# Cross–Party Program Approaches: An evidence review

## Introduction

Cross-party programs typically refer to approaches taken by members from different political parties who come together to collectively pursue a common goal. In multi-party democracies, cross-party initiatives can play a crucial role in bypassing partisan loyalties, thus leading to improved decision-making. On the other hand, collective action is any action taken by individuals, organizations, countries, or other entities to resolve an institutionalized problem. In politics, the outcomes may include but are not limited to, policies to reduce corruption and political conflict, improve resource governance, and mitigate information disorders.

Interventions like cross-party programs bridge the gap between political parties and factions, and are vital to preserving democratic values. After all, political parties play a crucial role in democracies because they represent the interests of various factions of society and help bridge the gap between public interests and the state. They not only disseminate political information but can also be used as a tool for nation-building in new democracies. The relationship between political parties in a country is one element that determines the progress of a nation (Burnell, 2004). In highly polarized societies, voters place a premium on partisan interests and are often willing to sacrifice democratic principles for the same (Svolik, 2012). Cross-party programs, in such cases, encourage collaboration over competition, advance common interests, strengthen democratic principles within countries, and promote collective action.

This report aims to provide the International Republican Institute (IRI) with a broad understanding of existing cross-party program approaches to collective action-related outcomes. The report examines different cross-party initiatives across the world and highlights interventions that have proven to be successful while making note of the limitations associated with each approach. Due to the limited availability of literature, the report also identifies research gaps, providing IRI with recommendations to address these gaps in the near future.

The nature of this topic—the impact of cross-party programs on collective action outcomes—lends itself to experimental methods in order to claim causality more confidently. In an ideal scenario, field experiments have interventions that closely resemble ordinary behavior and thus enable researchers to observe subjects who are not aware that they are part of an experiment (Gerber et al., 2009). In the absence of relevant field experiments, case studies can be useful in understanding cross-party programs.

## Cross-party approaches

This section examines different cross-party approaches, focusing on evidence-based initiatives and keeping in mind program parameters that are most likely to improve collective action

outcomes. In some cases, where there is little literature on intervention-based programs, the paper relies on qualitative case studies or non-experimental methods that can help IRI design interventions at a party level. The following cross-party approaches are discussed: contact hypothesis, legislative caucuses, cross-party dialogue, working groups, and integrity pacts.

## 1. Contact Hypothesis

Gordon Allport (1954) first developed the contact hypothesis in his book *The Nature of Prejudice*. In its simplest form, Allport's theory states that with more interactions (instances of contact), an in-group will develop warmer feelings towards an out-group. Factors that go into determining the outcomes of contact include frequency, duration, number of individuals, variety, status, the relationship between individuals or groups, the social atmosphere, and the degree to which the contact is genuine or superficial. Allport (1954) proposes that superficial or casual contact (daily interactions) may serve to reinforce stereotypes and animosity towards the out-group. Genuine contact—where an individual meets and spends time with a member of an out-group—often has the opposite effect, leading to a warming of feelings and a decrease in animosity.

Similar to Allport, other scholars have researched the determinants of successful intergroup contact. Using a survey, Lee, Farrell, and Link (2004) find that all types of exposure lead to positive feelings towards the out-group. Most findings, however, are less all-encompassing. Other factors like social status (Hayes, McAllister, & Dowds, 2007), the level of one's embedment in one's own in-group network (van Zomeran, 2018), the quality of interactions (Di Bernardo et al., 2019), and the context in which interactions occur, such as volunteer work, (Achbari, Gesthuizen, & Holm, 2018) may impact contact-based outcomes.

Research has also focused on measurable outcomes related to contact. The majority of contact-based interventions aim to address and resolve intergroup conflict. For instance, Achbari, Gesthuizen, and Holm (2018) find that contact that occurs while volunteering increases trust. Contact also increases empathy (Halperin, 2011), a sense of welcoming (Tropp et al., 2018), or solidarity (Dixon et al., 2016) with the out-group, shifts perceptions of the other (Brenner & Friedman, 2015), and leads to supporting policies more beneficial towards the out-group (Ellison, Shin, & Leal, 2011; Hayes, McAllister, & Dowds, 2007).

Evidence on contact's relationship with collective action, however, is far more ambiguous. On one hand, high-quality contact has the potential to increase motivation for collective action (Di Bernard et al., 2019). For example, Dixon et al. (2016) find that contact between Muslim students and individuals from other disadvantaged communities in India aided in building solidarity and a desire to participate in joint collective action as both populations were minorities in a Hindu majority country. Alternatively, contact may undermine efforts to promote social justice and collective action if the contact is a negative experience for participants (McKeown &

Dixon, 2017). More broadly, the degree to which an individual is embedded in their own social network determines the compatibility of intergroup contact and collective action (van Zomeran, 2018).

Scholars utilize three primary methods when studying the contact hypothesis: surveys (Tropp et al., 2018; Dixon et al., 2016; Ellison, Shin, & Leal, 2011; Lee, Farrell, & Link, 2004), focus groups or small-group interventions (Darweish & Thiessen, 2018; Brenner & Friedman, 2015; Halperin, 2011), and observation or selection on observables (Hayes, McAllister, & Dowds, 2007).

Contact hypothesis-based interventions tend to focus on average citizens (rather than the elite) who live in areas prone to conflict or prejudice. For example, Hayes, McAllister, and Dowds (2007) find that, among Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, attending a more religiously integrated school led students to be more supportive of secular policies in the long run. Halperin (2011) finds that discussions between Israeli and Palestinian women led to increased tolerance and empathy towards the out-group. In the United States, similar results have been found during Arab-Jewish dialogue (Brenner & Friedman, 2015) and contact between immigrant and non-immigrant populations (Tropp et al., 2018) and Hispanic and non-Hispanic communities (Ellison, Shin, & Leal, 2011).

While contact has the potential to increase empathy between two conflicting groups, it is unclear if contact alone is sufficient to spark collective action. After all, most contact hypothesis-based interventions, by nature, target small groups of citizens. Furthermore, politicians and other political elites may have incentives not to facilitate contact between a domestic in-group and out-group as ethnic and religious divisions may be co-opted for political, often electoral, gain (Dancygier, 2017; Mora, 2014; Wilkinson, 2006; Posner, 2004; Fearon & Laitin, 2000). In other words, the specific domestic political context can preclude contact from ever occurring as it is not viewed as favorable by the elite. Therefore, it is essential to consider the domestic context and the incentives for elites to facilitate and support contact.

Table 1: Contact hypothesis summary

| What Works | Risks | Intervening Factors | Outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Quality of contact: genuine, meaningful, and sustained contact | Reinforcing stereotypes | Domestic context: social structure, community features | Increased tolerance and empathy |
| Positive contact experiences for participants | Intergroup animosity and potential conflict | Social network: embeddedness in the network strengthens the pathway from contact to collective action | Increased sense of belonging |
| Contact delivered through prosocial activities, such as volunteering | | Social status: important when social contact studies are conducted on non-elites | Increased support for policies beneficial to the out-group |
| | | | Increased trust |
| | | | Increased solidarity |
| | | | Increased likelihood of collective action |

## 2. Legislative Caucuses

A caucus refers to a group of people who come together to work on a particular issue. Depending on the political context under which the group operates, this can range from nominating candidates for elections to influencing government and political processes. Cross-party caucuses involve parliamentarians from different political parties who discuss and engage with policy issues to achieve a common goal. They can be particularly effective in cutting across ideological and party lines.

According to Carman et al. (2016), caucuses are forms of legislative member organizations that allow legislators to build relationships with each other across ideological and party lines. The voluntary nature of caucuses ensures that a politically diverse mixture of politicians, who have substantive common interests, can come together to solve a particular issue. Membership in a caucus indicates not only a politician's priorities but also provides considerable opportunities for information exchange and coordination among different political parties. Matland (2005) argues that caucuses increase the visibility and legitimacy of politicians, especially women, as they look to establish a political base. With increased polarization, caucuses are well positioned to act as spaces where cross-party dialogue and decision-making can occur.

When looking at caucuses, the literature heavily relies on case studies to analyze the purpose, effectiveness, and impact of different caucuses on collective action outcomes. In the absence of

experiments, case studies can prove to be very useful in identifying constraints, as well as potential harms of caucuses. They can also play a pivotal role in structuring interventions, as they highlight barriers faced by different caucuses when advocating for their interests. Intervention-based programs concerning caucuses have been carried out by non-profits working to advance democratic issues. Typically, the literature on caucuses focuses on gender and race-based caucuses.

First, the majority of studies on race-based caucuses exist only in reference to the United States. In particular, research has focused primarily on the development and achievement of the Congressional Black Caucus (Holmes, 2000; Wilson, 2017). There are mixed results on the effectiveness of this caucus. Barnett (1975) concludes that while the establishment of the Black caucus led to the development of a common purpose, this did not necessarily translate into action. Homes' research supports this claim by arguing that although the Black Caucus was successful in forging a common identity, they passed fewer bills as compared to their White counterparts. Gamble (2009), on the other hand, questions the ability of the Black Caucus in advocating for the interests of the Black population, keeping in mind their minority status, and their constitutional responsibility to represent all their constituents, especially when the interests of the Black population are in conflict with the majority. These case studies help to understand the tenuous relationship between racial identity and political action and can serve as useful reminders when designing interventions to meet specific outcomes.

Next, looking at the role of gender-based caucuses across the world is important to examine the conditions around which they emerge and succeed in their objectives. An international survey conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2008) summarized that women's caucuses were useful in bringing the concerns of women to the forefront, influencing national politics, and providing oversight to parliamentary committees. However, this is possible only when institutions and political contexts actively support these caucuses.

In Cambodia, for example, the existing party systems and an emphasis on party loyalty reduce the abilities of cross-party caucuses to affect real change. Moreover, the presence of administrative barriers, including a lack of parliamentary support and financial resources, can further hinder the success of cross-party caucuses. A separate analysis of Pakistan's provincial caucuses concludes that religion and class differences can undermine the effectiveness of their caucuses (Khan, 2020). In Kenya, however, the cross-parliamentary women's caucus has been able to succeed despite the ethnic division in the country. It is posited that their success is because women's issues are viewed as non-political and non-controversial, a factor that is likely to change with time (Jobarteh, 2016).

A paper by Powley (2008) provides further insight into the effectiveness of women's caucuses, concluding that the success of a caucus depends on the issues around which it focuses. The right to abortion, for instance, is a polarizing issue that cannot be agreed upon by different political parties. However, it is possible to find common ground with less contentious issues like child

rights. The Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians (FFRP), a cross-party women's caucus in Rwanda provides further evidence with its success in advancing the rights of children through their caucusing (Powley, 2008). Alternatively, Holman and Mahoney (2019) provide evidence based on their analysis of U.S. state legislatures, concluding that the presence of a platform to discuss contentious issues is enough to foster trust and collaboration among members, reducing the importance accorded to issue-specific caucuses. Differences in the political context of these studies may be the key to understanding the differentiated results, emphasizing the importance of local understanding and political conditions when designing interventions.

Wang et al. (2016), looking at cross-party caucuses in Malawi emphasize the collaborative aspect of caucuses, stating that they are most likely to succeed when they act as a common entity and work as a unit with other external actors. The Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians also attributes its success to the ability of women to consult extensively with internal and external stakeholders, thus building effective relationships (Powley, 2008). Benigna (2007) further illustrates the importance of unity and cohesion in determining the achievement of their objectives. The study looks at Uganda's women's caucus, citing its emphasis on non-partisan approaches to attain their goals. The Ugandan caucus refused to take a public stand on politically divisive issues, preferring to maintain a united stance. Members were reminded of their common agenda as a deterrent to achieving individual outcomes that were not in the common interest of the caucus.

South Africa posits itself as a cautionary tale when working on multi-party caucuses, with their Parliamentary Women's Group failing to establish itself as an effective and important player in politics. Women are not a homogenous category, and their ideological and political affiliations, as well as their varied individual priorities on gender-specific issues led to a lack of consensus in the caucus. Single-party caucuses in South Africa have proven to be far more effective in leading to successful outcomes (Hassim, 2003). While cross-party caucuses in Malawi have played an instrumental role in advancing common issues, Wang et al. (2016) conclude that they are not indispensable and can be replaced by an active network of Civil Society organizations and women parliamentarians. Thus, while women's caucuses are key to promoting gender equality and solving particular collective action outcomes, these initiatives have to be structured keeping in mind the constraints imposed by party ideology. To be successful, caucuses must actively promote a sense of collective identity, and work to maintain the spirit of collective action.

When designing an intervention, it is useful to look at some existing interventions introduced by the National Democratic Institute of International Affairs, which is a non-profit working to establish and support democratic institutions worldwide. In countries like Azerbaijan, Colombia and Indonesia, NDI has provided political training in collaboration with local organizations to female politicians that facilitated the advancement of women's rights. In Indonesia, NDI organized focus groups to understand how women politicians were being perceived, and then worked with the politicians to counter these claims. In Somalia and Colombia, NDI has encouraged exchange programs, providing opportunities to politicians to learn from countries

that have been successful in developing caucuses and advocating on gender issues. In Nepal, NDI has actively helped the women's caucus to lobby the government on a variety of issues, in Kosovo it has focused its efforts on helping parliamentarians form a caucus. These initiatives provide insights on possible interventions keeping in mind the local needs of the population. They are also in line with USAID's policies on legislative strengthening, which advocate for assistance to be non-partisan in nature (NDI, 2008).

Table 2: Legislative caucuses summary

| What Works | Risks | Intervening Factors | Outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Promoting a common identity | Lack of activity | Need an initial common identity (gender, race, etc.) | Strengthening collective identity and interests |
| Establishing trust | Tension with constituency service | Expectations for representing the constituency | Advancing policies supported by the group |
| Support and training | | Party ideology (especially when it conflicts with caucus interests) | Overcoming partisan roadblocks |
| | | Institutional support/funding | |

## 3. Cross-party Dialogues

Cross-party dialogues, according to Burnell (2004), refer to instances where members from different political parties come together to discuss common challenges. These programs can lead parties to collectively pursue goals that help advance democracy. Associated with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), this model suggests effective communication as a tool to solve collective action outcomes. It is particularly useful in post-conflict settings, where building unity and cohesion across different sections of society is an immediate goal (Burnell, 2004).

Cross-party dialogues often build on the contact hypothesis, which posits that with increased interactions, an in-group will develop warmer feelings towards an out-group. To test this, Levendusky and Stecula (2021) set up an experiment to reduce polarization through cross-party dialogues among non-political elites in the United States. They concluded that when non-elites engaged in heterogenous political conversations with members from different political parties, there was a decline in partisan animosity that remained for at least a week after the intervention (Levendusky, 2021).

However, other studies indicate mixed results for similar interventions. For instance, Broockman et al. (2022) found that affective polarization was reduced only when participants discussed non-

political issues that they agreed upon (e.g., what their perfect day looked like). When participants discussed the behaviors of their political parties, there was no effect on affective polarization (Broockman et al., 2022). This suggests that cross-party dialogues can succeed only in specific contexts. According to Tuomala and Baxter (2019), empathy between politicians from different parties reduces intergroup conflict and boosts collaboration between them. They argue that cross-party dialogues generated empathy among politicians in Finland and fueled new opportunities for interactions and collaboration.

The increased presence of politicians on social media provides new opportunities for researchers to examine cross-party dialogues on these platforms. It is particularly useful to analyze whether conversations among elites on social media form echo chambers or act as new spaces for multi-party collaborations. An example of such a space is Twitter—where members of different political parties publicly communicate by mentioning (@) one another on the platform. In the Netherlands, a highly fragmented country with fourteen groups in parliament, a study found that cross-party dialogue between Dutch members of parliament (MPs) on Twitter does not create "echo chambers" but allows for productive communication that can lead to consensus (Del Valle et al., 2021). Similar results were found for Catalan MPs who also used Twitter to mention members of other parties (Bravo et al., 2018).

The success of cross-party dialogues is often dependent on the regional and political context under which they operate. While female activists from different political parties in Cambodia helped to increase the political participation of women and to change public attitudes about women (Chan et al., 2004), the cross-party dialogue had more mixed results in Ghana (Kauffman, 2018). To try to understand these conflicting results, scholars discuss different factors that can lead to success in the outcomes of the cross-party dialogue.

According to Friedman et al. (2015), who look at the determinants of successful dialogues between groups that share a tenuous political history, three dimensions can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of these dialogues. When participants depict (1) a shift in their attitudes to hold on to their beliefs and yet accept counterarguments, (2) a willingness to expand group boundaries to larger communities, and (3) resiliency, which is the ability to maintain relationships with opposing groups without resolving a conflict, dialogues are successful. These factors can be used as indicators when designing future interventions in similar spaces.

Cross-party dialogues are also used in post-conflict settings, especially when structuring national dialogues. National dialogues typically involve multiple stakeholders including different political parties, civil society, youth, and business and religious leaders. These dialogues help re-establish the legitimacy of the state and its political elites through effective negotiation. The existing political context is key to determining the success of national dialogues and is mediated by factors like the level of support and resistance from national elites and the public, the relationship with regional actors, the country's prior experience with multi-party negotiations, and the presence of violence within the country. These dialogues are highly structured processes

and are significantly shaped by neutral mediators who facilitate these negotiations (Helfer et al., 2018).

Finally, cross-party dialogues have also shown varying degrees of success when negotiating resource governance issues. In Norway, cross-party dialogues played a key role in reaching a consensus on how to invest oil revenues. Cross-party collaborations help develop optimal policies that are more successful and sustainable in the long run (Kauffman, 2018).

Table 3: Cross-party dialogues summary

| What Works | Risks | Intervening Factors | Outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Starting discussions from common ground | Increased animosity | Neutral mediators | Consensus building |
| Dialogue to foster empathy | Breakdown of trust | Existing political conditions (such as post-conflict settings) | Increased empathy |
| | | Violence (especially during national dialogues) | Decline in partisan animosity and polarization |
| | | Resiliency of stakeholders | |

## 4. Integrity Pacts

In the mid-1990s, Transparency International created integrity pacts to combat corruption in relation to public contracting. Since then, integrity pacts have been used in other contexts. However, reducing corruption is still the primary outcome. Simply put, integrity pacts are agreements between the government and businesses vying for a contract that there will be no bribes given, offered, or received (or any other corrupt act) within or between the involved parties and that this process will be monitored by a third party (Idemudia, Cragg, & Best, 2020). In short, they are promises to maintain truthfulness and transparency when competing for a specific outcome. For relevance to the topic, we are only looking at integrity pacts with both public *and* private actors involved, which include government and business leaders.

According to Transparency International (2013), integrity pacts have been implemented in 300 cases in over fifteen countries ranging from Honduras and Mexico to members of the European Union. More specifically, as Martin (2019) finds, there has recently been an increased use of integrity pacts in the European Union in an effort to combat corruption. She finds that integrity pacts help address existing gaps in compliance programs. Furthermore, integrity pacts have been helpful in Eastern Europe as they increase transparency, trust, and competition in the public procurement process (Schöberlein & Zúñiga, 2019).

One successful example of the implementation of an integrity pact is in Honduras. A pact was signed between the employees of the Ministry of Health and relevant actors who provided services to the Ministry that included an ethics statement after a massive corruption scandal was uncovered. Since its implementation, the integrity pact has led to increased transparency within and around the government (Transparency International, 2013).

While integrity pacts have primarily been used to combat corruption, they have also been utilized in other situations related to elections (Transparency International, 2013) and public works (Gainer, 2015). In Bulgaria, for instance, an integrity pact was used to ensure free, fair, and democratic parliamentary elections in 2013. The pact was signed by all sixteen political parties and monitored by eight NGOs. In particular, it focused on increasing voter turnout and decreasing instances of vote buying (Transparency International, 2013). Parties signed the integrity pact after a series of political and economic crises in Bulgaria (OSCE, 2014). It is unclear what, if any, causal relationship exists between the integrity pact and credible elections or what the specific outcomes were.

In El Salvador, integrity pacts have been used to improve public works. Prior to 2009, the Ministry of Public Works in El Salvador was plagued with corruption. The minister at the time decided to implement various integrity pacts between industry officials and the government. These were to be monitored by NGOs. Due to the success of integrity pacts at reducing corruption and improving public works, the Ministry signed 31 integrity pacts as of 2015 (Gainer, 2015).

Despite some instances of success for integrity pacts leading to a decrease in corruption and improved outcomes, they still face many challenges. Simply put, integrity pacts work in theory but struggle to be effective in practice (Idemudia, Cragg, & Best, 2020). Additionally, the success of any collective action measure to promote business integrity is highly context-specific (Schöberlein & Zúñiga, 2019). More research is needed to further understand the unique situation of states that utilize integrity pacts to reduce corruption in business.

Table 4: Integrity pacts summary

| What Works | Risks | Intervening Factors | Outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Third-party monitoring | Inefficient in the short-term | Elite support and participation | Increased transparency and trust |
| Inclusion of all relevant stakeholders | | Independent third-party monitor(s) | Decreased corruption |
| | | Long-term sustainability | Increased business competition |
| | | | Improvement of public works |

## 5. Working Groups

A working group is a collaborative team of individuals with varying areas of expertise or differing interests functioning to achieve a common outcome. There exists limited literature regarding the specific organization of working groups and their effectiveness on collective action, particularly in a political context. Of the relevant existing literature, scholars typically use qualitative case studies to examine working groups (Paus & Reviron, 2010; Stephenson, 2010).

Working groups include individuals from varied professional or interest-related backgrounds. As analyzed by Stephenson (2010), a European Union (EU) based working group that monitored and coordinated the implementation of trans-European networks in transport during the 1990s comprised commissioners from nine different departments. While this approach resulted in solving collective action issues by enforcing collaborative work among representatives of different groups, Paus and Reviron (2010) found that an existing risk of this method is that members may have too many opposing motivations, contributing to the possible abandonment of the working group. It is worth bearing in mind that this analysis is based on working groups operating in the agricultural sector, and results may differ within the political context.

The members of working groups tend to be from the political elite, as seen through Stephenson's (2010) findings. Though apolitical in nature, the elite makeup of working groups exists within agribusiness as well. Paus and Reviron's (2010) research includes a case study in Serbia of a working group that gathered two representatives of the Arilje municipality, a director of a center established by the municipality, and a former professor who specialized in raspberry production. Because working groups often seek to approach a policy or project-related issue, it is logical that the group be made up of elites within the field.

From the existing literature, it is difficult to determine to what extent working groups solve collective action-related issues within a political context. While Paus and Reviron (2010) conclude that working groups might increase confidence between members, leading to trust building, a key element in collective action, this aspect of trust was not mentioned in Stephenson's (2010) findings. Stephenson (2010) deduces that working groups, specifically at a high-level, "play a fundamental role in 'bridging the gap' between policy decision and policy implementation" and suggests that, at least within the context of the working group of commissioners, "participants accept a collective responsibility for policy". He concedes that the independent work of working group members outside of meetings may call into question the effectiveness of the working group alone. This may also call into question working groups' unique influence on collective action-related issues.

Table 5: Working groups summary

| What Works | Risks | Intervening/ Mitigating Factors | Outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mandating cross-party collaboration | Abandonment of groups due to conflicting interests | Presence of elites with decision-making capabilities | Increased confidence and trust |
| | | Acceptance of collective responsibility for policies | Bridges gaps between policy decisions and implementation |

## Challenges and Limitations:

The main challenges facing the literature build on and reinforce each other. First, the literature on direct interventions with experimental methods is relatively underdeveloped. Instead, existing literature relies on qualitative case studies to examine different cross-party initiatives and their relative success in different contexts. Since only a handful of organizations have focused their efforts on designing interventions and providing support to develop cross-party program approaches to improve collective action outcomes, it is difficult to confidently state any causal claims.

Second, from a substantive standpoint, the approaches draw from different traditions ranging from political science to macroeconomics and social psychology. These disparate sets of literature rarely engage with each other, and there are few multi-disciplinary research studies to evaluate the interactions between these perspectives. As a result, it is difficult to gauge the overall impact of cross-party programs or even to compare different mechanisms across disciplines.

Third, many of the findings seem to be context-dependent, where existing political and regional conditions determine the relative success or failure of a particular intervention or program approach. Without broader engagement and clarifying mechanisms, it is difficult, if not impossible, to generalize from one study to another and identify cross-cutting themes for further analysis.

## New Directions for Research

The evidence base on cross-party initiatives have highlighted the large gaps in the research agenda and the need for additional studies. In particular, three new directions for research are in line with IRI initiatives and extend planned and existing programs.

### 1. Studies focusing on the causal chain linking interventions to outcomes

The first direction for future research is in the design and testing of direct and targeted interventions. The need to work with political parties can make interventions difficult to design, but even analyses that attempt to look at collective action outcomes before and after changes to party institutions or party rules are few and far between.

One way to split the difference is to break down outcomes into more specific parts of the causal chain. For example, studies may find it more workable to focus on outcomes that can be readily measured in the short term, such as changes in attitudes. By contrast, complementary studies can focus on how these attitudes map onto subsequent changes in behavior. Complementary studies can also occur by the level of analysis: correlations at the national level between changes in party interactions and subsequent outcomes for cooperation may be combined with individual-level surveys, survey experiments, or lab experiments to test the specific mechanisms linking the causal chain.

One clear role for institutions such as IRI is in bringing together complementary studies under a broader unified conceptual framework. IRI and similar institutions are also better positioned to take the lead on research in these interventions because of the need to evaluate both short and long-term outcomes, which more academic publishing incentives can often leave out.

### 2. Studies of cross-party approaches spanning different institutional levels

Relatedly, another clear direction for future research is in working towards a more nuanced approach towards different institutional levels. At what level of government are cross-party approaches possible? Where would they have the greatest impact? It might not always be at the level of the legislature (in the case of the literature on caucuses), the level of elites (in the case of integrity pacts), or the level of individuals (in the case of the literature on social contact). Most of the literature tends to focus on matching single approaches to single targets of interventions, when engagement can occur in a greater variety of contexts.

For example, in many decentralized countries where IRI and other agencies operate, local levels of government may be the appropriate target of engagement. This also includes exploring potential interventions at branches other than the legislature, such as local elected executives or bureaucrats.

Encourage interventions to specify the selection of the level of their intervention with the same care as justifying the case selection or selection of methodological tools. For example, in many decentralized countries where IRI and other agencies operate, local levels of government may be the appropriate target of engagement. This also includes exploring potential interventions at branches other than the legislature, such as local elected executives or bureaucrats.

Working at a lower level of government may also lower the stakes of potential conflict and provide additional safeguards for the intervention. Other levels of government or branches of government and the bureaucracy may also be easier to access than the national legislature, and

more relevant to the research questions than focusing on the individual level. But in addition to mitigating potential risks and reducing implementation constraints, these local levels may be the most amenable to intervention and constitute the pool from which future party leaders are selected.

3. Examine the role of digital media in building cross-party approaches

Last, the most well-developed cross-party interventions tend to focus on in-person interactions. In fact, a common finding in the literature on social contact emphasizes the importance of sustained and meaningful forms of contact, often at the individual level.

However, in the current environment, much of political discourse and political interactions are moving online and to other virtual forums. How do the in-person forms of contact and interaction translate to digital and social media? What aspects of existing theories still apply? Which aspects of interventions are bolstered, and which are attenuated?

**Recommendations:**

1. Promoting the new directions for research

One clear role for institutions such as IRI is in bringing together complementary studies under a broader unified conceptual framework. A difficulty in this area is bringing together researchers working on psychological approaches with those working on informational/learning approaches. IRI and similar institutions are better positioned to take the lead in research on these interventions because of the need to evaluate both short and long-term outcomes, which more academic publishing incentives can often leave out.

One way to split the difference is to break down outcomes into more specific parts of the causal chain. For example, studies may find it more workable to focus on outcomes that can be readily measured in the short term, such as changes in attitudes. By contrast, complementary studies can focus on how these attitudes map onto subsequent changes in behavior. Complementary studies can also occur by the level of analysis: correlations at the national level between changes in party interactions and subsequent outcomes for cooperation may be combined with individual-level surveys, survey experiments, or lab experiments to test the specific mechanisms linking the causal chain.

IRI can also promote studies of interventions with a greater focus on the targeted level of the intervention, by encouraging researchers to specify the selection of the level of their intervention with the same care as justifying the case selection or selection of methodological tools.

Working at a lower level of government may also lower the stakes of potential conflict and provide additional safeguards for the intervention. Other levels of government or branches of government and the bureaucracy may also be easier to access than the national legislature, and more relevant to the research questions than focusing on the individual level. But in addition to mitigating potential risks and reducing implementation constraints, these local levels may be the

most amenable to intervention and constitute the pool from which future party leaders are selected.

Last, studies of new digital and online delivery mechanisms for cross-party interventions may similarly require new research partnerships. Again, IRI and partner organizations are similarly well-positioned to provide the research infrastructure needed to expand cross-party interventions.

### 2. Increased focus on context-specific outcomes

Interactions between parties differ across contexts, not only in the institutional context of political parties, but also in social structures, practices, and norms affecting the degree of contestation, trust, and contact between groups. These considerations are generally well factored into the design of interventions. For example, experiments using social contact theory will consider the existing cultural barriers to contact or the animosity between groups. However, these considerations are not always carried through in terms of the outcomes measured and the interpretation of results. What a successful intervention looks like may not be the same across contexts. Similarly, there may be culture-specific barriers to measurement tools that are used in other countries: which questions and concepts are sensitive, and the relative effectiveness of different tools for eliciting answers without social desirability bias may be different and need to be factored into the research design.

### 3. Develop risk mitigation strategies for cross-party program approaches

Risk mitigation strategies are essential to cross-party programs, because, by definition, these programs are fostering interactions outside the existing groups and with members of out-groups, which can lead to conflict between groups. In particular, interventions may have the opposite effect as intended: fostering conflict rather than cooperation, reinforcing stereotypes rather than learning across groups, and increasing animosity rather than empathy.

These strategies require particular attention to the exact form that interventions take. For example, social contact can encompass a wide variety of interactions, but the literature suggests that meaningful and sustained contact is associated with more pro-social outcomes. This also highlights the importance of the "delivery mechanism" for the interventions. Social contact that is brought about in prosocial settings, such as volunteering, may also contribute to reducing the risks of unintended consequences.

Risk mitigation also requires that cross-party programs are facilitated and monitored to a much greater extent than other types of interventions, and should not be conducted as a "nudge" or one-time inducement without careful measurement and monitoring. It requires measuring for adverse effects in any cross-party intervention, in addition to measuring the outcomes of interest for the study.

## 4. Factor in trust and credibility into the design of interventions

Much of the literature on cross-program approaches implicitly – if not always explicitly – requires that interventions are reliable and credible, and subsequent interactions across parties are built on some level of trust. However, many studies take these existing relationships as a given, without assessing how much the credibility of the intervention matters or the initial level of trust and interaction between the groups.

One notable exception that tackles issues of credibility is the literature on integrity pacts, which highlights the importance of third-party monitoring as a mechanism for credibility. However, similar mechanisms may also be in place for other interventions, just that they're not part of the research design: examples include having interventions like cross-party dialogues run by respected non-partisan organizations or research groups. The findings from third-party monitoring suggest that the credibility of the implementing team matters as well as the form of the intervention.

Last, both researchers and implementing agencies need better processes and mechanisms to address positionality: are we the right actors to be doing this intervention? Are we and our implementing partners trusted by the parties involved? Are we considered non-partisans? Are there groups who are better positioned for this type of work? Again, this is not only because of ethical reasons but also for programmatic ones: if credibility and trust are unobservable factors that affect the success of cross-party interventions, understanding the dimensions of trust and credibility in the implementation process will provide results that can be interpreted more clearly, making it easier to see how similar programs might work in different contexts.

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