The Montagu Principle:

Incivility Decreases Politicians' Public Approval, even with their Political Base

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Abstract

M. W. Montagu asserted that, "civility costs nothing and buys everything." In the realm of social judgment, the notion that people generally evaluate civil people more favorably than uncivil people may be unsurprising. However, the *Montagu Principle* may not apply in a hyper-partisan political environment in which politicians "throw red meat to their base" by unleashing uncivil, personal attacks against their opponents, satisfying the aggressive desires of their most hyper-partisan supporters, and thus potentially redoubling their approval among them. We conducted two longitudinal/observational studies of U.S. Congress and President Trump, and 4 experiments (N = 4837) involving real exchanges between President Trump and his adversaries and a speech by a fictitious politician. Civility helped or did not affect—but never harmed—the reputation of the speaker, supporting the *Montagu Principle*. Even self-identified "diehard supporters" of President Trump, for example, evaluated the president more favorably after he responded with civility to a personal attack. Uncivil remarks uniquely diminished the speaker's reputation, and had little impact on the reputation of the targets of the attack, the perceived winner of the verbal exchange, the reputation of the speaker's party, or the sense that the country is moving in the right direction. Incivility made the speaker seem less warm and did less to affect perceptions of dominance or honesty. This warmth deficit explained the reputational costs of incivility.

Keywords: civility, politeness, social judgment, political psychology, U.S. politics, Donald Trump

The Montagu Principle: Incivility Decreases Politicians' Public Approval, even with their Political Base

"Civility costs nothing and buys everything" ~Mary Wortley Montagu, 30 May 1756.

Interpreting the opening epigraph as a general rule—that civility is *usually* beneficial and *rarely* costly—seems likely to be true. Civility might usually make social interactions amicable, foster appreciation for the speaker, and reduce anger, rumination, and a desire for retaliation. But does the dictum apply only in some situations? We introduce the *Montagu Principle* in the realm of social judgment, which states that civility boosts (or at least does not diminish) social approval of the speaker regardless of the situation. In six studies, we test the *Montagu Principle* in contexts wherein there are good reasons to believe that it might not apply—hyper-partisan political exchanges. The results nonetheless support the *Montagu Principle*.

This research is theoretically important because it advances a new, general theory, the *Montagu Principle,* and presents the first evidence that it holds even in unlikely contexts. Practically, this research is important because it offers actionable advice for persons trying to gain social approval in the political arena and other competitive environments.

The *Montagu Principle* of Social Judgment

We treat *civility* as synonymous with *politeness* and define it as verbal behavior that shows respect for other people and allows them to avoid embarrassment. To be civil, speakers can pay compliments, use the first person plural (e.g., "we", "our") to communicate belonging and acceptance, use honorifics ("Ms.", "Doctor") and apologies, and hedge (using words like "perhaps" and "maybe") to soften the tone. Meanwhile people can be uncivil by using the first

and second person singular ("I" and "you"; because they are boastful and imposing, respectively), expressing certainty (e.g., "absolutely"), and by insulting others (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Morand, 2000).

The *Montagu Principle* could stem from an affinity for civility, an aversion to incivility, or both. An affinity for helpers and an aversion for hinderers are so basic and universal that they may even be innate (Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007). Given the strong theoretical reasons for both processes that we review next, we remain agnostic about whether one, the other, or both is operative and allow the data to speak to this question.

Benefits of civility. The theoretical foundation regarding the social benefits of civility draws from Erving Goffman's (1967) notion that social life is like a dramaturgical play in which a prime goal of each actor is to establish and preserve their reputation, or "save face". Verbal communication plays a role in "facework" because language not only conveys information (facts), but also manages the social relationship between the speaker and the target (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Civility can mitigate the impact of face-threatening information, such as receiving bad news, by demonstrating that the speaker holds the target in high esteem, and thus satisfying the target's need to belong (Baumeiser & Leary, 1995; DeCremer & Blader, 2006), and by showing that the speaker wishes to avoid imposing upon the target (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

"Big Two" theories of personality might help explain why civility could enhance a speaker's reputation. Although targets and witnesses may see the civil person as slightly submissive (a somewhat negative impression), they may also see him/her as warm (a positive impression), setting up ambivalence. Big Two theories suggest that people judge one another along two overarching and primary dimensions, with the first being warmth (or nurturance,

morality, or communion), and the second being dominance (or competence or agency; Abele & Wojciszke, 2013; Bakan, 1966; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Rosenberg, Nelson, & Vivekananthan, 1968; Trapnell & Wiggins, 1990). A critical finding from Big Two studies is that warmth is the primary, and dominance the secondary, dimension of social judgment. That is, if social approval is the goal, it is better to be seen as warm than it is to be seen as dominant. In this way, the benefits of coming across as warm could overwhelm any costs of being seen as slightly submissive.

Costs of incivility. Along with an affinity for civility, observers may also disapprove of incivility. The reputational costs of being uncivil have been demonstrated in online discussions (Ng & Detenber, 2005) and in the workplace (Tyler & Blader, 2000). Under typical circumstances such as these, incivility likely makes people disapprove of the speaker because it does reputational and emotional harm to the recipient. Harming others violates a widely shared deontological principle to not cause others to suffer (Bowlby, 1969; de Waal, 2008; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001).

Targets and even witnesses of incivility experience negative cognitions and emotions (Pearson & Porath, 2009) and a desire to retaliate against the perceived affront (e.g., Abelson & Miller, 1967; Chen & Lu, 2017; Lau & Pomper, 2001). These cognitions and emotions are so distracting that they cause people to perform poorly on unrelated routine and creative tasks (Wang et al., 2008; Nugier, Niedenthal, Brauer, & Chekroun, 2007; Porath & Erez, 2009). Even the performance of medical teams appears to suffer from being the target of incivility from patients or from other doctors (Riskin et al., 2015, 2017).

The *Red Meat Hypothesis*

A possible exception to the *Montagu Principle* might be in competitive contexts, wherein

the objective is to dominate an opponent. One such instance is the political arena. In politics, the goal of understanding candidates' policies, qualifications, and track records may supersede desires for manners. People may see criticism as fruitful, and prefer rhetoric that cuts to the chase at the expense of civility. Donald Trump's extraordinarily uncivil 2016 U.S. Presidential campaign juxtaposed with his electoral victory raises questions about whether he won because of his incivility, or in spite of it. If his incivility helped him win, then the *Montagu Principle* might not apply in the political arena, at least in the current era.

However, even in the political realm, attacking another person may harm the attacker's reputation. The conventional wisdom that attacking a political opponent is an effective method of gaining a competitive advantage in a popularity contest appears to have been debunked. Attacking an opponent does seem to make observers dislike the target; but it also makes observers dislike the attacker as well (Carraro & Castelli, 2010). If anything, the attacker ends up coming out slightly behind (Lau, Sigelman, & Rovner, 2007). Thus, previous studies on political attacks generally support the *Montagu Principle*. However, they stopped short of testing it in contexts wherein it might now fail to apply. This is because previous studies have not differentiated between the reactions of hyper-partisan supporters, less zealous supporters, moderates, and opponents to political attacks. It remains possible that attacks lower approval among most observers, while boosting it with the politician's hyper-partisan base.

Hyper-partisans' reactions to political attacks might be especially likely to violate the *Montagu Principle*. In a hyper-partisan environment, group loyalties become primary, and the quest for knowledge secondary (at best). Hyper-partisan individuals may approve of personal attacks against an adversarial politician because they loathe their political opponents (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012) and they see opponents as mean-spirited (Waytz, Young, & Ginges,

2014) and threatening (Brandt & Van Tongeren, 2017; Crawford, 2014). In the minds of a hyper-partisan, incivility may seem necessary to ward off the threat to their worldview that the adversary represents.

People tend to be intolerant of those with a belief system that conflicts with their own (see Brandt, Reyna, Chambers, Crawford, & Wetherell, 2014, for a review). Just as conservatives are intolerant of liberals and groups who pose a threat to conservative values (e.g., atheists, gays & lesbians, environmentalists), liberals are intolerant of conservatives and groups that conservatives pose a threat to liberal values (e.g., Christian fundamentalists, business people, the military). This intolerance for ideological competitors results in ill will, a willingness to derogate, and even the endorsement of aggressive and violent actions against the out-group (van Prooijen, Krouwel, Boiten, & Eendebak, 2015; van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2017). Hyper-partisans may be especially likely to approve of political incivility in the current era because political polarization and inter-ideological antipathy are the highest they have been in a generation or more (Ambramowitz, 2010; Levendusky, 2009; Mason, 2015).

Whereas warmth is typically the primary and dominance is typically the secondary dimensions of social judgment, this ordering may not always apply. In inter-group settings, wherein group members must rely on one another to face an adversary, some researchers have suggested that dominance may be the primary and warmth the secondary dimension (Abele & Brack, 2013). Applied in the political domain, politicians' most ardent supporters may feel that they are on a team with their political leader, and share a common cause. The end of defeating their political rivals may justify the means of incivility. Thus, political diehards could give more weight to the impression of dominance than the impression of cold-heartedness resulting from incivility, yielding greater approval.

Anecdotally, this positive reaction to incivility may have been on display when crowds at Trump rallies cheered in response to Trump calling his opponent "Crooked Hillary" or starting a round of "Lock her up!" chants. Commentators and other politicians have often tried to explain the strategy behind some of Trump's uncivil behavior by describing it as him "throwing red meat to the base" (Shelbourne, 2017). We dub this intuition the *Red Meat Hypothesis:* politicians can enhance the approval of their most hyper-partisan followers by uncivilly insulting a political adversary. An alternate version of the *Red Meat Hypothesis* notes that negative partisanship is on the rise; some political behavior is linked to hatred for the "other side" (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016). This negative partisanship gives rise to the *Hatred Variant* of the *Red Meat Hypothesis*: politicians can use incivility to enhance their approval among those who hate the target of their attacks. For example, people who hated Hillary Clinton may have approved of Trump's attacks on her.

One final distinction helps set up what we believe might be the most likely place to find evidence supporting the *Red Meat Hypothesis*. Within a hyper-partisan political arena, political conservatives may respond more positively to incivility than liberals. This is because conservatives tend to ascribe to an honor culture (Nisbett, 1993; Saucier et al., 2016), wherein one has a right and a duty to respond to perceived affronts in kind to restore one's prestige. Thus, conservatives may approve of their politicians' uncivil attacks on a political adversary if it is seen as a means of restoring the politician's honor.

The Present Studies

We tested whether observing a politician use civil (vs. uncivil) language toward a political opponent would increase approval of the politician in general (the *Montagu Principle*), and whether this boost in approval holds, is eliminated, or reversed with the politician's most

ardent and hyper-partisan supporters (the *Red Meat Hypothesis*). We include both real-world observational studies to assess the external validity, and controlled experiments with crowdsourced samples to assess the internal validity of the findings. The *Montagu Principle* could be the product of an aversion for incivility, an affinity for civility, or both; we make no hypothesis on this matter and allow the data to inform it.

Politicians may uncivilly attack their rivals while knowing that doing so will cost them support; they may nonetheless believe that their attacks will damage their rival's reputation even more than it will their own. If the popularity loss for the target is greater than that for the uncivil speaker, then incivility could be beneficial in the narrow sense that incivility is beneficial in a zero sum political competition. To test this possibility, we also examined the effects of incivility on the reputation of the target of the remarks.

To assess the boundary conditions of the souring of public sentiment in response to political incivility, we also examined whether incivility depresses satisfaction with the major political parties, and with the country as a whole. Attack ads seem to depress the national mood and breed distrust in the government (e.g., Brooks & Geer, 2007; Pinkleton, Um, & Austin, 2002, see Lau, et al. 2007 for a review) so we reasoned that incivility might do the same.

Finally, we sought to explain why incivility might cost or benefit a politician among members of his/her political base by examining how incivility alters perception of the speaker's warmth and/or dominance. The relative weight of these ambivalent impressions might help explain the costs and/or benefits of incivility.

Study 1: Civility of U.S. Congress over 20 years

In Study 1, we sought real world evidence of the *Montague Principle* by testing whether political civility of members of U.S. Congress predicts the same political body's public approval

over a 20-year time span. The longitudinal nature of the data set allows us to test time-lagged effects, which allow for inferences about causality. Our prediction is that civility will predict a time-lagged increase in social approval. However, the reverse causal effect is also likely. This is because experiencing social rejection causes the rejected person to experience hostile cognitions and go on the attack, both in retaliation against the attacker and against uninvolved others (DeWall, Twenge, Gitter, & Baumeister, 2009; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001). We suspect that incivility and social rejection may therefore be a vicious cycle.

Method

We acquired the entire *U.S. Congressional Record* and then used text analysis software to objectively measure the frequency of linguistic features of civility and incivility. We then tested whether civility (vs. incivility) in the U.S. Congress predicted the same body's public approval collected during the same time period. The unit of analysis was the month; for each variable we averaged all of the available observations within each month.

Political civility. We measured the civility (vs. incivility) of the language of U.S politicians by downloading and text analyzing the entire *U.S. Congressional Record*, all 267,264,597 words spoken by members of U.S. Congress during floor debates between 1996 (when transcription began) and the end of 2015. Transcripts included only the words actually spoken out loud by politicians in session; we did not include in our analyses files marked "extension of remarks", which contains text that was entered into the record after the fact, and not actually uttered during floor debates. Transcripts were available when Congress was in session, which amounted to 229 of the 240 months between 1996 and 2015. On average, monthly transcripts contained 1,167,094 words (*SD* = 680,807).

Previous research (Morand, 2000) applied and validated Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory by showing that certain features of language are associated with perceived civility. We selected three of those features that were readily amenable to measurement with text analysis software, Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker, Booth, Boyd, & Francis, 2015).

The first feature of civil language that we included was giving deference by using honorifics (e.g., "Mr.", "Madam"). Second, civility involves softening one's tone by hedging—using tentative language like "perhaps" and "somewhat" and avoiding language that exudes certainty, such as "obviously" and "absolutely"). Third, civility involves impersonalizing—avoiding drawing attention to the speaker or to the conversation party—by avoiding the use of the first and second person ("I" and "you"). This list of three indicators of civility is not exhaustive; other predictors of civility exist (Morand, 2000). However, the three listed above are readily amenable to automated/objective text analysis.

We used LIWC to objectively quantify the three civility features. LIWC counts the number of words in a target document (e.g., a transcript from Congress) that match words in a prescribed dictionary (e.g., honorifics), and divides the tally by the total number of words in the document—to return a word density score. Past research (see Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010) validated LIWC as a means of studying language objectively and from a distance. We applied five word dictionaries to *The Congressional Record*. The first dictionary (which we created) measured honorifics. It contained the following words: *congressman, congresswoman, doctor, dr, gentlem*, governor, madam*, mayor, miss, mister, mr, mr., mrs, mrs., ms, ms., president, prof, professor, senator,* and *sir*. Word stems ending in an asterisk capture all word endings (e.g., *gentlem** captures *gentleman, gentlemanly*, and *gentlemen*). We measured hedging with the

tentative and *certain* dictionaries built into LIWC 2015 software, calculating a hedging score by subtracting the *certain* score from the *tentative* score. And we measured impersonalizing using the built in dictionaries called *I* and *you*, and summing the two scores. For each feature, we then created z-scores, weighted each score by coefficients from past research (Morand, 2000), and added the three weighted scores together to form a single index of civility:

$$civility\ index = 0.57 \times honorifics + 0.18 \times (tentative - certain) - 0.38\ (I + you) \quad (1)$$

Civility scores ranged from -0.906 to 1.591, with $M = 0.000$ and $SD = 0.354$.

Approval of Congress. We operationalized public approval as the overall public approval of Congress in a given month. These data aggregate the views of people across the political spectrum and of varying political engagement, and thus preclude the possibility of testing the *Red Meat Hypothesis*. Our reason for using this data set was its availability. To our knowledge, no data that polled people by political party and political engagement over such a long time span are available. We acquired polling data from Gallup (2017) on the public's approval of Congress. The question was, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?" with the response options being "approve", "disapprove", or "no opinion". Data were available at the month level for 233 of the 312 months under study. Across the 233 months, the average approval of Congress was 30.6% ($SD = 14.5\%$).

Third variables. To test whether some third variable might explain away an association between civility and approval, we also included nine exogenous variables, including political polarization of Congress, indicators of economic strength of the country, indicators of violence, and indicators of military might (see the Supplemental Materials for details.)

Results

Figure 1 shows how members of the U.S. Congress were relatively civil around the turn of the last millennium. Civility then declined precipitously around 2007 and has been low ever since. The same general pattern was evident for public approval of Congress. Members of Congress' civility with one another correlated strongly with public approval of U.S. Congress, $r = .65$, $p < .001$. Controlling for nine political/sociological factors left the association between civility and approval intact (see Table 1).

Figure 1. The civility of members of U.S. Congress predicted public approval of U.S. Congress between 1990-2015 (Study 1). Political incivility and public disapproval have been the norm from 2007 onwards. However, politicians were more civil and Americans more satisfied with Congress between 1997-2003. Dots indicate monthly average scores. The line connects the average judgment for each year.

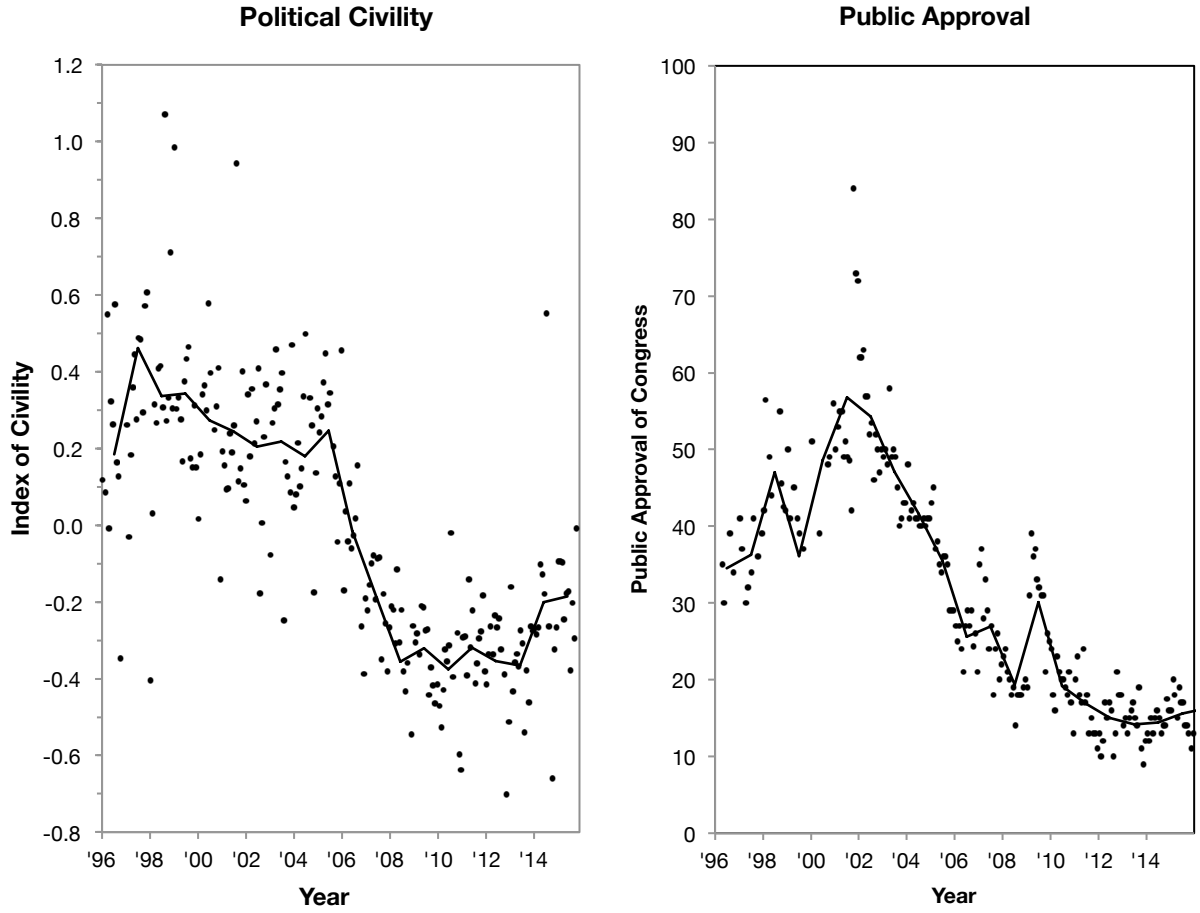


Table 1. Predictors of public approval of U.S. Congress in both individual and multiple regression analyses.

	Standardized Coefficients	
Predictor	**Individual**	**Multiple**
Civility of Members of Congress	.65***	.38***
Congress' Polarization	-.40***	-.13*
Gross Income in U.S.	.48***	.31**
Disposable Income Growth in U.S.	.36***	.13*
Unemployment in U.S.	-.45***	.32***
U.S.' GDP Growth	.19**	-.16**
U.S.' Military Spending	.51***	-.02
U.S.' Nuclear Dominance	.16*	.21*
Violent Crime in U.S.	.40***	.42***
Terrorism in U.S.	.40***	.15**

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

To examine the causal relationship between political civility and public approval, we assessed whether earlier political civility predicted later public approval (while controlling for earlier approval and all nine political/sociological factors), and vice versa. To explore the possibility that several months were required for one variable to affect the other, we included time lags of 1, 2, and 3 months. We found consistent evidence that public approval Granger-caused political civility, $\beta_{1\ month} = .383$, $\beta_{2\ months} = .300$, and $\beta_{3\ months} = .296$, all ps $< .001$. And we also found that political civility Granger-caused public approval, but only at a 2-month time lag, $\beta_{1\ month} = -.040$, $p = .40$, $\beta_{2\ months} = .159$, $p = .003$, and $\beta_{3\ months} = .081$, $p = .15$. These results suggest that political civility and public approval feed back on one another, with increases in civility boosting approval, which in turn, boosts civility.

Discussion

An observational/longitudinal analysis of the language of U.S. politicians found that political civility predicted public approval, even when controlling for nine possible alternative factors. A Granger-causality analysis suggested that civility boosts approval, which in turn

boosts civility, meaning that political incivility and public scorn form a vicious cycle. This study establishes the real-world significance of political incivility as a primary driver of public opinion. Political civility held a similar amount of sway as sociological fundamentals such as crime, employment, and the GDP. Considering how easy it is to be civil compared to how hard it is to reduce crime, create jobs, and boost the GDP, this study highlights the power of the *Montagu Principle*—civility yields a large return on a small investment.

Three limitations of the present study raise the impetus for further study. First, it remains possible that some unidentified third variable, beyond the nine that we included, could cause both civility and public disapproval to rise and fall together. Ultimately, experimental methods that we employ in Studies 3-6 will do well to address the causality question. Second, limitations in existing polling data preclude differentiating between the reactions from hyper-partisans and moderates. We introduce more granular polling data in Study 2. And third, the aggregation of text across all members of Congress, and directed at any possible targets, makes it difficult to determine whether rising incivility was directed at political opponents or at some other target. We address this limitation in Studies 3-6 wherein the targets of (in)civility are known to observers. Despite these limitations, Study 1 nonetheless lends initial support from a naturalistic setting for the *Montagu Principle*.

Study 2: Uncivil Tweets in President Trump's First Year in Office

In Study 2, we again sought to find real-world evidence that incivility depresses public approval, this time with a sitting Republican President, Donald Trump. This is an ideal context for testing the *Red Meat Hypothesis* because Donald Trump is an especially polarizing politician, and has a conservative base. His electoral campaign seemed to benefit from *Red Meat* effects when he encouraged uncivil "lock her up" chants against his opponent, whom he uncivilly

referred to as "Crooked Hillary". A noteworthy feature of this study was the granular public approval data, which differentiated between the sentiments of conservatives, moderates, and liberals.

Method

Sample. Using an online polling method, Ipsos (n.d) asks approximately 2000 adult Americans every day their opinions about President Trump. The pollster publicizes 5-day rolling averaged data, subdivided by the political leaning of respondents, ranging from *very conservative*, *moderately conservative*, *lean conservative*, *lean liberal*, *moderately liberal*, *very liberal*. Ipsos receives an "A-" grade from http://fivethirtyeight.com for polling quality, has virtually no ideological bias (0.1% for Democrats), and has correctly forecasted the results of 78% of the races it has covered.

Approval of Trump. For our analysis, we focused on three groups: *very conservative* ($n \sim$ 190 per day), moderate (the aggregate of *lean conservative* and *lean liberal; n* ~ 340 per day), and *very liberal* ($n \sim$ 190 per day). The poll asks whether participants approve of, disapprove of, or have mixed feelings about the job that President Trump is doing. We operationalized approval as the percentage of respondents that indicated that they approved of President Trump, and included data from January 28, 2017, when polling on Trump began to January 18, 2018. Thus, the data were derivative of ~260,000 judgments. Unsurprisingly, approval was higher among conservatives (M = 79%) than it was among moderates (M = 35%) and liberals (M = 12%).

Incivility. *The New York Times* (Lee & Quealy, 2018) catalogues all of President Trump's insulting tweets. We scraped them and operationalized incivility as the number of Twitter insults President Trump issued in a given day (we applied a 5-day rolling average to

parallel the approval data). President Trump issued 1.65 insulting tweets per day on average (*SD* = 0.75).

Results

To test whether Trump's incivility predicted public disapproval in general, we aggregated the judgments of liberals, moderates, and conservatives ($\alpha = .91$). Trump's incivility negatively predicted aggregated public approval, $r(354) = -.24$, $p < .001$. Each insulting tweet predicted a 1.10% drop in his public approval, 95%CI = 0.63%, 1.57%. Figure 2 displays Trump's incivility and his public approval at a more granular level, differentiated by political group. The more President Trump insulted others, the lower his approval ratings were among liberals, $r(354) = -.28$, $p < .001$ and moderates, $r(354) = -.34$, $p < .001$, but not among conservatives, $r(354) = -.01$, $p = .89$.

Next, we examined Granger-correlations to assess the causal relationship between incivility and approval. For example, we examined the correlation between incivility and later approval while controlling for current approval to assess whether incivility decreases approval over time. Table 2 shows how incivility and approval were bidirectionally related, replicating a result from Study 1. As civility increased, so too did Presidential approval ratings, and vice versa. Although one might assume that this pattern should lead to a mutually reinforcing increase in civility over time, we instead observed civility cycles—civility would go up (as would approval), but then civility cycled down (and approval decreased), and the pattern would repeat with some regularity. Moreover, the bidirectionality of civility and approval was not uniform across the ideological lines. Specifically, increased disapproval from liberals and moderates Granger-caused President Trump to issue more insults, which in turn Granger-caused his approval among conservatives to drop.

Figure 2. The number of times President Trump uncivilly insulted others predicted his public approval during his first year of office (Study 2).

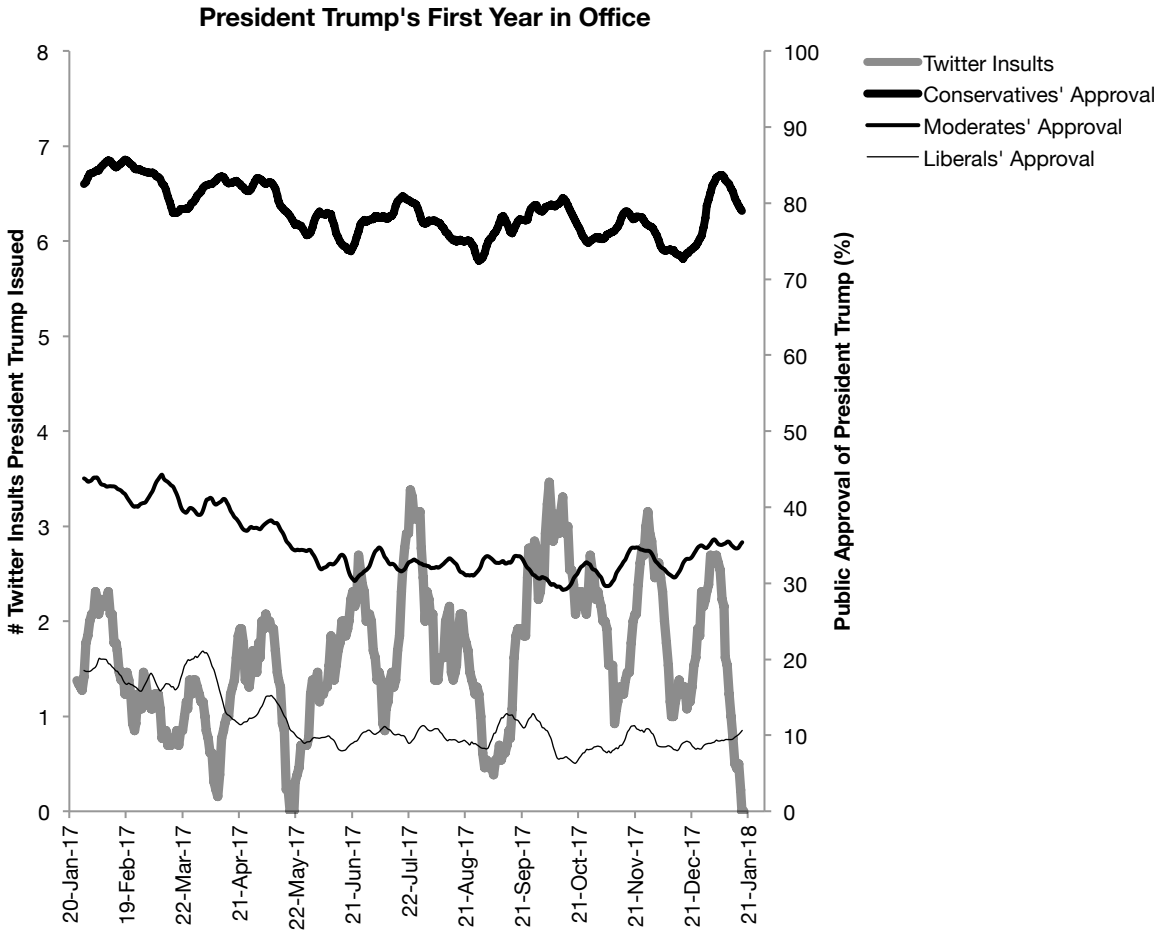


Table 2. Granger correlations (βs) of the number of times President Trump insulted someone on Twitter and his public approval among liberals, moderates, and conservatives (Study 2). Dipping approval from liberals and moderates caused President Trump to issue uncivil insults a few days later, which in turn caused his approval among conservatives to decline a few days later. Bolded numbers are significant.

	Public Approval → Trump Incivility			**Trump Incivility → Public Approval**		
Days Later	**Liberals**	**Moderates**	**Conservatives**	**Liberals**	**Moderates**	**Conservatives**
1	-.015	-.021	.002	-.002	.002	-.009
2	-.032	-.043†	-.002	-.008	.002	-.021†
3	-.053†	**-.070***	-.010	-.014	-.001	**-.035***
4	**-.079***	**-.098****	-.022	-.021	-.004	**-.052***
5	**-.107****	**-.128****	-.036	-.030	-.007	**-.068****

Note. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

A second observational study found that President Trump's incivility predicted a decrease in public approval among liberals and moderates, once again supporting the *Montagu Principle*. The *Red Meat Hypothesis* predicted that the trend might reverse with his conservative base. The context was ideal for finding Red Meat effects in that we used the actual tweets by a sitting, conservative political figure and the approval ratings from his conservative base. Yet, we still did not find supportive evidence for the *Red Meat Hypothesis*. Time-lagged analyses even suggested that Trump's uncivil tweets *depressed* approval with his conservative base several days later. These results favor the *Montagu Principle* and replicate and extend the effects reported in Study 1. Together, they establish the real-world benefits and absence of costs of civility.

Like in Study 1, we found a bidirectional relationship between civility and public approval. In the current study, the relationship was nuanced. Disapproval among liberals and moderates precipitated more uncivil tweets from the President, which in turn depressed approval with his conservative base. A limitation in this study is that that it did not show that Trump's incivility depressed approval among liberals and moderates. One possible explanation for this is that liberals and moderates do not read or hear about his uncivil tweets enough for the incivility to have a measurable impact. Previous research established that people selectively consume ideologically congenial political information on Twitter (Barberá, Jost, Nagler, Tucker, & Bonneau, 2015), meaning that liberals and moderates are less likely to follow people like President Trump on Twitter than are conservatives. Additionally, some liberal commentators (e.g., Rachel Maddow) prescribed observing Trump's deeds and not his words. Ultimately,

however, experimental methods are needed to better test whether the *Montagu Principle* or the *Red Meat Hypothesis* bears fruit in hyper-partisan attacks.

Study 3: President Trump Attacks

In Study 3, we experimentally tested whether uncivil remarks diminish public approval of a sitting president, Donald Trump. This is an ideal context to find evidence of the *Red Meat Hypothesis* because the U.S. is more hyper-partisan now than any other time in its history (Lewis & Poole, 2004) and Trump's base is conservative. Conservatives more so than liberals ascribe to a culture of honor, wherein retaliating against an insult is necessary and desirable to restore one's honor (Nisbett, 1993; Saucier et al., 2016). We reasoned that diehard Trump supporters' reactions to a Trump Twitter assault would pose the strongest test to date of the *Montagu Principle* by pitting their affinity for honor against antipathy for incivility.

We tested whether reading a set of uncivil tweets by President Trump decreased his approval, and whether the change in approval differed depending on whether participants were supporters or opponents of the president. We also tested whether the uncivil insults would "stick", diminishing public favor of his targets, and the mediating character attributions that might explain why incivility costs politicians public favor. In particular, we examined whether incivility made Trump seem more or less warm and/or dominant, and whether these attributions explain the change in public support.

Method

Participants. To select a sample size, we needed an estimate of the effect size. To our knowledge, no previous studies have experimentally tested whether political incivility decreases public approval of the speaker. Relatedly however, Lau et al. (2007) reported that negative political advertising depresses support for the attacking politician (meta-analytic $r = .37$ or $d =$

0.80). Using this effect size as an estimate, we would require $n = 26$ per cell to have 80% power. With an interest in detecting changes in public approval within five political groups (× 2 civility conditions), we would require 260 participants in total if sampling across the groups were likely to be homogenous. Given the general left-leaning nature of crowdsourced samples, we aimed to recruit 1000 participants to ensure adequate representation among less common ideologies (diehard Trump supporters in this case).

In September 2017, we recruited $N = 1053$ American adults (18+ years old) on Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Each participant received $0.30. Demographically, the sample spanned much of the lifespan, ranging from 18 to 97 years old ($M = 36.3$, $SD = 12.0$) and was gender-balanced (56.5% male). Ethnically, the sample was predominantly White (75%), with minorities of people identifying as Asian (11%), Black (6%), Asian (6.7%), Hispanic (6%), and American Indian (1%). In relation to President Trump, the sample was predominantly diehard opponents ($n = 453$), with significant minorities of opponents (243), undecideds (110), supporters (176), and diehard supporters (63).

Procedure. Participants reported their political stance and then read three actual tweets by Donald Trump, tweets that were either civil or uncivil (randomly assigned between participants). Participants then reported their feelings toward President Trump, rated his character on dimensions of warmth and dominance, reported their feelings toward the targets of the tweets, completed a manipulation check and reported demographics.

Political stance. The question asked, "How do you feel about President Trump?" with response options being -2 (*I'm a diehard opponent*), -1 (*I currently oppose the President but I'm not a diehard opponent*), 0 (*unsure/on the fence*), 1 (*I currently support the president but I'm not*

a diehard supporter), and 2 (*I'm a diehard supporter*). Cell *n*s ranged from 25 (Trump diehards) to 230.

Tweet manipulation. Participants viewed images of either three uncivil tweets by President Trump or three tweets that were more civil (see Figure 3). All three tweets were directed at the same four left-leaning targets, "Morning" Joe Scarborough, Mika Brzezinski, Barack Obama, and Hillary Clinton. Each tweet appeared on a separate webpage (with the paired tweets aimed at Morning Joe appearing together.)

Figure 3. President Trump's tweets that participants viewed in Study 4 (between-subjects design).

Feelings towards President Trump. The question asked, "How do you feel toward President Trump?" Participants responded on a 7-point scale anchored at -3 (*extremely negative*),

-2 (*moderately negative*), -1 (*slightly negative*), 0 (*neither positive nor negative*), 1 (*slightly positive*), 2 (*moderately positive*), and 3 (*extremely positive*).

Character attributions of President Trump. The question asked participants whether they "agree with the following statements". The statements were "President Trump is warm" and "President Trump is dominant". Responses were on a 7-point scale anchored at -3 (*strongly disagree*), -2 (*disagree*), -1 (*somewhat disagree*), 0 (*neither agree nor disagree*), 1 (*somewhat agree*), 2 (*agree*), and 3 (*strongly agree*).

Feelings towards President Trump's targets. Three successive questions asked, "How do you feel toward [Morning Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski/ Barack Obama/ Hillary Clinton]?" Participants responded using the same scale as they did to report their feelings toward President Trump. We aggregated the three scores ($\alpha = .76$) to form an index of feelings toward Trump's targets.

Manipulation check. The manipulation check asked, "In the tweets you just read, how polite was President Trump?" Response options were -3 (*very rude*), -2 (*rude*), -1 (*slightly rude*), 0 (*neither polite nor rude*), 1 (*slightly polite*), 2 (*polite*), and 3 (*very polite*).

Results

Manipulation check. The manipulation was successful. Politeness ratings were considerably higher in the civil condition ($M = 1.26$, $SD = 1.34$) than in the uncivil condition ($M = -2.20$, $SD = 1.12$), $t(1014) = 44.41$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.78$.

Feelings towards Trump. We anticipated that participants who had a pro-Trump stance would report more positive feelings toward the president than Trump opponents (main effect for political stance). Additionally, we tested whether reading civil or uncivil tweets would change how participants felt about the president (main effect for civility), and whether the size and/or

direction of the change depended on the political stance of the participant (interaction). Figure 4 shows how all three effects surfaced. A 2 (civility) × 5 (political stance) ANOVA yielded main effects for civility, $F(1,1009) = 42.71$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .041$ (civil > uncivil), and political stance, $F(4,1009) = 937.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .788$ (Trump supporters > Trump opponents, linear trend $F(1,1014) = 2407.04$, $p < .001$), and an interaction, $F(4,1009) = 5.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .020$. To decompose the interaction, we computed simple main effects within each political stance. Table 3 shows how, for every political group except diehard supporters, approval of Trump was higher after reading civil tweets than after reading uncivil tweets.

Figure 4. Feelings toward President Trump after reading either his civil or uncivil tweets (Study 4). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

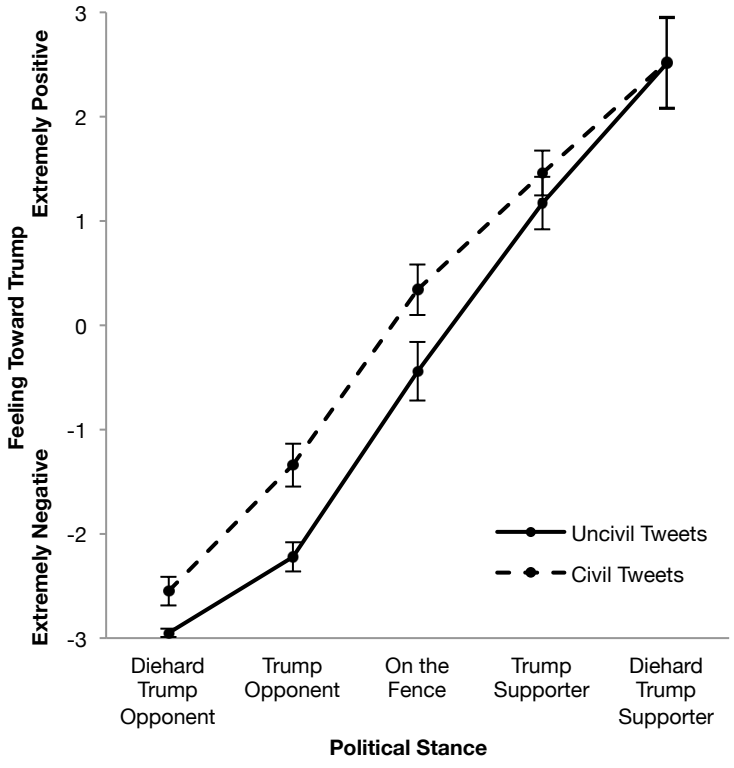


Table 3. Inferential tests of simple main effects testing whether reading civil versus uncivil tweets by President Trump enhanced public sentiment toward the president (Study 3). Bolded numbers are significant.

Political Stance	***F*(1,1009)**	***p***	***d***
Diehard Trump Opponent	20.53	<.001	0.54
Trump Opponent	55.47	<.001	0.89
On the Fence	18.86	<.001	0.80
Trump Supporter	3.47	.04	0.26
Diehard Trump Supporter	0.00	.99	0.01

Warmth and dominance. Why did incivility cost President Trump public favor with most Americans? We found that uncivil tweets made Trump seem less warm to people across the political spectrum, and *less* dominant to Trump's opponents (see Table 4). A 2 (civility) × 5 (political stance) ANOVA, predicting perceived warmth, yielded two main effects, Fs ≥ 87.84, ps < .001, $\eta_p^2 \geq .080$, and a weak interaction, $F(1,1007) = 3.87$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .015$. Simple main effects were significant for all five political groups (see Table 4).

The results for perceived dominance were weaker. A 2 × 5 ANOVA, predicting perceived dominance, did not yield a main effect for civility, $F(1,1007) = 1.14$, $p = .29$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$ (civil = uncivil), but did yield a main effect for political stance, $F(4,1007) = 45.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .152$, and an interaction, $F(4,1007) = 3.76$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .015$. Simple main effects were significant for diehard and non-diehard Trump opponents (civil > uncivil) but not for people on the fence or Trump supporters of either kind (see Table 4).

Table 4. Perceived warmth and perceived dominance ratings of President Trump after reading civil or uncivil tweets (Study 3).

	M (*SD*)		Simple Main Effect of Civility		
Warmth	**Uncivil**	**Civil**	***F***	***p***	***d***
Diehard Opponents	-2.83 (0.46)	-2.45 (1.00)	14.18	<.001	0.49
Opponents	-2.21 (0.95)	-1.43 (1.35)	32.10	<.001	0.67
Undecided	-1.23 (1.20)	-0.06 (1.15)	31.98	<.001	1.00
Supporters	0.07 (1.48)	0.90 (1.17)	25.95	<.001	0.62
Diehard Supporters	1.17 (1.64)	1.92 (1.13)	7.45	.006	0.53
Dominance	**Uncivil**	**Civil**	***F***	***p***	***d***
Diehard Opponents	-0.35 (2.10)	0.36 (2.10)	18.21	<.001	0.34
Opponents	0.30 (1.86)	0.99 (1.52)	9.60	.002	0.41
Undecided	1.29 (1.23)	1.15 (0.97)	0.16	.69	-0.12
Supporters	1.76 (1.03)	1.61 (1.15)	0.31	.58	-0.14
Diehard Supporters	2.43 (1.17)	2.04 (1.25)	0.75	.39	-0.32

We systematically tested whether perceived warmth and/or dominance statistically explained why incivility diminished public favor in a bias-corrected bootstrapped moderated mediation analysis. Allowing political stance to moderate the civility → attribute → approval effects, we found positive evidence of moderated mediation for both perceived warmth, B = 0.068, 95%CI = [0.014, 0.118] and perceived dominance, B = -0.019, 95%CI = [-0.032, -0.010]. Table 5 displays the mediation effects for Trump opponents, neutrals, and supporters. Perceived warmth consistently mediated the civility → approval effect, whereas dominance did for Trump opponents and neutrals, but not supporters.

Table 5. Uncivil tweets reduced public approval of President Trump in part because they made him seem less warm. For perceived dominance, the results were weaker and mixed. Numbers represent mediation statistics (civility → attribute → approval) for each of three political stance groups (*M* +/- 1 *SD*) from a bootstrapped moderated mediation model (Study 3). Bolded numbers are significant.

Political Stance		Mediation B [95%CI]	
Label	**Score**	**Perceived Warmth**	**Perceived Dominance**
Trump opponents	-2.00	**.223 [.155, .294]**	**.049 [.026, .078]**
Neutral	-0.81	**.303 [.243, .368]**	**.026 [.012, .043]**
Trump supporters	0.50	**.392 [.284, .510]**	.006 [-.013, .013]

Effects on the targets' reputations. Did Trump's uncivil tweets change feelings toward his targets? We found weak evidence of such effects. A 2 (condition) × 5 (political stance) ANOVA, predicting approval of his targets, yielded a strong main effect for political stance, $F(4,1007) = 234.74$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .483$ (Trump opponents > supporters), a weak main effect for condition, $F(1,1007) = 4.47$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$, and a weak interaction, $F(4,1007) = 2.40$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .009$. Simple main effects of civility for the five political identities were non-significant for all identities except people on the fence and non-diehard Trump supporters, who reported more positive feelings toward Trump's targets when he was civil (see Table 6).

Table 6. Evaluations of the targets of President Trump's civil or uncivil tweets (Study 3).

	***M* (*SD*)**		**Simple Main Effect of Civility**		
	Uncivil	**Civil**	***F***	***p***	***d***
Diehard Opponents	1.60 (1.18)	1.46 (1.09)	1.49	.22	-0.13
Opponents	0.67 (1.39)	0.66 (1.23)	0.01	.92	-0.01
Undecided	-0.55 (1.13)	-0.08 (1.40)	3.74	.05	0.36
Supporters	-1.35 (1.12)	-0.98 (1.36)	3.90	.05	0.30
Diehard Supporters	-2.27 (1.12)	-1.92 (1.20)	1.17	.28	0.30

Finally, we tested the *Hatred Variant* of the *Red Meat Hypothesis*, which states that people who hate the targets of an attack will approve of the attacker more when he is uncivil than

civil. We tested that possibility by using attitudes toward the targets as the potential moderator (rather than attitudes toward the attacker). We entered attitudes toward the target (-3 to +3 scale), condition (1 = civil, -1 = uncivil), and their interaction into regression model, predicting feelings toward Trump. The *Hatred Variant* predicted that main effects of civility ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$) and attitudes toward the targets ($\beta = -.65$, $p < .001$) would be qualified by an interaction. They were not, $\beta = .03$, $p = .20$, meaning that Trump's popularity gain from civil language was not reduced or reversed for people who hated his targets. Some nonlinearity could mask evidence of the *Hatred Variant* in this analysis so we also selected only those participants that hated Trump's targets (scoring less than or equal to -2 on the -3 to +3 scale). These individuals showed no preference for civil versus uncivil behavior, $t(122) = 1.25$, $p = .22$, $d = 0.23$. In sum, we found no evidence of the *Hatred Variant* of the *Red Meat Hypothesis*.

Discussion

An experiment with real tweets by President Trump found that incivility cost Trump public favor, and did so among people almost across the political spectrum (the exception being his most diehard supporters). Whereas an uncivil attacker (like President Trump) may have an immediate goal of besmirching a target's reputation, we again found that impressions of the targets were largely unaltered. This experimental evidence converges with the longitudinal analyses in Studies 1 and 2 to support the *Montagu Principle*. Despite the near-optimal conditions for finding evidence for the *Red Meat Hypothesis*, we still failed to find any.

It is perhaps unsurprising that people who oppose Trump disapproved of him even more after he attacked his opponents insofar as Trump's opponents support and perhaps identify with his opponents (the target of Trump's attack). What is perhaps more surprising is that people who had mixed feelings and people who generally supported the president also disapproved of his

uncivil tweets. These groups saw the president's incivility as a sign of lacking warmth; some groups also thought his incivility also made him seem less dominant. Both of these negative character impressions explained why incivility reduced the president's public support among moderates and liberals.

The one exceptional political group was his diehard supporters, whose opinions of Trump were unchanged by reading his uncivil tweets. This failure to detect a change in Trump's diehard supporters' feelings toward him could be a product of a relatively small sample of Trump diehards (cell *ns* = 25 and 35), and/or a ceiling effect on their feelings toward the president. Uncivil tweets did make Trump diehards see him as significantly less warm and yet (nonsignificantly) more dominant. These ambivalent impressions could have been the result of competing intuitions favoring honor and disfavoring incivility, respectively. If Trump supporters care more about his perceived dominance/honor than his perceived warmth/civility, then they may approve of Trump's incivility. A limitation of Study 3 was the relatively small sample of diehard Trump supporters, which meant that the study had only a small chance of detecting differences in reactions to civil or uncivil behavior among Trump's base.

A second limitation of Study 3 is the absence of context: participants did not read about what happened before Trump's tweets that might have provoked his reaction. Had they known, for instance, that Trump's attack on Mika Brzezinski and Joe Scarborough was, in fact, a reaction to scathing public remarks about the president by Ms. Brzezinski, they might have approved of his uncivil retaliation as a means of restoring his honor.

A third limitation was that the study stopped short of modeling the possible response options for the president in the face of a personal attack. After receiving an attack from a journalist, complimenting the journalist about an unrelated matter seems inappropriate and

strange. More realistic civil alternatives to counterpunching (uncivil tweets) would be civilly pivoting (changing the topic entirely and tweeting about something constructive), or not responding altogether.

A fourth limitation of this Study is that the veracity of some of Trump's tweets has been questioned (in particular, the alleged requests made by Joe and Mika, Mika's physical condition, whether Trump's phones were tapped, and President Obama's hypothetical involvement). These tweets may have reminded Trump supporters about Trump's complicated relationship with the truth. In this way, perceived dishonesty may have been a confound for incivility in this study. We address all four of these limitations in Study 4.

Study 4: President Trump Responds to an Attack

Study 4 was similar to Study 3 except that we now informed participants of the context before they read Trump's uncivil reaction. This would make it more likely that Trump supporters could construe his uncivil remarks as a defense of his honor rather than as unprovoked bullying. Additionally, we more realistically modeled the possible responses to the incoming attack. Our goal was to test whether, after receiving a personal attack from a journalist/commentator, President Trump's approval would be highest after he uncivilly counterpunched, civilly pivoted, or simply did not respond (neutral control). This permitted an initial test of whether civility benefits and/or incivility costs President Trump public support. We also included a measure of perceived honesty to test whether the uncivil or untruthful nature of his tweets was responsible for public disapproval. An alternative possibility is that Trump supporters may see his frank and uncensored comments as particularly honest, even if they may be not be civil. Finally, we took extra efforts to ensure that we had a sizable sample of diehard Trump supporters.

Method

Participants. In September 2017, we recruited $N = 1616$ American adults (18+ years old) on Amazon's Mechanical Turk. After recruiting 1307 participants, we had just 77 diehard Trump supporters. Having noted a small sample of Trump diehards as a limitation of Study 3, we recruited another 307 participants with the words "Only Trump Supporters Needed" added to the ad on Mturk. This increased our sample of diehard supporters to 187. Each participant received $0.30. Demographically, the sample spanned much of the lifespan, ranging from 18 to 77 years old ($M = 37.1$, $SD = 12.2$) and was gender-balanced (53.0% male). Ethnically, the sample was predominantly White (79%), with minorities of people identifying as Asian (9%), Black (6%), Hispanic (5%), and American Indian (1%). In relation to President Trump, the sample was predominantly diehard opponents ($n = 572$), with significant minorities of opponents (298), undecideds (142), supporters (417), and diehard supporters (187).

Procedure. Participants reported their political stance, and then read an attack by a journalist on President Trump. They then read one of three responses by President Trump—a counterpunch (uncivil), a pivot to a more constructive topic (civil), or a non-response (neutral control; randomly assigned between participants). Participants then reported their feelings toward President Trump, rated his character on dimensions of warmth, dominance, and honesty, reported their feelings toward the targets of the tweets, and reported demographics.

Political stance. The question was the same as in Study 3. Cell *n*s ranged from 41 to 206. Among diehard Trump supporters, cell *n*s ranged from 59 to 66.

Attack from a journalist. Participants read about a (real) personal attack on President Trump, from a journalist/commentator. We used the actual words that Mika Brzezinski spoke that provoked the "Psycho Joe" Twitter attack. Accompanied by a photograph of the two journalists/commentators, participants read that,

> Mika Brzezinski and Joe Scarborough are the hosts of "Morning Joe" on MSNBC. Mika made the following comment about President Trump: *Let's say someone came into NBC and took over NBC and started tweeting wildly about people's appearances, bullying people, talking about people in the competition, lying every day, undermining his managers, throwing them under the — that person would be thrown out. It's just not normal behavior. In fact, there would be concern that perhaps the person who runs the company is out of his mind.*

President Trump's responses. Participants were then randomly assigned to read one of three responses. The first was a counterpunch. It began by stating that, "President Trump learned of the comment, and tweeted…" and displayed images of the two "Psycho Joe" tweets (see Study 3 and Figure 3). The second condition was a non-response. It simply read, "President Trump learned of the comment, and offered no comment of his own." And the third condition was a pivot. It read, "President Trump learned of the comment, and tweeted…", along with an image of a tweet by President Trump on an unrelated topic: "Just finished a very good meeting with the President of South Korea. Many subjects discussed including North Korea and new trade deal!" We chose this tweet because President Trump made it on the same day (29 June 2017) as the "Psycho Joe" tweets and because it could represent a successful pivot away from a personal attack.

Feelings towards President Trump and his targets. The question asked, "How do you feel toward President Trump?" Participants responded on a 201-point scale anchored at -100 (*extremely negative*), -50 (*somewhat negative*), 0 (*neutral*), 50 (*somewhat positive*), 100 (*extremely positive*). We used a large (201-point) scale to avoid the kind of ceiling effect we

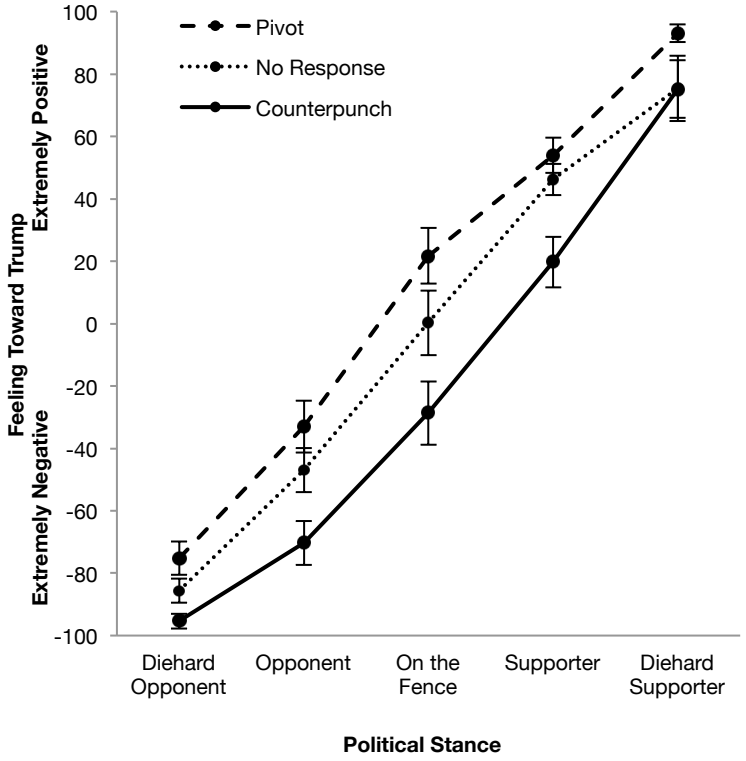
observed in Study 3. Participants also reported their feelings toward "Joe and Mika" on the same scale.

Character attributions of President Trump. Participants read, "President Trump is…" Three character attributes appeared below—*warm*, *dominant*, and *honest*—along with a 101-point slider scale anchored at 0 (*not at all*), 50 (*somewhat*), and 100 (*extremely*).

Results

Feelings Toward President Trump. Figure 5 shows how feelings toward President Trump varied by his response and participants' political stance. We first tested whether Trump's response influenced overall feelings toward him, and whether it depended on the political stance of the observer. A 3 (Trump's response: pivot, no response, counterpunch) × 5 (political stance) ANOVA, predicting feelings toward Trump, yielded main effects for Trump's response, $F(2,1599) = 85.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .097$, and political stance, $F(4,1599) = 1285.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .763$ (Trump supporters > Trump opponents , linear trend $F(1,1609) = 4528.02$, $p < .001$), and an interaction, $F(8,1599) = 3.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .019$.

Figure 5. Feelings toward President Trump after participants read a journalist/commentator rendering a personal attack against him, and his response (Study 5). Trump's response was to counterpunch (uncivil), pivot (civil), or not respond (control). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.



Testing whether incivility (counterpunching) depressed public approval of Trump, a 2 (Trump's response: counterpunch, non-response) × 5 (political stance) ANOVA yielded main effects of political stance, $F(4,1071) = 862.03$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .763$, a main effect for Trump's response, $F(1,1071) = 57.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .051$, and an interaction, $F(4,1071) = 5.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .020$. Analyses of simple main effects of incivility on approval revealed that incivility diminished approval among all political groups except diehard supporters (Table 7). And a test of whether civility (pivoting) increased public approval of Trump, a 2 (Trump's response: pivot, non-response) × 5 (political stance) ANOVA yielded only main effects of political stance, $F(4,1100) = 913.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .769$ and of Trump's response, $F(1,1100) = 36.15$, $p < .001$,

η_p^2 = .032, and no interaction, $F(4,1100) = 1.02$, $p = .39$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$, meaning that civility boosted Trump's approval across the political spectrum.

Table 7. Comparisons of President Trump's approval after uncivilly counterpunching versus not responding (Study 4).

Stance Regarding Trump	Counterpunch vs. No Response		
	F	*p*	*d*
Diehard Opponent	7.64	.006	0.42
Opponent	23.17	<.001	0.65
On the Fence	18.04	<.001	0.78
Supporter	42.03	<.001	0.65
Diehard Supporter	0.97	.970	0.01

Mediation. Why did incivility generally decrease and civility increase participants' support for President Trump? Our analyses suggest that counterpunching made President Trump seem less warm to people across the political spectrum, but no more or less dominant or honest (see Table 8). An omnibus 3 (Trump's response) × 5 (political stance) ANOVA, predicting perceived warmth, yielded a main effect of political stance, $F(4,1597) = 644.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .618$, a main effect of Trump's response, $F(2,1597) = 9.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .012$, and no interaction, $F(8,1597) = 1.23$, $p = .28$, $\eta_p^2 = .006$. To determine which of Trump's responses made the warmest impression, we ran 2 (Trump's Response) × 5 (political stance) ANOVAs in which Trump's response was to not respond and either counterpunch or pivot. Both ANOVAs produced main effects of political stance, Fs ≥ 406.61, ps < .001, η_p^2s ≥ .603, and neither produced interactions, Fs ≤ 1.90, ps ≥ .11, η_p^2s ≤ .007. Additionally, both the pivot-versus-no-response ANOVA, $F(1,1099) = 5.08$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$, and the counterpunch-versus-no-response ANOVA, $F(1,1069) = 4.84$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$, yielded main effects of Trump's response. That is, incivility made Trump seem less warm to people across the political spectrum.

Table 8. Perceived warmth, dominance, and honesty of President Trump after reading a counterpunching (uncivil), pivoting (civil) tweet, or non-response after receiving an insult from a journalist (Study 4).

	M (*SD*)		
Warmth	**Counter-punch**	**No Response**	**Pivot**
Diehard Opponents	4.40 (10.20)	6.11 (14.26)	6.35 (12.05)
Opponents	11.60 (14.56)	14.56 (14.77)	15.42 (15.45)
Undecided	25.96 (22.12)	28.59 (21.43)	36.59 (17.96)
Supporters	47.62 (24.02)	51.88 (22.06)	50.46 (24.73)
Diehard Supporters	67.97 (26.51)	70.62 (26.28)	77.40 (23.10)
Mean	**26.82 (29.68)**	**28.75 (30.19)**	**29.72 (30.87)**
Dominance	**Counter-punch**	**No Response**	**Pivot**
Diehard Opponents	50.83 (38.38)	54.11 (37.46)	51.09 (38.32)
Opponents	56.40 (31.48)	61.68 (29.34)	56.17 (31.75)
Undecided	63.02 (28.35)	70.52 (26.05)	69.46 (20.89)
Supporters	79.77 (18.52)	79.99 (16.75)	81.10 (19.90)
Diehard Supporters	87.25 (20.95)	84.95 (21.96)	89.69 (17.87)
Mean	**65.05 (35.98)**	**67.12 (31.41)**	**65.48 (33.45)**
Honesty	**Counter-punch**	**No Response**	**Pivot**
Diehard Opponents	7.17 (18.79)	5.11 (13.65)	6.41 (14.92)
Opponents	21.02 (21.31)	17.65 (19.56)	16.14 (18.89)
Undecided	38.64 (25.03)	41.41 (27.63)	43.73 (22.38)
Supporters	64.82 (23.43)	62.08 (22.25)	66.25 (22.28)
Diehard Supporters	86.20 (18.43)	81.53 (23.47)	90.71 (14.94)
Mean	**37.44 (35.82)**	**33.99 (34.70)**	**35.94 (36.28)**

The same change was not evident with perceived dominance and honesty. Omnibus analyses predicting perceived dominance and honesty yielded main effects of political stance, Fs ≥ 84.87, ps $< .001$, $\eta_p^2 \geq .175$, but no main effect of Trump's response, Fs ≤ 2.69, ps $\geq .07$, η_p^2s $\leq .003$, nor any interactions, Fs ≤ 1.28, ps $\geq .25$, $\eta_p^2 \leq .006$, meaning that Trump's response influenced how warm he seemed, but not how dominant or honest. Finally, we tested which attributes explain why civility boosted public favor of President Trump using a bias corrected bootstrapped moderated mediation analysis (see Table 9). Civility boosted approval with

moderates and Trump supporters because it made him seem more honest whereas incivility cost President Trump with moderates because it made him seem less warm.

Table 9. Civility benefited President Trump with moderates and Trump supporters because it made him seem more honest, whereas incivility cost him with moderates because it made him seem less warm (Study 4). Numbers represent mediation statistics (civility/incivility → attribute → approval) for each of three political groups (*M* +/- 1 *SD*) from a bootstrapped moderated mediation model. Bolded numbers are significant.

Political Stance		Mediation B [95%CI]		
Label	**Score**	**Warmth**	**Dominance**	**Honesty**
Benefits of Civility				
Trump opponents	-1.90	0.28 [-1.04, 1.88]	-0.61 [-1.96, 0.22]	0.15 [-2.91, 3.43]
Neutral	-0.43	0.88 [-0.54, 2.30]	-0.20 [-0.95, 0.30]	**2.97 [0.23, 5.59]**
Trump supporters	1.05	1.49 [-0.96, 4.02]	0.20 [-0.35, 0.82]	**5.80 [1.72, 9.94]**
Index of Moderated Mediation		0.41 [-0.57. 1.47]	0.27 [-0.03, 0.82]	**1.91 [0.11, 3.59]**
Costs of Incivility				
Trump opponents	-1.85	-0.95 [-2.01, 0.05]	-0.29 [-0.94, 0.05]	0.90 [-0.62, 2.48]
Neutral	-0.38	**-1.21 [-2.24, -0.19]**	-0.16 [-0.55, 0.03]	1.16 [-0.16, 2.45]
Trump supporters	1.08	-1.47 [-3.45, 0.22]	-0.04 [-0.31, 0.15]	1.42 [-0.43, 3.40]
Index of Moderated Mediation		-0.18 [-0.91, 0.52]	0.18 [-0.64, 1.07]	0.08 [-0.05, 0.28]

Feelings toward President Trump's targets. We again found little evidence that Trump's response affected how participants felt about the target of his attacks. A 3 (Trump's response: pivot, no response, counterpunch) × 5 (political stance) ANOVA, predicting feelings toward Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski, yielded a main effect of political stance, $F(4,1599) = 221.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .357$, a marginal effect of Trump's response, $F(2,1599) =$

2.42, $p = .09$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$ (leaning towards no response > pivot = counterpunch), and no interaction, $F(8,1599) = 0.87$, $p = .54$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$.

Finally, we tested the *Hatred Variant* of the *Red Meat Hypothesis* by using attitudes toward the target as moderating variable (rather than attitudes toward the attacker). We entered attitudes toward the target (-100 to +100 scale), condition (-1 = uncivil, 0 = no response), and their interaction into a regression model, predicting feelings toward Trump. The *Hatred Variant* would anticipate that main effects of Trump's response ($\beta = .13$, $p < .001$) and attitudes toward the targets ($\beta = -.58$, $p < .001$) would be qualified by an interaction. They were not, $\beta = .04$, $p = .28$, meaning that Trump's popularity loss from counterpunching versus not responding was not attenuated or reversed for people who hated Mika and Joe. Some nonlinearity could mask evidence of the *Hatred Variant* in this analysis so we selected only those participants that hated Trump's targets (scoring less than or equal to -70 on the -100 to +100 scale). These individuals showed no preference between a non-response and an uncivil counterpunch, $t(175) = 0.49$, $p = .63$, $d = 0.07$. In sum, we found no evidence of the *Hatred Variant*.

Discussion

After incurring a personal attack from a journalist/commentator, uncivil, retaliatory tweets lowered President Trump's approval ratings, and pivoting away boosted them. This study makes several important contributions. First, Study 4 replicates the *Montagu effect* found in Studies 1-3—civility only benefited and did not cost the politician. Second, Study 4 was the first study to show a clear benefit from civility among a politician's diehard base. Unlike in Studies 1-3, which generally produced null effects of civility on approval among the base, in Study 4 "Diehard Trump supporters" approved of the president more after he civilly pivoted away from an attacking journalist. Only Trump's most diehard supporters' approval was unmoved by

whether he responded uncivilly to the attack (versus not responding), a result that is inconsistent with the *Red Meat Hypothesis*: Incivility did not buy Trump points, even in the context of a strong attack from his detractors.

A third strength of Study 4 was it being the first study to tease apart the social consequences of civility and incivility. We found that civility benefited and incivility generally cost the speaker public support. Fourth, we showed that incivility did relatively little to affect sentiments toward the speaker's adversaries, meaning that incivility is costly even in a zero sum competition with adversaries. Fifth, we investigated the possibility that Trump's uncivil comments were also perceived to be less truthful by members of his base, and this potential dishonesty confound explained their lack of approval. We found that Trump's uncivil tweets made him seem less warm but no more or less honest to members of his base, meaning that perceived dishonesty appears to not conflate the intended manipulation.

A sixth strength is that Study 4 involved a larger sample of Trump diehards than in Study 3, which allowed for more precise effect size estimates. Moreover, the results clarified the possibility of ambivalent impressions resulting from incivility. Incivility made Trump seem less warm but no more or less dominant among members of his base, meaning that incivility did not produce ambivalence. Seventh, Study 4 realistically modeled the social situation by showing the instigating remarks by a commentator. This made it more likely that we would find *Red Meat* effect: his base now had good reason to approve of him defending his honor (but they did not). And eighth, this study modeled realistic responses that are available to a politician under attack and produced a clear indication of which is most favorable to public approval: civilly pivot > non-response > uncivilly counterpunch.

A limitation of the present study, however, was the recruitment method. Trump supporters on Mechanical Turk may not be representative of Trump supporters in general. Moreover, the "only Trump Supporters needed" ad could have recruited some Trump opponents who were feigning support in order to get paid. The ad could also have created a demand characteristic for bona fide Trump supporters to represent their group in a positive light and thereby not applaud incivility. Corroborating evidence from Study 2, which analyzed the responses of Trump supporters who were recruited less overtly by Ipsos, partly allays this concern. However, a follow-up study would be beneficial.

A second limitation is that experiments in Studies 3 and 4 relied on issues (e.g., election results, personal feuds, government surveillance) that are not necessarily central concerns to most Americans. It remains a possibility that the *Red Meat Hypothesis* applies only when the issue is of central importance to voters (e.g., immigration), wherein dominating the opposition at any cost may feel justified to hyper-partisans.

The primary impetus for including Trump's three responses to an attack from a journalist was to model his realistic response options. We also reasoned that counterpunching would be uncivil, pivoting civil, and not responding somewhere in between. A third limitation is that we did not include a manipulation check on these responses. Even if we had, the manipulation could have been confounded (e.g., with their varying content). Ultimately a within-subjects design and a tighter manipulation of (in)civility could better address this issue. We address all three limitations in Study 5.

Study 5: President Trump Attacks on the Topic of Immigration

In Study 5, participants again reviewed Trump's tweets that were either civil or uncivil, and evaluated the president. We relied on a different recruitment method (Prolific Academic) to

circumvent the recruitment limitations of Studies 3-4. And unlike in Study 3-4, the topic was more central to Americans' concerns—immigration[1]. We included a pre-test measure of support for Trump to permit a stringent test of whether civility boosts and/or incivility depresses public approval. Finally, we included a measure of voting intention to test whether civility might influence people's electoral behavior.

Method

Participants. In January 2018, we recruited $N = 783$ American adults (18+ years old) on Prolific Academic. To recruit similar numbers of Trump supporters and opponents without explicitly telling participants about our recruitment goals, we used Prolific Academic's prescreening questions and requested an approximately equal number of participants that self-identified as Republicans and Democrats. Each participant received £0.30 (~$0.42). Demographically, the sample spanned much of the lifespan, ranging from 18 to 76 years old ($M = 35.4$, $SD = 12.8$) and was gender-balanced (52.9% male). Ethnically, the sample was predominantly White (78%), with minorities of people identifying as Asian (8%), Black (6%), and Hispanic (6%). In relation to President Trump, $n = 276$ were diehard opponents, 160 were opponents, 41 were undecided, 214 were supporters, and 91 were diehard supporters.

Procedure. Participants reported their political stance and their feelings about President Trump, then read either a civil or uncivil pair of tweets by the President (randomly assigned between subjects). They then reported their feelings toward President Trump again, rated his character on dimensions of warmth, dominance, and honesty (using the same measures as in Study 4), indicated the likelihood that they would vote for him in the next presidential election, completed a manipulation check, and reported demographics.

[1] Americans rated immigration as the second most important non-economic problem facing the U.S. in January of 2018, with only dissatisfaction with government/poor leadership seen as more urgent (Gallup, 2018).

Political stance. The question asked, "What is your stance regarding President Trump?" with response options being the same as those in Studies 3-4. We also asked about participants' stance with respect to the target of Trump's tweets ("Senator Minority Leader, Chuck Schumer, and House Minority Leader, Nancy Pelosi.")

Feelings towards President Trump. The question asked, "How do you feel toward President Trump at this moment?" Participants responded on the same 201-point scale as that in Study 4.

Trump's civility. Participants read the following:

> The issues of immigration and border security are receiving a lot of attention these days. President Trump and the Republican majority in Congress want to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Democrats, led by Minority Leaders Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi, want to secure legal status for people brought to the U.S. illegally as children (by their parents). These individuals (also known as DREAMers) were protected under DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), introduced by then-President Obama. President Trump ended DACA in Sept. 2017 and gave Congress until March 2018 to pass a new DACA law to protect DREAMers. In Nov. 2017, President Trump planned a meeting with Minority Leaders Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi to discuss funding for the wall and immigration, and to keep the government open.

They then read one pre-meeting and one post-meeting tweet by President Trump about Leaders Schumer and Pelosi, with the tweets either being civil or uncivil (see Figure 6; randomly assigned, between participants). The uncivil tweets were real (with minor alterations such as date changes); we revised them to create the civil tweets.

Figure 6. President Trump's tweets that participants viewed in Study 6 (between-subjects design).

Voting intention. The question asked, "If the 2020 Presidential Election were held today, what is the likelihood that you would vote to re-elect President Trump?" Participants responded on a 101-point slider scale anchored at 0% (*no chance*) and 100% (*definitely*).

Manipulation check. The question asked, "How would you characterize President Trump's tweets?" Reponses were on a 201-point scale anchored at -100 (*very rude*), -50 (*somewhat rude*), 0 (*neutral*), 50 (*somewhat polite*), and 100 (*very polite*).

Results

Manipulation check. The manipulation was successful. Politeness ratings were higher in the civil condition (M = -17, SD = 63) than in the uncivil condition (M = -50, SD = 56), $t(764)$ = 7.66, $p < .001$, d = 0.55.

Change in feelings toward President Trump. To test how the tweets altered participants' feelings toward the president, we calculated change-in-feelings scores for each participant. Figure 7 shows how feelings toward President Trump changed after reading his civil or uncivil tweets. We first tested whether the civility (vs. incivility) of Trump's tweets changed

how Americans felt about him, and whether it depended on the political stance of the observer. A 2 (Trump's civility) × 5 (political stance) ANOVA, predicting changes in feelings toward Trump, yielded main effects for Trump's civility, $F(1,762) = 33.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .042$, and political stance, $F(4,762) = 5.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .030$ (Trump supporters > Trump opponents, linear trend $F(1,767) = 18.16$, $p < .001$), and an interaction, $F(4,762) = 7.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .037$. Table 10 shows the simple main effects within each political stance. For Trump opponents and moderates, change in approval of Trump was more positive after reading civil (versus uncivil) tweets, whereas for Trump supporters, there was no change.

Figure 7. Change in feelings toward President Trump after reading either his civil or uncivil tweets (Study 5). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

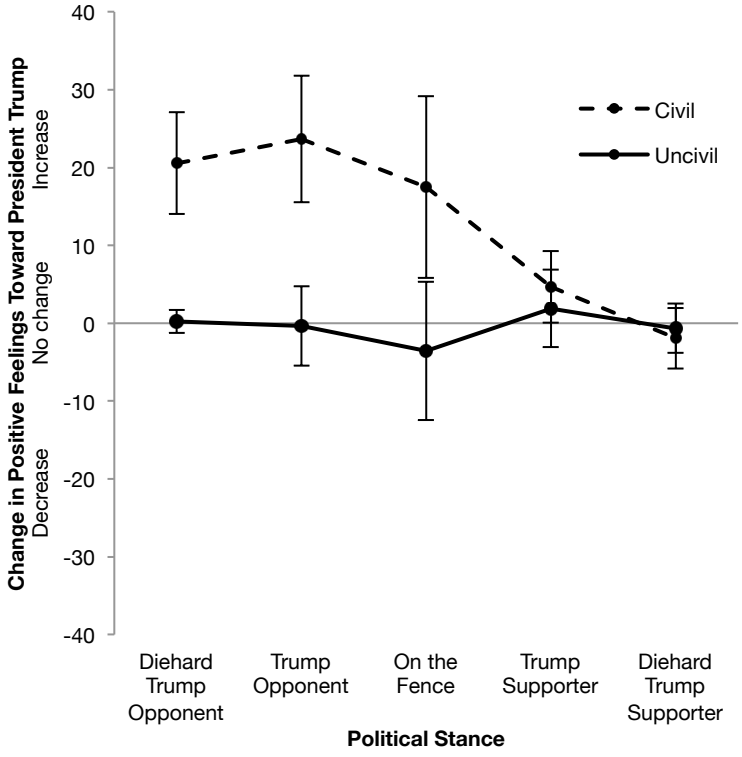


Table 10. Simple main effects of President Trump's civil versus uncivil tweets about Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi on the change in the public's feelings toward Trump (Study 5). The left set of columns parse the effect by participants' stance toward President Trump while the right columns parse by stance toward his targets.

Stance	Stance Regarding Trump			Stance Regarding Trump's Targets		
	F	***p***	***d***	***F***	***p***	***d***
Diehard Opponent	42.95	<.001	0.75	2.96	.086	-0.28
Opponent	33.84	<.001	0.78	14.50	<.001	0.86
On the Fence	6.69	.010	0.88	32.76	<.001	0.68
Supporter	0.62	.432	0.11	39.66	<.001	0.80
Diehard Supporter	0.05	.815	-0.10	0.00	.980	-0.01

Mediation. Why did incivility cost President Trump public favor relative to civility? Our analyses suggest that incivility generally made President Trump seem less warm, but no more or less dominant or honest (see Table 11). A 2 (Trump's Civility) × 5 (Stance Toward Trump) ANOVA, predicting perceived warmth, yielded a main effect of stance, $F(4,722) = 381.20$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .679$, a main effect of Trump's Civility, $F(1,722) = 25.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .035$, and an interaction, $F(4,722) = 4.00$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .022$. Simple main effects were uniformly in the direction of favoring civility over incivility, with significant effects found for moderate Trump supporters and centrists but not the other three groups.

Table 11. Perceived warmth, dominance, and honesty of President Trump after reading a civil or uncivil tweet about Democratic Minority Leaders Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi (Study 5).

	M (*SD*)		Simple Main effect		
Warmth	**Civil**	**Uncivil**	***F***	***p***	***d***
Diehard Opponents	7.96 (13.08)	3.84 (10.81)	2.81	.09	0.34
Opponents	16.45 (17.99)	14.62 (23.09)	0.33	.57	0.09
Undecided	39.41 (20.27)	18.26 (14.66)	12.39	<.001	1.20
Supporters	61.60 (24.60)	48.17 (25.22)	25.73	<.001	0.54
Diehard Supporters	86.24 (18.05)	82.45 (18.28)	0.88	.35	0.21
Mean	**37.99 (34.63)**	**27.94 (32.93)**			
Dominance	**Civil**	**Uncivil**	***F***	***p***	***d***
Diehard Opponents	53.23 (34.22)	45.47 (36.38)	5.08	.03	0.22
Opponents	58.21 (31.25)	63.64 (31.56)	1.46	.23	-0.17
Undecided	68.59 (21.54)	63.21 (27.91)	0.38	.54	0.22
Supporters	80.99 (19.94)	81.39 (16.11)	0.01	.92	-0.02
Diehard Supporters	88.02 (15.30)	92.09 (11.00)	0.48	.49	-0.31
Mean	**67.66 (30.44)**	**64.50 (33.38)**			
Honesty	**Civil**	**Uncivil**	***F***	***p***	***d***
Diehard Opponents	6.85 (13.77)	6.06 (14.58)	0.10	.75	0.06
Opponents	18.93 (19.51)	20.55 (25.38)	0.25	.62	-0.07
Undecided	54.55 (27.29)	36.05 (23.62)	8.97	.003	0.72
Supporters	68.39 (23.27)	70.78 (24.70)	0.78	.38	-0.10
Diehard Supporters	90.73 (13.5)	93.50 (10.58)	0.44	.51	-0.23
Mean	**41.77 (36.98)**	**37.92 (38.66)**			

The same trend was less apparent with perceived dominance and honesty. Omnibus analyses predicting perceived dominance and honesty yielded main effects of political stance, *F*s $\geq$ 56.97, *p*s < .001, $\eta_p^2 \geq .231$, but no main effect of Trump's response, *F*s $\leq$ 1.56, *p*s $\geq$ .162, η_p^2s $\leq$ .003. For perceived dominance, there was also no interaction, $F(4,758) = 1.75$, $p = .136$, $\eta_p^2 = .009$, whereas for honesty there was, $F(4,727) = 2.63$, $p = .033$, $\eta_p^2 = .014$. The locus of the honesty interaction was people who were on the fence with regards to Trump, who judged him to be more honest after reading civil tweets. For all other groups, civility did not affect perceived

honesty. That is, Trump's civility influenced how warm he seemed, but generally not how dominant or honest.

To test which attribute mediated the effect of civility on approval, we used post-test approval as the dependent variable (because we did not have pre-test scores on the mediators to allow for a meaningful comparison between the mediators and change in approval). A bias corrected bootstrapped moderated mediation analysis found that perceived warmth, but not dominance or honesty, mediated the effect of incivility on public approval (see Table 12). The civility → perceived warmth → public approval process was at play across the political spectrum, and strongest for Trump supporters (evidenced by a significant index of moderated mediation).

Table 12. Uncivil tweets reduced public approval of President Trump in part because they made him seem less warm, but no more or less dominant or honest (Study 5). Numbers represent mediation statistics (civility → attribute → approval) for each of three political groups (*M* +/- 1 *SD*) from a bootstrapped moderated mediation model. Bolded numbers are significant.

Political Stance		**Mediation B [95%CI]**		
Label	**Score**	**Perceived Warmth**	**Perceived Dominance**	**Perceived Honesty**
Trump opponents	-1.81	**3.01 [0.48, 5.88]**	0.75 [-0.38, 2.53]	0.26 [-3.71, 4.37]
Neutral	-0.33	**5.57 [3.17, 8.85]**	0.14 [-0.54, 1.05]	-0.90 [-4.26, 2.48]
Trump supporters	1.17	**8.13 [4.13, 13.42]**	-0.47 [-1.28, 0.09]	-2.06 [-6.65, 2.59]
Index of Moderated Mediation		**1.71 [0.20, 3.50]**	-0.41[-1.08, 0.01]	-0.78 [-2.57, 1.16]

Costs of incivility and/or benefits of civility? To test whether incivility cost President Trump, and whether it depended on the stance of the observer, we conducted a 2 (approval: pre-tweet, post-tweet; within subjects) × 5 (stance toward Trump; between subjects) mixed model ANOVA within the uncivil condition. We reproduced the already-established main effect of stance, $F(4,380) = 775.75$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .891$. A main effect of approval did not reach

significance, $F(1,380) = 0.17$, $p = .684$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$, nor did the interaction, $F(4,380) = 0.46$, $p = .765$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$, meaning that incivility did not cost President Trump public approval.

On the other hand, civility did benefit President Trump. We found significant main effect of stance, $F(4,382) = 824.97$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .896$, but now also a main effect of approval, $F(1,382) = 43.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .103$, and an interaction, $F(4,382) = 8.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .085$. Civility boosted approval among Trump's opponents and centrists, Fs ≥ 6.82, ps $\leq .009$, ds ≥ 0.63, but not among his supporters, Fs ≤ 2.51, ps $\geq .114$, $-0.14 \leq d$s ≤ 0.19 (see Figure 7).

We tested the *Hatred Variant* of *Red Meat Hypothesis* by using stance toward the targets of Trump's tweets as the potential moderator. The *Hatred Variant* would predict that a 2 (Trump's civility) × 5 (stance toward his targets) ANOVA, predicting change in approval of President Trump, would yield an interaction. Indeed, a marginal main effect of stance, $F(4,762) = 2.35$, $p = .053$, $\eta_p^2 = .012$, and a main effect of Trump's civility, $F(1,762) = 20.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .026$, were qualified by an interaction, $F(4,762) = 9.03$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .045$. Simple main effects showed a strong preference for civility over incivility among the three most moderate groups, a marginal preference for incivility among diehard opponents of the targets, and no effect among diehard supporters (see Table 10). The penultimate effect lends marginal support for the *Hatred Variant* of the *Red Meat Hypothesis*. However, this result should be considered in light of two previous studies producing nulls trending in the opposite direction.

Voting intention. Civility slightly boosted voter intention among those who were undecided about Trump. A 2 (Trump's civility) × 5 (stance toward Trump) ANOVA, predicting voting intention, yielded a main effect of stance, $F(4,761) = 1099.84$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .853$, a marginal main effect of Trump's Civility, $F(1,761) = 2.73$, $p = .099$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$, and a marginal interaction, $F(4,761) = 1.98$, $p = .096$, $\eta_p^2 = .010$. Simple main effects were null for all groups

($ps \geq .268$) except undecided individuals, who expressed a 13% greater likelihood of voting for Trump in 2020 after reading civil tweets ($M = 42\%$ chance, $SD = 16\%$) than after reading uncivil tweets ($M = 29\%$, $SD = 27\%$), $F(1,761) = 6.36$, $p = .012$, $d = 0.59$. Among diehard opponents ($M = 1\%$), opponents ($M = 7\%$), supporters ($M = 76\%$), and diehard supporters ($M = 98$), civility did not affect voting intention.

Discussion

A third experiment involving tweets by President Trump again supported the *Montagu Principle* and failed to provide evidence for the *Red Meat Hypothesis*. Civility boosted support for President Trump among moderates and his opponents, but not among his supporters. Meanwhile, exposure to incivility did not alter support for President Trump relative to baseline.

Study 3's sample of diehard Trump supporters was small, and that in Study 4 was larger but recruited in a suboptimal manner. A strength of Study 5 was the recruitment of a sizeable sample of diehard Trump supporters using a more optimal method (pre-screening questions). General convergence in the findings from Studies 3-4 with those from Study 5 provides greater reason for confidence that the *Montagu Principle* holds even in the Trump era. A second strength of Study 5 was introducing an issue that is of paramount importance to voters—immigration. Studies 3-4 had relied on less central issues, leaving open the possibility that incivility might benefit President Trump when it comes to central issues, even if it did not help him with less central issues. The results of the current study, however, did not support this idea, and instead further extended support for the *Montagu Principle*. A third strength was the inclusion of pre-test measures of approval, which permitted the most stringent test of whether civility benefits and/or incivility costs a speaker public favor. We found that civility was beneficial but incivility was not costly. A fourth strength of Study 4 was the inclusion of voting intention; the findings showed

that incivility may reduce the likelihood that moderates will vote to re-elect President Trump in 2020.

One reason why the civil tweets may have had a greater impact than the uncivil ones is that the uncivil tweets were real and typical for President Trump whereas the civil tweets were out of character. It is possible that Americans have come to expect incivility out of President Trump, and are thus unmoved by seeing more of it. For this reason, one limitation of the present study (and Studies 2-5 more generally) is the focus on the single politician, President Trump. Many Americans may have already made up their minds about President Trump, one way or another. This could be especially the case for Trump supporters; they might have accepted his incivility and decided to support him for other reasons.

Another limitation is that none of the studies so far has tested the possibility that liberals may prefer incivility to civility under some conditions. With political power squarely in conservative hands in the U.S. at this moment in time, liberals (and other lower power groups) may feel threatened and prefer incivility from their political leaders in the name of resistance. We address both of these possibilities in Study 6.

Study 6: Fictitious Political Speech

We tested whether reading an uncivil or civil speech by a fictitious member of the U.S. Congress altered public support for the speaker among the politician's co-partisans. To allow for the possibility that the support deficit resulting from incivility might be weaker, or reversed, among people who identify strongly with the politician's political party (i.e. the *Red Meat Hypothesis*) we included an individual differences measure of political identity strength. To test the boundaries of the souring of public sentiment, we asked participants about their feelings

toward the two major political parties in the U.S. (as a whole) and their feelings about the state and direction of the country.

Method

Participants. In August 2017, we recruited 1385 American adults (18+ years old) on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (n = 587) and Crowdflower (n = 798; a crowdsourcing website like Mechanical Turk). After excluding 136 political independents (see below), the final sample was N = 1249. Each participant received $0.30-$0.50. Demographically, the sample spanned much of the lifespan, ranging from 18 to 77 years old (M = 36.7, SD =12.6) and was gender-balanced (48.8% male). Ethnically, the sample was predominantly White (76%), with minorities of people identifying as Black (9%), Asian (8%), Hispanic (6%), and American Indian (1%).

Procedure. Participants reported their demographics, which included questions about their political identity, then completed a filler task[2] before reading a political speech by their co-partisan member of Congress. The speech was either uncivil or civil. They then reported their level of satisfaction with the country, the speaker, and the two major political parties, before completing a manipulation check, and receiving debriefing.

Political identity. A party identification question asked, "How do you identify politically?" Response options were *Democrat*, *Republican*, and *Something else*. If participants selected one of the two political parties, a political identity strength question automatically appeared, asking, "How strongly do you identify with this party?" Response options were 2 (*slightly*), 3 (*moderately*), and 4 (*very much*)[3]. If, on the other hand, participants selected

[2] The filler task was intended to manipulate participants' partisan vs. patriotic identity (it involved writing about a time that made participants feel proud to be an American/partisan). A manipulation check that they completed immediately afterwards found that the manipulation was unsuccessful. For the present purposes, this rendered the writing task effectively a filler task.

[3] A limitation of the present study was the moderator, which measured attitude strength rather than attitude intensity. The two are likely correlated: people who identify strongly with a party may also hold extreme positions on issues

Something else to the original question, the survey asked: "If you had to say which way you tend to lean politically, would it be more Democrat or Republican?" Response options were *lean Democrat*, *uncertain/don't know*, and *lean Republican*. We scored participants who leaned one way or another as having a political identity strength score of 1. Participants who indicated that they were uncertain/didn't know about which party they preferred (n = 136 or 9.8%) were not shown a political speech (because the speaker would not have shared their party identity), and are therefore dropped from all further analyses. Cell ns ranged from 88 to 203.

Speech manipulation. Participants read remarks delivered by their (fictitious) member of Congress, Senator Williams. The online survey matched the political party of the speaker to that of the participant so that Senator Williams and participants were always co-partisans. For Republican participants, the instructions were, "Read the following transcript of a speech by a Republican member of Congress, Senator Williams. We will ask you questions about it afterwards." For Democratic participants, *Republican* was replaced with *Democrat*.

The uncivil and civil speeches had similar content—a description of two competing proposals to improve infrastructure, a critique of the opposing party's proposal, and a signal of willingness to debate the matter—but delivered in vastly different ways. Whereas the uncivil speech included insults, accusations of deceit, overstatement, certainty, informal address, and directness, the civil speech included affirmations of common purpose and friendship with competitors, hedging, formal address, and indirect speech.

Uncivil speech. For Republican [Democrat] participants, the speech was as follows:

> I know for certain that it's time to invest in our infrastructure—bridges, roads, airports. Radical Democrats [Republicans] have put forward a proposal to make this happen. Independent experts looked at your proposal and predicted that 3 million people would lose their jobs. And the experts say that the projects would be over-budget. Shameful! Chuck, Nancy, and the rest of you slimy Democrats [Mitch, Paul, and the rest of you slimy Republicans] across the aisle: we appreciate that you at least pretend to share an interest

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and toward politicians. However, the two are not the same. Studies 3-5 used measures of attitude intensity; the results from this and those studies generally converged.

> in improving our nation's infrastructure. However, you are dead wrong about how to make it happen. My proposal would go further to create working class jobs and get America rebuilt under-budget. Sure. We can debate this in the open. I'm willing to let you run your mouths.

Civil speech. For Republican [Democrat] participants, the speech was as follows:

> We believe that it's time to invest in our infrastructure—bridges, roads, airports. Our Democratic [Republican] colleagues have put forward a proposal to make this happen. Independent experts looked at the proposal and predicted that 3 million people would lose their jobs. And the experts say that the projects would be over-budget. Mr. Schumer, Ms. Pelosi, [Mr. McConnell, Mr. Ryan] and the rest of our friends and colleagues from across the aisle: we appreciate that we share an interest in improving our nation's infrastructure. However, we respectfully disagree about how to make it happen. Our proposal would go further to create working class jobs and get America rebuilt under-budget. Let's debate this in the open. We are interested in what you have to say.

Approval of speaker. Participants were asked to "Grade Senator Williams on his job performance" on a 13-point grading scale anchored at 0 (*F*), 1 (*D*-), 2 (*D*), 3 (*D*+), 4 (*C*-), 5 (*C*), 6 (*C*+), 7 (*B*-), 8 (*B*), 9 (*B*+), 10 (*A*-), 11 (*A*), and 12 (*A*+).

Approval of political parties. Participants also graded Republicans and Democrats (as whole entities) on their job performance using the same scale grading scale as above. These measures would allow us to test whether the uncivil insults stick to their targets, and/or reflect poorly upon the speaker's party.

National satisfaction. To test whether incivility has even more systemic effects, perhaps by reducing overall confidence in the government, we included a measure of satisfaction with the state and direction of the country. Participants responded to two questions, the wording of which was taken from Gallup and McClatchy-Marist polls, respectively). The first question asked, "In general, how satisfied are you with the way things are going in the United States at this time?" Responses were on a 7-point scale anchored at -3 (*very dissatisfied*), -2 (*dissatisfied*), -1 (*slightly dissatisfied*), 0 (*neutral*), 1 (*slightly satisfied*), 2 (*satisfied*), 3 (*very satisfied*). The second question asked, "In general, thinking about the way things are going in the country, do you feel things are going in the right direction or that things are going in the wrong direction?" Responses were on a 7-point scale anchored at -3 (*wrong direction*), 0 (*neutral*), and 3 (*right direction*).

Responses from the two scales converged strongly, $r = .76$, $p < .001$, so we aggregated them to form a single measure of national satisfaction.

Manipulation check. The question asked, "In the speech you just read, how polite was Senator Williams?" Responses were on a 7-point scale anchored at -3 (*very rude*), -2 (*rude*), -1 (*slightly rude*), 0 (*neither polite nor rude*), 1 (*slightly polite*), 2 (*polite*), and 3 (*very polite*).

Results

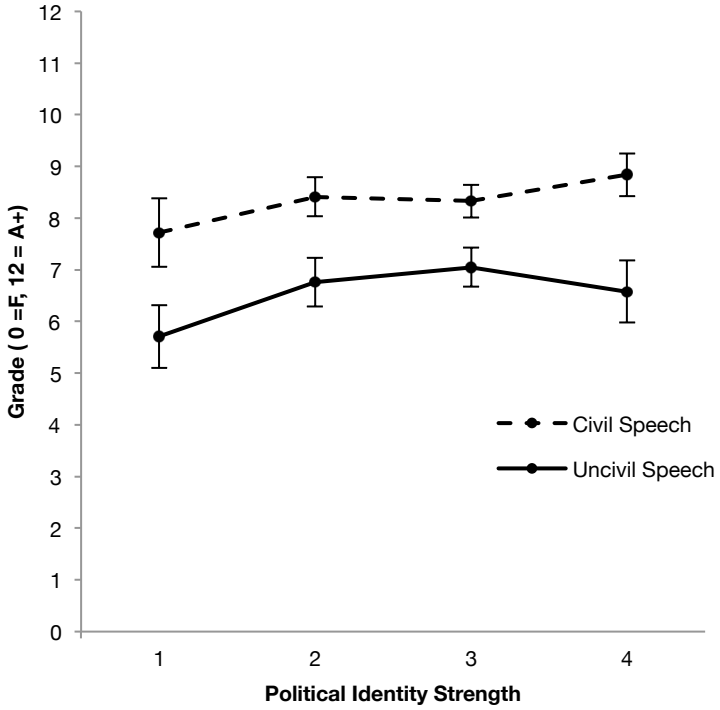
Manipulation check. The manipulation was successful. Politeness ratings were considerably higher in the civil condition ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.15$) than in the uncivil condition ($M = -0.85$, $SD = 1.63$), $t(1141) = 32.64$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.92$.

Feelings towards the speaker. We tested whether reading a civil or uncivil speech by one's own politician changed how participants evaluated their representative, and whether the size and/or direction of the change depended on the political identity strength (and political party) of the participant. A 2 (civility: rude, polite) × 4 (political identity strength) × 2 (political party: Democrat, Republican) between subjects ANOVA, predicting approval of the speaker, yielded a main effects of civility, $F(1,1128) = 86.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .071$ (civil > uncivil), a main effect for political identity strength, $F(3,1128) = 7.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .020$ (strong identifiers > weak identifiers; linear trend $F(1,1140) = 15.36$, $p < .001$), and no other effects, Fs ≤ 1.66, ps ≥ .17, $\eta_p^2 \leq .004$, meaning that the negative effect of incivility on approval was uniform across the various political identities, and that Democrats and Republicans did not differ from one another.

To illustrate how civility boosted and political identity strength was associated with positive evaluations of the speaker, we re-ran the ANOVA without political party as a factor. Figure 8 shows how grades of the politician were higher after reading a civil speech. Across all four political identity strengths (moderates to the hardcore base), participants evaluated their

politician more favorably when he was civil (versus uncivil), simple main effects for the four identity strengths Fs $\geq$ 22.97, ps $<$ .001, ds $\geq$ 0.50. To put the effect in concrete terms, civility boosted the speakers' grade by approximately two increments, from approximately a C+ to a B, and this improvement occurred across the political spectrum.

Figure 8. Evaluations of a fictitious politician of a co-partisan politician after the politician delivered a civil or uncivil speech (Study 6). Regardless of how strongly participants identified with their political party, incivility cost the politician in his public approval. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.



Feelings towards the political parties. Next we tested how far the negative feelings resulting from incivility extended by first examining whether the speaker's civility influenced feelings toward the two major political parties. We ran a 2 (civility) × 4 (political identity strength) × 2 (political party) between subjects ANOVA, predicting evaluations of one's own political party. And we ran a similar ANOVA predicting evaluations of the opponent political

party. Table 13 displays the results. Aside from a predictable "myside bias"—a main effect of political identity strength (with strong political identifiers evaluating their own party more positively, linear trend $F(1,1142) = 91.27$, $p < .001$, and the opponent party more negatively, linear trend $F(1,1141) = 24.76$, $p < .001$, than weak political identifiers)—no other robust effects emerged. A marginal effect of civility on the reputation of one's own party reflected approval being higher after the civil speech ($M = 7.17$, $SD = 6.75$) than after the uncivil speech ($M = 6.75$, $SD = 2.96$). In sum, incivility harmed the reputation of the speaker, did minor damage to the reputation of the politician's own party, and did little to the reputation of the party under assault.

Table 13. Inferential statistics testing whether a speaker's civility influences evaluations of two target political parties (co-partisan, opponent) and whether it depends on the political identity of the judge (Study 6).

	Own Party			**Other Party**		
	F	***p***	η_p^2	***F***	***p***	η_p^2
Political Identity Strength	35.10	<.001	.085	38.91	<.001	.094
Party	1.75	.19	.002	0.50	.48	<.001
Civility	3.67	.06	.003	1.09	.30	.001
Identity Strength × Party	1.96	.12	.005	2.14	.09	.006
Identity Strength × Civility	0.96	.41	.003	1.02	.38	.003
Civility × Party	0.06	.82	<.001	0.25	.62	<.001
Identity Strength × Civility × Party	0.19	.91	<.001	0.06	.98	<.001

National satisfaction. We tested whether civility had even more systemic effects by making Americans feel that the country is moving in the right direction, and found little evidence of systemic effects. A 2 (civility) × 4 (political identity strength) × 2 (political party) between subjects ANOVA, predicting national satisfaction, yielded main effects of political identity strength and party, along with their interaction (which are of tangential interest). While we did not find an effect of civility or any of its 2-way interactions, we did find a marginal 3-way interaction (Table 14). To decompose the marginal interaction, we ran civility × political identity

strength ANOVAs for Republicans and Democrats separately. Among Democrats, neither civility nor its interaction with political identity strength were significant, Fs ≤ 0.31, ps ≥ .58, η_p^2 < .001. Among Republicans, we found no main effect of civility, $F(1,403) = 0.73$, $p = .398$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$, but did find a marginal interaction, $F(3,403) = 2.51$, $p = .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .018$. Examining the simple main effects, we found that strongly identified Republicans reported greater national satisfaction after reading a civil (vs. uncivil) speech, $F(1,403) = 5.48$, $p = .02$, $d = 0.62$, and that no other Republican group's national satisfaction was affected by civility, Fs ≤ 1.77, ps ≥ .18, $|d|$s ≤ .28. In summary, we found almost no evidence that civility affected feelings about the direction of the country.

Table 14. Inferential statistics testing whether a speaker's civility influences feelings about whether the country was heading in the right directions (Study 6).

	National Satisfaction		
	F	***p***	η_p^2
Political Identity Strength	8.10	<.001	.021
Party	217.14	<.001	.161
Civility	0.20	.66	<.001
Identity Strength × Party	11.65	<.001	.030
Identity Strength × Civility	1.69	.17	.004
Party × Civility	1.11	.29	.001
Identity Strength × Party × Civility	2.46	.06	.006

Discussion

In a fictitious scenario, distal from the current presidency, incivility cost a politician public approval with his supporters, regardless of how ardent they were in their support, or which party they supported. Even hyper-partisans showed displeasure with their politician for being uncivil toward a political opponent. Incivility had a narrow impact, primarily souring participants' feelings toward the speaker, slightly diminishing the reputation of their party, and

doing little to affect the reputation of the political party under assault, or their level of satisfaction with the country as a whole. These results converge with those from Studies 1-5 to lend strong support for the *Montagu Principle*.

General Discussion

Previous studies (e.g., Carraro & Castelli, 2010; Ng & Detenber, 2005; Tyler & Blader, 2000) demonstrated how incivility generally damages a speaker's reputation. No previous research, however, had investigated whether the reputational costs of incivility occur during hyper-partisan character assaults. We introduced the *Montagu Principle*, which states that civility is beneficial and never costly to the reputation of the speaker. To allow for strong inferences (Platt, 1964), we tested whether the *Montagu Principle* applies in hyper-competitive contexts by studying how civility and incivility plays out in the domain of politics.

Consistent with the *Montagu Principle*, we found that the relative degree of civility and incivility in Congressional speech over 20 years predicted subsequent Congressional approval; approval of Congress also predicted the subsequent civility of Congressional speech (Study 1). Study 2 similarly used a longitudinal panel design, and tested whether presidential approval tracked with President Trump's rolling average number of insults levied on Twitter over his first year in office. Replicating the findings of Study 1, Study 2 revealed a bidirectional relationship between civility and approval ratings: As civility increased, so too did President Trump's approval ratings, especially among conservatives (a result at odds with the *Red Meat Hypothesis*).

We found similar support for the *Montagu Principle* in more controlled experiments as well. In Study 3, we found that exposure to examples of President Trump's real civil or uncivil tweets led to improved approval ratings for everyone except his most fervent supporters, whose

opinions were unchanged. Study 4 examined whether people would be more likely to approve of President Trump's incivility when they are explicitly made aware that he was reacting in retaliation to a vicious attack from political opponents. Even under this circumstance, we found support for the *Montagu Principle*: People, including his diehard supporters, approved more of a pivot to another topic than responding to his adversaries with retaliatory taunts.

Study 5 found that President Trump's uncivil tweets did not lower, but his civil tweets raised his approval. Civility also boosted intentions to vote for President Trump in 2020, especially among moderates. Studies 3-5 also yielded insights into the processes that lead to the Montagu effect. Exposure to an example of President Trump's civil behavior was associated with stronger perceptions of warmth, but not dominance or honesty. An increased perception of President Trump's warmth in turn was related to increased approval.

Finally, Study 6 tested the *Montagu Principle* using hypothetical candidates, rather than real world examples. Even extreme partisans reacted with disapproval to uncivil discourse on the part of their candidate, an effect that most strongly affected their feelings about the speaker, but weakly carried over to affect their perceptions of their own party and the country as a whole. Importantly, Study 6 revealed that a preference for civility in political contexts is not partisan; liberals and conservatives both prefer that their party representatives treat their opponents with civility. Finally, each of the experiments also tested whether civil or uncivil behavior affected participants' impressions of the targets of the (in)civility. Not only does incivility harm the actor's reputation, it also does little to harm to the target of incivility. In other words, politicians take a hit to their own approval, and gain no advantage in how people perceive their opponents when they engage in uncivil behavior. Taken together, these resulted yielded strong support for the *Montagu Principle*.

The *Montagu Principle* is derivative of the idea that people evaluate verbal communication for more than one quality. People may judge speakers for the value of their message, approving of people who share useful, interesting, accurate information, and disapprove of those who share useless, uninteresting, false information. The additional insight that forms the foundation of the *Montagu Principle* is that people also judge speakers for their mode of delivery. People may see others as having a duty to deliver information gently, in a way that shows respect for the subject of their communication and allows that person to save face, even when the information being delivered is less than flattering. An implicit recognition of the fundamental need to feel respected, accepted, and valued (Baumeiser & Leary, 1995; DeCremer & Blader, 2006) may underlie this prescriptive norm.

"Big Two" theories suggest that social life is about "getting along" (warmth) and "getting ahead" (dominance). A key insight from Big Two studies is that warmth is the primary and dominance the secondary of social judgment (Abele & Wojciszke, 2013; Bakan, 1966; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Rosenberg et al., 1968; Trapnell & Wiggins, 1990). This means that if the goal is social approval, the most important quality to exude is warmth. Our studies showed that civility made a person seem more warm, and did not change how dominant or honest they seemed. This pattern of attributions helps explain why civility was beneficial and never costly.

In addition to testing whether civility boosted approval in general, we also tested whether there are important boundary conditions on this effect. We were especially interested in the possibility that extreme partisans might enjoy seeing their political rivals taken down by their standard bearer (the *Red Meat Hypothesis*). The *Red Meat Hypothesis* predicted that political stance would yield a crossover interaction, with civility enhancing the reputation of the speaker with moderates, and diminishing the reputation of the speaker among his/her hyper-partisan

followers. Across one observational and four experimental studies, however, we observed either no interaction or open-jaw interactions. Incivility either decreased or did not change —and never decreased—social approval for the speaker, even when the observers were diehard Trump supporters. Diehard Trump supporters may simply be indifferent to Trump's incivility; perhaps they once disapproved of it and acclimated to it over time.

We anticipated that incivility might make a politician seem dominant, which would in turn boost approval with his/her base. However, we found little evidence that civility changes how dominant the speaker seems; it only affected his/her perceived warmth. Given the primacy of warmth over dominance in social judgment, this pattern of attributions helps explain why *Red* Meat effects were not evident.

Our confidence in our findings in support of the *Montagu Principle* and against the *Red Meat Hypothesis* is bolstered by a number of considerations. First, hypotheses were tested under conditions that were maximally favorable for disconfirming the *Montagu Principle*, and to support the *Red Meat Hypothesis*, yet we found the reverse pattern of results. Second, we tested hypotheses using methods that allowed us to maximize external validity by examining actual political speech (i.e., transcripts of the Congressional Record and the president's actual tweets), in concert with maximizing internal validity by running controlled experiments, and in most cases, maximizing mundane validity and experimental realism by garnering people's reactions to real world and contemporary examples of incivility.

The absence of evidence of *Red Meat* effects in our studies does not prove that they do not exist. Future research might examine whether political diehards experience some kind of ambivalence between desire for red meat and a desire for civility. Another possibility worthy of investigation is that some sub-set of hyper-partisans respond positively, and others negatively, to

political incivility. This possibility became apparent in an email that we received from a participant in Study 3. The participant contacted us out of the blue to explain why he devours the red meat in Trump's uncivil tweets: "I love how easily Pres. Trump manipulates progressives, Marxists, terrorists, corrupt politicians and unscrupulous journalists with his Twitter rants. They are all so precious as the sophomorically wet themselves and throw tantrums..." Future research might explore individual differences in authoritarianism, sadism, or perceived economic or other kinds of threat might differentiate hyper-partisans that approve and disapprove of incivility.

Taken together, however, we now know more than we did before about how people react to civility and incivility in politicized contexts. Our results indicate that incivility comes with large social costs and seldom if ever yields benefits, even when negative partisanship is high. These results are somewhat surprising, given how frequently political discourse can devolve into name calling and worse. With regards to the 2016 U.S. election, our findings suggest that Donald Trump's 2016 campaign for the U.S. Presidency was successful not because, but in spite, of his name-calling, threats to imprison opponents, racist and sexist slurs, and braggadocio. Learning the correct lessons from Trumpism is critical for future political campaigns and a strained democracy.

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