(Un)civil War: The Current Political Discourse in America

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Although negative campaigning and mean-spirited politics are far from new, the venomous way in which political candidates and officers behave toward those in the opposing party, and even sometimes within their party, has seemingly hit a zenith with the presidential election of Donald Trump. Not only did candidate and now-President Trump take vitriolic rhetoric to a new level, but there is evidence to suggest that his campaign and election has given others license to spew hateful comments about those with whom they disagree. Importantly, though, the political Left also struggles with incivility. Even a perfunctory review of political discourse within the Left reveals that this incivility is not only directed at the Right, but also at others who align on the Left but whose positions are different. This paper explores the divisiveness of political incivility on the Right and the Left, framing it as a natural but disturbing consequence of neoliberal ideology that is hyper-focused on individuals and winning at all costs. The paper concludes with recommendations for improving political discourse, drawing on the work of Lilliana Mason (2018) in her book *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity.*

Civility and Incivility in US Political Discourse: History and Overview

The need to behave in a "civil" manner is widely considered a requisite for sustaining order. But what does it mean to be "civil"? The term derives from the Latin *civilis*, which means the state of being a good citizen. By the mid-16th century, particularly in the West, the term became associated with politeness and refraining from obscene, disruptive, or disorderly behavior (Elias 1978). Within the political realm, the need for "civility" has long been regarded as essential to the viability of democracy (e.g., Carter 1998). In the absence of civil dialogue and debate, there is little possibility for reconciling disagreements or successfully mediating the conflicting values and interests that are inevitable in open, democratic societies. According to Louis Gawthrop and Dwight Waldo (1984), an ethics of civility is what ensures that the rights and privileges that citizens enjoy in a democracy are balanced by obligations and responsibilities. It is also this ethic of civility that is supposed to guide the language and actions of political representatives who presumably seek to promote the well-being or best interests of the populace. In short, democracy requires a certain etiquette of civility, without which a "government of the people" would quickly have to be replaced by a tyrannical state or otherwise devolve into a Hobbesian nightmare.

In the United States, and notwithstanding historical injustices associated with slavery, racism, and the subordination of women, the so-called founding fathers are often celebrated for making this country an exemplary model of civility and democratic etiquette. As discussed by Mark Kahn (1998), the founders were committed to civility as a key criterion for social standing and political legitimacy. Yet behind this romantic façade of virtue and civility, the history of US democracy is also rife with examples of astonishing *incivility*. For example, during the election of 1800, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams exchanged incredibly vulgar, ad-hominem insults. The Jefferson campaign referred to Adams as a "hideous, hermaphroditical character, which has neither the force and firmness of a man, nor the gentleness and or sensibilities of a woman." Adam's campaign responded by branding Jefferson "a mean-spirited, low-lived fellow, the son of a half-breed Indian squaw, sired by a Virginia mulatto father" (Geier, 2016). As another example, in 1828, Andrew Jackson was repeatedly called a "jackass" by his political opponents as a reaction to his slogan to "let the people rule." Jackson embraced the slogan, noting the virtues of

donkeys (loyalty, strength, persistence, etc.), thereby making this animal the symbol of the Democratic Party.   Also, in her book *Rude Democracy*, Susan Herbst (2010) gives the example of Charles Sumner, a Republican Senator from Massachusetts who, in 1856, was nearly beaten to death on the Senate floor by Virginia Representative, Preston Brooks (a Democrat), for having given a speech against slavery. Of course, as a more recent example, the Obamas were subject to all manner of racist attacks and images, which have included president Obama being depicted as an African witchdoctor, a radical jihadist, and an ape.

But while crass, violent, offensive language and behavior has a long history in US politics, many critics contend that in the era of Trump, incivility in political discourse has not only intensified but, because of the unprecedented pervasiveness of social media, reaches more people than ever before. Hardly a day goes by that President Trump does not violate some norm of political discourse by saying or tweeting something that many might regard as racist, sexist, classist, homophobic or hyper-aggressive. Many of Trump's supporters have also followed the president and employed highly uncivil tactics in their actions and language, celebrating Trump's profanities, assuming all brown-skinned people are "illegals" that need to be deported, and threatening "civil war" if the so-called "deep state" impeaches the president. At the same time, Trump's opposition has not fared much better in terms of living up to standards of political civility. From Hillary Clinton referring to Trump's supporters as a "basket of deplorables;" to California Representative, Maxine Waters encouraging the public to "push back" on members of the Trump cabinet wherever they see them and let them know they are "not welcome anymore, anywhere;" to celebrities such as Kathy Griffin teasing about employing violence against Trump (e.g., consider Griffin's photo shoot with a mock head of Trump's severed, bloody head); to members of the Trump administration—including Sarah Huckabee-Sanders, Stephen Miller, and Kristjen Nielsen—being heckled and harassed at restaurants and other public spaces; to anti-Trump activists using violence against Trump supporters and others on the Right; to making false lewd remarks about some sort of incestual relation between the president and his daughter, Ivanka; the level of civility among leftists and liberals (including the liberal media) also seems pretty low.

In terms of how incivility effects democracy, there are opposing viewpoints. According to some social scientists, employing incivility in the

105

form of profanity, demonizing opponents, denouncing contrary viewpoints as "fake," etc., can often be an effective way of generating passion, gathering support, mobilizing like-minded individuals, and opening up political debate, even if it means making others feel uncomfortable (Herbst 2010; see also Sydnor 2018). Research has also found that incivility is far more effective in terms of drawing people's attention and encouraging them to vote or to participate in the political process more generally (e.g., Brooks & Geer 2007). There is also plenty of research, however, that finds incivility to erode people's trust in institutions, reinforce political cynicism, and lessen respect for opposing viewpoints (e.g., Mutz 2016). Incivility may result in political gridlock and alienate voters (Massaro & Stryker 2012; Hutchens, Cicchirillo & Hmielowski 2014). Furthermore, according to political theorist Benjamin Barber, while "a rhetorical incivility within the boundaries of bi-partisan politics is a healthy manifestation of political conflict and disagreement. . . divisive rhetoric has become not only disagreement between parties but a rejection of the legitimacy of the other side, validating a position that your opponents are immoral, un-American and possibly worthy of being subjected to violence" (as quoted by James 1997). Although Barber's comments were from the 1990s, they are astonishingly relevant within the context of Trump's campaign and presidency. Images of Trump encouraging violence against his opponents at political rallies and his claim that the mainstream media is the "enemy of the people" are prime examples of this.

Polls suggest that a majority of American do believe that an erosion of civility is harming US democracy. A 2018 poll by Weber Shandwick, Powell Tate and KRC Research found that political incivility has become a "crisis," as 75 percent of respondents believe incivility is leading to political gridlock, 83 percent believe incivility leads to intolerance of free speech, and 93 percent believe it is important for the President of the United States to be civil (Shandwick & Powell 2018). Ultimately, it is not difficult to imagine why so many people believe incivility in politics is, in fact, problematic in a democracy. After all, effective democratic governance is supposed to be about disagreeing without disrespecting others, listening beyond one's preconceptions, prioritizing the common good over narrow, self-serving interests, and treating all voices as worthy of being heard.

Research does tend to show that conservatives are more accepting of political incivility (e.g., Fridkin & Kenney 2011; Mason 2018) and that

Republicans engage in more negative campaigning than Democrats (Lau & Pomper 2004). Both of these factors may help explain why Trump was able to win the presidency. Stryker, Danielson and Conway (2015) found that heavy viewers of *Fox News* were more accepting of political incivility. Although they predicted heavy viewers of *MSNBC* and the *Colbert Report* would show similar acceptance, they found the opposite: these respondents were less accepting of political incivility.

Incivility on the Right in the Era of Trump

It was on day one of his candidacy that Donald Trump made clear that his rhetoric would be vicious and often inaccurate. On the day that Trump announced his candidacy in 2015, he referred to Mexicans as rapists. He has since doubled down on that comment, claiming in June 2018 that he "was 100% right" (Baker & Rogers 2018). In the first Republican primary debate, commentator Megyn Kelly asked Donald Trump about disparaging comments he had made about women, both in person and on Twitter, to which he responded that "I think the big problem this country has is being politically correct" (Bump 2018). He routinely referred to his competitors, both Democrats and Republicans, with disparaging comments and derogatory nicknames. Trump has referred to some countries as "shitholes" and allegedly claimed all Haitian immigrants have AIDS .

Philip Bump (2018) of the *Washington Post* asserts that Trump won the election and is popular among his base precisely because of his coarse language. A 2017 poll by the Pew Research Center found that more than half of respondents who supported the President claimed to like his brashness more than anything else about him. A 2018 poll conducted by CBS-YouGov found that nearly 80 percent of Republicans most like "how Trump is upsetting the elites and establishment." Bump (2018) asserts that Trump's base has no problem with him being petty and vindictive because he largely does so to people they hate. This "pushback" against elites is really "pushback against shifts in American culture that have made it unacceptable to say things that are racist and sexist" (Bump 2018). In effect, Trump's vulgarity and brash tone against his opponent is,. in the eyes of his base, a clear manifestation of how the president represents a repudiation of the establishment. According to Bump (2018) politicians have traditionally respected standards of civility in their messaging because failing to do so would cost them votes. Yet Trump has shown that that is

not the case. Trump gets away with incivility because he refuses to be shamed (Baker & Rogers 2018).   "Rude and extreme rhetoric has galvanized and mobilized the Republican base by catastrophizing the consequences of Democratic governance and demographic change. This has won the right the support of less-ideologically committed and active voters who have found the rhetoric of Trump and precursors like Sarah Palin relatable, refreshing, and 'honest'"(Nwanevu 2018).

Important to emphasize is that it is not just Trump who employs uncivil language, it is most of his administration and many of his supporters. Former campaign manager Corey Lewandowski made a mocking noise when a liberal strategist asked about a 10-year-old with Downs Syndrome who had been separated from her parents at the border (Baker & Rogers 2018). Although he ended up being forced to resign, Carl Higbie, who helped with the 2016 Trump campaign and was appointed to oversee external affairs for the Corporation for National and Community Service, was found to have made a series of racist and inflammatory remarks about Black people, Muslims, immigrants and others. He also appeared on a radio show questioning Barack Obama's birth certificate. Comedian Jimmy Kimmel received a barrage of nasty tweets from Trump supporters after he commented that he understood why they may have voted for him but implored them to admit they made a mistake. One person wrote, "Why don't you go somewhere else like a different country if you don't like our president and stop your [sic] crying on tv snowflake" (Bradley 2017).

Trump and his supporters dismiss critics by calling them "politically correct" or "liberal snowflakes." They denounce the media as being biased and routinely claim any type of criticism to be "fake news." For instance, in advance of a July 2018 summit in Helsinki with Russian leader Vladimir Putin, Trump tweeted that the American news media "is indeed the enemy of the American people and all the Dems know how to do is resist and obstruct. Trump even skipped the White House Correspondence dinner, saying he did not want to be stuck in a room "with a bunch of fake news liberals who hate me" Democrats, Trump frequently tweets, are "dumb," "weak," and "disgraceful," among other insults (Lee and Quealey 2018). *The Guardian* interviewed nine Trump supporters at a 2017 rally in Phoenix and found it was his very incivility that appealed to them. One commented, "he's anti-left, he's anti-PC, he's anti-stupid," while another called protesters

against Trump "haters," a common refrain issued by Trump himself (Smith 2017).

Incivility on the Left in the Era of Trump

As Bump (2018) points out, "Democrats loathe Trump even more than Republicans love him." Many on the Left have responded to the President and his supporters in similar fashion. Christine Porath, a professor at Georgetown University, says, like "a bug of virus. . . .incivility is contagious." Actor Robert De Niro issued a curse-laden diatribe at the Tony Awards. A congressional intern screamed "f-@$ Trump" when he visited the capitol in June 2018 (Baker & Rogers 2018). Protesters at a Duluth, Minnesota rally held signs reading "Liar. Racist. Fascist. Sociopath. Twitter Troll. Idiot" and "My grandpa didn't fight Nazis for this" (Baker & Rogers 2018). As was noted, several Trump staffers were denied service in various restaurants by people who do not agree with the President and his administration. Last year, Education Secretary Betsy Devos had to be walked to her car by security after protesters blocked her entrance to a school building (Pavlich 2018). Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi claims to have been threatened while attempting to buy a movie ticket with a friend. She argues the protesters were aggressive, with one standing so close to her and yelling that she felt spit in her hair. Yet the activists do tell another story, asserting that they only accidentally ran into Bondi at the theater and that they merely tried to talk to her about her policies and support of President Trump.

Fox News, known for aligning conservative, denounced the Left as "setting a new standard of incivility" (McElway 2018). House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-California, said in response to the denial of service to Sarah Huckabee Sanders, "This is very dangerous. [The restaurant owner] should apologize to the American public. What is interesting to me is the people who claim tolerance seem to be the most intolerant in this process" (McElway 2018). Conservative sites like Townhall feature routine comments that claim the Left is actually more responsible for political incivility than the right. Will Alexander (2018) argued that, not only does the incivility lean Left, but that Leftists have been "mocking, bullying and insulting conservatives for decades." Alexander claims the Left knows it is outmatched and so is scrambling to remain relevant.

But returning incivility with the like does not work for everyone, as was evidenced when Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz tried it during the Republican debates. Some, like *The Atlantic* columnist Conor Friedersdorf have argued that responding with incivility makes a Trump re-election more likely, while others argue that such an argument is silly and merely serves to divide the anti-Trump movement (Cooper 2018). Still others express concern that the Left's responses will merely generate an arms race of sorts, with the Right amping up its attacks. This does seem to be the case with President Trump. After Democratic California Congresswoman Maxine Waters called on more people to "push back" against Trump and his supporters by creating crowds that tell them they are unwelcome, Trump tweeted, "Congresswoman Maxine Waters, and extraordinarily low IQ person, has become, together with Nancy Pelosi, the Face of the Democrat Party. She has just called for harm to supporters…Be careful what you wish for Max?" (McElway 2018).

Ryan Cooper (2018) wrote that, "If there is any main wellspring of 'incivility' (an extremely ill-defined word, but setting that aside), it comes from the monstrously evil actions of the Trump regime." Further, Cooper (2018) argues that because he is the President, Trump's incivility is "10,000 times more influential than any lefty protestor on Earth." Civility, Cooper reminds us, has long been used to dismiss heinous crimes. Similarly, Charles Pierce (2018) wrote in Esquire, "if you're being civil, you're not paying attention." These commentators and others point to the racist and abusive comments hurled at President Obama, and that some members of the Tea Party spit at members of the House of Representatives in arguing that while the Trump era has escalated incivility, it has been a tactic of the Right for some time (Caputo & Lippman 2018). Former Democrat Representative Tom Perriello, who lost his seat in 2010 and failed in his gubernatorial campaign in Virginia, notes that elected officials eight years ago were subject to death threats (Caputo & Lippman 2018).

Some on the Left believe responding to Trump and his supporters with equal incivility is actually necessary. Author and Blogger Jessica Valenti has written that "civility ended the day Trump was elected," and asking people who are upset with his policies to denounce them civilly is "like telling a woman to smile as she's being sexually harassed on the street" (Baker & Rogers 2018). Pavlich (2018) commented that, "Lectures about civility require taking the high road and that certainly isn't the place

110

Democrats and their activists currently stand." One of the problems, however, is that while the Left denounces political incivility, political infighting and backstabbing has long been a problem within the Left. This, too, undermines democracy, and is one of the main reasons why the GOP has prevailed in elections.

The Left and Acceptance of Allies

While the debate on the Left as to the merits of incivility toward its opponents continues, sometimes those opponents are fellow progressive commentators, celebrities, and activists. In an era where reactionary Republicans control both houses of Congress, the courts, and the presidency, there is infighting within the opposition over everything from identity politics to sexual assault to relations with Russia. This is part of a larger trend, summarized by comedian Bill Maher (2018) as a conflict between a person's "avatar," or public persona, and that person's authentic self. The avatar persona is meticulous with word choice and fearful to offend — not unlike a moderate or progressive politician. The avatar is paramount in a social and political sphere increasingly defined by Twitter, Facebook, and other social media — not to mention traditional media sources. While tactful messaging on these platforms may appear to be evidence of civility, it could just as easily be looked at as evidence of the opposite, given that these carefully constructed avatars often withhold the true beliefs of the real people behind them due to fear of virtual and, at times, actual, retaliation (White 2017).

For example, Matt Damon argued in a late 2017 interview that the nascent #MeToo movement should analyze high-profile sexual violence allegations on a spectrum (Agostini 2017). In other words, it would be wrong to conflate the actions of Al Franken, for example, with those of Roy Moore. He also praised the newfound focus on women's empowerment resulting from #MeToo and #TimesUp (Agostini 2017). He was heavily rebuked for this moderate position — first by co-star/ex-girlfriend Minnie Driver and actress Alyssa Milano. Their response, to put it mildly, was dismissive. Damon was treated as part of the problem and not as an ally in a shared struggle. In effect, he was told that his opinions were invalid because he is a male and that he should shut up and listen to women (Agostini 2017). He ultimately apologized, agreeing that he should "close [his] mouth for a while" (Brockington 2018).

Uncivil infighting via social media is nothing new for the Left, however. In 2014, Actress Rose McGowan, called gay men as "misogynistic" as straight men — among other controversial and divisive statements (Hare 2014). This led to a Twitter war with much vitriol on all sides. This was no aberration. The aforementioned Maher tackles political subjects with a level of candor not often seen on the Left, and no one is beyond his ire. As a result, he is the target of much criticism despite his relentless opposition to Trump and the Republicans (Wilstein 2018). While open debate is essential to a thriving democracy and constructive criticism should not be confused with incivility, the Left's opposition to Maher, in its worst manifestations, seeks to cast him outside the Left entirely (Jones 2017). The Left's denunciation of those who lack politically correct sensibilities and rejection of them as allies is true beyond the realm of entertainment, but it is especially strange in this context given that the role of a comedian is to push boundaries. Stephen Colbert, Michelle Wolf, and other comedians — ironically — find themselves under attack by the Left for jokes intended to undermine Trump and his supporters (Otterson 2017) (Wischhover 2017). Given this context, which predates 2016, the Left's infighting is not a response to Trump's ascension and his flouting of niceties and political correctness. On the contrary, it appears as if Trump took a page from the Left's playbook as he continues to tweet out attacks on not only the Democratic and grassroots opposition but also his allies and supporters (Mascaro et al 2018).

Despite the Left's emphasis on inclusion, many of its spaces — both virtual and physical — are anything but. Much of the Left's rhetoric emphasizes inclusion, even McGowan's calling out of gay men for allegedly being anti-women is an attempt to include women and emphasize their rights within the sphere of gay rights (Hare 2014). Most on the Left seek to extend not only attention but rights and privileges to those perceived as being left out of the circle of humanity — people of color, LGBTQ+ folks, poor people, etc. While these goals are laudable, the methods taken to achieve them could often be characterized as uncivil. The incivility comes when those well within the parameters of mainstream thought are shunned or disparaged by the Left when they could be embraced as allies or educated. Clearly there are certain views that are unacceptable in almost *any* space and should be shunned, but if the goal is to achieve sweeping social change, it is not only uncivil but unproductive to alienate potential allies whose views are mainstream. This is not a question of free speech

but of tactics. To expect that every potential ally be "woke" is to expect perfection in an imperfect world.

The Relevance of Neoliberalism in Encouraging Political Incivility

To a large extent, the incivility discernible in contemporary political discourse reflects a larger, more encompassing set of values, attitudes, habits, and relational structures associated with neoliberalism. Although typically associated with pro-market policies like de-regulation, privatization, and liberalization, neoliberalism is far more than simply a set of policy prescriptions and entails a specific vision of the world (e.g., Esposito 2011). Drawing from classical liberal principles and neoclassical economics, neoliberals focus on the individual and contend that, under conditions of freedom, all persons are rational actors who are *naturally* driven towards competition and constantly make calculations on what will serve their best interests. In fact, in a neoliberal society, a type of "market rationality" reigns supreme that prioritizes self-interests and "returns on one's investments" over any other consideration, including the interests and well-being of others (Brown 2015; Esposito & Perez 2014; Giroux 2008). Neoliberalism, in this sense, diminishes the communal nature of social existence and reconfigures society as little more than a heap of competitive individuals seeking to outdo one another in a relentless pursuit for private gain. And while neoliberals might insist that unregulated competition and the untrammeled pursuit of self-interest is the *sine qua non* of freedom and what promotes creativity, productivity, and prosperity, critics contend that neoliberalism encourages a Social Darwinian type of order in which compassion, trust, and civility are de-emphasized in favor of competitive advantage and "coming out on top." What results, to borrow from Henry Giroux (2017), is a "culture of cruelty" in which malice, greed, aggressiveness, and other qualities that might maximize self-gain are not only normalized but celebrated as virtues. A predatory mindset is thus promoted that dissolves democratic social bonds and encourages people to overlook one another's humanity.

Within the United States, this sort of mindset has led to a sharp decline in levels of empathy and perspective-taking. Indeed, a large 2011 study of U.S. college students found that the average level of "empathic concern" (i.e., people's feeling of sympathy for the misfortune of others) declined by 48 percent between 1979 and 2009, while the average level of

"perspective-taking" (imagining other people's point of view) declined by 34 percent during the same period (Konrath, O'Brien, & Hsing 2011). At the same time that levels of empathy have declined since the 1980s, levels of depression and anxiety during the same period have soared (Klein 2012). While there is a constellation of factors that might help explain this, the decline in mental health coincides precisely with the rise of neoliberalism and the attack on the welfare state, the outsourcing of US jobs to cheaper labor markets, the automation of workplaces, stagnant wages, the erosion of labor unions, and increasing costs in housing, food, education and healthcare. These shifts have encouraged a reduction in marriage rates, increased isolation, and, perhaps most striking, a decline not only in mental health but in life expectancy among middle-aged white Americans, which have traditionally been the most privileged group in US society.

As life and security become increasingly precarious in a neoliberal market economy, it is no surprise that civic values are weakened and people begin to search for scapegoats on which to vent their frustration and blame their problems. And while Trump has been masterful in employing this tactic to gather political support by telling his base that their problems have to do with illegal immigrants, liberal elites, political correctness, etc., members of the Left have also vented their frustrations by branding anyone who supports Trump as ignorant bumpkins, despicable bigots, or fascist pigs. What has resulted from these conditions are a series of hyper-partisan interpretative frameworks that undercut honest debate and stifle productive forms of political dialogue. As insults and ad-hominem accusations replace speech, interlocutors lose communicative competence. Hurting or delegitimizing one's opponents begins to supersede any effort towards reconciliation and consensus. People lose sight of other viewpoints that deviate from their own presuppositions about the world. Particularly with the advent of social media algorithms and personalized advertising, personal newsfeeds become echo chambers, as political viewpoints become increasingly insulated and intransigent. In the end, as both politicians and the people they serve lose the ability to deal with differences and attribute malevolence to oppositional viewpoints, the neoliberal logic of having to "destroy" or "outdo" others who stand in the way of your particular vision and interests becomes *de rigeur*. Under these conditions, incivility prevails while democracy is imperiled. One example that illustrates this perfectly is the Unite the Right rallies. These are rallies coordinated by and for those who consider themselves part of the extreme Right. The first, held

in August 2017 in Charlottesville, resulted in a violent clash with Leftist counter-protesters, leaving one woman dead and several people injured. A second rally was planned for mid-August, 2018 and counter-protests were again planned, although the second year the protests nearly shut it down before it happened. Antifa, the anarchist group, believes action, even violence, is required to contest the racist violence of the alt-Right. They also claim that the administration and law enforcement are sympathetic to the alt-Right and therefore simple nonviolent tactics will always disadvantage Leftists (Simon 2018).

Recommendations

Because humans are susceptible to both confirmation bias (seeking evidence to confirm what we already believe) and disconfirmation bias (dismissing competing evidence or finding ways to counter-argue with or reframe it), people on both sides of the political spectrum generally consume media that affirms their existing beliefs. Those who are most politically engaged may consume opposing media but with the general purpose of identifying counter-arguments (Mason 2018b). Similarly, for many people, our social identities are associated with our political ideologies, and people are more frequently associating with only others who align similar to themselves. It is, as Mason (2018b) says, the first time in history that both political parties hold strongly unfavorable opinions of each other. These polarized social and political identities leave people deeply distrusting their opposition, even in cases in which agreements on policy issues can exist (Mason 2018b). As Mason (2018a) has commented, "when we have political conversations, we are not like bankers discussing investments. We are more like screaming football fans. We have taken sides and we are not interested in sitting calmly with our opponents. Civility is not baked in to political discourse." Partisan victory, in such a climate, is the only way to "win," and politics driven by anger prevails over that driven by reason. Yet Mason (2018a; 2018b) notes that as we develop cross-cutting identities, we are more open to engaging with people who are dissimilar to us in various ways, including politically. Republicans tend to be more socially homogenous and spend less time meeting people who are different from them. This means that Democrats have more practice engaging with a range of political ideas, while Republicans "are more accustomed to a world in which they are not confronted" (Mason 2018a). The extension of this, then, is that Democrats should become more unified

115

in regard to what they stand for, not against. Meanwhile, Republicans should address their homogeneity and how it affects their positions and support for uncivil behavior. The Left also needs to reject any holier-than-thou rhetoric and really seek to identify why it is so unwelcoming to people who seek only to be allies.

While we understand the sentiment of groups like Antifa in that racism and systemic violence are very much still problems in the U.S., we disavow the use of violence to contest the alt-Right, and other factions of the extreme Right more generally. As was evidenced in Charlottesville in August 2017, the violent clash did nothing to help the two sides see one another's perspectives or to make positive social change. Instead, we call on activists on both sides to employ the bevy of nonviolent methods that have proven to be successful.

Voting for candidates who refuse to conduct themselves uncivilly certainly will be part of the solution. While there is some research showing that negative campaign ads can be effective, ultimately voters have free will to choose candidates who behave civilly. Given research that shows that women are less likely to use mean-spirited and nasty language politically, and that female voters are less accepting of incivility (Stryker, Danielson and Conway 2011), the projected wave of women running for office may help address the normalization of meanness that seems to dominate political discourse today. And, quite simply, educating new voters on the issues versus the attacks will always be an important part of the solution. Similarly, part of what has been effective at galvanizing Trump's supporters is his allegation that mainstream media is on a witch hunt and cannot be believed. The general public definitely needs to be able to identify fact from fiction. To this end, more efforts are needed towards enhancing media literacy skills among the public.

Of course, efforts to reject neoliberalism and its pathologizing and divisiveness would inevitably create a more civil political and social culture. Clearly this will require dramatic efforts that are well beyond the scope of this paper, but one part of it would include educating young people about neoliberalism and its influence on our lives, not simply in the form of pro-market policies, but as an unquestioned common sense that associates rabid competition and self-serving ruthlessness with virtue. Few are taught to critique neoliberalism, and thus may believe it to be inevitable or the

preferred ideology. Similarly, efforts to ensure a fair and unbiased media, in particular public media, can help people better understand complex issues without the nasty and mean-spirited attacks that are currently frequent components of news media.

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