Authentic Cross-Partisan Conversations Increase Respect for Outgroup Politicians

"I just want to say I was expecting this conversation to be terrible. I was expecting to have to listen to a MAGA hat wearing idiot tell me how Trump really won. You've changed some of my ideas about Republicans. It's nice to get to know you."
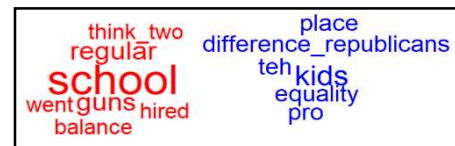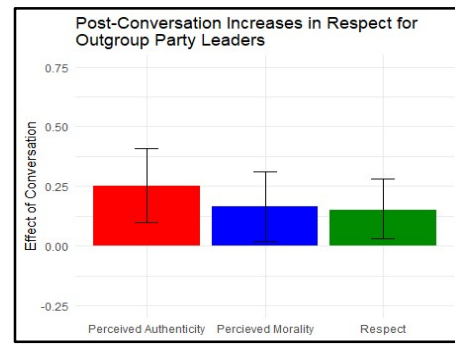
-Excerpt from participant conversations

Here we summarize key findings from a study showing that a single cross-partisan conversation can increase respect. We paired up 100 Democrats and 100 Republicans to discuss politics in live, text-based conversations. Views towards opposing party leaders improved following the conversation among participants from both parties. Participants who were most successful at building respect used authentic language and did not shy away from discussing divisive political topics. We are planning to submit these results for publication.

Online Chat can Foster Tolerance

We showed Democrats and Republicans video interviews of politicians. We then paired them with a member of the opposing party to spend 15 minutes talking about the politicians they watched. They also discussed the differences and similarities between their parties. Following the conversation, participants saw outgroup political leaders as more authentic, more moral, and respected them more.
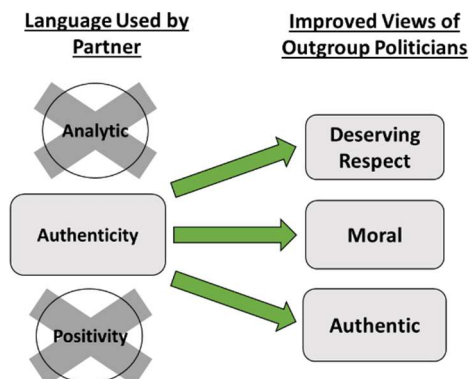

Democrats and Republicans who were best at building respect with their partners explicitly mentioned political topics—such as guns, equality, the difference between parties—as well as everyday topics like school and kids.

Words and phrases that, when used by Democrats (left) and Republicans (right) predicted increases in cross-partisan respect.

The Path to Respect

To test whether specific types of language drove increases in respect, we used a validated lexicon to measure analytic, authentic, and positive language in conversations. We then used a dyadic statistical model to isolate the effect of participants' language upon their partners' respect.

The results showed that Democrats' use of authentic language drove Republicans' to view Democrat political leaders as more moral, authentic, and deserving of respect. Democrats also came to view Republican leaders as more moral and authentic overall. Neither analytic language nor general positivity improved cross-partisan attitudes, suggesting that signaling authenticity is especially important for bridging divides in brief online conversations.