

Bridging Divides with Decision Point: Pilot Results Summary

Guiding Questions:

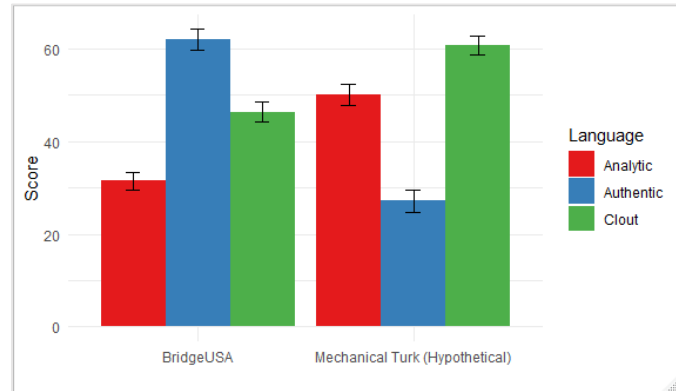
- 1) What language most effectively builds mutual understanding?
- 2) What can we do to increase perceived rationality and respect across political divides?

The Language of Bridging Divides

We started by examining conversations that were already succeeding at building mutual respect. We brought together 24 BridgeUSA members—from across the political spectrum—to chat about hot button politic issues for an hour over Zoom.

To check whether BridgeUSA members built mutual respect, we asked each pair to anonymously evaluate their conversation partner multiple times during the event. As expected, participants rated their partners near the maximum values across all of our indicators of perceived rationality and respect, regardless of their political differences.

Analyzing the language used by BridgeUSA members, their conversations were characterized first and foremost by authenticity—which captures linguistic cues for honesty, vulnerability, and humility. BridgeUSA members used less language that signals social status and confidence (Clout) and formal and logical thinking patterns (Analytic).



Language profiles scored using LIWC2015 (Pennebaker, et al., 2015)

We also gave 40 non-BridgeUSA participants (recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk) the same discussion prompts and asked them to explain their answers exactly as they would to someone who disagrees with them. In hypothetical conversations, everyday Americans defaulted to expressing themselves with logic and confidence. Conversely, actual conversations that built respect highlighted humility and vulnerability.

Looking at the most frequent phrases points to one concrete, but simple linguistic difference: the everyday American’s in our pilot prefaced their views with, “We need to...”, while BridgeUSA members said, “I think that...”

Mechanical Turk

they should be
i feel that
when it comes
should not be
needs to be
we need to
need to be
in this country
i think that
be able to

BridgeUSA

a little bit
and i think
i think that
i don't think
i feel like be able to
a lot of i do think
i think you
but i think

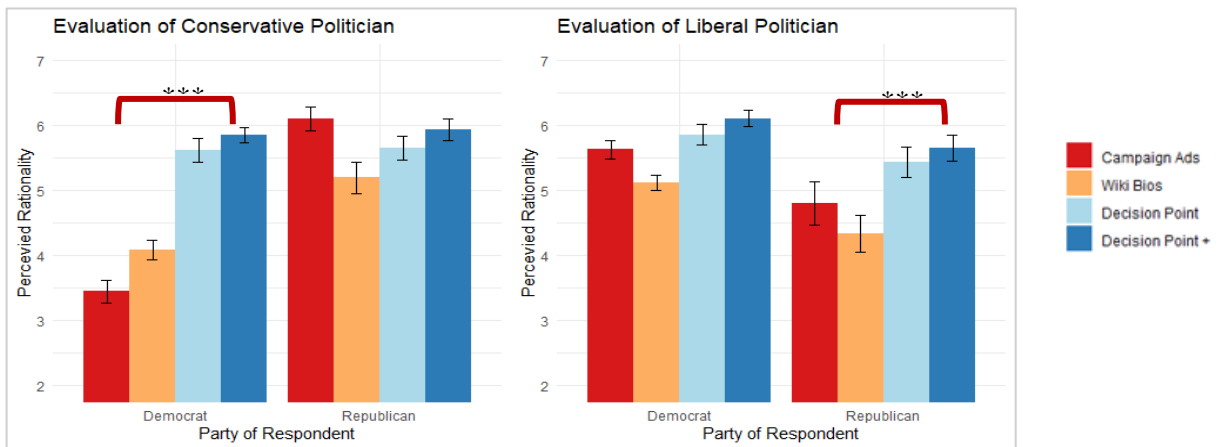
Figure 2. The 10 most frequent three-word phrases in our Mechanical Turk (Left) and BridgeUSA (Right) pilots

Increasing Perceived Rationality and Respect

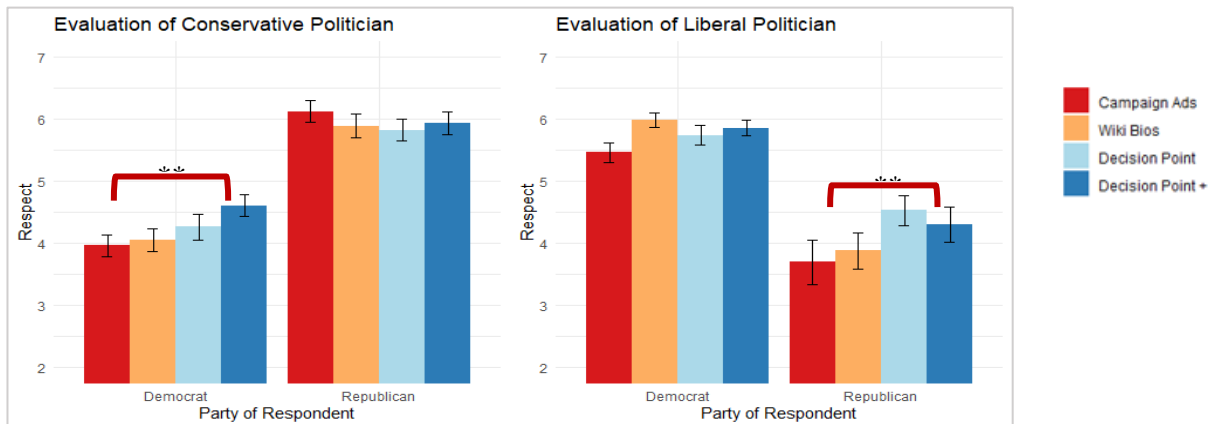
Communication that is less formal, less absolutist, and more authentic may be key to building respect. The Decision Point video series features clips of politicians outside of the more structured and competitive environments that characterize cable news and campaign ads, thus, Decision Point may be especially effective at building respect.

Compared to watching their campaign ads or reading biographical description, the Decision Point video series made political opponents appear more rational and built greater respect for them. This was true among both Democrat and Republicans. Moreover, solving the same policy dilemma **before** watching politicians do so in the videos (labelled “Decision Point+” below) tended to build perceived rationality to an even greater degree—suggesting that shared experiences may further build mutual understanding.

Decision Point Increases Perceived Rationality Across Political Divides



Decision Point Increases Respect Across Political Divides



Conclusion

Pilot conversations that scored high on mutual respect were characterized by honesty and humility—not outward displays of logical thinking and confidence. Along similar lines, seeing politicians in a more personal, less competitive context (the Decision Point series) gave glimpses into the minds of political opponents and built mutual respect.