

Predicting Civility

Civility score:

Items included in civility score:

- Typically, being civil in political conversations is not productive
- When someone with my political beliefs is accused of wrongdoing, I typically respond by citing examples of wrongdoing by the other side
- When I hear political leaders who share my ideology make insulting personal remarks about opponents, I tend to believe those remarks are justified
- I am okay with political leaders bending the truth if it helps influence people to adopt good or sound political views
- When disagreeing about politics, I respond more harshly with someone I don't know than with a friend
- When I engage with others about politics, it is important to me that I win the argument

Civility score calculations and summary statistics:

Factor analysis on these items yields loadings from 0.58 to 0.77 and a Cronbach Alpha of 0.78, indicating relatively high internal consistency and a strong correspondence with each item to a latent attribute categorized here as "civility." For each of the items, letting 0 correspond with strongly agree, 1 with somewhat agree, 2 with somewhat disagree, and 3 with strongly disagree, item values were added and then multiplied to create a zero to one hundred scale. Mean imputation was used for "Not sure" responses within each item. The mean civility score across all respondents is 70.19, and the median is 72.22.

Summary of model selection and model fit analysis

Items for which there was no evidence of a difference in civility score in simple regression were not considered in the multiple regression model. A variety of model selection criteria were employed (Schwarz Bayesian information criteria, Akaike information criteria, Mallows Cp statistic, using test, training, and validation data partitions, etc.) in early model iterations to certify that identified factors were present with some consistency regardless of model selection method employed. The combination of the factors in the final model explains 46% of the variability in civility score. While there is sufficient evidence to conclude that each of these factors play a role in civility score, civility score is not merely a function of these factors and other unmeasured influences may exist.

Predictors of civility among evangelicals:

Demographics:

- Gender (women tend to have higher civility scores)
- Age (older ages are associated with higher civility scores)

Faith and values:

- Higher levels of agreement with "Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin" are associated with higher civility scores
- Higher levels of agreement with "My political views are informed by my belief that every human being has equal and inherent dignity" are associated with higher civility scores
- Higher levels of agreement with "Prominent Christian leaders have influenced my political views" are associated with lower civility scores

Courage:

- Higher levels of agreement with "I don't reveal my political beliefs if I think I am in an environment where those beliefs are unpopular" are associated with lower civility scores
- Higher levels of agreement with "If those I disagree with politically are able to implement their agenda, our democracy will be in danger" are associated with lower civility scores

Listening to diverse voices:

- Higher levels of agreement with "I prefer to follow or befriend people on social media who have similar thoughts on social and political issues as me" are associated with lower civility scores
- Higher levels of agreement with "I trust news more if it is delivered by people who have similar thoughts on social and political issues as me" are associated with lower civility scores
- Those with a close friend with a very different household income tend to have higher civility scores
- Those with a close friend with very different religious beliefs tend to have higher civility scores

Policy views:

- Those who identify abortion as a primary issue tend to have higher civility scores
- Those who identify religious liberty as a primary issue tend to have higher civility scores
- Those whose support for political candidates depends primarily on one issue tend to have lower civility scores
- Higher levels of agreement with "I will only support a candidate who wants to make abortion illegal" are associated with lower civility scores
- Higher levels of agreement with "I will only support a candidate who demonstrates personal integrity" are associated with higher civility scores
- Higher levels of agreement with "I will only support a candidate who will make my life better" are associated with lower civility scores

Engagement:

- More frequent engagement with others on social or political issues on social media is associated with lower civility scores

Plausible explanations for a potentially unclear trend identified by regression analysis:

There may seem to be a tension between highlighting abortion as a primary issue being a significant positive predictor of civility and higher levels of agreement with only voting for those who want to make abortion illegal being a significant negative predictor of civility. One might plausibly wonder if this could be due to the minority of evangelicals who are for abortion being legal being more prone to highlighting it as a primary issue, but this is not supportable given the relationship between these two variables (50% of those prioritizing the abortion issue strongly agree they would only support a candidate who wants to make abortion illegal and 11% strongly disagree, while 15% of those not prioritizing the abortion issue strongly agree and 32% strongly disagree). That leaves the following as the only sensible way to reconcile these competing trends: That those who prioritize the abortion policy issue but also account for other issues in supporting political candidates tend to be more civil, but that those who prioritize abortion policy and consider nothing else in supporting political candidates tend to be less civil. Further support for this interpretation of the competing trends can be seen in the fact that those identifying as supporting political candidates primarily based on one issue tend to be less civil. However it is worth noting that these trends still exist while accounting for single issue support generally, so that there is a unique component to these trends not fully explained by incivility associated with single issue support in general.