Can we Boost Intensive Depolarization Events Using Light Touch Interventions?

Mark J. Brandt

Department of Psychology, Michigan State University

Jerad Morey

Respectful Conversations, Minnesota Council of Churches

Draft Date: 09 October 2025

Correspondence can be addressed to Mark Brandt (brandt15@msu.edu) and Jerad Morey (j.morey@mnchurches.org)

Acknowledgments: Funding for this project was provided by Stanford University's Strengthening Democracy Challenge. We thank Stanford's Polarization and Social Change Lab for feedback on a prior version of this project.

Conflict of Interest Statement: Jerad Morey is Director of Strategic Relationships at Minnesota Council of Churches, in which role he stewards the Respectful Conversations project.

Transparency Statement: The experiment was preregistered and includes three updates with different inclusion criteria as more events became available and other events were rescheduled. The preregistration, including all updates, is available here: https://osf.io/fr4y3/?view_only=595eb87d613f47ffb2574b8166f23661. Data from the experiment and code to reproduce the figures and analyses in this manuscript are available here: https://osf.io/hke9w/?view_only=71362e6c532d402d86c200d80461943f.

Abstract

Scholars and practitioners have identified methods for helping people empathize and express more positive feelings towards the people they disagree with. We tested if stacking a light touch video intervention on a more intensive intervention boosts the more intensive intervention. If successful, this would provide a template for improving existing interventions using the less intensive interventions often developed by academic researchers. We stacked a brief video intervention highlighting sympathetic personal narratives previously shown to decrease political animosity on a multi-hour event, led by MCC Respectful Conversations, that aims to increase empathy and understanding through guided conversations. The idea is that the video intervention would open people up to the lessons of the event. We tested this in a preregistered pre-test post-test experimental design (N = 209, Events k = 10). Although effects for liking and respect for people with different opinions were in the expected direction (b's range [.02, .05] across inclusion criteria), they were not typically significantly different from zero (p's range [.03, .26] across inclusion criteria). We also explored if the events improved people's attitudes in a one-group pre-test post-test design and found evidence that the overall events may be effective. In summary, we were not able to significantly boost the effects of the intensive treatment with a light touch video treatment. Suggestions for future research are discussed.

Can we Boost Intensive Depolarization Events Using Light Touch Interventions?

People are less likely to like people they disagree with (Byrne, 1969), an effect so consistent some have called it a psychological law (Byrne & Griffitt, 1968). When a person or group is perceived to hold different political views, people express animosity towards that group and are more likely to discriminate against that group (e.g., Brandt & Crawford, 2020; Crawford et al., 2017; Gift & Gift, 2015; Whitt et al., 2021; Woitzel & Koch, 2023). In this way, disagreements can degrade the social fabric of our communities. Community members and scholars are both interested in how to reduce the social fraying caused by disagreement (Hartman et al., 2022). It could have both practical benefits (more social cohesion) and theoretical insight (how to alter a psychological "law"). Here we examine how stacking a light touch video intervention on a more intensive in-person, conversation-based intervention can boost the effectiveness of the intensive intervention. We do this within the context of the Respectful Conversations program run by the Minnesota Council of Churches (hereafter MCC Respectful Conversations).

Approaches to Interventions

Scholars have identified a number of factors that might be used to reduce the negative interpersonal consequences of disagreement (Hartman et al., 2022; Voelkel et al., 2024). For example, imagining being included by people on the other side (Voelkel et al., 2021), receiving misperception corrections (Ahler & Sood, 2018; Mernyk et al., 2022; Moore-Berg et al., 2020), writing a brief paragraph about what one likes about America (Levendusky, 2018), and reading about warm interactions between opposing political elites (Huddy & Yair, 2021) all have been found to reduce political animosity. The typical approach across many of these efforts is to use tightly controlled lab or survey experiments with diverse, if not representative samples of participants (for a study including many such interventions, see Voelkel et al., 2024). These choices help maximize internal validity, but simultaneously constrain the types of studies that are conducted. For example, conducting a survey experiment on a representative sample requires that the intervention is short and easily presented in the survey context (often in an online questionnaire). Such designs can identify causal effects to inform psychological theory, but it is not clear that these designs' effects are durable (e.g., Dias et al., 2024; Holliday et al, 2025). Indeed, a meta-analysis of the prejudice reduction literature suggests that most of our methods produce weak effects that are unlikely to last (Paluck et al., 2021).

At the same time, a growing number of civic-minded organizations interested in reducing polarization and bridging political (and related) differences have developed programs to do just this. The precise goals and methods of the bridging community differ depending on the specific organization, but in many cases these practitioners are

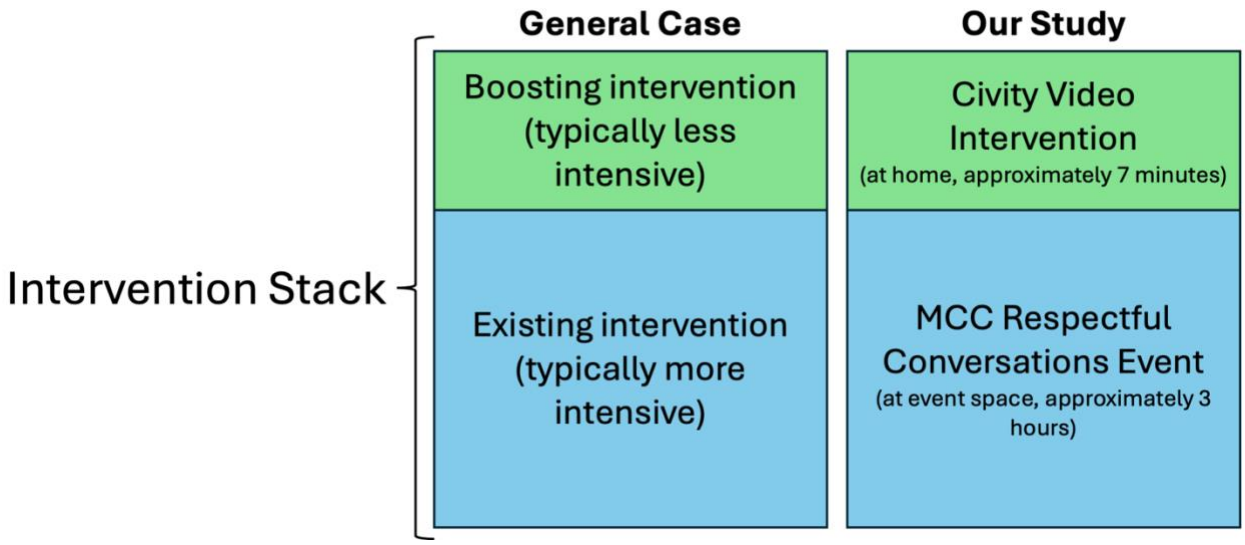
developing programs aimed at helping people connect across differences. For example, the organization Braver Angels developed Red/Blue workshops. These workshops aim to integrate information about the policies and perspectives of political outgroups with empathy building in a full-day event including structured and moderated exercises and discussions. Essential Partners, formerly the Public Conversations Project, developed reflective structured dialogue in the early 1990s. It is a model of empathy-building across divides in deeply-held values using participant engagement based on family therapy practices. There is some recent work testing these approaches. For example, an experimental evaluation of Braver Angels Red/Blue workshops found that the program reduced animosity among college students (Baron et al., 2021).

We now have multiple methods, from both scholars and practitioners, that potentially reduce animosity. A challenge is how to best integrate the findings from scholars that test less intensive interventions, with the more intensive programs developed by practitioners. One strategy already in use is to take the theoretical principle from the scholarly work and embed it into the program. For example Red/Blue workshops noted above takes social psychology work on empathy (Batson & Ahmad, 2009) and embeds it into their program (Baron et al., 2021).

Intervention Stacking

In this project, we are testing an additional strategy that we call intervention stacking (see Figure 1). This strategy pairs an existing and typically more intensive intervention with a boosting intervention that is typically less intensive, with roots in the research literature. This is different from the approach described in the prior paragraph because the boosting intervention is not fully integrated into the existing intervention and is instead deployed in a very similar way as it was used in the scholarly literature. If this strategy is successful, it would provide an easy method for practitioners to improve on their programs using methods from the scholarly literature. In other words, by stacking the interventions, the less intensive intervention may be an easy method to improve the outcomes of the more intensive intervention.

Figure 1. *Intervention stack in the general case and in our study*



Existing Intervention

The existing intervention that we will use in this project is the MCC Respectful Conversations program. MCC Respectful Conversations are facilitated, structured dialogue events designed to produce empathy across divides, strengthen community relationships, decrease polarization and increase peacebuilding capacity among participants.

For conflicts where community relationships are highly valued, MCC Respectful Conversations are designed in partnership with stakeholders of multiple perspectives to discern a specific framing topic (e.g., “The Election”, “Bridging Cultural Differences”). Following the discernment, volunteers from a host community are trained by a Lead Facilitator to be Table Facilitators. They learn the structure of the dialogue, they experience it as participants, and they gain skills in reframing statements and gotcha-style questions into questions of genuine interest focused on narrative-sharing.

At a MCC Respectful Conversation event, the Lead Facilitator and now-trained Table Facilitators lead a large community group through a dialogue process. The process begins with a meal and content about conflict and behavioral guidelines is delivered to the group as a whole, as well as specific small groups at tables. After this, within the small groups at tables, people take turns going around the table and share their perspective on the topic, as well as asking and responding to questions. Then there is a sort of conversational free-for-all about the topic, followed by another round of reflection on the experience. The event ends with a closing response round as a large group and evaluations.

Across the event, the structure and content is designed to increase awareness of and slow down the experience of the body's physiological response to threat when it is confronted by ideas that challenge worldview. By using tools like silence, structured questions, and joyful animation participants are more able to be fully present with each other. Questions posed are designed to evoke personal narrative, values sharing, and emotional revelation in way that moves the discussion away from a binary right/wrong topic area into one where participants experience more curiosity about each other. In combination, MCC Respectful Conversations are designed to strengthen democracy by fortifying our communities through enhanced relationships that result from higher-quality conversation.

Boosting Intervention

To identify a boosting intervention, we reviewed the interventions tested as part of the Strengthening Democracy Challenge (Voelkel et al., 2024). This project solicited potential interventions that could be used in a survey experiment to decrease political animosity and increase support for democratic norms. After identifying promising interventions, they experimentally tested 25 interventions in a large sample of US Americans. They found that 23 interventions reduce political animosity, 6 reduced support for undemocratic practices, and 5 reduce support for political violence. Of those successful interventions, our team discussed which interventions both fit well with the goals of MCC Respectful Conversations and would make the most sense to incorporate into the typical MCC Respectful Conversations process.

Based on our discussions, we chose a short, seven-minute video intervention that stresses the importance of individual stories (called "sympathetic personal narratives" in Voelkel et al., 2024) developed by the organization Civity (Kopell, Strand, Baleria, & Fiorella, 2024). In the videos, individuals talk about themselves and their experiences, often complicating the viewers ideas about the people based on their surface-level characteristics. Following these, participants then watch a video that discusses the value of connecting with people who are different and seeing them as members of their community. The focus of this intervention pairs well with the focus and philosophy of MCC Respectful Conversations, making it a good match. Moreover, this intervention was the fourth most effective intervention at reducing political animosity in the Strengthening Democracy Challenge (like most interventions, it did not significantly affect undemocratic practices and political violence, Voelkel et al., 2024).

In our stacked intervention, participants are asked to watch the sympathetic personal narratives videos before attending the MCC Respectful Conversation event. Our idea is that these videos can start to open people up to the idea of learning from the people

they disagree with. This initial openness then primes people to have an open mind when attending the full event and, hopefully, helping to increase the effectiveness of the event. If this is successful, it would suggest that adding just a 7 minute boosting intervention can help improve the existing 150-180 minute long MCC Respectful Conversation program.

The Current Experiment

The purpose of our experiment is to test if a combined treatment of the sympathetic personal narratives video intervention and the MCC Respectful Conversation event increases people's openness to those they disagree with compared to only participating in a MCC Respectful Conversation event. We use an experimental pre-test-post-test design and a series of MCC Respectful Conversation events for several different communities. We examined the effect of these interventions on a variety of outcomes representing openness and acceptance of people with different attitudes and opinions.

Method

Participants and Events

The research question, hypotheses, study design, and analyses were preregistered. All participants were people who volunteered to attend one of Minnesota Council of Churches' Respectful Conversations events starting in October 2023. The date, topic, and sample size for all of the events are in Table 1. To maintain the integrity of the MCC Respectful Conversation program, demographic data was not collected. However, an informal estimate from people who attended the events describe the samples as primarily White and an even mix of men and women. The events themselves were held for a range of communities, including municipality, school district, church, and university communities.

The original preregistration (Preregistration 1, submitted 13 October 2023) said we would collect data until the end of August 2024. Because some events were rescheduled, the preregistration was updated (Preregistration 2, submitted 15 August 2024) to extend our deadline until the 2024 November elections. An additional reschedule pushed back the event until 12 November 2024 and so we submitted a third update (Preregistration 3, submitted 13 October 2024) specifying this as our end date. During the final wave of MCC Respectful Conversation events that occurred in November 2024, there were two additional events after our 12 November 2024 cutoff for which we have data. For the analyses below, we show all results for each possible preregistration, as well as for all of the data (i.e. with the additional events after the 12 November cutoff). The events included in each preregistered inclusion criteria are noted in Table 1. Finally, one additional event was not included in the analyses because of an error in the distribution of the materials.

Table 1. *Sample sizes for each event at each time point in each condition, as well as total sample size*.

			Pre-Test Sample Sizes				Post-Test Sample Sizes		
Event	**Date**	**Topic**	**Control Condition**	**Treatment Condition**	**Total**	**Response Rate**	**Control Condition**	**Treatment Condition**	**Total**
1[a]	2023-10-14	Bridging Cultural Differences	5	1	6	0.67	3	1	4
2[a]	2023-11-13	Co-Creating Community at [University]	23	25	48	0.90	21	22	43
3[a]	2024-03-16	Being a Reconciling Church and What That Means	10	11	21	1.00	10	11	21
4[a]	2024-08-27	This Election	15	17	32	0.97	15	16	31
5[a]	2024-08-28	This Election	13	8	21	0.81	10	7	17
6[b]	2024-10-01	This Election	10	6	16	0.75	6	6	12
7[b]	2024-10-23	This Election	40	29	69	0.75	31	21	52
8[c]	2024-11-12	The Election	7	2	9	0.78	5	2	7
9	2024-11-20	The Election	15	11	26	0.58	10	5	15
10	2024-11-20	The Election	8	3	11	0.64	5	2	7
Total			146	113	259	0.78	116	93	209

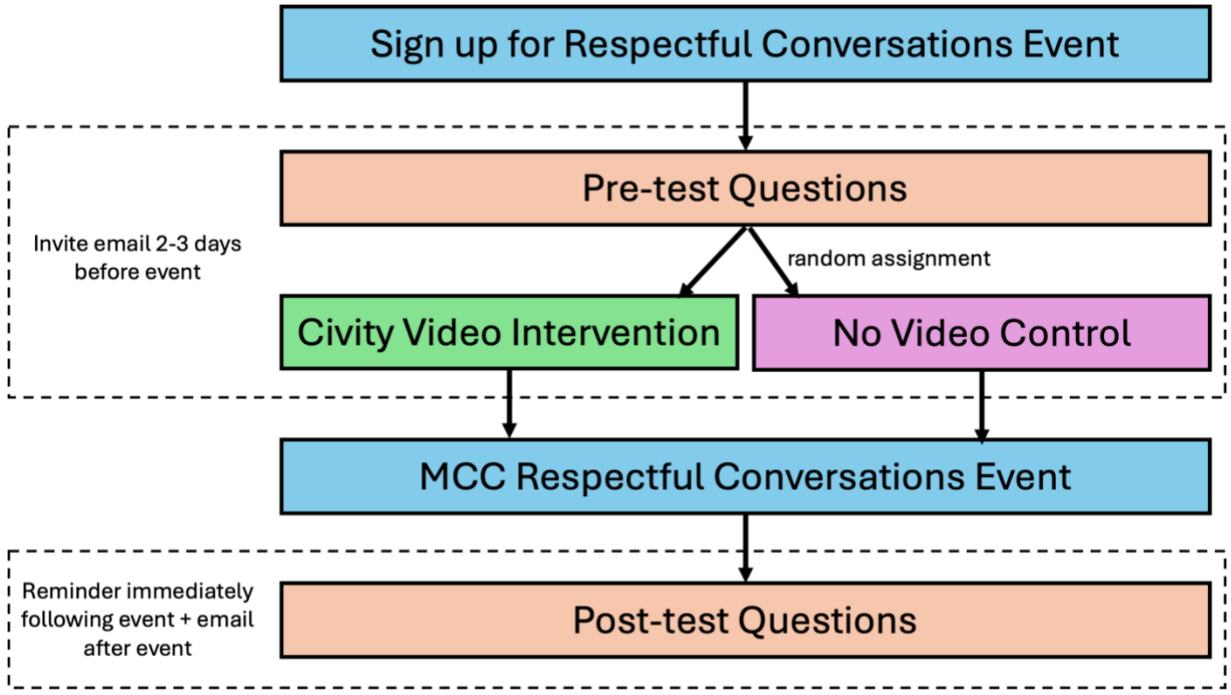
Note: Events sharing superscript [a] were part of Preregistration 1's inclusive criteria. Events sharing superscript [a] and [b] were part of Preregistration 2's inclusive criteria. Events sharing superscript [a], [b], and [c] were part of Preregistration 3's inclusive criteria. Events without any superscript were not part of any preregistrations inclusive criteria.

Design

We used a pre-post experimental design (see Figure 2 for a summary; for benefits of this design, see Clifford et al., 2021). After signing up for the event and in the 2-3 days before the event, participants received emails inviting them to complete a pre-event survey to help MCC Respectful Conversations evaluate their program and to help prepare the participant for the event. The survey included our key measures (see below), as well as questions to create anonymized codes to link participants with their post-test data.

After the questions, participants were randomly assigned to the intervention condition. This is the sympathetic personal narrative intervention from Voelkel and colleagues (Voelkel et al., 2024) developed by Civity (Kopell et al., 2024). Participants watched five short videos of people talking about what others may miss about them. Participants then watched another animated video about how democracy allows people with different views to work together. Our only modification of the original implementation is that we removed explicit mentions of politics in the text introduction to these videos because MCC Respectful Conversation events are not always about politics. We chose the Civity intervention because it was possible to implement into a MCC Respectful Conversation event and it has been shown to reduce partisan animosity (Voelkel et al., 2024). Participants randomly assigned to the control condition did not watch any videos and proceeded to the end of the questionnaire.

Figure 2. *Summary of study design*



Participants then attended their MCC Respectful Conversation event. At the event, they participated in the typical MCC Respectful Conversation process (summarized in Table 2).

Table 2. *Summary of MCC Respectful Conversation Event*.

Step	Activity
I	Shared meal
II	Event welcome with stated purpose, naming the framing topic
III	Video: humorous animation of physiological response to conflict
IV	Video: Illustration of guiding principles of the conversation, with improv actors humorously violating each
V	In small table groups: reminder of the guiding principles and sign of agreement
VI	In small table groups: facilitated conversation a. Circle Question 1 b. Circle Question 2 c. Circle Question 3 d. Unstructured time for participants to ask and answer questions of genuine interest e. Closing Question 4
VII	Large group open reflection
VIII	Evaluation

At the end of the event, participants were encouraged to fill out the post-event questionnaire, which included our key measures and questions to create anonymized codes to link with the pre-test measures. We also sent them a reminder email the day after the event to encourage more responses. The response rates for each event and in total are in Table 1.

Measures

We had several sets of key measures that we measured at both the pre-test and post-test to assess the effectiveness of MCC Respectful Conversations and the experimental treatment (see Table 3). All measures are coded so that higher scores indicate more openness to people and ideas that differ from the participants' own point of view. All measures are rescaled to range from 0 to 1. Correlations between all of the scales are in the supplemental materials.

Our key measures came from two sources. First, we adopted and adapted items from the Social Cohesion Impact Measure (SCIM; Bridging Movements Goals & Measures Program, 2024), a measure designed to measure the impact of depolarization initiatives.

This measure was developed in consultation with both practitioners and academics and includes multiple measures from the research literature (e.g., feeling thermometers, social distance measures). The SCIM assesses several outcomes related to polarization and we include those assessing liking of the outgroup (liking scale, items 1 and 2), morality (item 3), and respect (item 4). We also adapted items from previous evaluations of MCC Respectful Conversations that assess confidence in discussing difficult issues (items 5 and 6) and empathy (items 7 and 8).[1] As preregistered, we created 4 two-item scales from these items (all between item *r*'s > .50, all test-retest reliability *r*'s ≥ .50, see Table 3) and include item level analyses in the supplemental materials.

Table 3. *Scale items (1st column), correlations/alphas for items used in the scales (2nd and 3rd column), as well as the correlation between the pre- and post-test measurements of all scales and items (4th column).*

Scales/Items	*Item r* / α at Pre-test	*Item r* / α at Post-test	Pre-Post *r*
Liking Scale	.64	.68	.67
1. Please indicate how you feel toward people who disagree with you on [topic] using the scale below. 10 means that you feel very favorably or warm toward them, 0 that you feel very unfavorable or cold, and 5 is neutral.			.60
2. How comfortable are you having friends who disagree with you on [topic]? [1 = not at all comfortable, 5 = extremely comfortable]			.61
Respect Scale	.51	.64	.68
3. Would you say that people who disagree with you on [topic] are generally good people? [1 = not at all good people, 5 = extremely good people]			.58
4. I respect the opinions of people who disagree with me on [topic]. [1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree]			.62
Confidence Scale	.88	.83	.63
5. How confident are you in discussing difficult issues with people you disagree with? [1 = not confident at all, 5 = extremely confident]			.60
6. I am confident I can talk about controversial issues with people I disagree with. [1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree]			.61
Empathy Scale	.55	.63	.63
7. I understand others' points of view on [topic]. [1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree]			.59
8. I have empathy for those whose viewpoints are different from mine on [topic]. [1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree]			.50
Moral Humility Scale	.57	.54	.62

[1] Prior evaluations asked participants to retrospectively report if the event increased their confidence and empathy. However, it is not clear that participants have adequate insight into whether or not their attitudes and beliefs change (Grahamm & Coppock, 2021).

9.	I am open to learning about different moral values from people I typically disagree with. [1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree]	.44
10.	My views about moral issues today may someday turn out to be wrong. [1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree]	.62
11.	My moral ideas are much more just and fair than the ideas of those who disagree with me. (reverse scored) [1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree]	.52

As part of preregistered secondary analyses, we included three items from a moral humility measure that is being developed in the first author's lab (items 9, 10, and 11; Vallabha & Brandt, 2024). These items come from different subscales intending to asses Moral Learning/Openness (item 9), Moral Fallibility (item 10), and Moral Superiority (item 11). We analyze these as scales in the main text and include item level analyses in the supplemental materials (α and test-retest reliability *r*'s in Table 3).

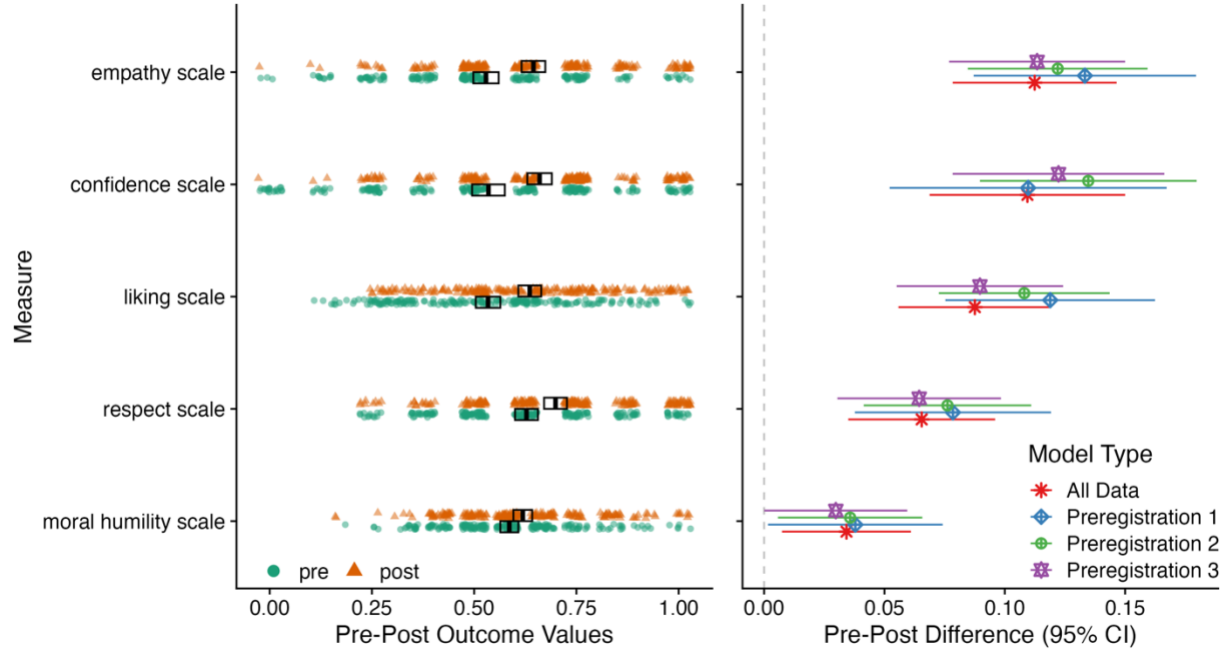
Results

Pre-Post Effect of MCC Respectful Conversations (Exploratory)

We first analyzed if there was evidence that MCC Respectful Conversation events depolarized participants. These analyses were not preregistered and so should be considered exploratory. Nonetheless, we think it is important to understand the trajectory of people's attitudes over the course of the events. To test this, we calculated the difference between the pre-test and post-test measures for each participant. Because participants were recruited from different events, we adjusted for these events using OLS regression. We regressed the difference score on a series of event contrast codes using a simple coding scheme. The intercept in a simple coding scheme corresponds to the mean of event means (see UCLA: Statistical Consulting Group, 2024). The significance of the intercept tells us if there was significant change over the course of the event. We repeated this analysis for all scales and items. We also repeated it for each of our preregistered inclusion criteria, as well as for all of the data.

Across all of the scales, we see that people became less polarized following the MCC Respectful Conversation events (Figure 3). This was also the case for the individual items (with exceptions for two of the moral humility items, see supplemental materials). As is evident in Figure 3 (right panel), the effects were largest for the empathy and confidence scales, with both increasing by between 15% and 18% of the scale range depending on the inclusion criteria. The smallest changes were for the moral humility scale with increases ranging from 6% to 7% of the scale range depending on the inclusion criteria. Based on these analyses, it appears that MCC Respectful Conversation events work (see Discussion for the limitations of this single-group pre-post design).

Figure 3. *Left Panel: Outcome values (x-axis) for pre-post measures of all scales (y-axis) using the full dataset. Boxes are the means (thick line) and 95% confidence intervals (left and right edge of the box) of the scales at the pre-test and post-test for the full data set. Right Panel: Estimated pre-post difference (x-axis) for all scales (y-axis) using different subsets of data based on the preregistered inclusion criteria.*



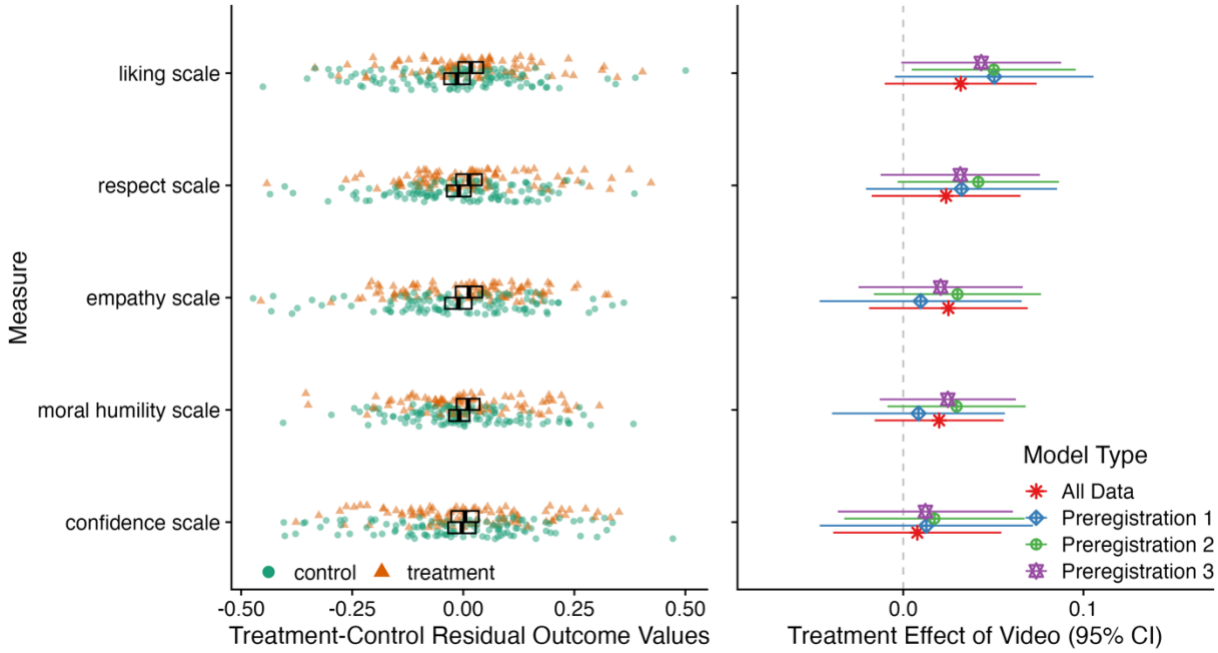
Treatment Effect of Boosting Intervention (Confirmatory)

We tested our preregistered experimental hypothesis across each of the scales using OLS regression. We regressed the post-test measure on the boosting treatment condition (0 = control, 1 = treatment) and the pre-test measure to estimate the treatment effect (Clifford et al., 2021). Because participants were recruited from different events, we preregistered that we would include a fixed-effect for event as a series of dummy codes. Instead of using dummy codes, we used the simple coding scheme described above.

Across all analyses, there was one statistically significant result (Figure 4). When using the inclusion criteria from Preregistration 2, there was a significant (p = .03) effect of the boosting treatment, indicating that the treatment increased liking by 5% of the scale range. The effect on liking using the Preregistration 1 inclusion criteria was nearly identical in size, but with a larger standard error making it non-significant (p = .07). The boosting treatment effects using the other inclusion criteria, which all included data from after the election, were smaller in size and non-significant (p's = .06 and .13).

There were no significant boosting effects for any of the other scales and inclusion criteria. All of the treatment effects were descriptively positive. In addition to the liking scale reported above, the respect scale had the most consistently positive estimates across the inclusion criteria, ranging between 2% and 4% of the scale range. Although none of these effects were statistically significant (all *p*'s > .07).

Figure 4. *Left Panel: Residual post-test values after removing the effect of the pre-test measure and the event contrast codes (x-axis) for all scales (y-axis) using the full dataset. Boxes are the means (thick line) and 95% confidence intervals (left and right edge of the box) of the scales for the full data set. Right Panel: Estimated treatment effect (x-axis) for all scales (y-axis) using different subsets of data based on the preregistered inclusion criteria.*



General Discussion

We tested if using a light touch boosting intervention could improve an existing, more intensive intervention when they are simply stacked together. The idea was that the sympathetic personal narratives video intervention could help prepare participants for the event, making them more open and receptive to MCC Respectful Conversations. If successful, this would provide an easy method to boost the effectiveness of existing interventions. In addition to this experimental component of our project, we were also able to evaluate the effectiveness of MCC Respectful Conversations.

We found that MCC Respectful Conversation events were associated with more positive attitudes, empathy, and moral humility in a one-group pre-post design. Although not part of our preregistered experiment, this is useful evidence suggestive of the benefits of MCC Respectful Conversations. Notably, because this part of the design lacks a control group, to treat the estimates of this pre-post design as a causal estimate, we need to assume that MCC Respectful Conversations was responsible for the changes. There are threats to this assumption, some more plausible than others. For example, it is possible that something happened between the pre-test and post-test that caused the changes we observe (e.g., events that depolarized the USA); however, given the relatively short time-span between the measures and that the events were held at different times throughout the year, this does not seem plausible. Similarly, we doubt the effects are due to maturation or other developmental processes; for the adults who attend these events, such processes are unlikely to occur over the course of a few days. A greater threat to the validity of this causal estimate is that participants may report more positive attitudes, empathy, and moral humility because that is what they expect from the event. Therefore, future tests of MCC Respectful Conversations (and similar programs) should use placebo control-group designs, measures less susceptible to controlled responses, and measures of longer term effects.

Our preregistered experiment tested if Civity's sympathetic personal narrative videos (Kopell et al., 2024) could boost the effects of MCC Respectful Conservations. It primarily resulted in null results. Although this might be taken as evidence that the videos do not work, we want to encourage restraint in coming to that conclusion. In particular, at this stage and with our final sample size, we may not have had the necessary power to precisely estimate the treatment effect. The values in the confidence intervals for nearly all of the scales include both zero, but also effects that would be substantively important (especially when considering the low cost of the boosting intervention).

It is also helpful to put the effect sizes of previous tests of the intervention into context with the effect sizes in our study. The original test of the sympathetic personal narrative intervention found an effect size equivalent to $b = .09$ on a measure similar to our liking scale (Voelkel et al., 2024). Our effects are smaller than this, however, there are important differences between our study and the original test. The original test had the dependent measures immediately follow the intervention and the control condition was a neutral control condition (when compared to a more active control condition, the effect size is equivalent to $b = .005$). In our study, the intervention took place at least 1 day, if not more, prior to the dependent measures. Moreover, people in our control condition also attended the MCC Respectful Conversation event. Given this context, we might expect somewhat smaller effect sizes in our design than $b = .09$. Notably, the original test also

measured their dependent measures after 2 weeks. After this delay, the effect size was equivalent to *b* = .027 or *b* = .018 (depending on sample inclusion criteria) on a measure similar to our liking scale. This is *smaller* than the effects we observed. This is to say, that the effect sizes we observe are consistent with those from Voelkel et al (2024) when considering time delays and neutral vs active control conditions. It is an open question as to whether we would have found larger effects with more immediate measurements of the outcomes, or if our effects would last at later measurement points. Generating lasting effects of depolarization initiatives appears difficult (Dias et al., 2024; Holliday et al., 2025; Voelkel et al., 2024).

It is also potentially a concern that some of the events took place so soon after a contentious election. Although we might hope that depolarization interventions, such as MCC Respectful Conversations and the sympathetic personal narrative videos, would work well in contentious environments, a major election may be too strong of a situation to overcome. Testing depolarization interventions in different political environments, with different types of political competition and outcomes will help future studies understand the extent these interventions generalize.

Finally, due to the nature of the evaluation procedure, we were unable to collect background data on the participants. If the boosting video intervention or the MCC Respectful Conversation events have different effects on people from different backgrounds, we are unable to identify that heterogeneity (our smaller sample size would also make this a challenge).

References

Ahler, D. J., & Sood, G. (2018). The parties in our heads: Misperceptions about party composition and their consequences. *The Journal of Politics*, *80*(3), 964-981.

Baron, H., Blair, R., Choi, D. D., Gamboa, L., Gottlieb, J., Robinson, A. L., ... West, E. A. (2021, May 10). Couples Therapy for a Divided America: Assessing the Effects of Reciprocal Group Reflection on Partisan Polarization. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/3x7z8

Batson, C. D., & Ahmad, N. Y. (2009). Using empathy to improve intergroup attitudes and relations. *Social issues and policy review*, *3*(1), 141-177.

Brandt, M. J., & Crawford, J. T. (2020). Worldview conflict and prejudice. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 61, pp. 1-66). Academic Press.

Bridging Movement Goals & Measures Program (2024). *Social cohesion impact measurement*. https://www.listenfirstproject.org/goals-and-measures

Byrne, D. (1969). Attitudes and attraction. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 4, pp. 35-89). Academic Press.

Byrne, D., & Griffitt, W. (1966). A developmental investigation of the law of attraction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *4*(6), 699.

Clifford, S., Sheagley, G., & Piston, S. (2021). Increasing precision without altering treatment effects: Repeated measures designs in survey experiments. *American Political Science Review*, *115*(3), 1048-1065.

Crawford, J. T., Brandt, M. J., Inbar, Y., Chambers, J. R., & Motyl, M. (2017). Social and economic ideologies differentially predict prejudice across the political spectrum, but social issues are most divisive. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *112*(3), 383.

Dias, N. C., Aarslew, L. F., Frederiksen, K. V. S., Lelkes, Y., Pradella, L., & Westwood, S. J. (2024). Correcting misperceptions of partisan opponents is not effective at treating democratic ills. *PNAS nexus*, *3*(8), pgae304.

Gift, K., & Gift, T. (2015). Does politics influence hiring? Evidence from a randomized experiment. *Political Behavior*, *37*, 653-675.

Graham, M. H., & Coppock, A. (2021). Asking about attitude change. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *85*(1), 28-53.

Hartman, R., Blakey, W., Womick, J., Bail, C., Finkel, E. J., Han, H., ... & Gray, K. (2022). Interventions to reduce partisan animosity. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *6*(9), 1194-1205.

Holliday, D. E., Lelkes, Y., & Westwood, S. J. (2025). Why depolarization is hard: Evaluating attempts to decrease partisan animosity in America. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *122*(39), e2508827122.

Huddy, L., & Yair, O. (2021). Reducing affective polarization: Warm group relations or policy compromise? *Political Psychology*, *42*(2), 291-309.

Kopell M., Strand P., Baleria G., & Fiorella M. (2024) Civity Storytelling Intervention: Expanding the Pool of People Who Matter. Civity. Retrieved October 9, 2025, from https://sshs.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_88PAor84VsO3X5Y?Condition=Civity_Storytelling, also available at www.civity.org/civity-storytelling-intervention/

Levendusky, M. S. (2018). Americans, not partisans: Can priming American national identity reduce affective polarization?. *The Journal of Politics*, *80*(1), 59-70.

Mernyk, J. S., Pink, S. L., Druckman, J. N., & Willer, R. (2022). Correcting inaccurate metaperceptions reduces Americans' support for partisan violence. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *119*(16), e2116851119.

Moore-Berg, S. L., Ankori-Karlinsky, L. O., Hameiri, B., & Bruneau, E. (2020). Exaggerated meta-perceptions predict intergroup hostility between American political partisans. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *117*(26), 14864-14872.

Paluck, E. L., Porat, R., Clark, C. S., & Green, D. P. (2021). Prejudice reduction: Progress and challenges. *Annual review of psychology*, *72*(1), 533-560.

UCLA: Statistical Consulting Group. (2024). *R library contrast coding systems for categorical variables*. https://stats.oarc.ucla.edu/r/library/r-library-contrast-coding-systems-for-categorical-variables/

Vallabha, S. & Brandt, M. J. (2024). *Moral humility: Construct Validation*. Manuscript in preparation.

Voelkel, J. G., Ren, D., & Brandt, M. J. (2021). Inclusion reduces political prejudice. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *95*, 104149.

Voelkel, J. G., Stagnaro, M. N., Chu, J. Y., Pink, S. L., Mernyk, J. S., Redekopp, C., ... & Willer, R. (2024). Megastudy testing 25 treatments to reduce antidemocratic attitudes and partisan animosity. *Science*, *386*(6719), eadh4764.

Whitt, S., Yanus, A. B., McDonald, B., Graeber, J., Setzler, M., Ballingrud, G., & Kifer, M. (2021). Tribalism in America: behavioral experiments on affective polarization in the Trump era. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, *8*(3), 247-259.

Woitzel, J., & Koch, A. (2023). Ideological prejudice is stronger in ideological extremists (vs. moderates). *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *26*(8), 1685-1705.

Supplemental Materials

Table S1. *Correlations between all scales at pre-test and post-test.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Pre-Test Liking									
2. Post-Test Liking	0.669								
3. Pre-Test Respect	0.691	0.578							
4. Post-Respect	0.582	0.766	0.682						
5. Pre-Test Confidence	0.425	0.300	0.250	0.161					
6. Post- Confidence	0.337	0.449	0.282	0.349	0.630				
7. Pre-Test Empathy	0.617	0.515	0.572	0.486	0.557	0.490			
8. Post-Test Empathy	0.502	0.612	0.478	0.627	0.427	0.559	0.631		
9. Pre-Test Moral Humility	0.426	0.441	0.504	0.460	0.219	0.256	0.478	0.428	
10. Post-Test Moral Humility	0.359	0.543	0.428	0.535	0.232	0.380	0.401	0.524	0.616

Note: Within time-point correlations are shaded gray.

Figure S1. *Left Panel: Outcome values (x-axis) for pre-post measures of all items (y-axis) using the full dataset. Boxes are the means (thick line) and 95% confidence intervals (left and right edge of the box) of the items at the pre-test and post-test for the full data set. Right Panel: Estimated pre-post difference (x-axis) for all items (y-axis) using different subsets of data based on the preregistered inclusion criteria.*

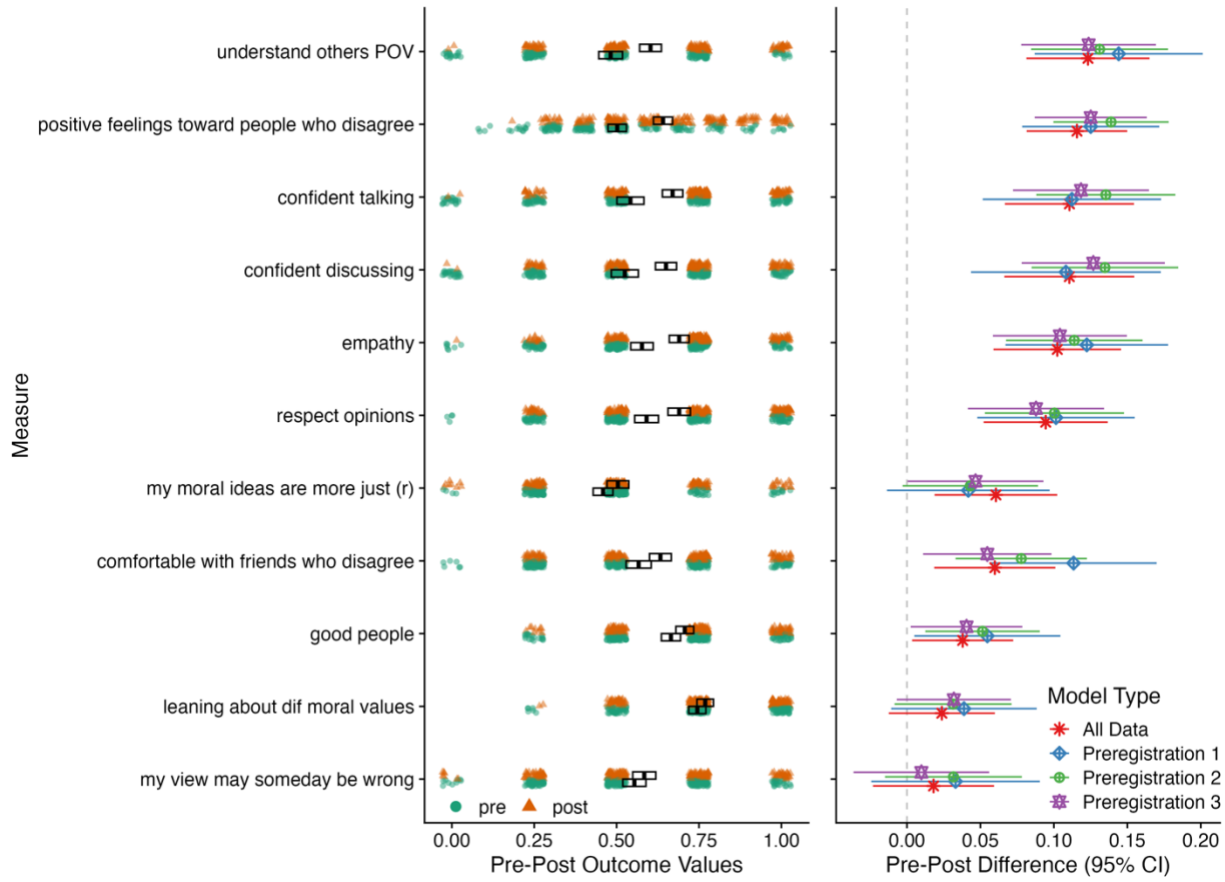


Figure S2. *Left Panel: Residual post-test values after removing the effect of the pre-test measure and the event contrast codes (x-axis) for all items (y-axis) using the full dataset. Boxes are the means (thick line) and 95% confidence intervals (left and right edge of the box) of the items for the full data set. Right Panel: Estimated treatment effect (x-axis) for all items (y-axis) using different subsets of data based on the preregistered inclusion criteria.*