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What is political incivility?

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ABSTRACT

Using 23 novel indicators and a 1,000+ sample representative of a full undergraduate population we examined: how much consensus there was about perceptions of the incivility/civility of various categories of speech/behavior; and whether political incivility is a unidimensional or multidimensional latent construct. Confirmatory factor analyses suggest perceived political incivility is a multidimensional construct. Insulting utterances, deception, and behaviors tending to shut down inclusive ongoing discussion can be treated as distinct, underlying aspects of incivility. More than 75% of respondents viewed all 23 indicators, except issue-oriented attacks, as very, mostly, or somewhat uncivil. If replicated on a representative national sample, standardized indicators of political incivility should be constructed and routinely employed in national surveys of political attitudes and behavior.

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

These concerns are not limited to the general public. The University of Arizona’s National Institute for Civil Discourse argues that “excessively hostile political discourse threatens democratic values and effective democratic governance” (Massaro & Stryker, 2012, p. 379). Empirical researchers have linked incivility with numerous ills. These include reduced trust in and legitimacy of political candidates and government, reduced capacity of elites and citizens to engage in reasoned discussion without

emotional manipulation, extreme political polarization, the impossibility of reaching bipartisan compromise on urgent issues, and the specter of total policy gridlock (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1997; Jamieson, 1992; Massaro & Stryker, 2012; Mutz, 2008a; Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011).

Despite incivility's potential wide-ranging effects on American democracy, survey researchers have not constructed standardized indicators tapping general types of speech or behavior that Americans perceive as uncivil. Researchers have defined incivility somewhat differently, and even when they define it similarly, they have operationalized it in different ways in both surveys and content analysis (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014; Fridkin & Kenney, 2004, 2008, 2011; Jamieson & Falk, 2000; Massaro & Stryker, 2012; Muddiman, 2013; Mutz, 2007; Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Papacharissi, 2004; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011; Uslaner, 2000). Some equate civility with politeness and incivility with rudeness (Herbst, 2010; Kasson, 1990), while others emphatically disagree (Papacharissi, 2004). Where use of highly emotional speech, including appeals to negative emotions such as hatred, fear, or anger, may sometimes be very uncivil (Jamieson, 1992; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011), some argue that emotional speech per se should not be equated with incivility (Massaro & Stryker, 2012).

We build on prior research in communication, history, political science, psychology, sociology, and law to examine how political incivility has been defined and operationalized and to explore further the nature and measurement of perceived political incivility. Many have questioned whether the public can come to consensus on what constitutes political incivility (Jamieson, Volinsky, Weitz, & Kenski, 2015; Massaro & Stryker, 2012), but we argue that this concern should be put to empirical test. Given that we do find substantial consensus in the sub-population we analyze, we think researchers and policy-makers could be well served by moving toward standardized measures of perceived political incivility by the American public. This would facilitate accumulation and replication of findings in which we can have confidence and would support better-designed interventions enhancing political civility and problem solving. With citizen attitudes clarified, scholars employing content analyses to examine incivility's incidence in politics and the media would benefit from improved capacity to match content-analytic categories to citizen concerns.

In this initial inquiry, we analyzed data generated using a simple random sample drawn from a convenient but substantively meaningful student population at a large southwestern research university.¹ Our random sample of undergraduates is representative of the full undergraduate population attending a public university in which about 90% of undergraduates are less than 30 years old. Given that prior research found less tolerance for political incivility among *older* Americans (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011), high aggregate levels of perceived incivility found for our sub-population are especially noteworthy and the different types of speech and behavior that we investigated may capture at least a substantial part of what many Americans mean when they indict the U.S. political system for its lack of civil discourse.

In what follows, we first show the degree to which there is – or is not – consensus among our respondents about what types of speech or behavior are uncivil. We then use confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test whether political incivility is most usefully understood as a unidimensional or multidimensional construct. This second step allows us

to investigate whether and how the diverse types of speech and behavior examined fit together to reflect the overarching construct of political incivility.

What is political incivility?

Prior research

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

Defining civil discourse as “the free and respectful exchange of different ideas,” Coe et al. (2014) investigated markers of its absence in online reader commentary to the *Arizona Daily Star* (p. 358). These included name calling, aspersion or derision of ideas, vulgarity, and pejorative speech. Massaro and Stryker (2012) also emphasized name calling, derisive or disrespectful speech and vulgarity, as well as intentional lies and misrepresentation, as categories of incivility in political discourse. Investigating political discourse in cable television, talk radio, and blogs, Sobieraj and Berry (2011, 2013) categorized multiple kinds of “outrage” speech. These included name calling, insulting language, misrepresentative exaggeration, character assassination, mockery, belittlement, obscenity, ideologically extremizing language, emotional displays, emotional language, and conflagration.

Substantial overlap exists between conceptual categories identified above, including a focus on name calling, vulgarity or obscenity, derision, and misrepresentation or lying. Like content analysts Sobieraj and Berry (2011, 2013) and Coe et al. (2014), experimentalists Brooks and Geer (2007) also honed in on name calling and insulting language as key markers of political incivility. Their uncivil variation on an otherwise civil advertisement criticizing an opponent was: “Education in our communities is suffering today because my *unthinking* opponent has *recklessly* failed to support our local teachers and our schools” (p. 6).

However, conceptual categories adopted by some researchers also contain potentially uncivil behaviors and types of speech absent in others, such as Sobieraj and Berry’s (2011, 2013) emphasis on emotional language and displays.² In addition, where content analysts typically identify qualitative boundaries between civil and uncivil discourse, Fridkin and Kenney (2008), who studied citizen reactions to campaign messaging, argued that incivility is most usefully viewed along a continuum, rather than as a sharp qualitative distinction. For these researchers, incivility does not equate with negativity but rather with an absence of stridency, “a more measured and courteous tone” (p. 698).

Despite suggesting that incivility as perceived by survey respondents typically will be a matter of degree, rather than a sharp qualitative distinction, in a later study that content coded campaign advertisements, Fridkin and Kenney (2011) instructed coders categorizing the advertisements on where to draw the line to make such qualitative distinctions. Allowing for a generous dose of rough and tumble politics, they cautioned coders to refrain from coding an advertisement as uncivil unless it included “explicit use of

harsh, shrill or pejorative adjectives describing candidates, their policies or their personal traits” (pp. 311–312).³

Overall, a pattern of substantial overlap in conceptualization, paired with an absence of more general consensus, is common in the empirical literature and has produced a series of different yet inter-related measures. One common thread uniting many studies at least on the surface is a focus on rudeness *in the political arena*. This has become sufficiently strongly associated with incivility that Herbst (2010) gave her influential book discussing the strategic mobilization, benefits, and costs of uncivil political discourse the title *Rude democracy*. In a 2005 experiment designed by Mutz and Reeves, indicators of rudeness represented civil and uncivil versions of a political debate. The text remained the same across conditions, but in the uncivil version, debaters interrupted each other, sighed, and rolled their eyes.⁴

Conceptualizing incivility as rudeness suggests a potential starting point for developing a coherent conceptualization of what incivility *is* and how it might be measured, but associating rudeness and incivility has been contested explicitly by authors like Papacharissi (2004), who argued strongly that political incivility *not* be equated with being impolite. According to Papacharissi, using strong language or sarcasm or writing in all capital letters in online exchange would be impolite but not uncivil. Incivility would be reserved for online comments or exchange that “threaten[ed] democracy, den[ied] people their personal freedoms” or “stereotyp[ed] social groups” (p. 267). Papacharissi is in tune with literature on democratic deliberation that focuses on inclusion, sensitivity to inequalities, and stereotyping that could censor voices, bias discussion, or shut down discourse (Chambers, 2003; Dryzek, 2002; Mutz, 2008b; Ryfe, 2005; Thompson, 2008). We return to the intersection of scholarship on deliberation and civility below.

Here, however, we emphasize that, although ordinary language use treats civility as synonymous with politeness, close reading of the literature suggests caution. Even when equated with “rude” politics or “rude” democracy, because *political* incivility is specific to the sphere of politics, it is different from impoliteness in everyday social interaction. Healthy democracy presumes and requires spirited contestation of views (Massaro & Stryker, 2012), whereas politeness norms in everyday life often require us to avoid challenging others (Goffman, 1967).

In their seminal discussion of politeness and how it helps maintain “face,” Brown and Levinson (1987) defined “positive face” as a “positive, consistent self-image” and suggested that actions threatening positive face include not just expressions of “contempt,” “ridicule” and “insults,” but also “contradictions or disagreements, [and] challenges,” and broaching “divisive topics, e.g., politics, race, religion ...” (pp. 61, 66–67). In short, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), contention itself tends to undermine maintenance of face. Similarly, Lakoff (2003) noted that politeness is mainly conceived as pertaining to behaviors allowing us to avoid interpersonal confrontation. This suggests that, although political incivility shares conceptual overlap with face-threatening behavior, the two are not equivalent. This theme too will be developed below.

Connections across the literature

Given the scholarly disagreements, how can we unite disparate concepts and measures of political incivility into a single conceptual framework that can be examined empirically?

To address this question and develop our measures of perceived political incivility for survey research, we draw especially on the conceptual framework of Massaro and Stryker (2012).

First, the concept of civil discourse has two components: discourse and civility. Discourse implies ongoing conversation and interaction. Thus, we should attend not only to individual one-off statements or utterances, but also to speech and behavior manifesting back-and-forth dialogue and interaction, whether fully “deliberative” in line with deliberative democratic ideals or not.

Though deliberation and civility typically are considered to be analytically distinct concepts, many scholars of deliberation presume either explicitly or implicitly that civility is required for genuine, successful deliberation (Bohman & Rehg, 1997; Chambers, 2003; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Ryfe, 2005). Civility norms often are equated with showing mutual respect (Chambers, 2003; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Steiner, 2012; see also Jamieson et al., 2015). Beyond this, “some scholars ... refer explicitly to a concept of deliberative civility, meaning careful listening to, and respect for, all persons as well as the effective consideration of all arguments” (Stryker & Danielson, 2013, p. 8).

Gastil (2013) outlined four key elements of deliberative civility: (1) “appreciation for insight offered by those with professional and practical knowledge”; (2) “arguments that avoid manipulation, fallacies or knowingly inaccurate information”; (3) “consideration of diverse viewpoints”; and (4) “affirmation of all persons in society and the web of relationships among them.”⁵ All four usefully might be considered a *subset* of a more complete conceptualization of political civility. Steiner (2012) also pointed to active listening, engaging all arguments and representing them accurately, and mutual respect. Stryker and Danielson (2013) suggested that “deliberative civility entails questioning and disputing, but in a way that respects and affirms all persons, even while critiquing their arguments” (p. 9).⁶ To the extent that mutual recognition and respect, along with freedom to express oneself, are protected by norms of deliberative civility, these norms overlap with protection of what Brown and Levinson (1987) termed “negative face,” defined as the freedom of action for those with whom one interacts. Again, however, and precisely because democratic civility is exercised *within* political contestation, it is not the equivalent of politeness or maintaining face in interpersonal social interaction.

Returning to what *is* included in the concept of political incivility, just as many civility scholars presume intentional falsehoods, misrepresentations and exaggerating to obscure the truth are aspects of political incivility, deliberation scholars emphasize that truthfulness is needed for authentic and effective deliberation. Therefore, as Gastil (2013) highlights, lying and deception also usefully can be thought of as components of an absence of deliberative civility – a conceptual region in which some – but not all – key elements of civility and deliberation respectively overlap.⁷ In short, and above all, deliberation scholarship encourages us to consider how incivility pertains to and manifests in ongoing interaction as well as in one-off utterances.

Second, at the same time as deliberative discourse typically is conceived to involve giving reasons and providing evidence while also allowing for passionate disagreements about social problems and political policies, contemporary social, cognitive, and neuropsychological research makes clear that emotions – even negative emotions – provide benefits as well as costs in the political arena. For example, anger and disgust often signal injustice (Massaro & Stryker, 2012; Ost, 2004). More than this, today’s science shows

that exercising reason is impossible without feeling emotion (Damasio, 1994, 1999; Kahneman, 2011; Lee & Stryker, 2011). Thus, some emotional displays might well be seen as part and parcel of civil political discourse. Herbst (2010) agrees, stating that passionate political discourse is not in itself uncivil.

Third, with respect to both one-off utterances and ongoing interactions, we see much overlap between behavior constituting political incivility and that which violates politeness or face-saving norms in non-political interaction, while also emphasizing that political incivility and interpersonal politeness are not the same. In much social interaction, it is seen as bad manners or a threat to maintaining face to disagree strenuously and passionately with one's interlocutor. However, issue- and policy-based arguments are central to the concept of democratic politics. Political civility norms presume political *argument*, while setting limits on *how* we argue.

Uniting the concept of political civility with that of maintaining face requires that we follow Papacharissi (2004) and restrict political civility norms to maintaining a *particular kind of collective face*. As do we, Papacharissi (2004) distinguishes political incivility from interpersonal politeness and the usual definitions of positive and negative face. At the same time, if we fail to show deference for the "democratic identity" of individuals or "disrespect ... the collective traditions of democracy" (Papacharissi, 2004, p. 267) this can be regarded as violating the collective face of democracy. Our approach to conceptualizing political civility is consistent with the democratic politics-specific concept of collective face offered by Papacharissi (2004).

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

Consistent with our own premises, and with those of scholarship on both deliberative civility and on maintaining face, Massaro and Stryker (2012) also specify, for the realm of politics, two categories that apply to discourse as well as to single utterances. These are speech that intentionally closes off further discourse and speech that denies political opponents the right to equal participation and legitimacy.

In sum, prior scholarship converges to suggest that political incivility is a complex, multi-faceted concept not fully coterminous with politeness or maintaining face in other interaction realms. Our CFA investigates whether our respondents agree. Despite some disagreement about whether to include impoliteness per se or emotional speech or displays per se as categories of incivility, there is much scholarly agreement on many of political incivility's key categories. Building on these consensual categories, on the need to assess perceptions pertaining to political incivility's discursive aspect as well as to the "one-off" utterance, and on expecting that citizens would *not* view issue-based political conflict as a form of political incivility, we constructed 23 potential categories of perceived incivility and proposed the following hypotheses.

Research hypotheses

As stated previously, numerous scholars, including those constructing valid and reliable content coding schemes for campaign advertisements and discourse across diverse media platforms, have emphasized the difficulty of “line-drawing” between civil and uncivil discourse (Coe et al., 2014; Fridkin & Kenney, 2011; Massaro & Stryker, 2012; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). However, some argue that the consensual specific categories of incivility delineated by researchers may likewise be relatively consensual among members of the American public. Consistent with the view of democratic norms as encouraging spirited disagreement about issues and our inference that *political* incivility is not coterminous with violations of interpersonal politeness, we expected perceptions of issue-based attacks to deviate sharply from this pattern. Therefore, we propose the following:

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

However,

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

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

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

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

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

Data and measures

Our data come from a 2013 online survey administered in two separate waves to a simple random sample of 19,860 undergraduate students at a large southwestern university. Using the complete student directory as our sampling frame, we administered the first wave to 10,000 students on 30 September 2013, and the second wave to 9,860 students on 6 November 2013.⁹ Of the 19,860 students randomly selected for inclusion in our sample, 1,035 respondents completed the entire survey and 1,218 respondents completed our battery of civility questions, resulting in response rates of 5.2% and 6.1%, respectively. All respondents received a \$10 gift card to Amazon.com following completion of the

Table 1. Incivility survey measures.

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

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

survey. To control for differences in cross-national perceptions of civility we omitted international students and restricted our attention solely to those U.S. citizens who completed our civility battery, yielding a final sample size of 1,170 respondents.¹⁰ In our descriptive analyses, we employed post-stratification weights to account for differences in the probability of selection into the survey across the two survey waves and ensure that our results are generalizable to our full undergraduate university population.¹¹ We also conducted these analyses without weights. Results of the unweighted and weighted analyses are comparable, suggesting use of these weights did not alter our findings.

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

Analytic methods

We used two analytic approaches to identify patterns in our data. First, we provide information on the distribution of individual responses for each civility item, identifying overarching patterns in individual responses. Previewing our findings, we found that the data supported H1 and H2. For the majority of our indicator variables, the response

distributions were either *j*-shaped or heavily negatively skewed, suggesting that the majority of respondents found these actions mostly or very uncivil. Given that the data are so heavily skewed and *j*-shaped data cannot be transformed to approximate a normal distribution, we treat our indicator variables as ordinal and/or nominal indicators in our analyses below.

In our second set of analyses, we identify underlying dimensions that may drive individual item attitudes about incivility. We draw on the theoretical arguments above to perform a series of CFAs to fit a series of theoretical models to our survey data and to test H3a and H3b. For our CFA models we use the Akaike information criterion (AIC), consistent Akaike information criterion (CAIC), and Bayesian information criterion (BIC) statistics to determine which model specification fits the data best.¹²

Findings

Perceptions of incivility

Our most striking finding arises from simple descriptive statistics. On most of our 23 potential indicators of incivility, our respondents exhibited substantial consensus. Indeed, on some items, variability is extremely small. On all items very few respondents – from 1.3% to 3.3% – indicated they had no opinion. The differences in percentages computed from weighted and un-weighted survey data are minimal. For each of the 23 items provided in Table 1, Table 2 provides the percentages of respondents that fall in each response category. We present results from the weighted data. Because Table 2 does not show the very small percentages of respondents who responded “no opinion” to each item, percentages for the five substantive categories on each item sum to slightly less than 100%.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for civility indicators.

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

Note: Results are displayed in percentages.

Further analysis of the 23 items revealed five clusters, each of which has a distinct response pattern that is shared across indicators assigned to a given cluster, but different from indicators assigned to a different cluster. We systematized identification of the clusters by performing a hierarchical cluster analysis. This exploratory data technique does not provide one “right” number of clusters for the input data. Rather, it provides a set of solutions from which the analyst can choose, depending on goals of the clustering. We balanced the criterion of minimizing within cluster variability with the criterion of parsimony of presentation. For the full battery of 23 items, within cluster variability is minimized by a 12-cluster solution. But for parsimonious presentation of clusters, we present the data grouped by the 5-cluster solution. This entails just one level of aggregation beyond the 12-cluster pattern for most of the items, and just two levels of aggregation beyond the 12-cluster solution for the remaining items.¹³

The cluster column in Table 2 indicates in which cluster a given indicator falls. We also present bar graphs of an exemplary item within the cluster, with those who answered “no opinion” removed, to provide a visual depiction of these results (see Figure 1). The

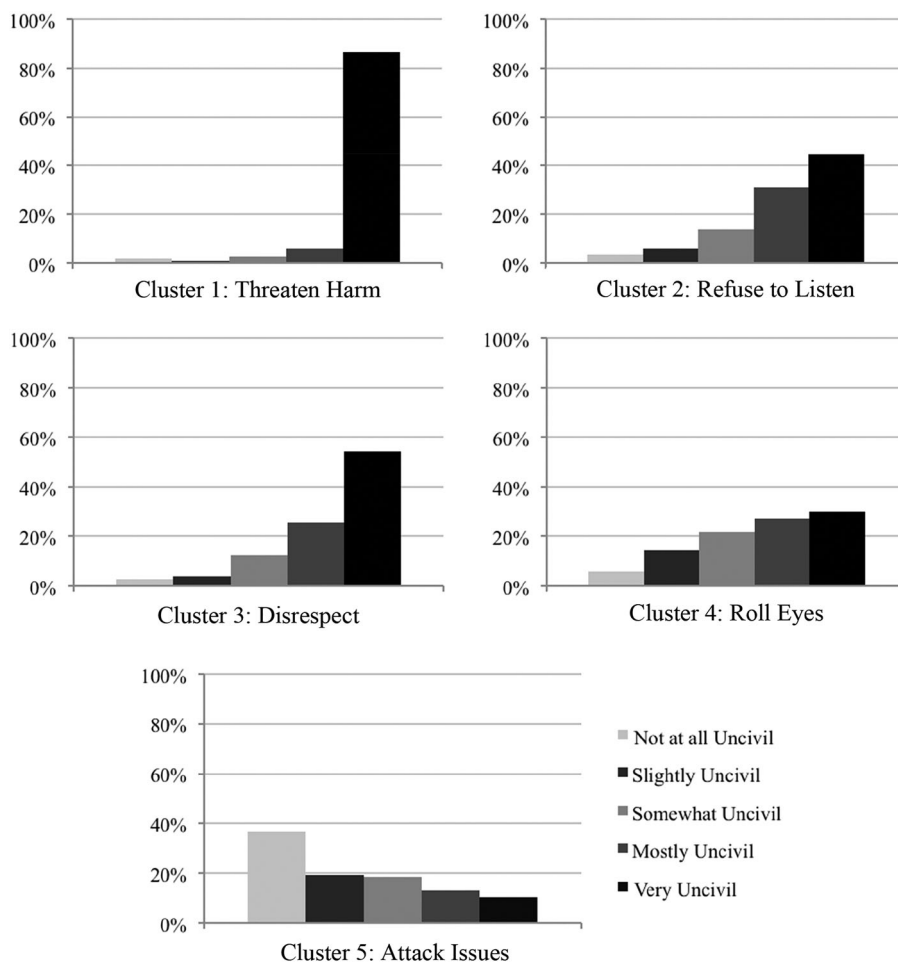


Figure 1. Distribution of individual responses for exemplary items from each question cluster.

exemplary item for the clusters – except Cluster 5, which contains only one item – is that which is closest to the mean marginal distribution for the indicators that make up that cluster. H1 and H2 are fully confirmed. Whereas about 56% of respondents found issue-based attacks not at all or only slightly uncivil, supporting H2, more than 75% of respondents viewed all other speech and behavior categories as very, mostly or somewhat uncivil, supporting H1.¹⁴

Reading top to bottom in Table 2, the first cluster of items contains three items whose response pattern is very distinct from that of all other clusters – threatening physical harm, encouraging others to threaten physical harm, and using racial, religious, ethnic or sexist slurs. On these items, extremely high percentages of respondents (82% or more) agreed that the activity was very uncivil. Similarly, extremely few respondents (4% or less) viewed these activities as not at all uncivil or only slightly uncivil. Overall, there was minimal response variability and maximal response consensus on these items, with 91% or more of the respondents finding these types of political discourse very or mostly uncivil.

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

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

Like Cluster 3, Cluster 4 contains seven items: failing to provide reasons or evidence for one's conclusions, verbal fighting or jousting, shouting at an opponent, attacking an opponent's personal character or conduct, interrupting those with whom one disagrees, eye rolling, and repeatedly emphasizing an opponent's minor flubs, oversights or improprieties. Patterns in Cluster 4 differ from those in Clusters 2 and 3 in that the combined totals of those who found the behavior not at all uncivil or only slightly uncivil are greater (from about 13% for interrupting to about 23.5% for verbal fighting or jousting). In turn, percentages of those who found the behavior very uncivil (36% or less) and the combined totals for very or mostly uncivil responses (ranging from 53% to 63%) are substantially less than the analogous percentages in Clusters 2 and 3.¹⁵ Conversely, those finding the behavior to be somewhat uncivil are greater for Cluster 4 (ranging from 19.5% to 23%) than for Clusters 2 and 3 (less than 17%).

Cluster 5 contains just one item which taps respondents' perceptions of the civility or incivility of attacking an opponent's stand on the issues. Comparing the bar graphs in

Figure 1 shows dramatically that the pattern of response on this item is reversed from that of all the other clusters. Less than one quarter of respondents find it very or mostly uncivil, and a majority find it not at all or slightly uncivil. In short, as hypothesized and as deliberative democratic scholars would hope, a large proportion of respondents distinguished issue-oriented attacks on political opponents from other types of attacks, including those based on personal conduct or character, presuming that the latter were uncivil whereas the former were not. This finding aligns with research on negative campaigning that suggests issue-oriented attacks on opposing candidates – part and parcel of spirited democratic debate – elicit a different response from their audience than do personal attacks (see Abbe, Herrnson, Magelby, & Peterson, 2001; Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1997; Fridkin & Kenney, 2004; Lau & Rovner, 2009; Thurber & Nelson, 2000). It also aligns with our assumption that political incivility usefully can be distinguished from rules of interpersonal politeness discouraging confrontation and argumentation in social interaction. As well, to the extent that respondents presumed both issue-oriented and personal attacks displayed some emotion, our contrary findings for these two types of attacks also suggest that, consistent with current science pertaining to the relationship between reason and emotion, it is not emotional display per se that signals incivility to the majority of our respondents.

With respect to the items in Cluster 4, the minimal number of respondents who found the activity mostly or very uncivil is about 50.5% (for emphasizing an opponent's minor flubs or improprieties). Across Clusters 1–3, the analogous percentages are far higher (from about 70% for mocking to about 93% for threatening harm and encouraging others to threaten harm). If respondents who found the activity somewhat uncivil are added, all Cluster 4 items were seen by more than 75% of respondents as uncivil. For Clusters 1–3, the analogous percentages range from about 86% for mocking to more than 95% for threatening harm or encouraging others to harm. We can conclude, then, that there is widespread consensus among our youthful sub-population concerning the types of political speech and behavior that “count” as political incivility.

Confirmatory factor analyses

Investigating whether the latent construct of political incivility was unidimensional or multidimensional, we examined five different model specifications. After testing a priori competing hypotheses H3a and H3b with Models 2 and 3, we constructed Models 4 and 5 based on empirical clues provided by our descriptive analysis.¹⁶

To conform to strict hypothesis testing, we first included all 23 indicators in Model 1. However, because our descriptive analyses confirmed that a majority of respondents did not find issue-based attacks uncivil, we dropped this item in assessing the dimensionality of political incivility. In addition, we also dropped those items tapping into respondents' perceptions of threatening harm or encouraging others to threaten harm given the low-level of variability present in individual attitudes across these indicators.¹⁷

Table 3 provides the model selection statistics for our CFA results, including AIC, CAIC, and BIC statistics for model selection.¹⁸ We conducted all CFA analyses in Stata using the gsem (generalized structural equation model) function with robust variance estimates. This allows measurement variables to be specified as ordinal and their relationships described by a set of logistic regression equations.

In the one-factor model, most of the loadings for the 20 indicator variables were fairly strong and statistically significant. Nevertheless, the factor loadings for the two-factor model were also highly significant and the AIC, CAIC, and BIC statistics indicated better model fit. Consistent with H3b, aspects of incivility that relate to remarks made by individuals (Utterance) can be separated from actions that strongly imply ongoing discursive interaction but discourage open and reasoned debate (Discursive).¹⁹

Bivariate residuals produced by an ancillary latent class analysis we conducted (see Stryker, Danielson, & Conway, 2015) suggested our data may be three-dimensional, with items related to dishonesty reflecting a third latent factor, that of deception. We thus used CFA to examine Model 4, including the items pertaining to making false statements and exaggerating to obscure the truth as observable indicators of the underlying factor Deception. As shown by Table 3, a three-factor model allowing exaggerated and misleading statements to load on a third latent variable (Deception) fit the data better than models constructed based on extant literature.

Moving a step further, our final model specified that failing to provide reasons or evidence should load on Deception rather than on the Utterance or Discursive dimensions. We argue that our respondents may see failing to provide reasons or evidence as such a key omission that it is seen as tantamount to deception. As well, this indicator exhibited relatively low factor loadings in all previous models. The AIC, CAIC, and BIC statistics provided in Table 3 suggest that, although the loading did not significantly improve, our final model specification was the best-fitting model for our data.²⁰ Figure 2 provides visual depiction of our final model, including the different factor loadings for each indicator variable, and correlations among latent factors.

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

It also is noteworthy that, within the conceptual domain of political incivility, our distinction between the Utterance and Discursive dimensions closely conforms to the distinction between violations of positive face (utterance) vs. negative face (discursive) emphasized by politeness scholars. This parallel supports the validity of that part of our

Table 3. Model selection statistics for confirmatory factor analyses.

	-2LL	BIC	AIC	CAIC	# of parameters
All variables included (<i>n</i> = 996)					
One-factor model	44,972.73	45,752.85	45,198.73	45,865.85	113
Threaten Harm, Encourage Harm, and Attack Issues omitted (<i>n</i> = 996)					
One-factor model	41,141.30	41,831.68	41,341.30	41,931.68	100
Two-factor model	41,044.75	41,742.03	41,246.75	41,843.03	101
Three-factor model No Evidence loaded on Utterance	40,950.00	41,661.08	41,156.00	41,764.08	103
Three-factor model No Evidence loaded on Deception	40,855.70	41,566.78 ^a	41,061.70 ^a	41,669.78 ^a	103

^aIndicates the best-fitting model specification. Deviators and respondents who provided a "don't know" response were omitted from the data.

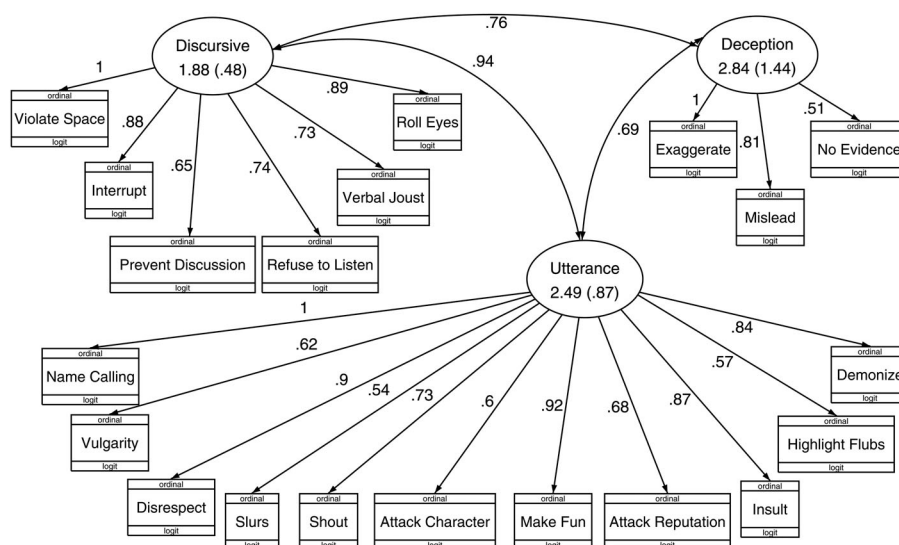


Figure 2. Diagram of best-fitting three-factor model with factor loadings.

Note: Standard deviations of latent variables are displayed below variable names with standard errors displayed in parentheses.

construct tapping into the considerable overlap between interpersonal impoliteness and political incivility. At the same time, our empirically based elimination of issue-based attacks from the CFA, the strong scholarly basis for inclusion of indicators of deception in analyzing political incivility, and our CFA finding that Deception represents a separate dimension beyond the two dimensions of face signaled by politeness scholars, support our argument that the concepts of interpersonal impoliteness and political incivility are not equivalent.

Conclusion

With respect to what is *perceived* to be uncivil, our survey results suggest both a great deal of consensus, and also a concept that does not focus on negativity or rudeness or attacks “on face” per se, but distinguishes issue- and person-based attacks, and confirms our view that political incivility is usefully distinguished from interpersonal politeness outside of politics. Because prior research suggests that youthful respondents are more tolerant of incivility than their older peers (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011, p. 314), it might well be that even *larger* percentages of Americans as a whole would concur that, save for issue-oriented attacks, our measures tap a panoply of types of perceived political incivility. The next step is to examine whether such consensual results hold for a representative sample of voting-eligible Americans.

With 20–20 hindsight, we would have done well to include multiple highly synonymous items tapping forms of political disagreement or contention that we would expect most respondents to perceive as civil. For example, we might have crafted items tapping “political policy-based” or “political proposal-based” or “political program-based” attacks, as well as “issue-based attacks.” We will do so in future surveys. Assuming

responses on such new items are patterned like responses to our current item assessing the political incivility of issue-based attacks, this would provide even stronger evidence that confrontation per se in politics is not perceived as uncivil and that therefore *political* incivility is not the equivalent of deviation from interpersonal politeness.

At the least, however, our current findings open up new and useful directions for further research. Most generally, they suggest the utility of exploring further how, and the degree to which, perceptions of what counts as uncivil are institution- or behavioral-arena specific vs. how and the degree to which these perceptions generalize across interaction arenas.

Because respondents are likely to associate both issue-based and person-based attacks with exhibiting emotion, our findings also suggest a majority of our respondents did not regard displaying emotion per se as uncivil, even though they did assess multiple types of speech and behavior exhibiting belligerence or contempt as uncivil. Future research should test this assumption more directly with items displaying the same speech with and without any display of emotion. For example, experimentalists could design a study in which the same speech content is accompanied by different degrees and types of emotional displays to assess whether exhibiting particular emotions, such as zeal or anger, would invariably be perceived as uncivil.

Many of the types of speech and behavior measured by our civility items apply across communication platforms from face-to-face to print to radio and television to online communication. For example, our items include indicators of all categories of online behavior that Coe et al. (2014) presumed reflected incivility in online commentary to the *Arizona Daily Star*. A limitation is that we did not include behaviors that take on specific meanings in online interaction (e.g., writing in all capital letters as tantamount to shouting; we did however, include shouting itself) nor did we include online-specific labels for categorizing hostile or aggressive behavior (e.g., flaming or trolling). Although perceptions of such behaviors should be assessed directly and explicitly in future surveys, these labels encompass some behaviors (e.g., deception, person-based attacks) that our items *do* invoke and examine without specifying the media platform context. And while much political communication today does occur in computer-mediated ways, much of it also still occurs off-line.

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

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

Variability across persons and over time, as well as patterned differences among regional or demographic sub-groups in perceptions of political incivility in the media, in electoral campaigning, and in Congress may well help predict variability in such key aspects of American democracy as political participation, including but not restricted to voting and trust and legitimacy of government (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011; Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Mutz, 2007; Mutz & Reeves, 2005). For these reasons, categories of perceived uncivil political discourse used in survey research also are relevant to how content analysts categorize the civility/incivility of the political discourse they examine. To the extent that conceptual categories employed in extant content analyses of media and politics overlap with ours, as they do substantially in the recent work of Coe et al. (2014) and Sobieraj and Berry (2011, 2013), our findings, combined with content-analytic findings on the prevalence of diverse types of political incivility, may be suggestive for Americans' evaluation of, and engagement in, American democracy.

Especially if our key finding of substantial consensus on types of perceived political incivility is replicated for a representative national sample of Americans, moving toward standardized measures of types of incivility is both possible and useful for research and practice. As well, promoting generalized civility norms for political discourse will not be quixotic. Where constitutional protection for free speech precludes establishing *legal* rules requiring civility, it does not hinder adopting strong *social* norms favoring civil discourse.

With respect to standardization, we want to underscore a key distinction: that between standardized indicators used to measure and track characteristics of particular populations or sub-populations and the degree to which any findings based on such standardized indicators are – or are not – generalizable to populations or sub-populations different from those in the focal survey. Clearly, we cannot generalize our findings *beyond* the sub-population to which they pertain. Future research surveying both broader American sub-populations (e.g., all college students nationwide) and the full population of Americans 18 and older is needed to know the extent to which our findings will or will not generalize to these larger populations. Surveying perceptions of political incivility on nationally representative samples is especially important for understanding and evaluating the state of American politics as a whole.

Our battery of civility questions provides an excellent starting point for such future inquiry and for working toward standard batteries of questions that can be used to assess variability in perceptions of political incivility over time within and across given populations. That our questions were meaningful to – and generated meaningful and structured response patterns for – our sub-population strongly suggests it is useful to move toward one or more standardized indicator batteries for survey research on perceptions of political incivility. This is a major contribution of our research, as is its conceptual insight that many distinct types of speech and behavior reflect an overarching underlying construct of political incivility with a three-dimensional structure. This insight too now can be tested on a representative national sample, as can our hypothesis that perceived political incivility will not include issue-based political attacks, such that the concept of political incivility is usefully distinguished from that of interpersonal impoliteness.

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

Notes

1. Prior scholarly research similarly examines key issues pertaining to incivility on non-national and sometimes non-representative samples of convenience populations and is judged to provide useful findings and insights. For example, Coe et al. (2014) content analyzed online comments responding to articles in a single newspaper, *The Arizona Star*. Hmielowski, Hutchens, and Cicchirillo (2015) tested a communications model of what leads to online flaming behavior in two attitude surveys, neither of which were national nor representative of the *non-national sub-populations* from which they were drawn. Admittedly, we too selected our population based on convenience, rather than selecting it as a random draw from some larger population of universities. Though the results are not generalizable beyond our convenience population, they *do* represent that population and are generalizable to it.
2. Jamieson and Cappella (2008) likewise highlighted use of belligerent and passionate emotional appeals by talk radio show host Rush Limbaugh as a departure from civil discourse.
3. In yet another study, Fridkin and Kenney (2004) examined what they termed “mudslinging” by asking campaign managers an open-ended question about themes of their opponents’ campaign. Mudslinging was assumed to have occurred “when campaign managers reported their opponents engaged in ‘smear tactics,’ ‘relentless attacks,’ ‘deceptive messages’ or ‘unwarranted’ or unconscionable criticisms” (as cited in Massaro & Stryker, 2012, p. 424).
4. Sighing and eye rolling also can be considered emotional displays, but these displays signal contempt rather than the belligerence highlighted by Jamieson and Cappella (2008) and Sobieraj and Berry (2011).
5. In emphasizing mutual understanding and respect, experiential expertise and equality, Gastil’s (2013) concept of deliberative civility is similar to the concept of invitational rhetoric elaborated earlier by Foss and Griffin (1993).
6. Like several scholars of civility (Harcourt, 2012; Karst, 1990; Sapiro, 1999), scholars of deliberation often presume that civility is appropriate where there is full inclusion of all potential views and all participants are equal. But others have shown that when inclusion and equality are absent, civility norms have been used to prevent marginalized groups from participating fully in democratic governance (see Stryker & Danielson, 2013, for a review).

7. While highlighting the dangers of deception and incivility for effective democratic discourse, Kathleen Hall Jamieson has maintained that deception in politics is a distinct construct from that of political incivility (personal communication to first author, 4 March 2013).
8. We leave for further research how well or poorly a concept of incivility pertaining specifically to politics matches concepts used in research on workplace incivility; here too we think it likely there is much overlap but not complete equivalence given institution-specific expectations for conduct (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Loi, Loh, & Hine, 2015; Pearson & Porath, 2009). Here, we cannot pursue Massaro and Stryker's (2012) suggestion that, depending on more specific elements of *political* context, insults or even vulgar language directed at an idea or institution (as opposed to a person) may not be perceived as uncivil by some Americans. We pursue such nuance in additional papers; here we highlight the almost universal scholarly consensus that insulting and/or vulgar language are uncivil. With respect to verbal attacks, Massaro and Stryker (2012) view issue-based attacks as civil and person or character based attacks as uncivil.
9. The second wave was reduced (less 140) to correct for the greater probability that the remaining students would be randomly selected.
10. Concerned that our low response rate might have introduced response bias, we compared our sample to university-provided demographic data and found our sample was representative of the population from which it came. To see if it was representative of college students nationally, we compared our data to that of the 2012 Current Population Survey (CPS) Educational Attainment dataset. We restricted attention to those in the CPS data who had completed "some college" and divided respondents into two broader age groups (18–29-year olds vs. 30 years or older) to examine any key differences between these two groups of respondents. Comparisons of the two samples suggest that African-Americans, Caucasians age 30 or older, and male respondents are underrepresented in our data compared to college students nationwide. Hispanic respondents, individuals who identified as members of some "other" ethnic group, those who were 30 or older, and women were overrepresented in our data. Our results, then, cannot be generalized to college students nationwide. To account for the possibility that students selecting into our sample were more interested in politics than their peers, we compared our weighted survey data to data from the 2012 Annenberg National Election Study (ANES) web survey. Surprisingly, our respondents were consistently *less* interested in politics than their peers from the ANES data.
11. Post-stratification weights were not included in our CFA because it is not allowed with GSEM estimation in Stata; however, we are confident in our results because our sample quite well represented the population from which it was randomly selected.
12. Although the drawbacks of the AIC are well known, and the BIC is touted for overcoming such shortcomings (see Kass & Raftery, 1995), we include both AIC and BIC statistics.
13. In short, our five cluster solution maintains a key goal of data reduction for descriptive purposes through clustering. Note that we do *not* use our cluster analysis to clarify the conceptual dimensionality of political incivility. This is the role of our CFA.
14. Since we do not know the five category ordinal response patterns on the 23 items for the full undergraduate population, we cannot know the precise amount of sampling error to attach to our percentage estimates for each response category on each item. Though the meaningful calculation would be to estimate confidence intervals around each percentage estimate, there is no straightforward agreed-upon way to do this. Therefore, we rely on our random sampling procedure and the fact that we have a large sample size relative to the total undergraduate population to ensure we have reasonably minimized sampling error. Importantly, confirmation of H1 and H2 does not rely on absolute precision in point estimates for individual category percentages, but rather on general patterns which are strongly exhibited in the data.
15. The low for very uncivil in Clusters 2 and 3 is about 43% (for exaggerating to obscure the truth) and for very and mostly uncivil combined it is about 73% (for mocking). The high on very uncivil for Clusters 2 and 3 is about 63% (for name calling and derogatory language),

and for very uncivil and mostly uncivil combined it is 84.4% (for intentionally making false or misleading statements).

16. Our total n for the CFA was 996, as compared to 1,170 for our descriptive analyses. This was because some respondents “clicked through” survey items very quickly without paying attention to their responses, e.g., providing responses of “Very uncivil” or “not at all Uncivil” to all civility items. Eliminating respondents who fit such highly deviant patterns, as well as those who answered five or more of the civility items with “No opinion,” reduced sample size by 174. Because the integrity of responses to items in our civility battery is so essential to conclusions drawn about the underlying dimensionality of political incivility, we treated these 174 respondents as non-responders, eliminating them from our CFA.
17. Ancillary latent class analysis (LCA) also suggested omitting threatening or encouraging harm because these did not significantly contribute to latent class profile structure. LCA description and results are available on request and in Stryker et al. (2015). Where most scholars presume racial, ethnic, religious or sexual slurs are uncivil, only Massaro and Stryker (2012) focus on threats of harm as markers of incivility. Thus, we retained the “slur” item, even though the limited variability of responses on it mirror that of threatening or encouraging harm.
18. Because our data violate the assumption of multivariate normality, fit statistics typically applied to continuous-level data (RMSEA, CFI, and TLI) are generally not appropriate. But we replicated all analyses in Mplus and, to obtain traditional fit statistics, also ran the models using weighted least squares with adjusted means and variances (WLSMV). Such estimation is ideal for non-normally distributed ordinal data with larger sample sizes (Kline, 2012; Lei & Wu, 2012). All these analyses indicated an increasingly better fit leading up the final model. We offer traditional fit statistics (RMSEA, CFI, TLI) in the text for our final model, and provide these for all models, to be interpreted with caution, in [Appendix A](#).
19. Our two-factor model did produce a very high correlation (.91) between the latent variables Utterance and Discursive and our best-fitting three-factor model produced an analogous correlation of .94. Thus we performed an equivalence test for nested models, in which “the free parameters of one model are a subset of the free parameters of the second” (Bollen, 1989, p. 291). Specifically, we calculated a model in which the covariance of the two latent variables was constrained to 1. Should this nested model result in a better fit, it would indicate that the two latent variables should not be treated as separate, underlying dimensions of incivility. Based on the results, however, we are correct in treating aspects of incivility that relate to Utterance and those related to Discursive as separate, as the nested model was the worse fitting model. We therefore have sufficient statistical power to distinguish these two dimensions despite the fact that they are closely related. The fit statistics further support our conclusions (see [Appendix A](#)).
20. Traditional fit statistics calculated in MPlus using WLSMV estimation support this conclusion and suggest the three-factor model fit the data well (CFI = .93, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .93).

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Appendix A

Goodness-of-fit statistics for confirmatory factor analyses

	χ^2	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	# of parameters
All variables included ($n = 996$)					
One-factor model	1,886.23	.89	.88	.92	113
Threaten Harm, Encourage Harm, and Attack Issues omitted ($n = 996$)					
One-factor model	1,459.37 ^a	.90	.89	.91	100
Two-factor model	1,303.53 ^a	.91	.90	.92	101
Three-factor model No Evidence loaded on Utterance	1,191.23 ^a	.92	.91	.92	103
Three-factor model No Evidence loaded on Deception	1,034.06 ^a	.93	.92	.93	103

^aThe chi-square value for WLSMV cannot be used for chi-square difference testing in the regular way. Further, we suggest the above statistics be interpreted with caution due to the violation of multivariate normality.