to have an opinion. Even though those who made these claims did not actually voice support for compromise, they were not necessarily opposed to compromise either, like those who voiced allegiance to one side. This, I believe, is an important distinction, and I thus added a third category.

In the coding of the verbatim responses, if a respondent made clear a preference for one side or expressed that she thought one specific side was at fault, her answer scored a “0.” If a respondent was neutral about the solution, or unclear about which side they think is most responsible for the problem, her response was given a “1.” If she expressed a compromise solution or an interest in seeing both sides coming together and compromising, her response was given a “2.”

Using respondents’ answers to the two multiple choice questions, as well as whether their compromise score for their open-ended answers, I constructed a compromise score, on a scale of 0-4. Respondents would receive a “4,” for example, if they selected the compromise option in both multiple choice questions (1 point for each), and expressed support for compromise in their open-ended response (a “2” in the response coding). Subjects’ scores on this scale, in conjunction with their reported partisanship, provide a test of Hypothesis 4.

The open-ended answers will also provide a test Hypothesis 3. I analyzed the open-ended responses to determine whether they qualified as uncivil, in accordance with the incivility index, as done in the analyses presented in preceding chapters. As in the previous measures of incivility use, subjects were coded as “1” if they used any incivility in their answers, and “0” if they did not.

Sample

The final sample consisted of 820 subjects¹¹⁷ were exposed to one of the four paragraphs. 195 saw paragraph 1, 187 saw paragraph 2, 213 saw paragraph 3, and 225 people saw paragraph 4. Given that some people indicated no partisan affiliation, slightly smaller groups fell under each of the four conditions: 172 people were featured in the civil-like-minded condition, 177 were in the civil-disagreeable group, 169 were in the uncivil-like-minded group, and 174 saw an uncivil-disagreeable message. The averages for a number of demographic measures for the entire sample, as well as each of the conditions, are included in Table A2 6-1 in Appendix 2.

There were some slight differences between the groups on some demographic measures, as shown in Table A2 6-1. The uncivil-disagreeable group was slightly more “Republican” on the 7-point partisan identification measure than both of the like-minded groups, and a bit more conservative than the civil-like-minded group. Additionally, in the civil-disagreeable group, the average educational attainment was lower than in the others, and the percentage of non-white subjects was slightly higher. These differences were not dramatically large, but they were statistically significant. There were no significant differences between the groups when it came to age and gender.

The patterns in the results presented below suggests these differences are not likely factors in different results between the groups on the measures of interest; ideology and race do not have significant effects on any of measures, and partisan identification and education have effects that cannot be explained by these initial group differences.

¹¹⁷ As my experiment was included at the end of the survey, there was some attrition from the original 1,000 subjects who received the module.

Furthermore, it does not appear that the content of the messages caused the differences, as the attrition occurred earlier on in the survey module.

Results

The debt debate is likely a subject in which most people are frustrated with to begin with. Therefore, it is not surprising that feelings of anger were the norm among the experimental sample. The overall average anger score was just above a “3,” equating to the sample pool, on average, being “somewhat angry” about how debt talks were progressing in Washington. Nonetheless, subjects in each of the four conditions differed in how angry they felt about the debt debate. For the sake of brevity and parsimony, I report just the differences in percentage claiming to be “very angry” for each condition comparison.¹¹⁸ Subjects in the two uncivil conditions reported higher levels of anger than subjects did in the two civil conditions (the difference significant at 0.05). In the uncivil groups, about 43 percent of subjects reported being “very angry” about the debt debate, compared to 32 percent in the civil groups.¹¹⁹

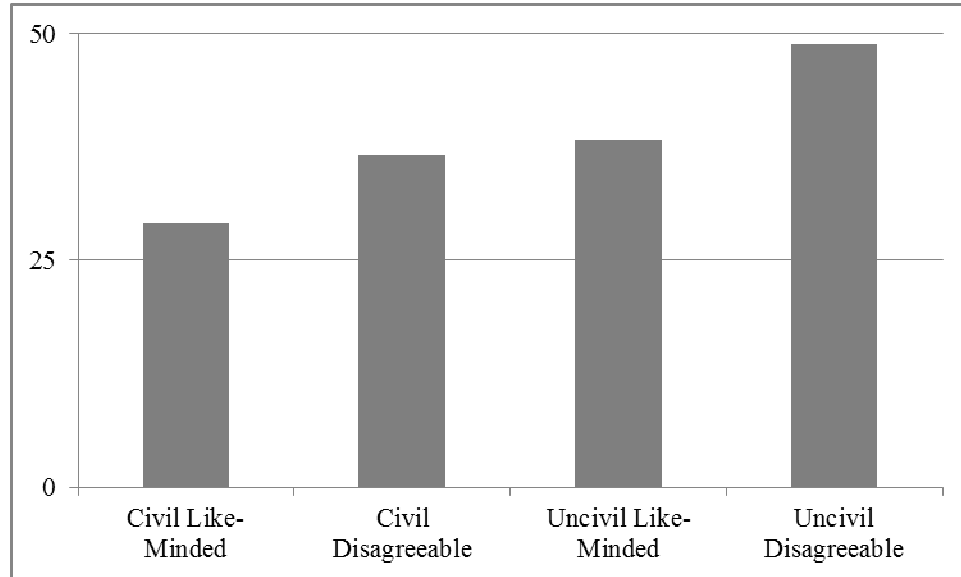
However, the effect that incivility has on anger varied with whether the measure was like-minded or disagreeable. The level of anger was significantly higher when the uncivil message was also disagreeable; an uncivil comment, when it is aimed at a person’s side, is more incensing than when directed at the other side. Nearly 49 percent of those exposed to an uncivil disagreeable message reported being “very angry” about the debt debate, compared to 38 percent of those exposed to an uncivil like-minded

¹¹⁸ However, the statistical significance of differences for the anger measure, as well as the analyses to follow, was determined using the Kruskal-Wallis method.

¹¹⁹ Overall, the average anger score on the 4-point scale among people was 3.04 in the civil conditions, and 3.14 in the uncivil conditions. This difference was significant at 0.05. When restricting the comparison to just partisans (leaving out self-identified “independents”), this difference is larger, with those in the civil conditions averaging 3.05, and those in the uncivil conditions averaging 3.19, and significant at 0.01.

message. On the other hand, 37 percent of respondents who read a civil disagreeable message reported being “very angry,” while just 29 percent of those exposed to a civil like-minded message said the same.

Figure 6-1: Percentage Who Were “Very Angry” About the Debt Debate, by Condition



Note: Bars represent the percentage of subjects in each condition who said they felt “very angry” about the debate over federal debt reduction.

Whether the message was both civil and like-minded mattered. The fact that there was no significant difference in anger among those exposed to an uncivil like-minded message and civil disagreeable message illustrates this well. Taking a civil-likeminded message and either adding incivility or making it disagreeable increases anger, and to a similar degree. This suggests that when a message is not in accordance with our views, or is negative of our in-group, it can anger us. On the other hand, the presence of incivility can increase incivility even when the message is “like-minded” and negative towards the out-group. This is evidence of “target aversion”; the presence of more vitriolic words that

vilify the opposition leads to higher levels of anger than when the message lacks uncivil elements. Thus, there is some support for my first hypothesis--that exposure to like-minded incivility induces feelings of anger—in that those who saw a civil-like-minded message were less angry than those who saw an uncivil-like-minded message at a statistically significant level. But this finding comes with the caveat that a civil-disagreeable message has about the same effect on anger.

When the message is both uncivil and disagreeable, however, anger increases the most. There was a 20 point difference in the percentage that reported being “very angry” about the debt debate between those exposed to an uncivil disagreeable message (49 percent) and a civil like-minded message (29 percent). This is strong support for “perpetrator aversion”—hearing an uncivil attack on our in-group induces a significant increase in anger, and supports my second hypothesis—that exposure to disagreeable incivility induces feelings of anger.

Incivility

Those who were exposed to either uncivil message were more likely to use incivility than those exposed to the civil messages. While close to one quarter (24 percent) of people in the uncivil groups used incivility, far fewer in the civil groups did the same (14 percent). Exposure to the uncivil messages equals a 58 percent increase in probability of making an uncivil remark. Additionally, there is a connection between incivility use and feelings of anger. I conducted a probit regression to test the effect of anger (1-4) on incivility while controlling for other factors, including age, gender, race,

education, partisan identification, and ideology.¹²⁰ The results, included in Column 1 of Table 6-3, confirm that anger has a significant positive effect (at 0.000) on use of incivility. The only other variable that had a significant effect was education, which had a small, positive impact on incivility use at the 0.10 level; this might hint towards political awareness or sophistication having an impact on incivility use.

These general connections between use of incivility with exposure to the uncivil messages and anger support my hypotheses. However, I also expect that whether the message attacks your in-group or out-group should make a difference. In Figure 6-2, I display the mean incivility use among partisans in each of the four conditions.

Differences in incivility use emerge among people exposed to like-minded and disagreeable messages. While slightly more people in the uncivil-like-minded group used incivility than in civil-like-minded group (about 21 percent versus about 17 percent), the difference is not significant. When the message is like-minded, incivility does not seem to make people more likely to use incivility than they would if it was civil. The interesting finding, however, is not the comparison between the two like-minded groups, but the comparison of either group to the civil-disagreeable group. Those in the uncivil-like-minded group were more likely to use incivility than those in the civil-disagreeable group, in which 13 percent use incivility--a difference of about 8 percentage points (significant at 0.05). But there was not a statistically significant difference between those in the civil-like-minded group and those in the civil-disagreeable group.

¹²⁰ Age (Zukin et al. 2006, Wattenberg 2008), education (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993), and gender (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Kaufman and Petrocik 1999) are each understood to be factors which influence political opinions and behavior, and thus their presence in the model is necessary to isolate the effects of uncivil media exposure. Likewise, partisan identification, race, and ideology are well-established influences on political behavior (i.e., Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Zaller 1992; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002).

Table 6-3: Predictor of Incivility Use and Willingness to Compromise

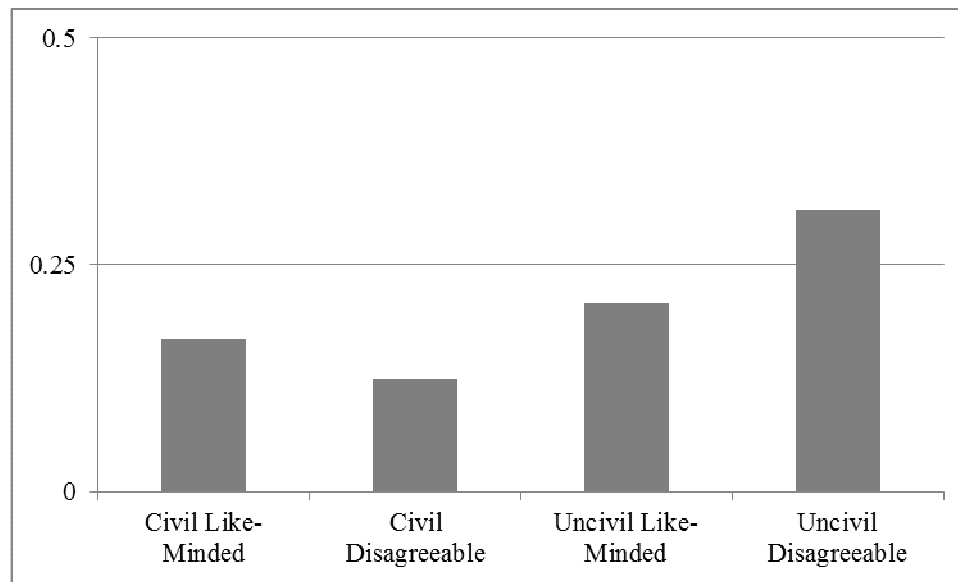
VARIABLES	(1) Incivility	(2) Compromise
Anger	0.55*** (0.078)	-0.21*** (0.043)
Age	-0.00 (0.004)	-0.00* (0.003)
Gender	-0.02 (0.110)	0.16** (0.077)
Education	0.07* (0.038)	-0.07*** (0.026)
Partisan Identification	0.02 (0.033)	-0.03 (0.022)
Ideology	-0.03 (0.064)	-0.00 (0.045)
Race	-0.05 (0.154)	-0.02 (0.103)
Constant	-2.77*** (0.423)	
<i>Cut 1</i>		
Constant		-1.72*** (0.280)
<i>Cut 2</i>		
Constant		-1.24*** (0.278)
<i>Cut 3</i>		
Constant		-0.46* (0.276)
<i>Cut 4</i>		
Constant		0.37 (0.279)
Observations	803	803
Adj. R-squared	0.09	0.02

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

Note: The coefficients presented in Column 1 are the results of a probit regression, predicting use of incivility (0-1) with standard errors in parentheses. The coefficients presented on Column 2 are the results of an ordered probit regression, predicting willingness to compromise (0-5) with standard errors in parentheses.

It is noteworthy that the civil-like-minded group falls in-between the civil-disagreeable group and uncivil-like-minded group, statistically different from neither when it comes to incivility use. That the like-minded groups do not differ from each other suggests that perhaps that both like-minded messages—which critique the other side— increase the extent to which people use incivility. The uncivil-like-minded message, however, increased incivility enough to make a distinction from the civil-disagreeable message. While this is one case concerning one particularly high-profile issue, this finding suggests that hearing a message which attacks the other side primes people to be uncivil, but it is the addition of uncivil elements that fully pushes them into uncivil talk.

Figure 6-2: Percentage Who Used Incivility, by Condition



Note: Bars represent the percentage of subjects in each condition who used incivility in their verbatim responses.

Incivility, however, makes a huge difference when it comes to disagreeable messages. The group with the highest percentage of incivility use was the uncivil-disagreeable group, in which 31 percent of people made an uncivil comment. This was a

rate about 19 percentage points higher than the group with the lowest percentage of incivility use, the civil-disagreeable group (12 percent). Incivility use in the uncivil-disagreeable group was also about 10 percentage points higher than the rate of use in uncivil-like-minded group, and 14 percentage points higher than in the civil-like-minded group—both differences statistically significant.

Why did the uncivil-disagreeable messages induce far more incivility use than their civil counterparts, but the uncivil-like-minded messages did not? There are two potential explanations. One is that the two like-minded messages were too similar for them to have distinct effects, and making the civil-like-minded message slightly less hyperbolic, or by tuning up the amount of incivility in the uncivil-like-minded message, more of a distinction between the groups may occur. As this experiment took place immediately after the 2012 election, people did not need much in the way of encouragement to attack the other side. Perhaps both the like-minded messages were hyperbolic enough to influence political talk. This would explain why uncivil like-minded media, which is very hyperbolic and distinctive from “civil” media (Sobieraj and Berry), was found to induce incivility use (as demonstrated in chapter 4).

A second may be that like-minded messages simply do not induce emotional reactions, and instead increase incivility by leading people to “mimic” like-minded behavior. More hyperbole might raise the rate of incivility use in the uncivil-like-minded group closer to that of the uncivil-disagreeable group, by providing more “incivility” to mimic. This would explain the low level of incivility use in civil-disagreeable group: unlike the civil-like-minded messages, there are no attacks on the other side to mimic,

and unlike the uncivil-disagreeable group, there is less negative emotional arousal¹²¹ stimulating retaliation.

Determining which of these two cases is correct is tricky. On the one hand, incivility use by those in the civil groups appears to be due less to emotional arousal than in the uncivil groups, indicating that the uncivil-like-minded group did induce anger.¹²² However, while the rate of “very angry” incivility users in the uncivil-like-minded group is about the same as in the uncivil-disagreeable group, the overall lower rates of anger in the like-minded group indicates that the message was less successful in inducing anger, and, hence less successful in inducing incivility, than the uncivil-disagreeable message.

This hints to the idea that uncivil-like-minded messages do not induce incivility use through anger. Recall from the previous chapter that while those exposed to an uncivil-like-minded post on the message board used incivility at a greater rate than those exposed to a civil-like-minded post, incivility use was not tied to feelings of anger.¹²³ Recall also that only the uncivil post that featured emotional elements--use of capitalized words and exclamation points—had a significant effect on incivility use by like-minded partisans (Republicans); the post lacking the elements did not have a statistically significant effect. This points to the idea that like-minded uncivil messages lead people to mimic the behavior, and adopt uncivil phrases and tactics (i.e., use of capitalized words and exclamation points) when denouncing the “other side.” From this perspective, like-

¹²¹At least in terms of anger. It is possible that the civil-disagreeable messages, which points out the shortcomings of one’s own side with little hyperbole, actually induces some anxiety in people, which would not induce them to be uncivil.

¹²² Whereas 62 percent of those in the civil-like-minded group who used incivility also reported being “very angry,” the number rises to 68 percent among those who used incivility in the uncivil-like-minded group. Among the disagreeable groups, this distinction is again larger: a full 70 percent of uncivil users in the uncivil-disagreeable group reported being “very angry,” compared to just 61 percent of users in the civil-disagreeable group.

¹²³ The results from chapter 4, which examine the effect of tuning into uncivil political media, also indicate that like-minded incivility induces use of incivility.

minded messages should not generate more “target aversion” than already exists—these messages tap into preexisting aversion, and provide uncivil “tools” with which to launch attacks on the other side. But there needs to a certain number and variety of incivility instances for this to occur. The lower level of incivility use in the CCES experiment among the civil-like-minded group is likely due to the “restrained” use of incivility in the message that lacked emotional elements; like the non-hyperbolic message used in the message board experiment, the CCES message did not feature capitalized words and exclamation points.

In simple terms, there was not a lot of incivility to mimic. In fact, in being a “report” of what a partisan leader said, the message was robbed of what might be its most powerful elements—it lacked the visual and verbal stimulants that come with uncivil partisan talk on television and radio, and lacked the digital equivalents of both that show up in many online interactions, in the forms of capitalized words and extended punctuation. These sorts of uncivil elements, as Herbst (2010) and others argue, likely pull in the attention of a like-minded audience. They pay more attention, and hence remember the phrases and behavior utilized. When it comes time for them to offer their own political opinions, this type of political talk remains on the “top of the head” (Zaller 1992) and is easily replicated.

It might be too simple, however, to conclude that rather than upsetting partisans, like-minded uncivil messages are cognitively pleasing to see, hear, and read. Anger was still higher in the uncivil like-minded group than in the civil like-minded group, and the connection between anger and incivility use was stronger in the former than in the latter. It is likely, then, that both explanations are somewhat apt. Future research, with multiple,

distinct variations in uncivil like-minded messages, is necessary to completely sort this out.

Uncivil disagreeable messages, however, do induce anger—even when they lack histrionic elements. In the message board experiment presented in the previous chapter, this did not translate into larger increases in use of incivility (but did induce reprimands of the message poster). Outside of the message board, in the more “private” survey environment of the CCES experiment, anger did translate into increases in incivility use—and quite significantly. Those angered by the attacks on their side retaliated by adopting uncivil tactics in their own messages. When you are a partisan, and vitriolic comments are directed at your “side,” you are more likely to get angry and return the favor. Generally, the connection between exposure to incivility and use of incivility provides support for my third hypothesis; however, this comes with the important caveat that uncivil-like-minded messages were far less influential than uncivil-disagreeable messages.

Compromise

Overall, openness to compromise was lower in the uncivil groups than in the civil groups. Partisans and independents exposed to an uncivil message averaged a compromise score of 1.62, on the 0-4 scale, while those in exposed to a civil message averaged a score of 1.76. The different of 0.14 points falls just outside of significance at the 0.10 level. Among partisans, however, whom the uncivil messages should resonate with (and who made up about 88 percent of the sample), this difference was more apparent. Whereas partisans who saw a civil message averaged 1.75 on the 5-point compromise scale, partisans exposed to an uncivil message had an average 11 percent

lower, at 1.55 (a difference significant at 0.05). The debt debate is a topic many already have strong opinions about; that the uncivil stimuli, consisting of a few subtle changes to one single short paragraph, reduced people’s willingness to compromise highlights the power of incivility. These additions, magnified throughout a half hour program, a blog post, or numerous postings on Facebook, would likely lead to a sharper decline in compromise. Increasing the hyperbole, and adding histrionic elements—which I have previously shown to be very influential and are common to most uncivil political media—would also strengthen the effect.

As found in previous studies, anger is clearly driving reduced willingness to compromise. Whereas those who reported being “not at all angry” or “not very angry” averaged a compromise score close to “2” on the 0-4 scale,¹²⁴ the average was a bit under 1.3 for those who reported being “very angry” (the difference was significant at 0.001). An ordered probit regression, which includes the same control variables as in the incivility use model included in Column of Table 6-3, confirms the strong negative influence that feelings of anger have on openness to compromise on the debt issue.¹²⁵ The results of the ordered probit regression are included in the Column 2 of Table 6-3.¹²⁶

Unlike previous studies, this analysis connects feelings of anger to exposure to uncivil messages. In the uncivil groups, 91 percent of those who reported no willingness

¹²⁴ The actual average for those who reported no anger was 1.92, and for those who said they were not very angry, the average was 2.14.

¹²⁵ Additionally, replacing anger in the model with a measure of being in one of the uncivil conditions (“0” if in a civil condition, “1” if in an uncivil condition) shows that partisans exposed to an uncivil message had lower levels of compromise, even controlling for the various demographic factors.

¹²⁶ Though not reported in this model, the predictor which has the strongest effect on reducing willingness to compromise is incivility use. This variable saps the predictive power of both being in an uncivil condition and anger. As using incivility is likely an effect of both these predictors and endogenous to low willingness to compromise, this result is not unexpected; had there been no relationship between the two, or if incivility use had a positive relationship with compromise, this would raise questions about my theory. Instead, it provides further confirmation that exposure to incivility, via anger, can induce anti-deliberative attitudes and behavior.

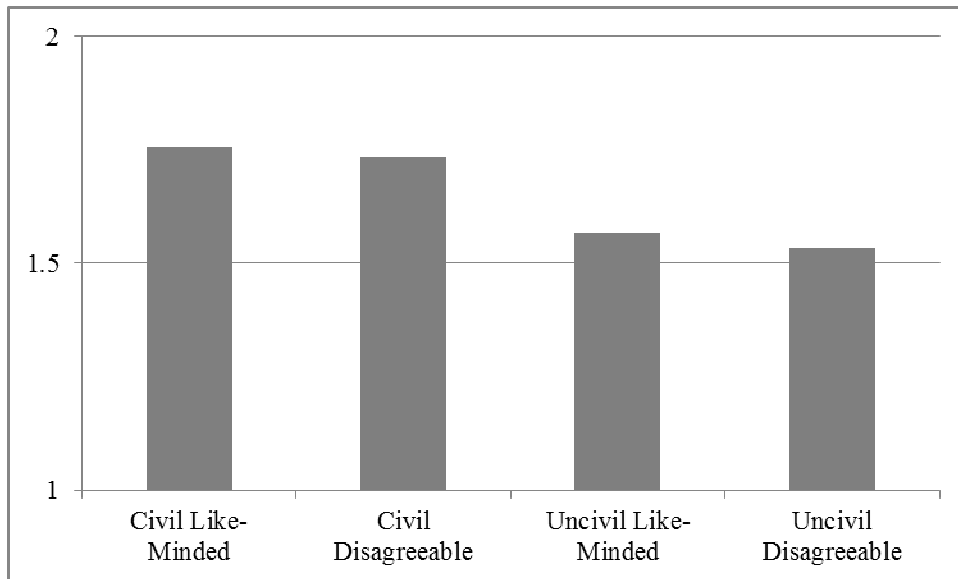
to compromise were also “somewhat” or “very” angry—very few people reported no willingness to compromise while also not feeling any anger. On the other hand, only 37 percent of those who indicated high willingness to compromise (a “4” on the 0-4 scale) were “somewhat” or “very” angry about the debt debate. This same relationship existed among people exposed to the civil messages, with 89 percent of people who reported no willingness to compromise being “somewhat” or “very” angry. The difference, however, is that levels of anger were significantly higher in the uncivil groups—particularly the uncivil-disagreeable group--and therefore compromise was lower on average.

The higher levels of anger in the uncivil groups, and the strong tie between feelings of anger and a reduced willingness to compromise indicate that uncivil messages have the ability to reduce a deliberative spirit in political talk. I next look at whether the message is like-minded or disagreeable makes a difference in the effects of incivility on compromise. Figure 6-3 displays the average compromise score (0-4) for each of the four conditions.

Among the four conditions, the average compromise score was lowest in the uncivil-disagreeable group, where the average score was 1.54. The average score among those in the uncivil-like-minded condition at 1.57 was the second lowest. Willingness to compromise was 1.74 in the civil-disagreeable condition, and the highest in the civil-like-minded condition, which had an average score of 1.76. Comparing the differences in means between groups, only the difference between the uncivil-disagreeable mean and the civil-like-minded mean meets a conventional level of statistical significance (at 0.10). However, the difference between the uncivil-disagreeable condition and the civil-

disagreeable condition is close to significance, as is uncivil-like-minded condition with both of the civil conditions.¹²⁷

Figure 6-3: Average Compromise Score, by Condition



Note: bars represent the average score on the 0-4 compromise measure.

These group averages do not differ much from the averages of all partisans who saw a civil message (1.75) and all partisans who were exposed to an uncivil message (1.55), a difference that was significant. It is therefore reasonable to assume that both like-minded and disagreeable uncivil messages lowers willingness to compromise, and that the differences between the conditions would reach significance with larger samples.

¹²⁷ Interestingly, when partisan “leaners” are dropped from the analysis (leaving “weak” and “strong” partisans), the difference between the uncivil-like-minded group with civil-like-minded group reaches significance (at 0.05) and the difference between the uncivil-like-minded group and the uncivil-disagreeable group gets closer to significance—but the relationships between the uncivil-disagreeable group and civil groups does not improve. This may suggest that strength of partisanship matters more when an uncivil message is like-minded, although this deserves further verification.

Table 6-4: Predictors of Willingness to Compromise, by Condition

VARIABLES	Civil Like-Minded	Civil Disagreeable	Uncivil Like-Minded	Uncivil Disagreeable
Anger	-0.25*** (0.100)	-0.32*** (0.108)	-0.13 (0.090)	-0.22** (0.105)
Age	0.00 (0.006)	-0.00 (0.005)	-0.00 (0.006)	-0.01 (0.005)
Gender	0.15 (0.178)	0.18 (0.166)	0.18 (0.183)	0.19 (0.171)
Education	-0.18*** (0.059)	0.05 (0.060)	-0.12** (0.059)	-0.05 (0.057)
Partisan Strength (1-4)	-0.11 (0.099)	-0.25** (0.099)	-0.30*** (0.101)	-0.03 (0.102)
Democrat-Republican	0.29 (0.225)	-0.39* (0.241)	-0.54* (0.275)	-0.34 (0.232)
Ideology (1-5, L-C)	-0.13 (0.102)	0.11 (0.100)	0.08 (0.111)	0.03 (0.105)
Race (0-1)	0.19 (0.232)	0.02 (0.204)	0.02 (0.240)	-0.39 (0.271)
<i>Cut 1</i>				
Constant	-2.11*** (0.636)	-2.26*** (0.639)	-2.54*** (0.692)	-2.09*** (0.651)
<i>Cut 2</i>				
Constant	-1.73*** (0.630)	-1.71*** (0.633)	-1.97*** (0.685)	-1.60** (0.647)
<i>Cut 3</i>				
Constant	-0.81 (0.625)	-1.12* (0.631)	-1.10 (0.676)	-0.70 (0.640)
<i>Cut 4</i>				
Constant	0.16 (0.633)	-0.34 (0.630)	-0.42 (0.676)	0.16 (0.644)
Observations	172	175	168	174
Adj. R-squared	0.05	0.04	0.05	0.03

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

The coefficients presented above are the results of an ordered probit regression, predicting willingness to compromise (0-5), with standard errors in parentheses.

Given that the uncivil-disagreeable condition was much more influential than the uncivil-like-minded condition when it came to inducing anger and incivility use, it is

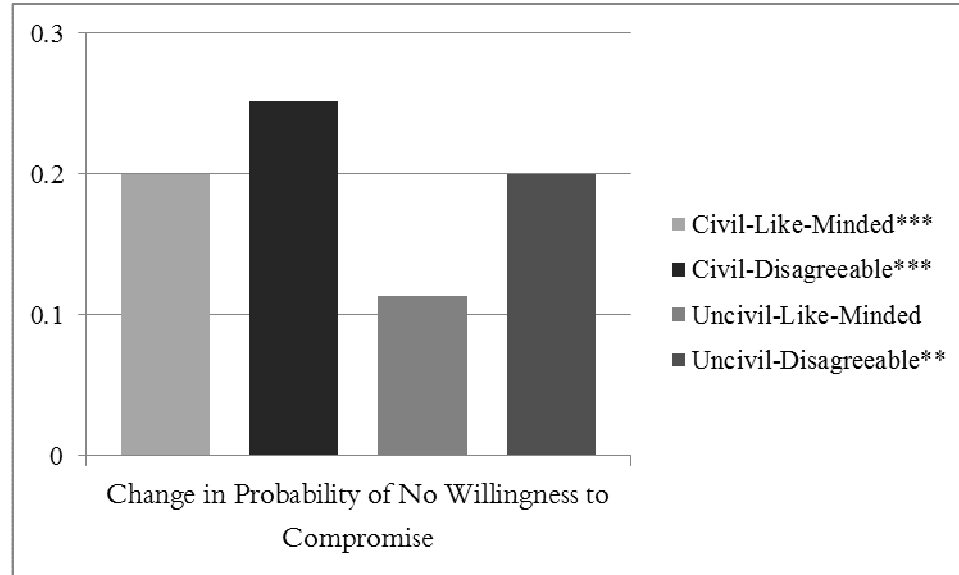
interesting that the uncivil-disagreeable position did not have a significantly more powerful effect on willingness to compromise than the like-minded condition. Was the connection between anger and reduced compromise weaker in the uncivil disagreeable condition than in the uncivil-like-minded? It actually appears to be the opposite. Table 6-4 displays four ordered probit models for each condition, to see if anger (and other predictors) has different effects on compromise in the different conditions. I include the same control variables as in the previous models presented in this chapter. However, I break up partisan identification into two separate variables, in order to isolate the effects of partisan strength and partisan identification.¹²⁸

In the civil-like-minded, civil-disagreeable, and uncivil-disagreeable conditions, anger has a significant negative effect on willingness to compromise. However, it is not significant in the uncivil-like-minded condition. Figure 6-4 shows the change in probability of being unwilling to compromise (a “0” on the 0-4 scale) with a move from not being angry at all to being very angry for each of the four conditions.¹²⁹ This change in anger increased the probability of not compromising by 20 to 25 percentage points in each of the conditions but the uncivil-like-minded condition; in that condition, the change was only 11 percentage points and insignificant. This means there is a large difference in the effect of anger on compromise between the two uncivil conditions—the effect of going from not being angry to very angry is 75 percent greater in the uncivil-disagreeable condition.

¹²⁸ “Partisan strength” is a four category variable, ranging from “weak” to “strong” partisan, while “Democrat-Republican” is a dichotomous variable, with “0” indicating the respondent is a Democrat, and “1” indicating the respondent is a Republican.

¹²⁹ Predicted probabilities were calculated using the observed value approach (Hanmer and Kalkan 2013).

Figure 6-4: Change in Compromise as Predicted by Change in Anger



Note: Bars represent the change in predicted probability of being unwilling to compromise (a “0” on the compromise measure) with a move being “not angry at all” to “very angry.”

While both uncivil conditions lower willingness to compromise, anger is only the main driving factor in the uncivil-disagreeable condition. Instead of anger, partisan strength (1-3) is a strong, significant predictor in the uncivil-like-minded condition, with stronger partisanship associated with decreased willingness to compromise.¹³⁰ The Democrat-Republican dichotomous variable is also significant, indicating that Republican identification is associated with lower willingness to compromise. Education is also significant, indicating that years of schooling reduced compromise.

Republican identification is also significantly associated with reduced willingness to compromise in the civil-disagreeable and uncivil-like-minded conditions. Indeed, overall, and in three of the conditions, Republicans had significantly lower compromise scores on average; however, in the civil-like-minded condition, Republicans actually

¹³⁰ Partisan strength was also significant in the civil-disagreeable condition.

have a slightly higher compromise score (1.80 versus 1.72), although the difference does not reach significance. This relationship deserves further analysis, but I will lay out a couple of potential explanations. One is that unwillingness to compromise is seen as a positive quality among contemporary Republican identifiers. The rise of the Tea Party movement and its message of “no compromise” (Skocpol and Williamson 2012) has perhaps resonated with Republicans in the electorate. Another factor may be that the debt debate is simply more important to the average Republican than it is to the average Democrat, and therefore Democrats are more willing to concede. Replacing the debt issue with one that Republicans care less about than Democrats might see this relationship reversed. These partisan positions become activated in any condition that is either uncivil or disagreeable.¹³¹

In addition to the uncivil-like-minded group, partisan strength was also significant in the civil-disagreeable group, and education was significant in the civil-like-minded group. In these groups as well, both partisan strength and education had negative effects on willingness to compromise. Yet only in the uncivil-like-minded condition were both negative and significant. This suggests that in the uncivil-like-minded condition, political sophistication is driving reduced compromise: educated partisans, likely aware of the politics surrounding the debt debate and more passionate about their positions, are more likely to be activated by like-minded messages; as Zaller (1992, 127-128) notes, reception of a political message increases with political awareness, and the message has a higher rate of acceptance when it is like-minded.

¹³¹ Why the Democrat-Republican variable is not significant in the uncivil-disagreeable model is unclear, although it is reasonable to assume that the higher level of anger among all partisans in the condition makes the distinction between party identification and strength irrelevant.

It is not surprising then that partisan strength and education are significant in the uncivil-like-minded model. For some, like-minded messages that blame the out-group are cognitively pleasing to hear. It is politically aware strong partisans for whom uncivil messages should be the most appealing.¹³² Perhaps they feel some enjoyment when witnessing a leader bash opponents; a harshly worded message that leaves little room for ambiguity may bring satisfaction to partisans more than any other type of message. But this is merely reaffirming what like-minded partisans more or less believe; rather than generating new feelings of anger, the uncivil like-minded messages tap into preexisting views, strengthen resolve, and reduce uncertainty. These messages also send instructions about how to engage with the other side; when a like-minded “leader” conveys the bad behavior of the “other side,” it causes people to put on their partisan lenses and reject compromise. When hyperbolic, uncivil elements are added, these messages become even more powerful. The other side is not just in the wrong—they are really bad, perhaps in an immoral sense.

These results provide support for my fourth hypothesis, as exposure to uncivil messages reduces willingness to compromise. However, anger only appears to be driving reduced compromise in the disagreeable condition. In the like-minded uncivil group, the mimicking effect appears to reduce compromise. Just as incivility use rose among those exposed to an uncivil-like-minded message without feelings of anger increasing, the uncivil-like-minded message affects deliberative attitudes without necessarily inducing anger. Still, it is difficult to dismiss anger as a complete non-factor, as with incivility use, “target aversion” may occur among some. The higher rate of anger in the group,

¹³² Likely, how valid the message is perceived to be also increases; as Zaller (1992, 127-128), reception of a political message increases with political awareness, and the message has a higher rate of acceptance when it is like-minded.

compared to the civil-like-minded group, indicates that some sort of aversion is occurring with exposure to the uncivil like-minded message. What this all suggests is that the connection between like-minded incivility and anti-deliberative attitudes is a complicated one. These messages may not affect every partisan in the same way, unlike uncivil-disagreeable messages, for which the negative relationship between anger and compromise is much clearer. To make sense of this, in the next section I compare these results to the analyses presented in the previous chapters.

Discussion

Anger can drive anti-deliberative attitudes. Consistent with findings in a number affective intelligence studies, the experiment above shows that strong feelings of anger are related to low willingness to compromise. Throughout this project, I have considered whether incivility in political discourse induces anger, and in turn affects deliberative attitudes. I have addressed related questions as well: Do we get just as angry (and thus less open-minded) when exposed to uncivil messages that attack the other side as we do when we receive messages that attack our own side? And can uncivil messages induce anti-deliberative attitudes and behavior through means other than anger?

I have presented evidence that strongly suggests that we get angry when someone on the “other side” makes an uncivil attack on our in-group--which I refer to as “perpetrator aversion.” In both the message board experiment presented in chapter 5 and the CCES experiment presented in this chapter, the addition of incivility to a disagreeable message increases anger. In the message board experiment, this led to reduced satisfaction with the discussion and reduced consideration of the view included in the post. Additionally, people increased their reprimands of the uncivil “perpetrator” in their

own message board posts. In the CCES experiment, exposure to an uncivil disagreeable message led to an increase in the use of incivility, as well as reduced willingness to compromise on the issue being discussed (the national debt).

The connection between uncivil like-minded messages, anger, and anti-deliberative attitudes is less clear. On the one hand, there is evidence that the addition of incivility to a like-minded message increases the use of incivility by those exposed to the message. The analysis included in chapter 4 shows that tuning into like-minded uncivil media increases incivility use, and the message board experiment backs the claim that like-minded incivility boosts uncivil political talk. Yet, in the message board experiment, anger does not appear to be driving the increase in incivility use, and deliberative potential did not decrease among those exposed to the uncivil like-minded message.

The CCES experiment provides some limited evidence that some “target aversion” is occurring. While there was not significantly more incivility use in the uncivil like-minded message than in the civil like-minded message, the ties to feelings of anger were stronger. Additionally, higher levels of anger and lower levels of willingness to compromise in the uncivil group also suggest that an emotional reaction to the like-minded incivility occurred. However, the use of incivility among both like-minded groups was dwarfed by the use of incivility in the uncivil-disagreeable group. Furthermore, while anger has a negative relationship with willingness to compromise, the relationship is not significant; measures of political awareness instead have a significant negative effect on compromise.

What these analyses demonstrate is that the effects of uncivil like-minded messages are complicated. While additional research is needed, these results suggest that

both “target aversion” and a “mimicking effect” occur. Some people become angry upon hearing about the bad things the other side is doing, and react by closing their minds to their ideas. Others will simply find the like-minded analysis pleasing, and mimic the uncivil behavior without becoming angrier. The extent to which both cases happen, and whether a person falls into the first category or second, likely depends on variables like the focus of the message—discussion of the debt may infuriate some, while others will become angrier over issues like immigration. The levels and type of incivility may matter, too--the combination of histrionic incivility and the discussion of the national debt might have a different effect than a combination of histrionic incivility and student loan debt relief. Also, importantly, how much does it matter *who* the messenger is and the manner in which people respond to the messenger? Did people react to an uncivil disagreeable message differently when the messenger was believed to be a random student on a messenger board than they did when the messenger was believed to be a party leader? Did the difference in the sense of privacy—an online forum versus a survey—have an effect as well?

In future analyses, it will be helpful to make distinctions between types of uncivil like-minded messages. First off, the degree to which the message is uncivil—specifically, whether it contains emotional elements—appears to make a difference. Both the disagreeable uncivil messages in the CCES experiment and in the message board experiment that lack histrionic elements fail to boost incivility use significantly. The message board experiment post that includes histrionic elements—capitalized letters and multiple exclamation points—boosts incivility use, and quite significantly. Likely, these

additional uncivil elements mean more uncivil behavior to mimic—which is why use of incivility increases without increases in anger.

The effect of uncivil disagreeable messages seems much more straightforward; in both experiments, exposure to uncivil messages attacking your side meant increased anger and reduced deliberative potential. However, the experiments differed in the extent to which this produced increased use of incivility. As I predicted at the end of chapter 5, the different setting (and more heterogeneous demographics) led to an increased use of incivility with exposure to the message in the CCES experiment, whereas this did not occur in the message board experiment. Time and place, perceived audience, whose message you are responding to, the exact content of the message—all of these things potentially will alter the effects of an uncivil message. There are many combinations to try, each potentially producing somewhat unique results. Who acts in what way and when will vary. But what is clear and not in doubt is that the addition of incivility to political talk is influential on political deliberation. In each of the analyses I have included in this project, it has boosted the use incivility. In both experiments, overall levels of anger increased and willingness to deliberation declined when incivility was added to political messages. Political discourse changed, and not for the better.

The incivility I incorporated into the experiments is mostly subtle. Claims were slightly more hyperbolic than in the “civil” versions, and even the civil messages were negative towards one side. Likely, the negativity of the civil messages had an effect that positive messages would not have. That the addition of a few hyperbolic elements to the messages is enough to affect anger, incivility use, and willingness to compromise

demonstrates the power of incivility and that the distinction between negative and uncivil political talk is an important one to make.

Additionally, the uncivil messages used in this experiment were fairly watered-down compared to political talk common to talk radio, cable television, and online discourse. Along with a general increase in uncivil political talk in media (as I discuss in chapter 3), Sobieraj and Berry (2011) argue that extreme, histrionic incivility has made its way into political blogs, television, and radio. As shown in the message board experiment, the post that included histrionic elements was the most influential. By operationalizing incivility in the manner I did, my analyses may be underestimating the effect of incivility—or at least underestimating the effect that more “outrageous” types of incivility that many are exposed to on a daily basis has on political attitudes and beliefs. On a day to day basis, political incivility may curb effective deliberation to a greater extent than shown in this project. Future analyses should investigate the effects of “outrage” incivility through experimental means. I expect that the extremity of attitudinal and behavioral reactions increases with the extremity of the incivility.

Some important distinctions are also probably lost in using a binary measure for incivility use. Just as some political messages in media may be more outrageous than other uncivil remarks, some political talk by the public is likely more outrageous than other types. By making such a distinction, future analyses may further make clear the connection between uncivil messages, anger, and use of incivility. In the next chapter, I will reflect on this and other directions that future research on the effects on uncivil political talk should take.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

A picture is said to be worth a thousand words. For Arizona Governor Jan Brewer, a picture of her waving her finger in the face of President Barack Obama translated into thousands of campaign dollars. Similarly, Representative Joe Wilson gained fame and a steady stream of campaign donations after calling the president a liar on live television. Reflecting on these incidents in an interview with *National Public Radio*, former longtime House member Lee Hamilton notes, “When you do show disrespect, when you yell out at the State of the Union or you shake your finger at the president, you get a lot of support. You raise a lot of money and get a lot of plaudits and emails for standing up.”¹³³ Echoing Hamilton in the same *NPR* piece, political scientist George Edwards notes that the current political climate incentivizes attacks on politicians from the other party, while discouraging collaboration and compromise.

These anecdotes illustrate how an anti-deliberative, hyperbolic spirit among the public can reinforce these same sorts of attitudes within government. When the voting public scorns compromise and rewards incivility, public officials take note. In a political climate already dogged by polarization, having politicians chasing fame and fortune through acts of incivility threatens to accelerate, extend, and prolong partisan conflict. Additionally, an anti-deliberative public is more likely to elect representatives who espouse anti-compromise beliefs (Wolf et al. 2012). The result is more partisan gridlock.

I have argued that anti-deliberative attitudes among the public are sustained and exacerbated by uncivil political talk. With political information, appeals to emotion can

¹³³ See Greenblatt (2012). Text available at: <http://www.npr.org/2012/01/26/145910143/the-public-respects-civility-but-rewards-rudeness?sc=fb&cc=fp>

affect the political behavior of those exposed, and the manner in which they process political information (Marcus et al. 2000; Brader 2006; MacKuen et al. 2010). Because incivility can induce feelings of anger, it can reduce people's willingness to consider views alternative to their own. Furthermore, even when it fails to offend, exposure to incivility can provide particular phrases, tactics, and arguments to mimic, and can sanction the use of incivility more generally. The rise of the Internet, which allows people to share their political thoughts with masses of strangers across the country means that every person with a laptop or a smartphone has the ability to induce anti-deliberative attitudes among their fellow citizens at any time, any place. Incivility may not be the origin of partisan polarization, but it can make it much worse.

Incivility and Democratic Efficiency

Outside of affecting governmental processes, incivility in mass political discourse limits public deliberation. Deliberation has been called “essential to democracy” (Page 1996) and viewed as a means to generating and tapping the “wisdom of the multitude.” But political talk in it of itself cannot produce the positive democratic outcomes attributed to deliberation, even when the discussants are informed, interested participants. These results are the fruits of self-reflection, a refinement of views, compromise, listening, and consideration of alternative opinions. For discourse to produce these things—that is, for political talk to become political deliberation—civility is needed.

Certainly, a conversation devoid of emotion and passion is not desirable. And conflict is a central, critical aspect of debate and democracy. Incivility, however, adds another dimension, which stifles listening and reflection—the very reason discourse is important. Alexander Hamilton argued in *Federalist No. 1*, “For in politics, as in religion,

it is equally absurd to aim at making proselytes by fire and sword. Heresies in either cannot be cured by persecution,” (Hamilton et al., 1787/1788). This has a ring of truth to me; it seems there are few worse ways to convert people whose views you believe are in the wrong than to attack them in a vitriolic manner. I am by no means suggesting that those who utilize incivility are inadvertently limiting the potency of their own arguments. Oftentimes, incivility is used in arguments for strategic purposes, where obstinacy is a goal (Herbst 2010). Incivility is used as a spark, a mobilizer, a way to rally a base and maintain allegiance to shared beliefs within a faction. Political dialogue by elites is not made for the purposes of developing new ideas and generating consensus—the purpose, rather, is to win arguments and elections, and thus dialogue and incivility are used strategically.¹³⁴

Practically speaking, however, there are repercussions for the overuse of incivility, including the inefficient use of political talk. Kingwell (1995) (remarking on the views of Paul Grice), writes that “conversation is rational to the extent that it involves the efficient exchange of information and the goal-directed influencing of other people.” An exchange is inefficient, however, if minds are closed by the tone of the conversation; points are made, but not considered. Uncivil political talk may succeed in mobilizing the base, but it does not win people over to your side.

The presence of incivility in political talk typically adds no new information, and, rather than opening minds to views different from those an individual already holds, uncivil elements can close minds and discourage deliberation. If the purpose of discourse is to find common ground and produce innovation through the exchange of ideas, and if

¹³⁴ For example, much literature on voting behavior suggests campaigns are meant to rally a base, as opposed to the Downsian idea of appealing to the ideological center.

incivility in discourse results in a scenario where there is a lot of talking, but very little listening and even less compromise, then exposure to incivility limits the “efficiency” of political discourse—lots of energy is expended, but very little return is made. Rather than improving society, heterogeneity in viewpoints bogs down American politics.

I have taken some liberties in describing the relationship between incivility and anti-deliberative attitudes. My findings are more nuanced and complicated. These results need to be replicated, and more research needs to be conducted to clear up unanswered questions. However, that incivility has negative ramifications for political deliberation should not be in doubt. In the next section, I briefly summarize my findings, and describe some of these unanswered questions. I will conclude by describing my plans for future research, as well as recommending directions other researchers should follow to help us understand the impact of uncivil political talk.

Summary of Findings

In chapter 1, I laid out hypotheses that I would test throughout this project. The first hypothesis was that (H1) the use of incivility by the American public when expressing political opinions has increased. In chapter 3, I presented evidence that the use of incivility by the general public has grown over time, trending alongside an increase in partisan polarization and the growth of a high-choice, partisan media environment.

I also hypothesized that (H2) exposure to uncivil political talk leads to an increased propensity to use incivility when offering political opinions. Using panel data, I showed in chapter 4 that tuning into like-minded uncivil partisan news increases people’s propensity to use incivility. The results of two separate experiments presented in chapters

5 and 6 also indicate that, in general, exposure to uncivil political talk induces incivility use. These findings support H2, as incivility breeds more incivility

I also use the experiments to test two “sub-hypotheses” related to H2: (H2A) exposure to disagreeable incivility induces the use of incivility in retaliation; and (H2B) exposure to like-minded incivility induces the use of incivility. Here things get a bit more complicated. In one experiment, disagreeable incivility boosted uncivil political talk, but in the other it did not. I attribute this mixed finding to the different formats and settings of the experiments. I also find that exposure to like-minded incivility can boost incivility use, but only when the uncivil message includes histrionic elements.

I also argue that exposure to uncivil political talk can induce feelings of anger, which in turn reduce people’s willingness to deliberate and compromise. In line with this, the experiments tested a third hypothesis, central to my theory: (H3) when exposed to uncivil political talk, individuals will be less likely to indicate willingness to deliberate. With this hypothesis come two sub-hypotheses: (H3A) exposure to disagreeable incivility will induce anti-deliberative attitudes; and (H3B) exposure to like-minded incivility will induce anti-deliberative attitudes.

The results indicate that a distinction should indeed be made between like-minded incivility and disagreeable incivility. When a message is uncivil and disagreeable, the connection between feelings of anger and anti-deliberative attitudes is clear, in support of H3A. Using different measures of deliberative potential, both experiments show that willingness to deliberate decreased with exposure to disagreeable incivility. Moreover, anger was a powerful predictor of reduced deliberative attitudes.

However, there is less evidence of anger's role in inducing reactions to like-minded messages. Although, in the CCES experiment, those exposed to uncivil like-minded talk reduced their willingness to compromise, anger does not appear to be driving these reactions. In the message board experiment, like-minded incivility did not have an effect on deliberative attitudes. Rather than inducing anger, like-minded incivility seems to lead people to "mimic" the uncivil behavior and anti-deliberative attitudes espoused by a member of their in-group. Overall, there is not enough support for me to accept H3B.

When answering the question, posed by H3, if incivility negatively affects deliberation, the answer is 'yes.' The setting in which political talk takes place, the extremity of the incivility, and whether the message is like-minded or not will all make a difference. But exposure to incivility reduced satisfaction with discourse, consideration of opposing views, and willingness to compromise, while also increasing critiques of those expressing uncivil opinions.

Moreover, deliberative attitudes were reduced regarding topics people have preexisting opinions about. Many likely have strong feelings when it comes to dealing with the federal debt, and are unlikely to compromise to begin with. That deliberative attitudes were further reduced by subtle, watered-down uncivil manipulations speaks to the power of incivility. Even when the public was polarized to begin with, uncivil political talk made the divisions worse. More extreme, emotionally-strident incivility would likely produce even larger effects. Alongside its ability to induce more uncivil political talk, it is clear that the presence of incivility will make productive, meaningful deliberation a very unlikely product of political discourse.

This research, however, is just scratching the surface. Many questions remain, especially about the effects of like-minded incivility. In the next section, I outline some directions for future research.

Future Research

First and foremost, the experimental findings need to be replicated, and in different ways. The diversity of online settings provides an opportunity to explore online incivility in ways far different from the message board experiment. The development of a measure of incivility use that takes the extremity (and type) of vitriol into account can provide a more nuanced understanding of exposure effects. Future experiments should also be conducted with larger samples. It also makes sense to use more specific tests to identify the targets of people's anger; for example, the use of feeling thermometers might reveal changes in affect towards targets when people are exposed to like-minded incivility attacking that particular target. Measuring emotional stimulations through cognitive neuroscience methodology may also be warranted (see McDermott 2007).

Media Research

More research should be done on uncivil political media exposure, as well. Specifically, researchers should consider how people come to choose whether to watch more vitriolic, uncivil political media in a high-choice media environment, and when it is that they abstain from using uncivil media. Do they need to already feel angry or "anti-deliberative" to willingly tune in? When they do choose to tune in, does this intensify emotions and predispositions?

I think tracking emotions both before and after uncivil media exposure can answer these questions. Some research in this area has been done previously; Huddy et al.

(2007), for example, examine how anxiety and anger about political issues affect the propensity to tune in to news media. However, the connection between these emotions and news use is not completely clear. Furthermore, only a single wave is used, and thus the causal direction cannot be determined. Additionally, the type of news media is not considered—if anxiety stimulates open-mindedness, then perhaps anxious people tune into news that does not necessarily reinforce preexisting views; anger, on the other hand, should. My point is not to criticize this research, but to point out the many questions that political communication scholars have yet to address.

Stimulating Civil Discourse

The Internet democratizes political communication and opens politics and society to a plurality of voices. Yet, the value of this is limited if hearts and minds are closed to views alternative to preexisting ones. By manipulating exposure to incivility, I have shown uncivil discourse can have this effect. A research direction I am particularly excited about is to now do the opposite. Instead of figuring how to make people more uncivil and anti-deliberative, a critical (if obvious) question is how to stimulate civil discourse in the online world, and hence foster pro-deliberative attitudes.

The key to nurturing deliberative attitudes is limiting the amount of incivility in online interactions. However, methods for promoting civil discourse in online settings are understudied and inchoate. My first goal is to research and develop strategies that can be implemented immediately to encourage civil discourse in online settings. For instance, many websites that feature interactive tools now instruct users to keep their comments

“civil,”¹³⁵ and others require users to log in via a social networking site account to reduce anonymity. However, there has been no scholarly assessment of these techniques. How effective are they in reducing incivility? Do they make a difference? Are certain strategies more effective than others?

I am also interested in studying actions that can be taken by individual users. Research in multiple fields¹³⁶ (including my research presented in chapter 5), have found that individuals offended by incivility in online settings reprimand and denounce uncivil “perpetrators.” It remains unclear how effective these actions are in discouraging uncivil discussions. Other behavior, such as mediation by third parties and “diplomatic” outreach, may promote civility. Using experimental methods to manipulate the presence and content of these techniques in online settings can provide insight into which methods are effective, by measuring participants’ reactions. Internet-based experimental surveys¹³⁷ and experiments using message board platforms make such analyses possible.

Finally, a lack of norms guiding acceptable behavior allows for rampant incivility in interpersonal online communication. A more abstract research goal of mine is to study methods for fostering norms of civility for online interaction. “Step 1” will be to provide preliminary answers to the essential questions of what these norms should be and how they can be promoted. This will likely involve an extensive literature review of theory regarding Internet discourse and “netiquette” to identify a common set of norms, and field studies of civility initiatives to evaluate methods of encouraging civility.

¹³⁵ I.e., instructions for commenting on articles featured on the website of the University of Maryland campus newspaper, *The Diamondback*, lay out rules of conduct, and require commenters to log in via email: http://www.diamondbackonline.com/news/national/article_caace00e-982c-11e2-b658-0019bb30f31a.html

¹³⁶ See: Lee (2005); Papacharissi (2004); and the work by the University of Wisconsin’s Social Media and Democracy Group: <http://smad.journalism.wisc.edu/papers.html>.

¹³⁷ For example, Time-Sharing Experiments for Social Scientists (TESS).

I began this dissertation by noting that there is no shortage of political talk in American politics. Moreover, the infrastructure for mass political deliberation is in place, largely thanks to the rise of social media. There are people using the Internet at this very moment to talk politics, yet it is not likely doing much in the way of improving society. An essential question for contemporary American democracy is how to foster deliberative attitudes so as to transform a cacophony of voices into a cosmopolitan online conversation. I believe civility in political talk is the key—but how to encourage it, and diminish the ubiquity of uncivil political talk, are questions that need much more attention.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Additional Information

A1 2-1: Incivility by Criterion (Chapter 2)

Identifying Occurrences of Incivility by Each Criterion

Criterion 1, includes claims that feature name calling, mockery, and character assassinations; the inclusion of additional superfluous adverbs and adjectives which add no new information, but are purposefully insulting, belittling, and condescending qualify as uncivil under Criterion 1. Criterion 2 includes claims that spin and exaggerate in a misrepresentative fashion the candidates' behavior and views; use of much more extreme, inflammatory words or phrases which made the candidates seem more radical, immoral, or corrupt but did not alter the central claim qualify as uncivil under Criterion 2. Criterion 3 includes claims that featured emotional language and exaggeration; for this criterion, language that suggested the candidates or their affiliations should be feared or are responsible for sadness qualifies as uncivil. This criterion also includes thoughts that are purposefully exaggerated through upper-class letters, multiple exclamation points, and profanity. The final criterion, Criterion 4, included conspiracy theories. To qualify as a conspiracy theory, claims must include accusations of very sinister motives and actions that are baseless. Although unreasonable, these claims are presented as factual. Claims qualifying as uncivil under Criterion 4 cannot be turned civil negative through adjustment.

A1 4-1: Incivility by Criterion (Chapter 4)

Common Uncivil Claims by Criterion in NAES Data

Common claims made up the bulk of uncivil answers for each criterion. Violators of Criterion 1 tended to accuse either candidate of being a liar and deceitful, untrustworthy, and of running a dirty campaign. Insults involving his race and name (such as, “I do not like his color” and “[h]is name sounds like a terrorist name”) were directed at Barack Obama. Common themes of the second criterion included claims that either candidate made attempts to appeal to, pander to, or become ideological and religious radicals, as well as claims that they were trying to trick or fool the electorate, or do other unsavory things to get elected. Exaggerated claims of his war views (such as, “war monger” or “he wants to start WW3”), exaggerated claims of his perceived move to the right (“sold his soul to get elected”; “caved in to the far right extremists”; “he's become a radical on the extreme Right”), and exaggerated claims of his temper (“volatile” and “has a dangerous temper”) were directed at McCain.

Criterion 2 incivility directed at Obama included exaggerated claims of his fiscally liberal views (“Marxist,” “socialist,” “communist”), exaggerated claims stemming from his purported choice to not wear a flag pin and a photo of Obama without his hand on his heart during the national anthem (“completely unpatriotic” “disrespects America”), and exaggerated claims about his social liberalism, particularly abortion (“most pro-murder candidate in the history of USA!!!”). Common displays of Criterion 3 incivility included capitalized letters followed by multiple exclamation points; these displays also usually featured one or more examples of profanity. Common examples of the fourth criterion of the incivility index, conspiracy theories, included claims that

McCain was a “puppet” and a “Manchurian candidate,” while Obama was accused of being a “Muslim” or having “muslim ties,” was an atheist, a racist or disliked white people, was born in a foreign country, as well as a multitude of suggestions that he has a secret, hidden insidious agenda.

A1 4-2. Uncivil Political Media in 2008

Dividing by Partisanship and Format

The Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ), a non-profit research organization associated with the Pew Research Center, releases annual reports featuring content analyses of different forms of media, including cable television news, network television news, local television news, newspapers, and radio. The content analyses of the 2009 PEJ report (which reviews media throughout 2008) notes that primetime cable news and talk radio stood out among other forms of media when it came to pundit-themed, opinionated news—the type of content that is most likely to include uncivil elements. This is consistent with the content review of various media by Sobieraj and Berry (2010) which found that nearly all pundit-themed cable news and political talk radio programs consistently include some uncivil “outrage,” and on average contain significantly more incivility than other “opinionated” media, like blogs and newspaper columns.

Although, according to the 2009 PEJ “prime-time cable in 2008 closely resembled talk radio with pictures” in that both “placed a premium on high-octane opining and polarizing,” conflating partisanship with incivility is inappropriate when it comes to television news—even cable news. Given that political television is more restrained, it makes sense to make distinctions between program format and content. I initially divide the programs included in the NAES questioning in four ways: Political versus non-

political television, partisan bias (liberal, conservative, non-partisan), uncivil versus “civil” programs, and differences in format.

Previous studies utilizing the 2008 NAES data have divided the media in political and non-political groupings and by partisan bias (Dilliplane et al. 2013; Dilliplane 2011). Dilliplane et al. (2012) determined which of the programs included in the NAES survey featured political content through content analysis. Dilliplane (2011) identifies 26 programs (15 with a “Democratic” slant and 11 with a “Republican” slant) that had a partisan bias. Dilliplane determined partisan bias utilizing perceptions of bias among respondents from the 2008 NAES telephone survey, and Lexis Nexis searches for the program host’s name in close proximity to liberal, Democrat, conservative, or Republican. My own Lexis Nexis search of program titles news coverage aligns with most of these distinctions (with a notable exception, *Lou Dobbs Tonight*, explained below)

I then divided programs by format. This is an important distinction, as difference types of programs can be expected to have different types of effects on audiences. Pundit cable news, for example, might be more effective in inducing negative political emotions (Sobieraj and Berry 2010). Along with cable news programs, other types of television media included in the NAES data regarded as having a partisan bias were the satirical news shows (*The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, *The Colbert Report*), and morning “soft news” talk shows (*The View*, *Good Morning America*, and *Fox & Friends*) Dilliplane (2011).

Categorizing the satirical news programs, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report*, is difficult (Baym 2005). While likely to feature uncivil elements

(such as name-calling) and likely to be sympathetic to liberal viewpoints, *Daily Show* viewers have been found to be more cynical of both political parties and their candidates, rather than unabashed Democrats (Baumgartner and Morris 2006). *The Daily Show* host Jon Stewart is notable critic of uncivil high-octane cable news programming, and played a role in CNN cancelling the pundit-oriented program *Crossfire* (Baumgartner and Morris 2006), and *The Colbert Report* was designed to be a parody of shows like the *The O'Reilly Factor*. The argument has been made that both satirical programs qualify as “culture jamming,” meant to subvert dominant political messages, as well that of the media (Warner 2007). As parodies of the news, they are qualitatively something different from the news programs they are satirizing, and therefore should be conflated with those programs. Nonetheless, they still may induce the use of incivility. Thus, I created a separate variable for exposure to either or both satirical programs.

Also, what to do about talk shows? Although the late night talk shows the *Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and *Late Night with David Letterman* likely feature some political humor on a regular basis, as well as hosting politicians from time to time, previous studies have found neither show has much effect on political opinions (Young 2004; Baumgartner and Morris 2006). Furthermore, neither was found to have a clear partisan slant (Dilliplane 2011).

Although daytime talk shows like *The View*, *Good Morning America*, and *Fox & Friends* all were qualified as having partisan biases by Dilliplane (2011), they should not be treated the same as pundit cable news programs, mostly because political content is likely more sporadic. While transcripts of *The View* from 2008 are not available, episode reviews at TV.com from 2008 are. While the program probably can be uncivil and

political, the consistency with which a large portion of its content is political is probably low. An episode in which Bill Clinton visited the program in September 2008, for example, was sandwiched between an episode with visits from actor Dick Van Dyke and gossipier Perez Hilton, with a segment entitled kick-off of "Whoopi Wears a Dress"¹³⁸ and an episode with actors Aaron Eckhart and, Robert Wagner; and a Macy's fashion show segment. Reviewing the episodes that took place throughout this time, and viewing some episodes available on-line, these programs appear to be more political than fellow daytime talk shows, but still only occasionally political in the grand scheme of things. Like the satirical news programs, I place partisan-slanted talk shows in a separate category. Given that these programs are best qualified as "soft news," it is not clear if they will have much effect on influencing political opinions (Prior 2003); but see Baum (2003).

Measuring Incivility in Political Media

To distinguish between uncivil partisan news and "civil" partisan news,¹³⁸ I relied on two measures. First, I ran a search on Lexis Nexis for reports in major world publications for instances of incivility taking place on each program throughout the entire period of the NAES survey (January 1st 2008 to January 31st 2009) for each political program. The rationale behind this measure is that incidents that if a program is consistently uncivil and controversial, some of the more intense instances will become news themselves. Sobieraj and Berry (2010) identify various manifestations of uncivil language and behavior that can appear in political media, including name calling, misrepresentative exaggerations of views and actions, and mockery. The elements used

¹³⁸ I use the term "civil media" loosely, simply to differentiate these programs from one's that have high levels of political incivility

by Mutz and Reeves (2005) in their “recreation” of uncivil mediated political discourse were hostility, rudeness, emotionality, and quarrelsome discussions. Together, these studies provide a theoretical guide to identifying media that include uncivil discourse. For media to include such elements as mockery, hostility, and character assassination, the programming’s host, hosts, or guests need to have opinions and need to at the very best take a negative view towards some persons, policy, or institutions—as opposed to standard news programs, for example, where news is merely read and very little opinionated commentary is offered.

Among the types of “outrage incivility” that Sobieraj and Berry (2010) found to be most common in political television were mockery, misrepresentative exaggeration, ideologically extremizing and insulting language, and emotional displays. Not all of these are likely to be reported, and conducting a search for all of the idiosyncratic ways each media source might do any of these is not possible to do in a rigorous fashion. Instead, I searched for reports of incivility likely to be common which reflect these “outrage” types: First, Reports of an argument or conflict between guests or between guests and hosts were done by searching for the show’s name with the words “argue,” “yell” and “interrupt,” as well as their various tenses and parts of speech variations (i.e., “argued,” “arguing,” and “argument”). Second, reports of a show’s host or guests making accusations or attacks on a political or media figure; “distort,” “accuse,” “bash,” “attack,” or “denounce,” as well as their various tenses and parts of speech variations. Finally, to help identify additional uncivil incidents that were perceived to have crossed a ‘civility line,’ and might account for various types of incivility, I searched for reports of a program’s name and “apology” (with “apologies,” “apologize,” and “apologizing”).

I manually analyzed each result returned in these searches to check the context with which the words or words were used. Additionally, each instance of incivility was only counted once, even it was reported by numerous periodicals, to minimize the sensationalist factor. Exceptions were that the instances had to be in some partisan political context. For example, Barbara Walters sniping Rosie O'Donnell on *The View* did not count, nor did comments made by guests against Iran. To take into account of differences in the amount of airtime for each show (ranging from one hour per week to several hours per day), the total amount of uncivil incidents reported in the press for each program was divided by the estimated total amount of hours the program aired during the panel study period (January 1, 2008 to January 31, 2009). This provides a ratio of events per hour of programming. To make comparisons easier, the scores were multiplied by 100. A score 1.0 indicates that one uncivil incident was reported every per every 100 hours of programming.

With the exception of *Lou Dobbs Tonight*, none of the programs deemed politically “neutral” were reported as having any uncivil incidents. The *Dobbs* “exception” is not surprising, due to the high-profile, controversial, and ideological nature of Lou Dobbs’s views. While Dilliplane (2011) qualifies this show as neutral, there is reason to include it as a show with a conservative/Republican bias. While Dobbs’ views may best be qualified as “populist,” the Lexis Nexis search of reports on him during 2008 overwhelmingly focus on his immigration views, perceived to align with right wing views.¹³⁹ Dobbs also generated controversy in 2008 for a show questioning Barack Obama’s place of birth, an issue consistent with conservative punditry in 2008.

¹³⁹ See: Stelter, Brian, and Bill Carter. 2009. “Lou Dobbs Abruptly Quits CNN.” *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/12/business/media/12dobbs.html> (November 1, 2012).

As selective exposure theory suggests that not all political opinions need to be congenial for a viewer to tune in—just the views among most relevant to particular viewers (for a discussion, see Stroud 2011, 25-27), and Mr. Dobbs most notable political views can be considered conservative, it makes sense to include his program with the other Republican/conservative bias programs.

Table A2 4-1 displays the scores for each the programs with partisan slants. Given that no neutral program (excepting *Lou Dobbs Tonight*) included any uncivil incidents, and I am really interested in making a distinction between uncivil partisan media and civil partisan media, I restrict the analysis to just partisan/ideological media from here on. Rather than choosing an arbitrary cut-off for the divide between uncivil and “civil” programming, shows with above-average scores were selected as uncivil. Eight programs (in bold) had scores above the average of 1.15.

It is possible that certain programs receive more coverage than others for various reasons, and thus relying on reports of incivility is biased; for example, higher-profile programs may receive more press coverage and thus higher scores, or programs that are not typically uncivil were more likely to make news when something uncivil happened. Furthermore, the previous measure does not take into account differences in the level of incivility on a program throughout the campaign season. To evaluate the accuracy of this measure, as well as evaluate whether there is consistency in incivility over the sampling period I employ a second measure of incivility in political media, examining the actual content of programs by searching actual transcripts. Unfortunately, transcripts for some programs or that encompassed a program’s entire duration¹⁴⁰ are not made available.

¹⁴⁰ For the Fox News Channel program *Your World with Neil Cavuto*, for example, only the transcripts of interviews are made available. The other programs for which no transcripts or incomplete transcripts

Still, the availability of complete transcripts for most of the programs allows me to complete these two goals.

I searched transcripts for three types of incivility, again referencing the list of most common uncivil incidents in political television created by Sobieraj and Berry (2010). Insulting language, mockery, name calling, belittling, and character assassination were all common in Sobieraj and Berry's content analysis, and fall under Criterion 1 of my Incivility Index. To identify these types of incivility I searched for incidents when a show's host, a guest, or an interviewee made reference to someone being a "liar," "moron," or "idiot." The specific context was not considered, except to ensure the reference was not made in jest ("Just to make it simple for an idiot like me, Congressman, you're saying..."), or part of an official report (i.e., "Prosecutors are arguing that the accused is a compulsive liar.").

Sobieraj and Berry also found misrepresentative exaggeration and ideologically extremizing language to be common elements of incivility in political television, which pertain to Criterion 2 of my index. To identify these types, I searched for references to "radical" or "lunatic" members of the out-group. On Republican slanted shows, I searched for references to left-wing/left/liberal radicals, lunatics, or lunacy, and on Democratic slanted shows, I searched for references to right-wing/right/conservative radical, lunatics, or lunacy. Context was reviewed through manual analysis.

Finally, Sobieraj and Berry report that emotional displays, emotional language, and obscene language were prevalent in political television, which pertains to Criterion 3 of my index. Because they are on television, most hosts and guests refrain from using

existed were *The View*, *Fox & Friends*, *Studio B with Shepard Smith*, *Fox Report with Shepard Smith*, *Geraldo*, *MSNBC Live*, *Out in the Open*, and *BET News*.

obscurity, and when they do, it is not recorded in transcripts. However, it is possible to get a sense of if there is negative emotionality of a show by measuring the amount of “lesser” obscenities, such as “damn,” “hell,” or “crap.” Thus, I searched for instances of when a show’s host, a guest, an interviewee, or viewers “calling-in” or “writing-in” expresses themselves using “damn,” “hell,” or “crap.” The occurrences of these words only counted if they were used to emphasize points; for instance, mentions of Hell in theological discussions would not count, nor would discussions of quotes (i.e., discussion of Reverend Jeremiah Wright’s infamous “God damn America” quote). Context was reviewed through manual analysis.

To measure the frequency of these instances of incivility, the number of uncivil incidents was divided by the total number of words spoken (as reported in the transcripts). To standardize the scores, each show’s rate of incivility was then multiplied by the average amount of words per one hour of programming for that show. This was determined by adding up all the words included in the transcripts for each program within each of the wave’s time ranges and dividing it by the total by the amount of shows (or episodes) that took place within that same range. If a program’s running time was only a half hour in length (i.e., *Hannity*), then the total amount of words was divided by only half the amount of shows. If was more than an hour (i.e., *Good Morning America* is two hours in length), then then number of shows was multiplied by the numbers of hours of its running time. The resulting score is the average number of instances of uncivil incidents occurring per hour of programming, with a score of 1.0 indicating that the program averaged at least one instance per hour in that time frame. Table A2 4-2 shows

the scores for each program by wave and in throughout all three waves. Additionally, I break down the occurrence of incivility by each of the three incivility dimensions.

The average occurrence of incivility on each of these political programs throughout the three waves was 0.59. Programs with a wave average about the average were designated uncivil (in bold). The six programs that qualified as uncivil under this measure were among the eight programs that were marked as uncivil in the “hearsay” measure (transcripts were not available for the remaining two, *The View*, and *Fox & Friends*, both talk shows). This consistency gives me confidence in the accuracy of the measures.

Talk Radio

The format of political talk radio leaves little difference between general ideological/partisan programs and uncivil ideological/partisan programs. The presence of incivility in political talk radio has been well-documented, and previous content analyses have established the presence of incivility in most of these specific partisan/ideological programs included in the NAES questioning (Barker 2002; Jamieson and Capella 2010; Sobieraj and Berry 2010). In 2008, talk radio programming, dominated by conservative commentators, consisted of hosts attacking policies and vilifying targeted individuals—among all the comments on conservative talk radio in 2008 made about Hillary Clinton, for example, 30 percent emphasized the idea that she did not have any hard core beliefs, and 15 percent revolved around the idea that she was personally unlikable (Project for the Excellence in Journalism 2009). The unavailability of transcripts on Lexis Nexis for makes tracking the prevalence of particular content over the waves for these programs, but it is likely a safe to assume that incivility ebbs and flow any more over the campaign

period (and likely less) than it does political television media. In addition to talk radio programs, I include exposure to NPR's *All Things Considered* in the analysis; NPR programs are perceived to have a liberal bias (Iyengar and Hahn 2009), but are largely devoid of incivility (Sobieraj and Berry 2010). The programs are displayed in Table A2 4-4.

A1 4-3: Fixed-Effects Argument

There are both theoretical and methodological reasons for why the fixed-effects method is superior to a model including lagged uncivil media exposure variables: although I have hypothesized that the relationship between exposure to uncivil media and use of incivility in political talk is causal, the relationship can be considered synchronous, as the effect of exposure to uncivil media is immediate and fleeting. Additionally, Achen (2001) and Allison (2009) argue that the inclusion of lagged dependent variables as explanatory variables can bias the coefficients of other predictor variables, and therefore should never be used as such. As a control for spuriousness, the fixed-effects method is far more effective.

While a random-effects model allows for the inclusion of time-invariant variables and observations that do not vary across waves, it cannot control for unobserved heterogeneity and omitted variable bias, greatly weakening the causal leverage of the model (Kohler and Kreuter 2008). A random-effects model is still a viable option, however, if it can be shown that the estimates are not biased. To see if this was the case, I ran a Hausman test to determine if the estimates the random-effects model produced were significantly different from the fixed-effects estimates. The test confirmed that fixed-effects and random-effects estimates were significantly different from each other

($p=0.000$) indicating that the random-effects model produced biased results and was thus inappropriate to use. The random-effects model did, however, show that changes in exposure to uncivil media correlated with an increased propensity to utilize uncivil language. As the random-effects model did not drop groups that experienced no within-group variability—the main advantage this approach holds over the fixed-effects approach—these effects are meaningful. The results of the random-effects models can be made available upon request.

A1 5-1: Additional Discussion of Democratic-Republican Attitudinal and Behavioral Differences

As shown in Table A2 5-1 of Appendix 2, the mean anger score among Democrats was significantly larger than that of Republicans in the experimental groups. There is a large, significant (at the 0.01 level) difference between the mean anger score of Democrats and the mean anger score of Republicans in group 2—Democrats were on average half a point (0.41) higher on the one-point scale. They were slightly more likely to be angry than Republicans in the control group as well, and even more likely to be angry in group 1, but these differences were not significant. Overall, Democrats in either experimental group had a mean anger score that was 0.26 points higher than Republicans in the experimental groups, significant at the 0.01 level.

As shown in Table A2 5-2 in Appendix 2, subtracting the Republican incivility mean from the Democrat incivility mean reveals that Republicans were more likely to use incivility. The difference between Republicans' and Democrats' use of incivility in the control group was incidental and insignificant at conventional levels; however, experimental group Republicans were 30 percentage points more likely than Democrats

to use incivility (significant at 0.05). The opposite effect is true for critiquing the original poster. The difference between Democrats and Republicans in the control group was small and insignificant. As expected, Democrats were on average 21 percentage points more likely to critique the original poster than Republicans in the experimental groups. As with use of incivility, these differences were only significant in group 2 when the experimental group is broken down: Democrats were 18 percentage points more likely to critique the poster in group 1, but the difference is insignificant at conventional levels. The 24 point difference between the Democrat mean and Republican mean in group 2, however, is significant at the 0.05 level.

Appendix 2: Additional Tables and Figures

Table A2 4-1: Number of Reported Uncivil Incidents in Partisan Media, Per 100 Hours of Programming

Program	Score		Score
Anderson Cooper 360	0.00	Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer	0.00
Beltway Boys	0.00	Lou Dobbs Tonight	3.24
BET News ¹	0.00	MSNBC Live	0.00
CNN Newsroom/ Headline News ²	0.00	Nightline	0.00
Countdown with Keith Olbermann	4.87	The O'Reilly Factor	4.32
Fox and Friends	1.89	Out in the Open	0.00
Fox Report with Shepard Smith	0.00	Situation Room	0.18
Geraldo	0.00	Special Report with Brit Hume	0.00
Good Morning America	0.54	Studio B with Shepard Smith	0.00
Hannity and Colmes	3.78	This Week with George Stephanopoulos	0.00
Hannity's America	1.80	The View	3.78
Hardball with Chris Matthews	2.70	Your World with Neil Cavuto	0.54
Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer	0.00	<i>Program Average</i>	<i>1.15</i>

¹Specifically, I conducted a search for uncivil incidents occurring on *BET Nightly News*.

²Searched for uncivil incidents occurring on *CNN Newsroom*.

Table A2 4-2: Number of Uncivil Incidents in Partisan Media Transcripts, Per Hour of Programming

Dimension	Wave 2				Wave 3				Wave 4				Avg. /wave
	1	2	3	Total	1	2	3	Total	1	2	3	Total	
<i>Republican Slant</i>													
Beltway Boys	0.00	0.00	0.17	0.17	0.00	0.00	0.25	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.14
Hannity and Colmes/Hannity	0.25	0.18	0.25	0.67	0.13	0.13	0.39	0.65	0.27	0.31	0.19	0.77	0.70
Hannity's America	0.30	0.30	0.10	0.70	0.00	1.29	0.71	2.00	0.00	0.80	0.10	0.90	1.20
O'Reilly Factor	0.81	0.15	0.56	1.53	0.64	0.18	0.56	1.38	0.30	0.42	0.42	1.14	1.35
Special Report w/ Brit Hume	0.03	0.00	0.11	0.14	0.07	0.04	0.17	0.28	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.06	0.16
<i>Neutral</i>													
Lou Dobbs	0.49	0.05	0.64	1.19	0.45	0.25	0.12	0.82	0.17	0.05	0.19	0.40	0.80
<i>Democratic Slant</i>													
Anderson Cooper 360	0.06	0.00	0.19	0.24	0.21	0.00	0.31	0.53	0.06	0.00	0.12	0.18	0.32
CNN Newsroom / Headline News	0.01	0.00	0.05	0.07	0.03	0.00	0.17	0.20	0.03	0.00	0.14	0.17	0.15
Countdown w/ Keith Olbermann	0.67	0.12	0.98	1.78	0.52	0.11	1.17	1.80	0.40	0.09	0.87	1.36	1.65
Hardball w/ Chris Matthews	0.13	0.01	0.64	0.78	0.09	0.00	1.17	1.26	0.15	0.00	0.49	0.64	0.89
Late Edition w/ Wolf Blitzer	0.08	0.00	0.08	0.15	0.20	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.10	0.00	0.10	0.20	0.18
Situation Room	0.14	0.00	0.29	0.43	0.06	0.02	0.14	0.22	0.08	0.00	0.09	0.17	0.27
ABC Nightline	0.09	0.00	0.37	0.46	0.08	0.00	0.17	0.25	0.10	0.00	0.22	0.32	0.34
Good Morning America	0.01	0.00	0.09	0.10	0.01	0.00	0.04	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.05	0.07
<i>Average</i>	<i>0.60</i>				<i>0.71</i>				<i>0.45</i>				0.59

Table A2 4-3: Breakdown of Television Programs by Format, Partisanship, and Presence of Incivility

Uncivil Pundit Cable News Programs	Network	Network News	Network
The O'Reilly Factor++	FNC	ABC News Nightline	ABC
Hannity and Colmes++	FNC	60 Minutes	CBS
Hannity's America++	FNC	Frontline	PBS
Hardball with Chris Matthews**	MSNBC	20/20	ABC
Lou Dobbs++	CNN	Dateline NBC	NBC
Countdown with Keith Olbermann**	MSNBC	Face the Nation	CBS
Uncivil Partisan Talk Shows	Network	Meet the Press	NBC
The View**	ABC	This Week w/ George Stephanopoulos**	ABC
Fox and Friends++	FNC	McLaughlin Group	Syndic
Civil Cable News	Network	ABC World News	ABC
Out in the Open (Rick Sanchez)**	CNN	NBC Nightly News	NBC
CNN Headline News /Newsroom**	CNN	The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer	PBS
Special Report with Brit Hume++	FNC	CBS Evening News	CBS
Your World with Neil Cavuto++	FNC	CBS Morning News	CBS
Geraldo at Large++	FNC	America This Morning	ABC
Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer**	CNN	CBS Sunday Morning	CBS
MSNBC Live**	MSNBC	Satire	Network
Studio B with Shepard Smith++	FNC	The Daily Show with Jon Stewart**	COM
The Fox Report with Shepard Smith++	FNC	The Colbert Report**	COM
Anderson Cooper 360**	CNN	Entertainment	Network
Larry King Live	CNN	The Tonight Show with Jay Leno	NBC
Reliable Sources	CNN	The Late Show with David Letterman	CBS
Beltway Boys++	FNC	CSI: Miami	CBS
Civil Talk Shows	Network	The Simpsons	FOX
The Early Show	CBS	Ellen DeGeneres Show	Syndic.
The Today Show	NBC	Brothers and Sisters	ABC
Good Morning America**	ABC	Oprah	Syndic.
		Law and Order	NBC
		Big Love	HBO
		Scrubs	NBC

**Liberal/Democratic Slant

++Conservative/Republican Slant

Table A2 4-4: Radio Programs by Type

Talk Radio Programs
The Rush Limbaugh Show++
The Sean Hannity Show++
Michael Savage, The Savage Nation++
The Glenn Beck Program++
Bill O'Reilly, Radio Factor++
Dr. Laura Schlessinger++
Laura Ingraham++
The Neal Boortz Show++
The Mike Gallagher Show++
The Mark Levin Show++
nnett's Morning in America++
The Jerry Doyle Show++
Radio News
National Public Radio*

++ Identified as a conservative-leaning program by the 2009 and 2010 “State of the News Media” annual report by the Pew Project for the Excellence in Journalism.

*Specifically the program *All Things Considered*

Table A2 4-5: Descriptive Statistics of Uncivil Political Media Users (NAES Data)

	Conservative Uncivil Media		Liberal Uncivil Media		General Uncivil Media	
	Exposure	No Exposure	Exposure	No Exposure	Exposure	No Exposure
Age	55.810*** (13.799)	49.196 (14.405)	55.498*** 13.083	49.967 (14.632)	54.632*** (13.627)	47.684 (14.677)
Gender (0-1)	0.466*** (0.499)	0.577 (0.494)	0.493*** (0.500)	0.560 (0.497)	0.480*** (0.500)	0.585 (0.493)
Education (1-9)	4.803 (1.545)	4.799 (1.654)	5.094*** (1.619)	4.747 (1.624)	4.936*** (1.568)	4.703 (1.674)
Party ID (1-7)	3.316*** (2.179)	4.499 (2.149)	5.175*** (2.053)	4.035 (2.199)	3.670*** (2.294)	4.475 (2.090)
Ideology (1-7)	3.602*** (1.575)	4.044 (1.414)	4.319*** (1.476)	3.866 (1.455)	3.749*** (1.609)	4.033 (1.383)
Interest (0-3)	1.897*** (1.109)	1.555 (1.073)	1.92*** (1.166)	1.587 (1.070)	1.894*** (1.123)	1.461 (1.033)
Gave Money to Campaign (0-1)	0.268*** (0.443)	0.146 (0.353)	0.298*** (0.458)	0.154 (0.361)	0.266*** (0.442)	0.113 (0.317)
Voted in 2006 Midterm (0-1)	0.833*** (0.373)	0.698 (0.459)	0.831*** (0.375)	0.713 (0.452)	0.830*** (0.376)	0.663 (0.473)

Standard deviations are in parentheses. Statistical significance of difference in means determined by the Tukey WSD method for binary measures, and the Kruskal-Wallis test for ordinal and continuous measures.

***Difference between exposure mean and non-exposure mean significant at the 0.01 level

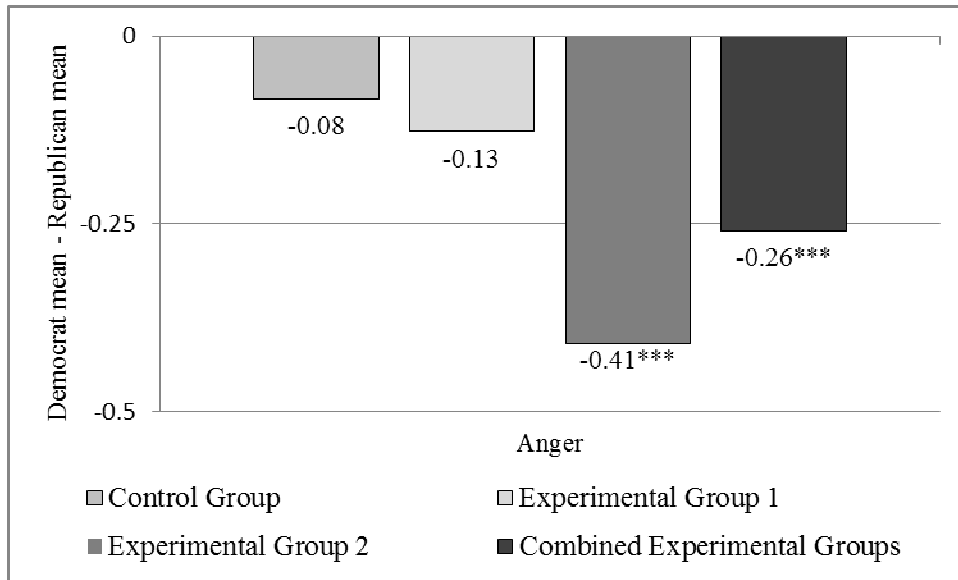
Table A2 5-1: Table of Means (Message Board Experiment)

	Range	Mean (Full)	Control Group	E1	E2
R's Age	18-63	22.82 (7.76)	23.00 (7.61)	22.00 (2.86)	23.90 (10.87)
R's Gender	0=Male 1=Female	0.72 (0.45)	0.70 (0.47)	0.77 (0.43)	0.69 (0.47)
R's Race	0=White 1=Non-white	0.36 (0.48)	0.36 (0.49)	0.37 (0.49)	0.35 (0.48)
R's Partisan ID	7 Categories: 1=Strong Democrat 7=Strong Republican	3.08 (2.01)	3.00 (1.87)	3.10 (2.07)	3.14 (2.17)
R Used Incivility	0=No Use 1=Used Incivility	0.25 (0.46)	0.09 (0.29)	0.27 (0.45)	0.45 (0.51)
R Critiqued OP	0=No Critique 1=Critiqued OP	0.16 (0.37)	0.03 (0.17)	0.23 (0.43)	0.24 (0.44)
R's Satisfaction with Original Post	4 Categories: 0=Not Satisfied At All 3=Very Satisfied	1.82 (0.84)	2.03 (0.68)	1.97 (0.77)	1.41 (1.02)
R's Consideration of Original Post	4 Categories: 0=No Consideration At All 3=A lot of Consideration	2.27 (0.74)	2.27 (0.63)	2.2 (0.81)	2.35 (0.81)
R's Deliberative Potential	6 Categories: 0=No Potential 6=Maximum Potential	4.10 (1.31)	4.30 (1.05)	4.17 (1.29)	3.79 (1.57)
Original Post Made R Angry	4 Categories: 0=Not Angry At All 3=Extremely Angry	0.60 (0.88)	0.33 (0.60)	0.57 (0.82)	0.93 (1.10)
Original Post Made R Afraid	4 Categories: 0=Not Afraid At All 3=Extremely Afraid	0.19 (0.55)	0.21 (0.60)	0.13 (0.35)	0.21 (0.68)
N		92	33	30	29

Table A2 6-1: Table of Means (CCES Experiment)

Variable	Civil- Like-minded	Civil- Disagreeable	Uncivil- Like-minded	Uncivil- Disagreeable	All
Age (18-90)	55.69 (15.06)	52.96 (15.76)	55.89 (15.12)	54.35 (16.18)	54.40 (15.47)
Gender (0=male, 1=female)	0.55 (0.50)	0.55 (0.50)	0.53 (0.50)	0.49 (0.50)	0.53 (0.50)
Partisan Identification (1=Strong Dem, 7=Strong GOP)	3.73 (2.38)	3.99 (2.40)	3.76 (2.42)	4.33 (2.37)	4.06 (2.30)
Education (1=No High School, 6=Graduate Degree)	3.72 (1.50)	3.36 (1.41)	3.75 (1.47)	3.70 (1.43)	3.60 (1.46)
Ideology (1=Very Liberal, 5=Very Conservative)	3.12 (1.12)	3.26 (1.23)	3.28 (1.21)	3.30 (1.10)	3.23 (1.13)
Race (0=White, 1=Non-White)	0.16 (0.37)	0.24 (0.43)	0.17 (0.38)	0.12 (0.32)	0.18 (0.38)
Observations	172	177	169	174	820

Figure A2 5-1: Differences in Means of Reported Feelings of Anger Towards Original Post by Party Identification



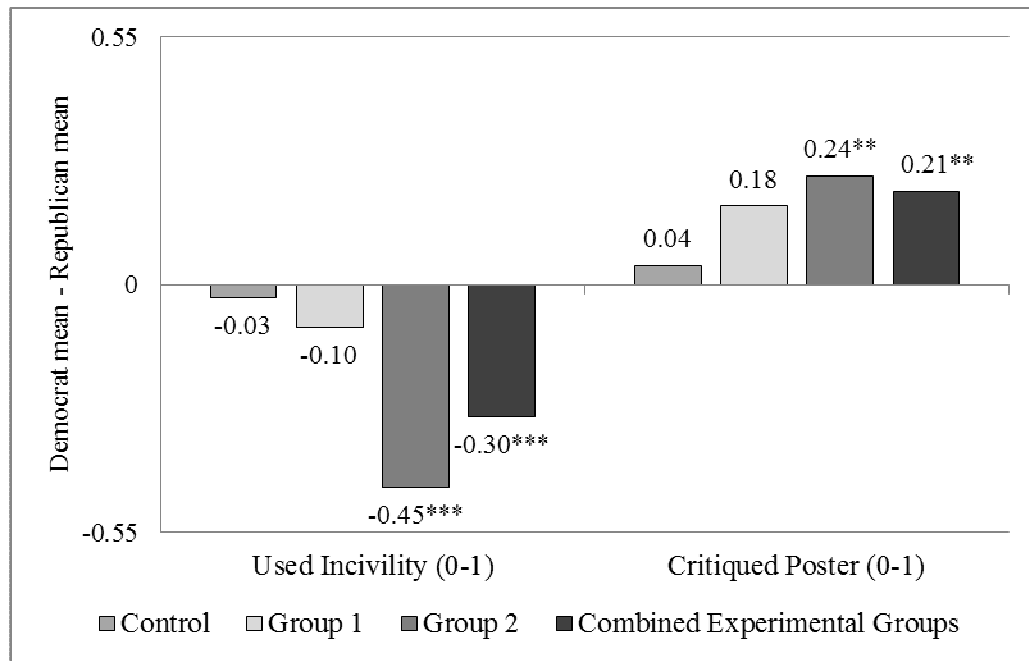
**Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.10 level*

***Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.05 level*

****Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.01 level*

Note: The significance of differences in means for each comparison was confirmed using Student's t-tests with Satterthwaite's degrees of freedom, due to the unequal samples sizes and variances of groups being compared.

Figure A2 5-2: Differences in Means of Use of Incivility and Critiques of Original Poster by Party Identification



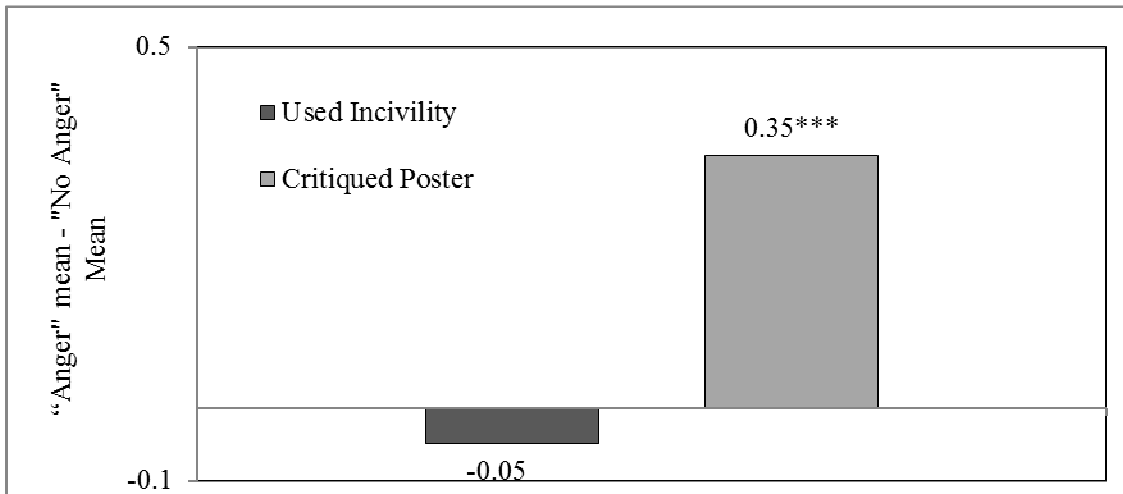
**Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.10 level*

***Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.05 level*

****Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.01 level*

Note: The significance of differences in means for each comparison was confirmed using Student's t-tests with Satterthwaite's degrees of freedom, due to the unequal samples sizes and variances of groups being compared.

Figure A2 5-3: Anger, Incivility, and Critiques



*Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.10 level

**Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.05 level

***Tukey WSD Method determines that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.01 level

Note: The significance of differences in means for each comparison was confirmed using Student's t-tests with Satterthwaite's degrees of freedom, due to the unequal samples sizes and variances of groups being compared.

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