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# Using "Balanced Pragmatism" in Political Discussions Increases Cross-Partisan Respect

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Synthesizing research on wisdom and a real-world practitioner intervention, we develop and test a strategy for presenting political views that fosters cross-partisan respect. This strategy of balanced pragmatism combines two aspects of "wise reasoning": balancing multiple interests and seeking pragmatic solutions. Studies 1–5 ($N = 2,846$) demonstrate that participants respected outgroup political elites more when they used balanced pragmatism versus other forms of messaging. Studies 6–8 ($N = 671$) extend the usefulness of balanced pragmatism to everyday political disagreements: cross-partisan comments about divisive issues (i.e., guns and immigration) generated more respect when they used balanced pragmatism versus logical analysis. Strikingly, people were as willing to discuss politics with opponents who used balanced pragmatism as they were with ingroup members. Balanced pragmatism appears to improve cross-partisan respect by making opponents seem more moral and rational. Results highlight connections between political psychology and wisdom research and illustrate the fruitfulness of scientist–practitioner collaborations.

***Public Significance Statement***

The United States is facing historical levels of partisan hate and multiple political crises that demand action. There are many calls for ordinary Americans and politicians to engage respectfully with each other, but concrete strategies are needed to help bridge divides. This work seeks to provide one strategy by connecting different domains of psychology—morality, politics, and the science of wisdom—and also by leveraging insights from a real-world practitioner organization. The strategy we describe—balanced pragmatism—offers a general approach to presenting political views to foster respect from political opponents. We show how both political elites and ordinary Americans can employ this strategy to build cross-partisan respect.

*Keywords:* wisdom, politics, morality, political polarization

*Supplemental materials:* https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0001554.supp

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Partisan animosity has reached historical highs in the United States (Boxell et al., 2020). Recent work has found promising strategies for bridging this divide (Hartman et al., 2022), including correcting false perceptions (Lees & Cikara, 2020; Reininger et al., 2020; Ruggeri et al., 2021) and using the language that appeals to the "other sides'" values (Feinberg & Willer, 2015). Although these findings are important, people need additional strategies to encourage cross-partisan respect in daily discourse. Political tolerance is a two-way street, involving seeing the best in others while also making it easier for them to see the best in ourselves. Integrating emerging models of "wise reasoning" (Grossmann et al., 2020) with work from practitioner organization, we develop an approach to discussing political dilemmas and contentious issues that can help partisans appear more moral and rational—balanced pragmatism. We test whether employing balanced pragmatism across a variety of contexts can improve perceptions of morality and rationality, thereby fostering respect and willingness to engage among partisans.

## Current Solutions for Presenting Political Views

How can people present their views to encourage respectful discourse? It seems crucial to make yourself seem both moral (Goodwin et al., 2014; Leach et al., 2007) and rational (Kubin et al., 2021) because people seldom like talking with those who seem immoral and irrational. Some strategies to seem moral and rational are obvious, like avoiding personal attacks and not falsely

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Curtis Puryear served as lead for conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, writing–original draft, and writing–review and editing. Kurt Gray served as lead for funding acquisition and served in a supporting role for conceptualization, investigation, methodology, writing–original draft, and writing–review and editing.

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caricaturing the other side. Research also reveals routes to respectful conversations, including receptivity (Minson et al., 2020; Yeomans et al., 2020) and focusing on personal experiences of harm rather than facts (Kubin et al., 2021). To reveal other ways to increase respectful discourse across political divides, it can be useful to look at how bridge-building practitioners are combating political animosity in the field.

The inspiration for this current work is the apparent ability for a video series—"Decision Point"—to increase respect toward cross-partisan political elites. These videos were made by the nonprofit polity and featured on the website of an organization that bridges divides on college campuses, BridgeUSA. These videos featured politicians reasoning through political dilemmas on camera, and although they were initially developed to help voters evaluate the thoughtfulness of political candidates, polity contacted us when they noticed that they also appeared to improve respect for cross-partisan political elites.

When we viewed the videos, we saw links between the kind of reasoning used by politicians and emerging research on the psychology of wisdom. We thought that the Decision Point series nudged politicians to demonstrate "wise reasoning." Wisdom is rooted in motivations to make moral decisions that also require metacognitive processes (Brienza et al., 2018; Grossmann et al., 2020)—like perspective taking and attention to context—and recent work shows people who engage in wise reasoning also hold more positive attitudes toward ideological outgroups (Brienza et al., 2021). We thought that demonstrating wisdom in discussions about political issues could help Americans from the opposing party perceive them as more moral and rational, thereby fostering respect and willingness to engage.

## Wisdom

The pursuit of wisdom is as old as recorded history, as humans have tried to master their emotions, to be impartial, and to strive for a common good (Staudinger & Glück, 2011). This rich history has generated numerous theories and definitions of wisdom among lay people and philosophers. More recently, empirical scientists have tried to identity the key components of wisdom and apply them to topics such as education (Bruya & Ardelt, 2018), leadership (Sternberg, 2007), and conflict resolution (Grossmann et al., 2010). In one synthesis of empirical work, Staudinger and Glück (2011) identified three psychological components of wisdom: cognitive insights into the self, others, and the world; emotion regulation skills such as tolerance for ambiguity; and motivations to improve the well-being of others and the world. A more recent project surveyed wisdom scientists and built a wisdom model based upon the results (Grossmann et al., 2020). Similar to Staudinger and Gluck, this model also posits that wisdom requires motivations to do good (or moral aspirations) and experiential knowledge of how to do good in context (or cultural experience). A key contribution of this recent work was identifying commonly agreed-upon elements of wise reasoning (labeled "perspectival metacognition"), which comprise epistemic humility, dialectical thinking, considering diverse perspectives, and context adaptability.

The present work draws from this rich literature on wisdom, focusing on two key elements of wisdom: balance and pragmatism. These two elements are central to influential models of wisdom, especially Sternbergs' balance theory (Sternberg, 1998) and the extension of this framework to leadership (Sternberg, 2007). These models of wisdom focus on understanding each party's perspective and how to craft a solution given those interests. Though approaches to defining and measuring wisdom have expanded in the past 20 years, we focus on balance and pragmatism because we thought they might be especially relevant to perceptions of political leaders. People want political leaders who listen to and understand the view points of all of their constituents (Gangl, 2003; Hibbing, 2001; Valgarðsson et al., 2021), and people want leaders who can implement policies effectively (Bos & van der Brug, 2010; Hetherington, 1998).

Drawing from existing work (Brienza et al., 2018; Sternberg, 1998), balanced reasoning involves understanding the concerns of multiple parties—especially parties in conflict—and incorporating those concerns into the decision-making process. Balancing multiple perspectives is an important quality for any arbiter of conflict (Gent & Shannon, 2011). It aids conflict resolution by making both sides feel heard, including among romantic partners (Gordon & Chen, 2016) and employees (Lloyd et al., 2015). More recent work illustrates that balancing multiple perspectives is not only important for leaders who manage conflict, but also for the disputants engaged in those conflicts. Signaling receptiveness to political opponents' views fosters more positive evaluations across party lines (Chen et al., 2010; Yeomans et al., 2020). Explicitly weighing the other side's concerns may also counteract prevailing assumptions that political opponents do not share or understand our moral values (Fernbach & Van Boven, 2022; Lees & Cikara, 2021). Thus, balance can signal caring for multiple sides' values—including those that conflict one's own values—which we suggest will make speakers appear more moral. However, balance accomplishes little without action. Work on wisdom—stretching back to Aristotle's concept of phronesis (Kristjánsson et al., 2021)—emphasizes both reasoning about what is good and doing practical good—that is—being pragmatic.

Pragmatism is the ability to implement and adapt solutions to the present context. This definition draws from Sternberg's balance theory of wisdom—which emphases the importance of practical knowledge and the ability craft solutions (Sternberg, 1998). We also draw from key elements of wise reasoning identified by more recent work, including context adaptability and the tendency to look for solutions as situations evolve (Brienza et al., 2018). Wise decision makers understand that superficially similar conflicts can require different solutions depending on the specific language, culture, norms, and other details of the situation (Grossmann et al., 2020). This attention to context and practical solution finding is a core component of interactive problem solving, a technique used in conflict resolution workshops in the Middle East (Kelman, 2008; Rouhana & Kelman, 1994). Beyond catalyzing actual change, focusing on finding workable solutions may reveal one's genuine concern and avoid the appearance of vague, deceptive "bullshitting" (Pennycook et al., 2015) that often characterizes political discussions. By backing concern for multiple perspectives with a focus on practical problem solving, we suggest balanced pragmatism can help partisans appear more moral—overcoming an important obstacle to respect.

Balanced pragmatism may also improve cross-partisan respect and willingness to engage by increasing perceptions of rationality. Appearing rational is important for fostering respect across political divides (Kubin et al., 2021). Balancing multiple interests and seeking solutions capable of satisfying those interests in context requires people to engage in metacognitive processes (Grossmann et al., 2020). Balance requires perspective-taking and considering how others interpret issues; pragmatism requires reflecting on whether

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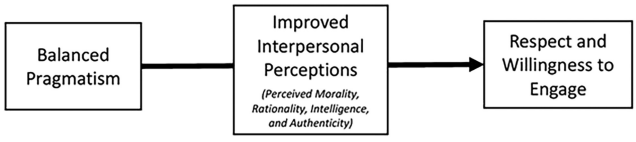
one has considered alternative solutions that could work in the present context (Brienza et al., 2018).

Focusing on pragmatic solutions may also help partisans appear genuinely committed to resolving political issues. People who focus exclusively on seeing both sides of an issue often seem like they are simply trying to appeal to everyone and avoid conflict, which makes them appear inauthentic (Silver et al., 2021; Silver & Shaw, 2022). Voters are also often skeptical that vague, campaign promises will be followed with concrete action (Adams et al., 2011). Signaling ones' ability to find pragmatic solutions may alleviate doubts that elites or ordinary Americans intend to resolve issues, potentially making them appear more authentic.

Employing balanced pragmatism to solve political dilemmas and issues may help political opponents appear more moral and rational to each other, fostering more cross-partisan respect and willingness to engage. We propose it accomplishes this by combining concern for competing interests with seeking solutions that satisfy these interests in context. Because it requires caring for others' interests and seeking solutions without sacrifice one's own convictions, we expect it to make people seem moral. Furthermore, since balancing multiple interests in social contexts requires reflection and understanding, we theorize that balanced pragmatism will also increase perceived rationality. Perceived morality (Goodwin et al., 2014) and rationality (Kubin et al., 2021) each shape people's willingness to engage respectfully with others in political context. Pragmatism may also help elites and ordinary Americans appear genuinely committed to resolving political issues, and emerging work suggests that perceived authenticity may promote political engagement (Lee et al., 2020; Montgomery, 2017). Whether perceived authenticity promotes respect beyond perceived moral traits (e.g., honesty)—which are already established to be crucial factors in social evaluations (Leach et al., 2007)—is unclear. We test balanced pragmatism's power to increase perceptions of morality and rationality, thereby fostering respect and willingness to engage with political opponents (see Figure 1), while also exploring whether pragmatism promotes perceived authenticity.

We suggest combining balance and pragmatism will be more effective at building cross-partisan respect than employing either balance or pragmatism alone. Though balance and pragmatism may often go hand-in-hand (e.g., practical decision making often requires understanding and considering what people on both sides of an issue want), it is also possible to employ one and not the other (e.g., emphasizing the importance of addressing both sides' concerns without ever discussing practical solutions). We expect being either balanced or pragmatic will likely help foster respect, but we also expect messages that employ both balance and pragmatism to foster the most respect overall. Though we suspect that perceptions of balance and pragmatism will often overlap, we also expect balance and pragmatism to each have unique effects upon respect to some degree.

**Figure 1**
*Proposed Model of How Balanced Pragmatism Increases Cross-Partisan Respect*




## The Present Studies

We tested whether employing balanced pragmatism improves interpersonal perceptions of political opponents (e.g., perceptions of rationality and morality), thereby fostering respect and willingness to engage with opposing political elites and ordinary Americans. Studies 1–3 were directly inspired by the Decision Point videos and focused on shifting perceptions of figures known to be especially targeted with partisan hatred—congress members of the opposing party (Whittington, 2019). We tested whether watching politicians using balanced pragmatism to solve political dilemmas could build cross-partisan respect and engagement more than other typical presentations of politicians. Study 4 then moved beyond these videos to test whether political elites could signal balanced pragmatism and increase cross-partisan respect in short quotes. Study 5 tested whether balance and pragmatism each predicted respect for politicians using a sample of 120 posts on social media from current members of the U.S. congress. Studies 6–8 then tested whether ordinary Americans could successfully build cross-partisan respect and engagement by incorporating balanced pragmatism into comments about divisive political issues. All studies were preregistered.

The present studies examined multiple types of interpersonal perceptions—including perceived rationality, morality, authenticity, and intelligence—which we thought may explain how balanced pragmatism increases cross-partisan respect. Before examining whether each of these perceptions uniquely predicted cross-partisan respect, we first tested whether participants actually treated these perceptions as distinct constructs via exploratory factor analyses. We thought this was important to examine, especially since rationality is often considered a moral trait (Stahl et al., 2016). The results of these factor analyses showed that rationality and morality consistently loaded on the same factor, but intelligence and authenticity loaded on separate factors. Following these results, we decided to combine our measures of rationality and morality. This did not substantively change our statistical inferences (i.e., experimental effects did not become significant only after combining the morality and rationality measures), but it suggests that perceived rationality and morality are closely related, at least in political evaluations. We report the results of these factor analyses in detail in the online supplemental materials.

The present research focused primarily upon whether balanced pragmatism fostered cross-partisan respect, but most of our studies also explored whether balanced pragmatism improved respect among ingroup members. We thought this was important for understanding how useful balanced pragmatism is as a strategy for fostering respect overall. After all, anyone contemplating how to communicate their political views is likely concerned about how political allies will respond as well. And it is possible that balanced pragmatism builds respect among outgroup members, while simply arguing for your own side is better at gaining the respect of ingroup members. Studies 1, 2, 3, and 5 each contain results exploring how people respond to balanced and pragmatic messages from ingroup politicians.

### *Transparency and Openness*

All studies were preregistered. All data sets, analysis scripts, study stimuli, measurement scales, and preregistration documents are

available on our Open Science Framework (OSF) page (https://osf.io/376ak/). Preregistered, confirmatory hypotheses predicted that balanced pragmatism would increase cross-partisan respect and willingness to engage across our studies. We had no preregistered, confirmatory hypotheses for ratings of ingroup politicians. Effects upon interpersonal perceptions (i.e., rationality, morality, authenticity, and intelligence) were not always listed as confirmatory in our preregistrations. Specifically, effects of balanced pragmatism upon perceived rationality were confirmatory in Studies 1 and 2. Effects upon perceived intelligence—a trait that is related to, but distinct from rationality—were confirmatory in Studies 3, 4, and 8. Effects upon perceived morality were confirmatory in Studies 3, 4, and 8. Since morality and rationality loaded onto the same factor in Studies 1 and 2, this caused some of our analyses to deviate from our preregistered hypotheses. Other exploratory analyses are explicitly labeled as such in the main text.

## Study 1

This study examined whether watching interviews with politicians using balanced pragmatism (i.e., videos from the "Decision Point" series developed by a practitioner organization) improved cross-partisan respect compared to campaign advertisements. Both types of videos involved politicians explaining their beliefs, but the Decision Point videos asked them to resolve more specific, contextualized political dilemmas with competing interests. This allowed us to test whether watching videos that should encourage balanced pragmatism were more effective at improving cross-partisan respect than videos in which politicians explained their beliefs without needing to be balanced or pragmatic. We also compared these conditions to a more neutral baseline, in which participants read short biographies about each politician—from the (arguably) impartial Wikipedia—rather than watching them explain their views. Last, we examined whether increases in respect were driven by perceived morality and rationality (we explore authenticity in Studies 2–4).

### Method

#### *Participants*

We recruited 394 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk via CloudResearch.[1] We excluded 18 participants for missing multiple attention checks, leaving a final sample of 376 participants ($M_{age} = 39.89$, $SD_{age} = 12.75$; 175 women, 198 men, two other gender).[2] In all studies (except Studies 4 and 5), all participants identified as either Democrat ($n = 255$) or Republican ($n = 121$). All experiments targeted collecting a minimum of 100 participants per between-subjects condition based on a power analysis for a two-tailed test of two independent means with an effect size of $d = 0.40$, power of .80, and $\alpha = .05$.

#### *Procedure*

Participants were randomly assigned (i.e., between subjects) to either watch videos of politicians solving political dilemmas (the balanced pragmatism condition), watch campaign advertisements, or read biographies about the same politicians. We also included a fourth condition in which participants responded to the same dilemma prior to watching the politician solve it. This gave participants the opportunity to share in the experience of solving the dilemma prior to watching politicians do so. We label this condition "balanced pragmatism with experience."

Our primary analyses focused on the effects of our between-subjects manipulation upon attitudes toward an outgroup politician. However, we also wanted to conduct exploratory analyses of attitudes toward ingroup politicians. Thus, participants watched/read messages from politicians from both parties (i.e., within-subjects). Participants in the balanced pragmatism conditions saw one video featuring a Democrat politician (former U.S. representative Patrick Murphy) and one video featuring a Republican politician (former U.S. representative David Jolly). In the campaign ad condition, participants saw two ads with the same Democrat politician and two ads with the same Republican politician (because the campaign ads were roughly half the length of the balanced pragmatism videos). These politicians were chosen because they were both U.S. representatives with similar levels of public recognition. Participants evaluated each politician immediately after watching the videos/bios for each politician (in the campaign ad condition, participants watch both ads prior to rating each politician). Whether participants saw videos/bios from the Democrat or Republican politician first was randomized for each participant.

#### *Measures*

After each video, participants rated how rational (i.e., "…is rational," "has views that make sense," and "is logical for holding this view," $\alpha = .96$) and moral (i.e., "…is honest," "…is sincere," and "…is trustworthy," $\alpha = .96$) they thought the politician was. They then read the politician's stance on three issues (immigration, abortion, and taxes), each of which were common left-wing and right-wing attitudes (e.g., being prolife vs. prochoice; supporting raising vs. supporting lowering taxes). They then rated how respectful they would be in a conversation with the politician (i.e., "To what extent would you respect [TARGET's] view on [ISSUE]?" "…be considerate of [TARGET's] stance on [ISSUE]," "…try to see things from [TARGET's] point of view," $\alpha = .95$) and how willing they would be to engage with the politician (i.e., "How willing would you be to have a general discussion with [TARGET]," "…interact with [TARGET]," and "…exchange ideas with [TARGET]," $\alpha = .98$). All items used 7-point Likert scales with anchors *not at all* to *very much*.

We also included measures of broader attitudes toward political opponents, such as general political intolerance. However, we observed mixed results for these measures across Studies 1–3, and we listed them under exploratory analyses in our preregistrations.

[1] MTurk workers were recruited through CloudResearch in all studies using filters to block duplicate IP addresses, to block suspicious geocodes, and to verify worker country location. All studies also either included CloudResearch's filter for blocking low-quality participants or used their approved participant list. Participants were also required to have a 95% HIT approval rate.

[2] In all studies we collected data for participants' gender (response options: man, woman, and other), whether participants identified as transgender (response options: yes or no), whether participants identified as Hispanic/Latino (response options: yes or no), and participants' race (response options: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; White; Other). Exact wording of demographic items is provided in the online supplemental materials, and all demographic data is shared on our OSF page.

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We report measures and results for group-level attitudes in the online supplemental materials.

### Balanced Pragmatism Video Materials

Each video from the Decision Point series featured politicians responding to dilemmas that—based on features of the dilemmas and how politicians responded to them—appeared to encourage them to employ balanced pragmatism. Study 3 contains evidence validating this idea. For these reasons, we refer to these videos as the "balanced pragmatism" videos/condition throughout Studies 1–3.

**Balanced Pragmatism Prompts.** The balanced pragmatism videos (i.e., videos from the Decision Point series) showed the politician responding to one of four political dilemmas. Each dilemma asked the respondent to imagine that they were on staff in a presidents' administration and involved solving some social conflict with competing interests that needed a context-specific solution. For example, one dilemma asked the respondent to imagine that they are chair of the presidential transition team. They are asked to resolve a controversy in which a problematic video surfaces for a top job candidate criticizing a signature policy of the president elect, who also happens to be good friends with the president elect.

**Politician Responses.** Politician's responses were each roughly one minute long. As an example, one politician's response first recommended dismissing the candidate with the problematic video, but then paused to consider that this candidate is also a personal friend of the president elect (balancing perspectives). They then offered a contextualized solution for how to move forward in light of this information (pragmatism). Specifically, they said that if the president elect still seemed interested in hiring the candidate who had previously criticized their signature policy, then you should find a way to frame this as the president elect being open-minded.

### Comparison of Videos and Bios

Campaign ads were roughly half the length of balanced pragmatism videos (~30 vs. ~60 s long). To control for time spent watching each politician, participants in the balanced pragmatism conditions watched one video for each politician, and participants in the advertisement condition watched two videos for each. Written biographies were adapted from each politician's Wikipedia page. They discussed their early life, education, and political career in roughly 200 words.

## Results

### Confirmatory Predictions and Analysis Strategy

We report our results in three sections, which test different parts of the model depicted in Figure 1: the effects of balanced pragmatism upon our outcomes (i.e., respect and willingness to engage), the effects of balanced pragmatism upon interpersonal perceptions (i.e., morality, rationality, intelligence, and authenticity), and the relationship between our outcomes and interpersonal perception. We also conducted formal tests of mediation via the lavaan package in R (i.e., estimating the indirect effects of balanced pragmatism through interpersonal perceptions). Mediation analyses supported the model in Figure 1, and we report these results in the online supplemental materials. However, given well-documented limitations of cross-sectional mediation analyses (Rohrer, 2018; Yzerbyt et al., 2018), results in the main text report results for each path in the model in Figure 1 piece-by-piece (rather than focusing on estimates of indirect and direct effects).

Our analyses compared the balanced pragmatism condition to the remaining experimental conditions. To do this, we dummy-coded the four experimental conditions (0 vs. 1) with the balanced pragmatism condition as the reference group and regressed our outcomes upon these variables in ordinary least squares regressions. This study contained a version of the balanced pragmatism condition in which participants solved the same dilemmas they watched politicians solve (prior to watching the videos). Hypothesis 2 in our preregistration predicted this would have stronger effects compared to the other balanced pragmatism (in which participants did not solve dilemmas prior to watching the videos). However, these two balanced pragmatism conditions did not differ significantly from one another (see Table 1), so our results focus on the baseline balanced pragmatism condition in which participants did not solve the dilemma before watching the videos—a lower involvement intervention, which presumably makes it more scalable.

Last, we also explored whether the effects of balanced pragmatism extended to evaluations of ingroup politicians. We explored this by conducting mixed analyses of variance (ANOVAs) that tested the interaction between ingroup versus outgroup and experimental conditions.

### Exploratory Factor Analyses

Prior to conducting our primary analyses, we examined whether each of our measures represented distinct constructs. We were especially interested in whether the interpersonal perceptions we examined (morality and rationality in Study 1) were unique from one another. Exploratory factor analyses (using principal axis factoring and promax rotations) revealed that perceptions of morality and rationality were highly related in Study 1 (and in Study 2). Though we originally predicted that perceptions of rationality and morality would uniquely contribute to cross-partisan respect, people often moralize rationality (Stahl et al., 2016). Following these results, we decided to combine our measures of morality and rationality into a single scale.

### Effects of Balanced Pragmatism Upon Interpersonal Perceptions

We first tested whether balanced pragmatism videos increased perceptions of morality and rationality (using the combined scale suggested by our factor analyses), which we thought would foster respect. Compared to watching the campaign ads, $b = 1.64$, $t(372) = 8.50$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.19$, and reading the impartial Wikipedia bios, $b = 1.29$, $t(372) = 6.70$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.04$, watching balanced pragmatism videos caused participants from the opposing party to see the politicians as significantly more moral/rational. This finding supported our predictions, with the important caveat that we combined our measures of morality and rationality. Morality and rationality appeared to represent a single potential mediator, rather than two unique mediators as we originally predicted.

### Effects of Balanced Pragmatism Upon Respect and Willingness to Engage

We next tested whether the balanced pragmatism condition increased our outcome variables: respect and willingness to engage. Compared to campaign ads, the balanced pragmatism condition

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**Table 1**
*Descriptive Statistics for Ratings of Outgroup Politicians and Contrasts With the Balanced Pragmatism Condition in Studies 1–3*

| Condition | Moral/rational *M* (*SD*) | Intelligent *M* (*SD*) | Authentic *M* (*SD*) | Respect *M* (*SD*) | Engage *M* (*SD*) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Study 1 | | | | | |
| Balanced pragmatism | 5.33 (1.18) | — | — | 4.41 (1.50) | 5.01 (1.56) |
| Balanced pragmatism w/ experience | 5.48 (1.17) | — | — | 4.47 (1.55) | 5.06 (1.68) |
| Campaign ad | 3.69 (1.54)* | — | — | 3.87 (1.57)* | 4.14 (1.97)* |
| Wiki bios | 4.03 (1.31)* | — | — | 3.98 (1.56) | 4.75 (1.73) |
| Study 2 | | | | | |
| Balanced pragmatism | 5.69 (1.17) | — | 5.02 (1.42) | 5.36 (1.34) | — |
| Bridging divides | 6.03 (1.27) | — | 5.41 (1.13)* | 5.80 (1.24)* | — |
| University event | | — | | | — |
| News (nonpartisan) | 4.90 (1.49)* | — | 4.49 (1.42)* | 4.52 (1.64)* | — |
| News (partisan) | 4.66 (1.58)* | — | 4.48 (1.37)* | 4.35 (1.68)* | — |
| Wiki bios | 4.90 (1.57)* | — | 4.56 (1.50)* | 4.40 (1.42)* | — |
| Study 3 | | | | | |
| Balanced pragmatism | 5.01 (1.29) | 5.46 (1.26) | 5.03 (1.30) | 4.93 (1.50) | 4.58 (1.54) |
| Campaign ad | 3.83 (1.65)* | 4.26 (1.61)* | 4.20 (1.53)* | 3.84 (1.77)* | 3.07 (1.73)* |
| News (nonpartisan) | 4.47 (1.20)* | 5.01 (1.13)* | 4.19 (1.32)* | 4.67 (1.30) | 4.35 (1.52) |

*Note.* Means with asterisks are significantly different from the Balanced Pragmatism condition. w/ = with; ad = advertisements; bios = biographies.

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increased respect, $b = 0.54$, $t(372) = 2.36$, $p = .019$, $d = 0.35$, and willingness to engage, $b = 0.87$, $t(372) = 3.37$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.49$. Compared to the Wikipedia bios, the effects of the balanced pragmatism condition were in the predicted direction, but were not significant, respect: $b = 0.42$, $t(372) = 1.86$, $p = .064$, $d = 0.28$; willingness to engage: $b = 0.26$, $t(372) = 1.01$, $p = .312$, $d = 0.16$. These results suggested that watching the politicians employ balanced pragmatism was better at fostering respect than watching them discuss their positive impacts in advertisements (we only examined campaign ads with the politicians discussing their positive impacts; we did not examine negative, attack ads). However, we observed more mixed results comparing balanced pragmatism to written biographies. One possibility is that learning about someone's life story is another powerful method for fostering respect. Still, the effects were in the predicted direction, and we examine this comparison again in Study 2.

### *Relationship Between Interpersonal Perceptions and Respect*

To test the final piece of the model depicted in Figure 1, we tested whether the combined measure of morality/rationality predicted respect and willingness to engage. We regressed respect and willingness to engage upon morality/rationality and the three dummy-coded variables representing the four experimental conditions. Results from these two regression models revealed that rationality/morality predicted respect, $b = 0.57$, $t(371) = 10.57$, $p < .001$, and willingness to engage, $b = 0.62$, $t(371) = 10.20$, $p < .001$. Combined with our other results, this provided support for each path in the model in Figure 1: that balanced pragmatism caused increased in rationality/morality, which then predicted respect and willingness to engage.

### *Effects of Balanced Pragmatism Upon Respect for Ingroup Politicians*

Last, we explored how participants responded to watching members of their own party employ balanced pragmatism. Though fostering cross-partisan respect may be a goal in itself, partisans are also likely concerned about how political allies will respond to their political messages. A mixed ANOVA revealed the effect of experimental condition upon respect was not significantly moderated by whether the participants were evaluating an ingroup or outgroup politician, $F(3, 372) = 2.12$, $p = .096$, $\eta^2_G = .009$. But this interaction effect was significant for willingness to engage, $F(3, 372) = 3.01$, $p = .031$, $\eta^2_G = .007$, and rationality/morality, $F(3, 372) = 27.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_G = .062$. Probing this interaction revealed that—for ingroup evaluations—the balanced pragmatism condition did not significantly differ from any other conditions (see the online supplemental materials for detailed results), except the balanced pragmatism condition still increased perceived respect/rationality compared to reading Wikipedia bios. These findings suggest that watching ingroup politicians employ balanced pragmatism does not affect respect or willingness to engage compared to other ways people often encounter politicians from their own party.

## Discussion

Watching politicians address political dilemmas—which involved balanced and pragmatic responses—improved respect and willingness to engage among participants of the opposing political party. We found this effect in comparisons with campaign advertisements. Comparisons with written biographies were in the expected direction but were not significant. One possibility for this result was that reading someone's life story may also help humanize them and foster respect. We examined this condition further in Study 2. Results also supported the idea that balanced pragmatism may foster respect by increasing perceptions of morality and rationality, which participants in Study 1 perceived to be highly related. However, people also learn about politicians in interviews and discussion panels, which may provide more insights into how politicians reason through issues than campaign advertisements. We next asked how the balanced pragmatism videos would compare to other media that show these same politicians explaining the rationale behind their views without employing balanced pragmatism.

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## Study 2

Politicians who appear to use balanced pragmatism seem to foster more respect among cross-partisans, but one open question is how well this strategy works compared to a best-case scenario—politicians explicitly discussing the importance of bridging divides. Participants watched the same videos from Study 1, or videos of the same politicians cohosting an event at the Harvard Kennedy School on partisan cooperation. We suspected that balanced pragmatism would again improve respect relative to news interviews, but likely not as much as this extremely cooperative event—a case seldom found in modern politics. We again whether perceptions of rationality and morality (and also authenticity) predict cross-partisan respect.

### Method

#### *Participants*

We collected 507 participants (after excluding 10 for failing multiple attention checks) from Amazon's Mechanical Turk via CloudResearch ($M_{age} = 41.41$, $SD_{age} = 12.86$; 255 women, 248 men, four other gender; 348 Democrats, 159 Republicans).

#### *Procedure*

Study 2 followed a similar procedure as Study 1, but with additional conditions and slightly different measures. Participants, all of whom identified as either Democrats or Republicans, watched either our balanced pragmatism videos (i.e., videos from the "Decision Point" series), nonpartisan news clips (that were respectful to the other side), the bridging divides university event, or read the same Wikipedia bios used in Study 1. Though we focused primarily on news clips that were respectful to the other side (labeled the "nonpartisan news clips"), we also included a second condition containing news clips that our pilot data indicated were more negative and critical of political opponents (labeled the "partisan news clips"). These clips in the partisan news clips condition were also about more divisive issues (i.e., gun control and immigration instead of campaign finance and taxes). We focused on the nonpartisan news clips because we thought they would be a stronger test of our hypotheses, but we included the partisan news clip condition to compare the balanced pragmatism videos against clips where politicians were talking about more divisive issues too. Participants in each condition containing videos (i.e., every condition except for the Wikipedia bios condition) watched one video featuring the Democrat politician and one featuring the Republican politician. The order of the two videos was randomized for each participant. All conditions featured the same two politicians from Study 1. After learning about each politician, participants filled out measures of perceived rationality, morality, authenticity, and intentions to treat the politician respectfully.

#### *Measures*

We measured perceived authenticity with four items (e.g., "is authentic" and "is true to themselves in most situations," $\alpha = .96$) and used slightly longer measures of rationality (six items, e.g., "is irrational" and "can't be reasoned with," reverse-scored, $\alpha = .97$) and morality (six items, e.g., "is immoral" and "doesn't care about others," reverse-scored, $\alpha = .97$). Our measure of respect used the same items as in Study 1, but instead of asking them 3 times (once for their intentions to respect the politicians' views on each of three topics), we simply asked about their intentions to be respectful if they were to talk with each politician about politics in general.

#### *Video Materials*

**Balanced Pragmatism.** We used the same balanced pragmatism videos from Study 1.

**News Clips.** We searched for news clips that varied in how critical the politicians were of their political opponents. After collecting an initial set of eight news clips (four for each politician), we conducted a pilot study asking 198 left-leaning Democrats and 135 right-leaning Republicans to rate one video featuring a politician from the opposing party. Each video was evaluated by a minimum of 30 participants. Participants rated each video on perceived positivity toward the opposing party (one item: "Based on this clip, what would you guess [SPEAKER'S] feelings are toward [POLITICAL OUTGROUP]?") and on how much they criticized the opposing party (two items: "In the above video, [SPEAKER] picks a fight with [POLITICAL OUTGROUP]," and "In the above video, [SPEAKER] talks negatively about [POLITICAL OUTGROUP]"). We then selected the videos that scored highest on these three measures on average and those that scored lowest (two for each politician, four videos total). All nonpartisan videos scored above the midpoint on perceived positivity toward opponents and below the midpoint on criticism of opponents (by contrast, partisan videos scored below the midpoint on perceived positivity and above the midpoint on criticism. Descriptive statistics for our news clips are provided in the online supplemental materials.

**Bridging Divides University Event.** We selected one clip for each politician (1–2 min in length each) where they discussed the importance of bridging divides to solve gridlock in Washington. The clips also included both representatives (the same representatives appearing in our other materials) engaging with each other and discussing the possibility of running on a unity ticket (i.e., a campaign with a Republican and Democrat running for office together). Thus, we intentionally selected segments highlighting each politician's ability to respectfully engage with someone of an opposing party. Of course, watching two politicians talking about working across divides to solve political issues may also increase perceptions of balance, which is why we listed this condition as exploratory in our preregistration. Still, we thought this condition would provide valuable data on how much politicians going to great effort to bridge divides can garner respect. We expected this to have strong effects upon engagement outcomes (i.e., intentions to respect and willingness to engage), creating a high bar for our balanced pragmatism videos to match.

### Results

#### *Analysis Strategy*

We again compared the balanced pragmatism condition to the other conditions in linear regressions. Our preregistered hypothesis predicted that balanced pragmatism condition would increase respect compared to the two news clip conditions and the Wikipedia bios condition. Though we included two news clip conditions to examine more videos with the politicians talking about more issues (labeled the "partisan" and "nonpartisan" clips), we focus primarily on the nonpartisan clips. The clips in the partisan news clips condition were about more divisive issues (i.e., gun control and immigration instead of campaign finance and

taxes), and we thought it would be easier for the balanced pragmatism videos to foster cross-partisan respect compared to these videos. Thus, the results reported here focus mostly on the nonpartisan clips, which we expected to pose a stronger test of our hypotheses. We report the results for the partisan news clips in Table 1. In addition to these contrasts, we conducted exploratory analyses comparing the balanced pragmatism condition to the bridging divides university event condition. Last, we again explored whether the effects of balanced pragmatism differed for evaluations of ingroup members via mixed ANOVAs.

### *Exploratory Factor Analyses*

Exploratory factor analyses again indicated that rationality and morality loaded onto the same factor (despite using new measures of morality and rationality with more items), By contrast, there was clearer evidence that perceived authenticity represented a distinct construct, and both of our outcomes—respect and willingness to engage—again loaded on separate factors. Following these results, we again combined perceptions of rationality and morality into a single scale, while treating authenticity, willingness to engage, and respect as separate constructs as we initially theorized.

### *Effects of Balanced Pragmatism Upon Interpersonal Perceptions*

We first tested whether the balanced pragmatism condition caused participants to see politicians as more moral/rational and authentic compared to watching news interviews with the same politicians. Results showed that the balanced pragmatism videos increased perceived morality/rationality compared to the nonpartisan news clips, $b = 0.79$, $t(502) = 3.98$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.59$, and the Wikipedia bios, $b = 0.79$, $t(502) = 3.99$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.57$. We observed the same effects upon perceived authenticity compared to the nonpartisan news clips, $b = 0.53$, $t(502) = 2.74$, $p = .006$, $d = 0.37$, and the Wikipedia bios, $b = 0.46$, $t(502) = 2.43$, $p = .015$, $d = 0.32$. These results supported our prediction that seeing outgroup politicians employ balanced pragmatism would improve interpersonal perceptions compared to watching them explain their views in interviews (without criticizing political opponents).

### *Effects of Balanced Pragmatism Upon Respect*

We next examined whether the balanced pragmatism videos also increased participants' respect for politicians of the opposing party, one of our key outcomes. Results supported our predictions, both compared to nonpartisan news clips, $b = 0.83$, $t(502) = 3.94$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.56$, and—in contrast to Study 1—to Wikipedia bios, $b = 0.96$, $t(502) = 4.71$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.70$. Watching videos that should encourage political elites to employ balanced pragmatism in political dilemmas improved cross-partisan perceptions and respect compared to watching political elites respectfully explain their views and compared to written biographies.

### *The Relationship Between Interpersonal Perceptions and Respect*

To test whether morality/rationality and authenticity may explain the effects of balanced pragmatism upon respect, we next regressed respect upon both rationality/morality and authenticity while controlling for the dummy-coded experimental condition variables. These results revealed that both morality/rationality, $b = 0.43$, $t(500) = 10.86$, $p < .001$, and authenticity, $b = 0.38$, $t(500) = 9.05$, $p < .001$, each uniquely predicted respect. This suggests that balanced pragmatism may help foster respect by improving perceptions of multiple, distinct traits.

### *Balanced Pragmatism Versus the Bridging Divides Event*

We also examined how the balanced pragmatism videos compared to clips that were explicitly about fostering cross-partisan respect—videos in which the same politicians as our other videos hosted a university event about bridging political divides. As we anticipated, videos that showed the same two politicians cohosting an event focused on cross-partisan respect and ending political gridlock were especially effective at increasing respect. These contrasts, along with others that were not the focus of our preregistration, are provided in Table 1. Most notably, the bridging divides event clips were slightly better at increasing authenticity ($p = .028$), morality ($p = .044$), and respect ($p = .014$) compared to the balanced pragmatism condition. Publicly working with a political opponent at a large event is, perhaps unsurprisingly, an effective strategy for making members of the opposing party treat you with more respect in return. But much political messaging requires explaining views on issues, not explicitly celebrating respect and bipartisanship. And watching videos that should encourage employing balanced pragmatism to solve dilemmas were nearly as effective at improving cross-partisan respect.

### *Effects of Balanced Pragmatism Upon Respect for Ingroup Politicians*

We explored how participants responded to watching members of their own party employ balanced pragmatism. We were especially interested in comparing the balanced pragmatism videos to news clips. Existing work shows that people are drawn to criticism of political opponents (Rathje et al., 2021), so we were especially interested in comparing the balanced pragmatism videos to the partisan news clips condition. Mixed ANOVAs revealed interaction effects (Ingroup vs. Outgroup × Experimental Condition) upon morality/rationality, $F(4, 502) = 13.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_G = .027$; authenticity, $F(4, 502) = 7.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_G = .013$; and respect, $F(4, 502) = 14.29$, $p < .033$. Probing these interactions indicated that balanced pragmatism did not affect perceived authenticity among ingroup members compared to any other conditions. Balanced pragmatism did still increase perceived rationality/morality and respect compared to both the partisan news clips and Wikipedia bios, though these effects were smaller (see the online supplemental materials for detailed results). These results suggest that watching ingroup politicians employ balance and pragmatism may be more effective at fostering respect even compared to watching the same politician criticize the opposing party on divisive issues like guns and immigration.

## Discussion

Study 2 provided a stronger test of the effects of videos that should encourage balanced pragmatism upon cross-partisan respect (i.e., against news interviews with the same politicians respectfully explaining their views). It also provided a comparison with videos we expected to represent a best-case scenario for bridging divides (i.e., cohosting a real-world university event about solving political

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gridlock, alongside a political opponent). Results revealed that balanced pragmatism increased cross-partisan respect compared to these news interviews and did so nearly as well as the bridging divides university event. This suggests that participating in real-world events that aim to bridge divides can help elites appear more worthy of respect from cross-partisan. Of course, doing so takes time and resources, and the present results show that highlighting balanced pragmatism in even hypothetical dilemmas can also foster perceived morality and rationality, as well as authenticity. Our next study measured perceived balanced pragmatism to both validate the videos we used and to explore whether they were better at increasing perceived balance or pragmatism.

## Study 3

The hypothetical political dilemmas used in our videos provided opportunities to employ balanced pragmatism, but neither of our studies thus far explicitly measured whether they actually made politicians appear more balanced and pragmatic. This study aimed to replicate the effects of balanced pragmatism upon respect while also confirming that they did so by increasing perceived balanced pragmatism. We also included new measures of interpersonal perceptions—focusing more on intelligence rather than perceived rationality—to see if this better captured a trait that fostered respect and was more distinct from morality.

### Method

#### *Participants*

We collected 304 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk ($M_{age} = 40.84$, $SD_{age} = 12.51$; 167 women, 134 men, three other gender; 198 Democrats, 106 Republicans).

#### *Procedure*

Study 3 followed a similar procedure as Studies 1 and 2. Participants either watched balanced pragmatism, campaign ads, or nonpartisan news clips for each politician. Each condition contained the same videos from Studies 1 and 2 (i.e., one video for each politician, except for the campaign ad condition, which had two videos for each politician), presented in random order. After each clip, they rated each politician on balanced pragmatism.

We used eight items to measure balanced pragmatism and other, closely related elements of wise reasoning. Two items asked about how much the politician balanced multiple perspectives ("In the video I just watched, [TARGET]…," "…takes different viewpoints into consideration" and "…tries to see things from the perspectives of multiple people"; $\alpha = .91$). For pragmatism, we included a single face-valid item ("…is pragmatic") and another item about context sensitivity ("…takes context into account"; $\alpha = .79$) since an understanding of how solutions will work in context was a key part of our definition of pragmatism. We also included two items that captured seeking conflict resolution (i.e., "…works to benefit everyone" and "takes into account the interests of different people or groups"; $\alpha = .91$), which we thought may capture another element of balance: seeking balanced resolutions to conflicts. We also included an item measuring perceived recognition of the limits of one's knowledge or intellectual humility ("considers the possibility that they might be wrong"). Last, we included an item about recognizing that it is difficult to predict how situations will evolve ("recognizes that sometimes things do not go as expected"), another element of wise reasoning that may be important for pragmatic leaders.

We used the same measures of perceived morality, authenticity, and respect as in Study 2. Participants also completed the measure of willingness to engage from Study 1 (which was absent from Study 2). Last, since we found that perceptions of rationality and morality were highly related in Studies 1 and 2—even using different measures—we measured a construct that is closely related to but distinct from rationality: intelligence (i.e., "is smart," "is clever," and "is intelligent"; $\alpha = .96$). We thought employing balanced pragmatism could also increase perceived intelligence, which may also be desirable quality in political leaders that is distinct from both morality and authenticity.

### Results

#### *Analysis Strategy*

Our preregistered hypotheses for Study 3 stated we would compare the balance pragmatism condition against two conditions: the news clip condition and the campaign ad condition. Study 3 had no additional conditions. Prior to these primary analyses, we tested whether the balanced pragmatism videos increased perceived balance and pragmatism. We again explored the interactions between ingroup versus outgroup and experimental conditions via mixed-effect ANOVAs.

#### *Exploratory Factor Analyses*

We first conducted an exploratory factor analyses with two goals: to test whether participants distinguished perceived intelligence from perceived morality and to test whether participants distinguished between perceived balance and perceived pragmatism. Results suggested distinct factors for authenticity, morality, intelligence, respect, and willingness to engage. This suggested that participants may have been less likely to conflate perceived intelligence with morality than perceived rationality with rationality. Following these results, we treated intelligence and morality as distinct variables in Study 3.

Results also revealed that our balanced pragmatism items measured a construct that was distinct from other interpersonal perceptions and our outcomes. However, whether or not perceived balance and perceived pragmatism loaded on distinct factors was less clear. We decided the best approach was to simply report the results for the average of all eight items ($\alpha = .92$)—as suggested by one of the two-factor solutions we examined. We also examined the effects on each item individually for exploratory purposes.

#### *Validating Balanced Pragmatism Videos*

We predicted that the video series featuring politicians working through political dilemmas (which we have referred to as the balanced pragmatism Videos) improved perceptions of political opponents by highlighting balanced and pragmatic decision making. Examining participants' ratings of politicians on the measure of balanced pragmatism supported this idea. The balanced pragmatism videos significantly increased perceived balanced pragmatism compared to campaign ads, $b = 1.67$, $t(298) = 9.81$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.37$, and to nonpartisan news clips, $b = 0.82$, $t(298) = 4.87$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.73$. We also conducted exploratory analyses of each item to better understand which elements of wise reasoning the videos may have highlighted most effectively (see the online supplemental

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materials for detailed results). Compared to both campaign ads and nonpartisan news clips, the largest observed effects of the balanced pragmatism videos were upon the "takes context into account" item ($d = 1.33$ and $d = 0.67$), and the smallest effects were upon the two items that represent seeking conflict resolutions (e.g., the effects upon "takes into account the interests of different people or groups" were $d = 0.84$ and $d = 0.39$). Of course, these fine-grained comparisons were exploratory, but at least within Study 3, the balanced pragmatism videos seemed particularly effective at increasing perceptions of context sensitivity. Most importantly, the results for the eight-item average revealed the balanced pragmatism videos had large effects upon perceived balanced pragmatism overall.

### *Effects of Balanced Pragmatism Upon Interpersonal Perceptions*

We next tested whether the balanced pragmatism condition increased perceptions of morality, intelligence, and authenticity for outgroup politicians. Compared to watching campaign ads, watching balanced pragmatism videos increased perceived morality, $b = 1.29$, $t(297) = 5.98$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.80$; intelligence, $b = 1.20$, $t(297) = 6.24$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.83$; and authenticity, $b = 0.83$, $t(298) = 4.19$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.64$. Compared to the nonpartisan news clips, balanced pragmatism also increased morality, $b = 0.55$, $t(298) = 2.77$, $p = .006$, $d = 0.44$; intelligence, $b = 0.38$, $t(297) = 2.01$, $p = .046$, $d = 0.32$; and authenticity, $b = 0.84$, $t(298) = 4.26$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.58$. Replicating results from Studies 1 and 2, we again found that watching outgroup politicians employ balanced pragmatism to solve political dilemmas increased perceived morality and authenticity. We observed this effect both in comparison to reading about their life history and watching them respectfully explain their views in news interviews. We also found evidence that the balanced pragmatism videos increased perceived intelligence, another construct that may also help foster cross-partisan respect.

### *Effects of Balanced Pragmatism Upon Respect and Willingness to Engage*

We next tested whether the balanced pragmatism condition fostered respect and willingness to engage (our outcomes). Compared to watching campaign ads, watching balanced pragmatism videos increased respect, $b = 1.09$, $t(298) = 5.01$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.67$, and willingness to engage, $b = 1.51$, $t(298) = 6.62$, $p < .001$ $d = 0.92$. The effects of balanced pragmatism (vs. nonpartisan news clips) upon respect, $b = 0.26$, $t(298) = 1.20$, $p = .230$, $d = 0.19$, and willingness to engage, $b = 0.22$, $t(298) = 0.99$, $p = .324$, $d = 0.15$, were in the expected direction but not significant. Notably, politicians also scored significantly higher on perceived balanced pragmatism in the news clips condition compared to the campaign ads condition (though not as high as the balanced pragmatism videos; see Table 1). Thus, part of the reason for this nonsignificant result may be that the politicians we examined already tried to appear both balanced and pragmatic (at least in the nonpartisan clips we selected).

### *Relationships Between Interpersonal Perceptions and Respect*

We next tested whether morality, intelligence, and authenticity each uniquely predicted respect and willingness to engage. Regressing respect upon our mediators (while controlling for experimental condition), perceived morality, $b = 0.47$, $t(294) = 7.21$, $p < .001$, and intelligence, $b = 0.36$, $t(294) = 6.03$, $p < .001$, both predicted respect, while perceived authenticity was nonsignificant, $b = 0.11$, $t(294) = 1.86$, $p = .063$. For willingness to engage, only perceived morality was a significant predictor, $b = 0.64$, $t(294) = 8.45$, $p < .001$, while perceptions of intelligence, $b = 0.12$, $t(294) = 1.73$, $p = .085$, and authenticity, $b = 0.09$, $t(294) = 1.38$, $p = .170$, were nonsignificant. These results suggest that perceived morality and intelligence may both help foster respect, but that perceptions of morality (and rationality, based on the results of Study 1) are specifically important for fostering cross-partisan engagement. Results for authenticity were more mixed. Perceived authenticity predicted respect in Study 2; in the present study, this relationship was slightly smaller and nonsignificant.

### *Effects of Balanced Pragmatism Upon Respect for Ingroup Politicians*

As in Studies 1 and 2, results from mixed ANOVAs revealed that the effects of the balanced pragmatism videos were smaller for evaluations of ingroup politicians. The interaction between ingroup versus outgroup evaluations and experimental condition was significant for morality, $F(2, 298) = 12.19$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_G = .030$; intelligence, $F(2, 296) = 10.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_G = .021$; authenticity, $F(2, 298) = 5.11$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_G = .011$; respect, $F(2, 298) = 8.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_G = .022$; and willingness to engage, $F(2, 298) = 16.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_G = .038$. Probing these interactions again revealed smaller effects of balanced pragmatism upon attitudes toward ingroup politicians. The only significant contrasts were small increases in perceived morality compared to news clips ($B = .30$; $p = .038$) and increases in perceived intelligence compared to campaign ads ($B = .40$; $p = .007$). But although balanced pragmatism did less to foster respect among ingroup members, it still fostered as much respect as watching the same politicians discussing their positive impacts in campaign ads or explaining their views in news interviews. These results, combined with the results of Studies 1 and 2, suggest that watching leaders employ balanced pragmatism to solve political dilemmas may have an overall positive effect across both outgroup and ingroup members.

## Discussion

These results further supported the idea that balanced pragmatism helps to increase respect among cross-partisans (see Figure 2 for summary of results from Studies 1–3). Results also revealed that watching political leaders employ balanced pragmatism fosters respect by increasing perceptions of intelligence and morality. But even though the balanced pragmatism videos increased perceived intelligence and morality to nearly the same degree, increases in perceived morality appeared to be especially likely to translate into increases in respect and willingness to engage. This finding is consistent with work demonstrating that perceptions of moral traits dominate person perception (Goodwin et al., 2014). Nevertheless, people may also want competent and intelligent leaders, and our results indicated that increases in perceived intelligence also helped foster respect. We next examined the effects of balance and pragmatism within a different type of stimuli: short quotes.

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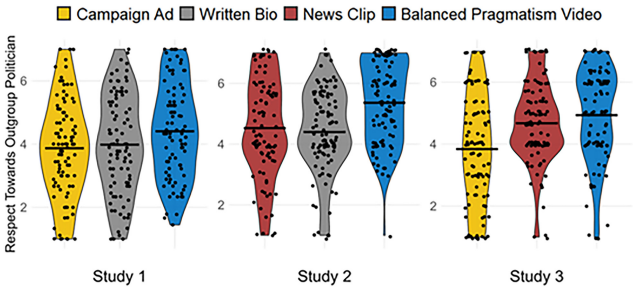
**Figure 2**

*Effects of Balanced Pragmatism on Respect for Outgroup Politicians*




*Note.* Ad = advertisements; Bio = biographies. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

## Study 4

Much political messaging consists of sound-bites or short posts on social media, and it is likely more difficult to demonstrate the "wise reasoning" of balanced pragmatism in this context compared to video clips solving dilemmas. Nevertheless, we thought that short quotes endorsing balanced pragmatism could still signal morality and intelligence better than other common comments made by politicians. This study compared balanced and pragmatic comments to other political messages, like comments supporting one side or embracing respect generally. In addition to these comparisons, we also tested whether balanced pragmatism was more effective at increasing respect than balance or pragmatism alone and expanded the items used to measure perceived balance and pragmatism. Last, in addition to recruiting Democrats and Republicans, we also examined the effects of balanced pragmatism among Independents—the largest political group in the United States. Thus, Study 4 tested whether balanced pragmatism increased respect and willingness to engage in new contexts (i.e., short quotes and among independents), while examining the individual effects of balance and pragmatism more precisely.

### Method

#### *Participants*

We collected 1,155 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk ($M_{age} = 42.47$, $SD_{age} = 13.71$; 687 women, 486 men, 11 other gender; 523 Democrats, 301 Republicans, and 331 independents).

#### *Procedure*

Participants read two quotes from an interview with an ostensibly real politician, describing how they addressed divisive political issues. Democrat and Republican participants were told the quotes came from a politician from the opposing party (unlike Studies 1–3, this study did not explore reactions to ingroup politicians). Independents read that they came from a politician. These two quotes signaled one of five different strategies, corresponding to five, between-subjects conditions: the balance condition (e.g., "I listen to both sides' concerns. I try to understand what the other side is saying too."), the pragmatism condition (e.g., "I am willing to try any policy that could fix the issue. I look at as many options as needed to find a solution"), the balanced pragmatism condition (which combined one balanced and one pragmatic quote), the respect condition (e.g., "I focus on being polite to everyone. I try to be well-mannered with the other side too"), and the searching for strongest argument condition (e.g., "There is usually one side that is more correct on these issues. I look for the position that makes the most sense"). Since our pool of quotes contained two balanced quotes and two pragmatism quotes, participants assigned to the balanced pragmatism condition were also randomly assigned to see one of two possible quote pairs (i.e., either Balanced Quote 1 and Pragmatism Quote 1 or Balanced Quote 2 and Pragmatism Quote 2). Participants in the balanced pragmatism condition always saw the balanced quote before the pragmatism quote. We did this because we thought the best way to employ balanced pragmatism would first signal one's ability to balance multiple perspectives prior to focusing on solutions, though we did not test different orders of balanced and pragmatic quotes in this study.

After reading each quote, participants rated how they felt about it (1—*very negative* to 7—*very positive*). After evaluating the quotes, participants rated the quoted politician on new measures of perceived balance and pragmatism. The goal of these measures was to capture balanced pragmatism with more specificity. We used longer measures that combined items from Study 3 with items adapted from the Situated Wise Reasoning Scale (Brienza et al., 2018) that mapped onto our definitions of balance and pragmatism. To measure balancing multiple perspectives we included items focused on perspectivism and considering multiple points of view ("the politician is the type of person who…," "…takes time to get other people's opinions before coming to a conclusion" and "…puts themselves in other people's shoes", as well as two items that were included in Study 3, "…takes different viewpoints into consideration" and "…tries to see things from the perspectives of other people," reliability of four-item scale: $\alpha = .97$). For pragmatism, we focused on context sensitivity and prioritizing finding workable solutions (these four items included: "…is pragmatic and practical," "…views it as very important to resolve issues," "…considers which solution will work best in the present context," and "…looks for different solutions to find the one that works best," reliability of four-item scale: $\alpha = .95$).

We also included two new, exploratory measures: support for the politician ("I trust this politician to solve political issues" and "I would consider voting for this politician," $\alpha = .90$) and participants' overall impression of the politician (as well as their baseline evaluation of similar politicians, measured prior to the manipulation; 0—*very negative* to 100—*very positive*). Participants then filled out the same measures of perceived intelligence, authenticity, morality, willingness to engage, and respect as in Study 3.

### Results

#### *Analysis Strategy*

To test the model in Figure 1, we fit linear regression models comparing the balanced pragmatism condition to the searching for strongest argument condition and to the endorsing respect condition. We also tested our prediction that combining balance and pragmatism would foster more cross-partisan respect than either balance or

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pragmatism alone. We tested this by comparing the balanced pragmatism condition (which combined balanced and pragmatism quotes) to the balance condition (which only used balanced quotes) and to the pragmatism condition (which only used pragmatic quotes). As in Studies 1–3, each of these comparisons were tested by dummy-coding the experimental conditions with the balanced pragmatism condition as the reference group.

So far, we have primarily focused on testing whether balanced pragmatism fosters cross-partisan respect. However, fostering respect among independents—who make up the largest political group in the United States—is also important for elites and everyday Americans. We thought that the effects of balanced pragmatism would generalize to independents. Tests of moderation supported this idea. The effects of the balanced pragmatism condition upon interpersonal perception, respect, and willingness to engage did not significantly differ among independents compared to partisans. Results reported in the main text include independents, Democrats, and Republicans. Since our preregistered hypotheses focused on ratings of outgroup politicians, we also report results for independents and partisans (i.e., Democrats and Republicans) separately in the online supplemental materials.[3]

### *Exploratory Factor Analyses and Effects Upon Perceived Balanced Pragmatism*

Exploratory factor analyses again suggested that respect, willingness to engage, authenticity, intelligence, and morality all loaded on distinct factors. This further supported the idea that participants distinguished perceived intelligence from morality (even though they did distinguish rationality from morality).

Despite developing items to better distinguish perceptions of balance and pragmatism, results again did not provide clear evidence that participants distinguished between these two constructs. A distinct factor did emerge that appeared to represent pragmatism, but the pragmatism items cross-loaded on the factor with the balance items. Moreover, these four-item subscales were highly correlated ($r = .87$). From these results alone, it is difficult to discern whether this strong relationship stemmed from our items, the stimuli we examined in Study 4, or because balance and pragmatism truly are often inseparable when evaluating political leaders (though participants in Study 5—which examined a much broader range of political messages—did distinguish between perceived balance and pragmatism).

Despite the strong relationship between our measures of balance and pragmatism, they still were affected by our manipulations as we expected. The balance condition increased perceived balance compared to the search for strongest argument condition, $b = 1.40$, $t(1150) = 11.42$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.94$, and respect condition, $b = 0.33$, $t(1150) = 2.37$, $p = .018$, $d = 0.22$. Likewise, the pragmatism condition successfully increased perceived pragmatism compared to both the strongest argument, $b = 1.52$, $t(1150) = 11.21$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.04$, and respect conditions, $b = 0.79$, $t(1150) = 5.80$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.54$. The pragmatism condition also increased perceived pragmatism more than the balance condition increased perceived pragmatism. Likewise, the balance condition increased perceived balance more than the pragmatism condition, and results from a mixed-effects model indicated that this interaction effect was significant, $b = 0.56$, $t(460) = 7.86$, $p < .001$. Even though participants' self-reported perceptions of balance and pragmatism were highly related, these results still provided some evidence that our experimental manipulation did successfully increase perceived balance and pragmatism largely how we expected.

### *Effects of Balanced Pragmatism Upon Interpersonal Perceptions*

**Balanced Pragmatism Versus Searching for the Best Argument.** Balanced pragmatism should make outgroup politicians appear more moral and intelligent, which we expected to drive partisans' willingness to engage respectfully with them (see Figure 1). In comparison with the search for best argument condition, the balanced pragmatism condition increased perceived morality, $b = 1.12$, $t(1150) = 9.05$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.84$; intelligence, $b = 0.82$, $t(1150) = 8.78$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.82$; and authenticity, $b = .38$, $t(1150) = 2.86$, $p = .004$, $d = 0.27$.

**Balanced Pragmatism Versus Endorsing Respect in General.** We also expected the balanced pragmatism condition to increase perceived morality and intelligence compared to quotes endorsing respect generally. As predicted, balanced pragmatism increased perceptions of intelligence compared to the Respect condition, $b = 0.28$, $t(1150) = 2.42$, $p = .016$, $d = 0.23$. By contrast, we observed no effects of the balanced pragmatism condition upon perceived authenticity, $b = 0.11$, $t(1150) = 0.86$, $p = .392$, $d = 0.08$, or perceived morality, $b = 0.10$, $t(1150) = 0.79$, $p = .43$ $d = 0.07$. This latter finding was surprising, as we expected endorsing balance pragmatism—which mentioned understanding and listening to participants' ingroup—to signal morality better than simply endorsing respect in general. One possibility is that it is difficult for politicians to signal morality in short quotes beyond what broadly endorsing respect already accomplishes. Nevertheless, endorsing balanced pragmatism did still make politicians appear more intelligent, which we expected would help foster respect and willingness to engage.

### *Effects of Balanced Pragmatism Upon Respect and Willingness to Engage*

**Balanced Pragmatism Versus Searching for Best Argument.** We next tested whether the balanced pragmatism condition increased respect and willingness to engage, compared to a politician who claimed to search for the best argument (the search for best argument condition). The balanced pragmatism condition increased willingness to engage, $b = 1.11$, $t(1149) = 7.37$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.68$; respect for the opposing politician, $b = 0.88$, $t(1149) = 6.25$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.58$; and an exploratory outcome, willingness to support the candidate, $b = 1.19$, $t(1150) = 8.36$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.78$. Both the balance condition and the pragmatism condition also increased respect and willingness to engage compared to the search for best argument condition (see Table 2 for descriptive

[3] Independents were told they were reading quotes "from a politician" and partisans read that they were reading quotes from a Democrat/Republican politician (whichever was their outparty). This may have caused independents to have different initial feelings toward the politicians they rated compared to partisans who evaluated an outgroup member. To ensure this did not affect the results, we also measured participants' baseline feelings toward the politicians they rated (rated after reading a description of the politician, but before they saw the quotes) and tested whether these initial feelings moderated the effects of balanced pragmatism. No tests of moderation were significant (see the online supplemental materials for results).

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**Table 2**
*Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables in Study 4*

| Strategy endorsed in quotes | Willingness to engage *M* (*SD*) | Respect *M* (*SD*) | Morality *M* (*SD*) | Intelligence *M* (*SD*) | Perceived balance *M* (*SD*) | Perceived pragmatism *M* (*SD*) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Balanced pragmatism | 4.78 (1.57) | 5.15 (1.48) | 4.87 (1.26) | 5.21 (1.10) | 5.23 (1.34) | 5.20 (1.33) |
| Balance | 4.46 (1.57) | 4.79 (1.40) | 4.57 (1.31) | 4.93 (1.21) | 4.77 (1.45) | 4.52 (1.44) |
| Pragmatism | 4.65 (1.63) | 5.01 (1.45) | 4.70 (1.35) | 5.14 (1.19) | 4.95 (1.46) | 5.26 (1.42) |
| Respect | 4.35 (1.65) | 4.87 (1.61) | 4.77 (1.43) | 4.93 (1.23) | 4.44 (1.53) | 4.47 (1.50) |
| Best argument | 3.67 (1.70) | 4.27 (1.67) | 3.74 (1.34) | 4.20 (1.44) | 3.37 (1.65) | 3.74 (1.58) |

*Note.* The above are from the full sample, including independents. Descriptive statistics for partisans and independents separately are provided in the online supplemental materials.

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statistics and the online supplemental materials for statistical tests). In sum, balanced pragmatism improved respect compared to a politician who claimed to look for the best argument.

**Balanced Pragmatism Versus Endorsing Respect in General.** We also expected balanced pragmatism to increase respect and willingness to engage more effectively than endorsing respect in general. Compared to quotes endorsing respect, the balanced pragmatism condition increased willingness to engage, $b = 0.43$, $t(1149) = 2.93$, $p = .005$, $d = 0.26$, respect, $b = 0.28$, $t(1149) = 2.00$, $p = .045$, $d = 0.19$, and support for the politician, $b = 0.36$, $t(1150) = 2.52$, $p = .012$, $d = 0.23$. Neither the balance nor the pragmatism condition had any significant effects upon these three outcomes compared to the respect condition (see the online supplemental materials). Results provided some evidence that simply endorsing balanced pragmatism in short quotes could still improve cross-partisan engagement more than endorsing respect in general, but these effects were small.

### *Relationships Between Interpersonal Perceptions and Respect*

To test the last step of the model in Figure 1, we again tested whether interpersonal perceptions predicted respect and willingness to engage. Consistent with the results of Study 3, we again found that perceived morality was the strongest predictor of respect, $b = 0.45$, $t(1146) = 10.94$, $p < .001$, and perceived intelligence also predicted respect, $b = 0.23$, $t(1146) = 6.04$, $p < .001$. Contrary to Study 3, perceived authenticity predicted respect, $b = 0.20$, $t(1146) = 5.89$, $p < .001$. And perceived intelligence, $b = 0.23$, $t(1146) = 5.77$, $p < .001$, and authenticity, $b = 0.19$, $t(1146) = 5.32$, $p < .001$, both predicted willingness to engage as well, though still not as strongly as perceived morality, $b = 0.49$, $t(1146) = 11.17$, $p < .001$. In sum, Study 4 still suggested that perceived morality was the strongest predictor of respect and willingness to engage, while also providing stronger evidence that perceived intelligence and authenticity also uniquely predict respect.

Perceived morality was the strongest predictor of respect and willingness to engage out of all of the mediators we examined. However, results from Study 4 also revealed that the balanced pragmatism condition only increased perceived intelligence compared to endorsing respect in general. This could mean that perceived intelligence is still a crucial mediating variable despite having smaller relationships with respect and willingness to engage compared to perceived morality.

### *Effects of Combining Balance and Pragmatism*

We also examined the effects of combining balanced and pragmatic quotes (the balanced pragmatism condition) compared to the balance condition and the pragmatism condition (which used two balanced or two pragmatic quotes, respectfully). Compared to the balance condition, results showed that the balanced pragmatism condition increased respect, $b = 0.37$, $t(1149) = 2.60$, $p = .010$, $d = 0.24$; willingness to support the politician, $b = 0.39$, $t(1150) = 2.78$, $p = .005$, $d = 0.26$; and willingness to engage, $b = 0.31$, $t(1149) = 2.08$, $p = .037$, $d = 0.19$. Compared to the pragmatism condition, the balanced pragmatism condition did not improve respect, $b = 0.14$, $t(1149) = 1.02$, $p = .31$, $d = 0.09$; willingness to support, $b = 0.04$, $t(1150) = 0.28$, $p = .782$, $d = 0.03$; or willingness to engage, $b = 0.13$, $t(1149) = 0.84$, $p = .40$, $d = 0.08$. These results suggest that quotes endorsing balance were less effective at increasing respect and willingness to engage in the absence of quotes endorsing pragmatism.

## Discussion

Overall, results revealed that demonstrating balanced pragmatism in short quotes improves respect and willingness to engage. Perceived morality and intelligence may help explain this effect. However, effects of balanced pragmatism—compared to general endorsements of mutual respect—only increased perceived intelligence. This latter finding was unexpected, especially given that wisdom is closely tied to moral motives (Grossmann et al., 2020). It is possible that simply stating one's intentions to consider the other sides' perspective does little to signal balance beyond what endorsing mutual respect accomplishes, at least in short quotes. Nevertheless, pairing a pragmatic quote with a balanced quote did significantly increase respect and willingness to engage compared to two balanced quotes and to two quotes that endorsed mutual respect in general. These findings provide evidence for our model in a new context, while providing initial evidence that combining balance and pragmatism may be more effective than employing balance alone.

## Study 5

We next examined perceptions of balance and pragmatism in a larger set of real-world messages from politicians. Balance and pragmatism both appear to help political leaders garner more respect, but some evidence from Study 4 suggested that pragmatism may be especially effective at increasing respect. However, Studies 1–4 tested a limited set of stimuli: All of the videos used in Studies 1–3 featured the same politicians and Study 4 examined a small pool of hypothetical quotes. Study 5 addressed this limitation by asking participants to evaluate a large sample of social media posts from current members of the U.S. congress. This enabled us to better test the unique contributions of perceived balance

and pragmatism across a broader range of messages. We also leveraged this large set of real-world messages to explore whether balance and pragmatism still predicted respect when politicians discussed highly divisive issues.

## Method

In a correlational design, this study asked participants to evaluate 30 real-world political tweets (randomly drawn from a larger stimuli set of 120 tweets). This pool was designed to contain tweets that were respectful (i.e., we excluded tweets that were negative or critical of the other side), politically relevant, and that varied in how much they employed balance and pragmatism. Thus, in contrast to Study 4 (which conducted a controlled, experimental test of a small set of stimuli), this study examined a large set of real-world stimuli—testing whether participants' perceptions of balance and pragmatism were predictors of respect for politicians.

### *Participants*

We recruited 505 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk via CloudReseach ($M_{age} = 40.68$, $SD_{age} = 11.61$; 236 women, 265 men, three other gender; 279 Democrats, 126 Republicans, 88 independents, 11 something else), who each evaluated 30 real-world tweets from current members of U.S. congress.

### *Stimuli*

We first obtained the Twitter handles of every member of the U.S. House of Representatives in January 2023 (from https://pressgallery.house.gov/member-data/members-official-twitter-handles). We then used the Twitter Application Programming Interface to collect every tweet from each of these accounts from December 1, 2022 to January 30, 2023 ($N = 50{,}961$). We then excluded tweets with fewer than 30 words (reducing our sample to 26,181), reasoning that we might be more likely to find examples of politicians exhibiting balance and pragmatism in relatively long tweets. We then extracted a random sample of 700 tweets (350 Democrats and 350 Republicans). Next, we wanted to reduce this set of tweets to a smaller set of stimuli that (a) provided examples of messages discussing a wide range of issues, (b) varied on balance and pragmatism, and (c) was small enough to obtain multiple ratings for each tweet (we targeted a minimum of ~30 ratings for each tweet from each party). We also wanted to only include tweets that discussed political issues without criticizing the opposing party or being highly alarmist and negative. We thought highly critical and negative tweets would be unlikely to build cross-partisan respect, and we wanted to compare balanced pragmatism tweets to political messages that were also respectful. The lead author applied three exclusion criteria: tweets that explicitly criticized the opposing party, tweets that were irrelevant to politics (e.g., tweets about holidays or memorials), and tweets that were highly negative. This left a sample of 159 tweets.

To help ensure this sample actually contained examples of balance and pragmatism, the lead author labeled each of these 159 tweets as high (1) versus low (0) on balance and pragmatism. Based on these preliminary ratings, the sample contained 85 low balance and low pragmatism tweets; 16 high balance and low pragmatism tweets; 31 high pragmatism and low balance tweets; and 27 high balance and high pragmatism tweets. We then reduced the number of low balance and low pragmatism tweets by roughly half (to 46 tweets) by removing tweets about similar issues, resulting in the final stimuli set of 120 tweets (59 authored by Democrats; 61 by Republicans). We also collected pilot data to make sure these stimuli contained examples of tweets that varied on balance and on pragmatism. Results from this pilot data were similar to the primary results of this study, which—as depicted in Figure 3—contained 41 tweets that were above the mean on both balance and pragmatism (based on the average ratings for all participants); 35 tweets that were below the mean on both balance and pragmatism; 24 tweets that were above the mean on pragmatism and below the mean on balance; and 20 tweets that were above the mean on balance and below the mean on pragmatism. The final stimuli set on our OSF page also contains the lead authors' preliminary ratings, along with labels for the topics mentioned in the tweets, and preliminary ratings of the divisiveness of the issue.

### *Procedure*

Participants were told they would evaluate 30 tweets authored by members of the U.S. congress. To reduce the number of items participants had to complete for each tweet, we measured perceived balance and pragmatism with one item each (i.e., "Based on the above tweet, how balanced is this politician?" "Based on the above tweet, how pragmatic is this politician?"). To ensure participants interpreted balance and pragmatism the same way, we provided definitions of balance and pragmatism prior to the tweets. The definition of balance listed two key qualities (i.e., "they consider the perspectives of people on each side of disagreements" and "they make decisions that are considerate of what each group wants [e.g., Democrats, Republicans, and independents]"), as did the definition of pragmatism (i.e., "They are solution focused. They would choose an imperfect solution that accomplishes something over getting nothing done at all" and "they pay close attention to context. They make sure their solutions are practical in the current situation"). We then asked participants to answer four short questions to confirm they read these definitions (e.g., "A politician understands and listens to each side's point of view. They are also good at crafting practical solutions that work in the current situation. This politician is…"; answers included: balanced but not pragmatic; pragmatic but not balanced; balanced and pragmatic; neither balanced nor pragmatic). We only included participants who correctly answered three out of four questions (505 out of 540 participants), and participants were allowed to retry answering the questions up to 6 times (414 answered at least three correctly on their first try; 361 answered all four correctly on their first try).

After confirming their understanding of the definitions of balance and pragmatism, we told participants that "many of the tweets you evaluate will not be as clearly balanced or pragmatic as the practice questions you just answered" and also explained that the purpose of the study was "to collect your impressions," including their "honest impression of each politician based on the single tweet you see from them." Participants then rated a random sample of 30 tweets from our pool of 120. After each tweet, participants completed the items for balance and pragmatism; an item measuring perceived tone ("What is the overall tone of this Tweet"; 1—*very negative* to 7—*very positive*); an item measuring perceived divisiveness ("To what extent is this tweet about a highly divisive issue [i.e., an issue that Democrats and Republicans disagree strongly about]?"; 1—*not at all divisive* to 7—*very divisive*) and items for respect (i.e., "How much do you respect this politician"; 1—*no respect* to 7—*a lot of respect*) and willingness to engage (i.e., "How interested

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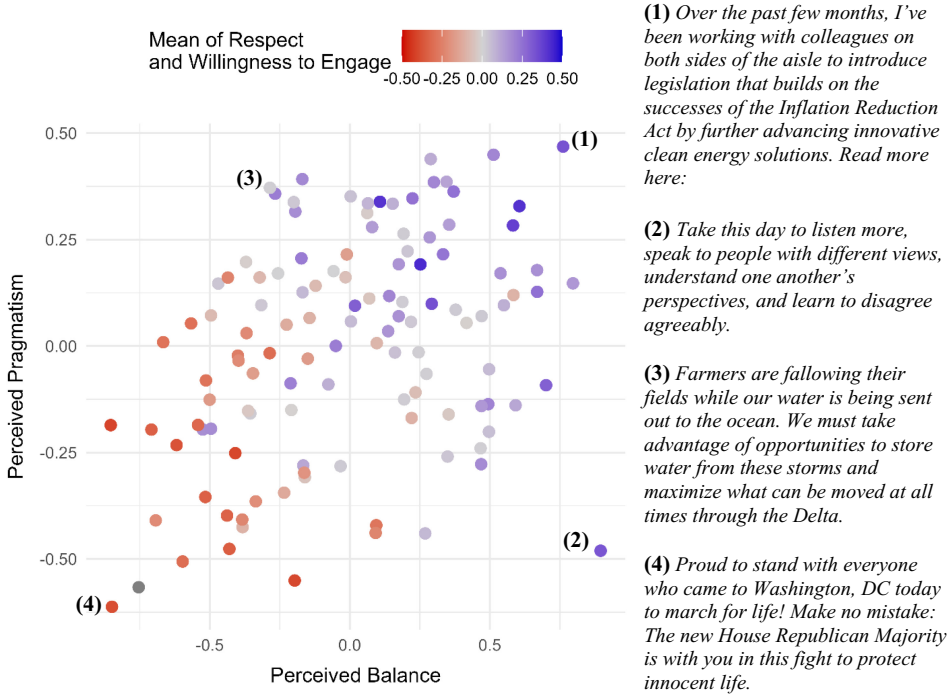
**Figure 3**

*More Balanced and Pragmatic Tweets Foster More Respect and Willingness to Engage*




*Note.* Each tweet was rated by a median of 126 participants (range: 105–145). Breaking down by political party, each tweet was rated by a median of 69 Democrats (range: 49–86); 31 Republicans (range: 19–47); and 25 who identified as neither Democrat nor Republican (range: 13–34). The four text examples represent tweets employing each possible combination of balance and pragmatism (based on participants' ratings). See the online article for the color version of this figure.

are you in hearing more about this politician's point of view?"). After rating 10 tweets, participants saw a page saying they had finished 10 out of 30 tweets. This page also contained reminders of the definitions of balance and pragmatism, accompanied by the message "If you'd like to review the definitions of balance and pragmatism again, we have placed them below." Participants also saw this message after rating 20 out of 30 tweets. After rating 30 tweets, participants completed demographics.[4]

## Results

### *Analysis Strategy*

Our primary analyses fit mixed-effects models looking at the relationships between balance and pragmatism (our predictors) and respect and willingness to engage (our outcomes), while controlling for perceived tone of the tweet. Our single-item measures of respect and willingness to engage were highly correlated in Study 5 (when aggregating these two variables at the tweet level, this relationship was $r = .95$), so we averaged these two items. Throughout the rest of this result section, we refer to this two-item composite as "respect."

Prior to analyses, we restructured our data to isolate the within-participant relationships between our predictors (perceived balance and pragmatism) and outcome (respect; Curran & Bauer, 2011). We standardized each variable, calculated the means for each participant, and then calculated the participant-centered values for each predictor. In all mixed-effects models, we entered both the participant means and the participant-centered values, including random effects for tweet ID and participant ID. For models including interactions among the participant-centered variables (e.g., the interaction between perceived balance and perceived pragmatism within participants), we also included the interactions between the variables representing the participant means on the same variables (e.g., the interaction between perceived balance and perceived pragmatism *between* participants). All analyses reported in the main text focus on how much perceptions of balance and pragmatism predict our outcomes within participants (i.e., the participant-centered predictors). For visualization, Figure 3 depicts the average ratings of perceived balance and perceived pragmatism for each tweet, aggregating ratings for each tweet. Full R code for all analyses is available in our preregistration materials and in R scripts on our OSF page.

[4] For some of the tweets in our stimuli set, the political party of the tweet author was not obvious. Study 5 also contained a between-subjects manipulation in which half of our participants were told the political party of the tweet author. Within this condition, participants also completed the item "What political party do you think this politician belongs to" from 1—*definitely a Democrat* to 5—*definitely a Republican*. On average, participants correctly rated tweets from Republicans significantly higher on this item than they did tweets from Democrats, $d = 0.68$, 95% CI [.64, .73]. We also found that balance and pragmatism tended to be slightly stronger predictors of our respect and willingness to engage when participants were explicitly told the party of the tweet authors (see the online supplemental materials for these results).

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### *Testing the Importance of Balance and Pragmatism*

We first examined whether perceptions of balance and perceptions of pragmatism each uniquely contributed to respect for politicians. As depicted in Figure 3, ratings of balance and pragmatism were modestly correlated, $r = .36$, $p < .001$. Tweets that were seen as balanced were also more likely to be seen as pragmatic; however, there were also many examples of tweets that were seen as balanced but not pragmatic and vice versa. The aggregated results (i.e., participant ratings averaged for each tweet) depicted in Figure 3 reveal that the tweets that were best at fostering respect and willingness to engage were tweets that were high on both balance and pragmatism. These results suggested that both balance and pragmatism may both shape evaluations of politicians. Of course, these results also combine ratings of Democrats, Republicans, and independents. Some of the tweets depicted in Figure 3 likely received lower scores on respect simply because there were more Democrats in our sample (e.g., the tweet about abortion in Figure 3). We accounted for this in our mixed effect models, testing the effects of balance and pragmatism within ratings of tweets from outgroup politicians specifically.

We next examined how much balance and pragmatism predicted respect within participants in mixed effect models (our preregistered, confirmatory analyses). We dummy-coded target types—whether the tweet was authored by an ingroup politician, an outgroup politician, or neither (i.e., for participants who did not identify with either party). Ratings of tweets from political outgroups were coded as the reference group. Examining the simple effects among ratings of outgroup politicians, the results suggested that perceptions of pragmatism, $b = 0.20$, $t(14{,}497) = 22.28$, $p < .001$, and perceptions of balance, $b = 0.32$, $t(14{,}446) = 33.64$, $p < .001$, both contributed to respect for outgroup political leaders. Next, we further explored whether these relationships differed across target type.

**Balance and Pragmatism in Evaluations of Ingroup Versus Outgroup Leaders.** We tested whether perceived balance and pragmatism were especially strong predictors of respect for political outgroup versus ingroup leaders. Our analyses in Studies 1–4 focused primarily on evaluations of politicians from the opposing party. Analyses of evaluations of ingroup politicians found similar, but slightly weaker effects of balance and pragmatism in Studies 1–3. However, since the materials in Study 5 contained real tweets with politicians talking about divisive issues, we thought there could be a greater chance of backfire effects among balanced politicians (e.g., Democrats could respond negatively to seeing a Democrat politician who is willing to compromise or listen to Republicans on issues like climate change).

Tests of interaction effects suggested that the effects of pragmatism did not differ across evaluations of tweets from ingroup versus outgroup leaders, $b = -0.01$, $t(14{,}501) = -0.77$, $p = .444$, nor did they differ across tweets from ingroup leaders versus tweets evaluated by participants with no political party, $b = -0.02$, $t(14{,}394) = -1.33$, $p = .183$. Perceived balance was a stronger predictor of respect in evaluations of outgroup politicians compared to ingroup politicians, test of interaction, $b = 0.18$, $t(14{,}499) = 14.51$, $p < .001$. However, balance was still a significant, positive predictor of respect for political ingroup members, $b = 0.14$, $t(14{,}446) = 15.51$, $p < .001$. These results suggest that pragmatism is equally relevant to evaluations of ingroup and outgroup politicians, while perceived balance is especially important in evaluations of political opponents. Even though perceived balance was less strongly associated with respect for ingroup politicians, we did not observe evidence of balance backfiring.

**Balance and Pragmatism in Tweets About Divisive Issues.** We next tested whether perceptions of balance and pragmatism still predicted more political respect specifically for tweets about divisive issues. Our pool of stimuli contained tweets about a wide range of issues, some of which were more divisive (e.g., tweets about the Inflation Reduction Act and abortion), some less divisive (local farmers), and others were about no specific issues (e.g., a tweet about the importance of listening to the other side). Participants' ratings of how much tweets were about a divisive issue (i.e., issues that Democrats and Republicans disagreed on) also suggested our stimuli contained tweets about divisive and nondivisive issues (on a 7-point scale, $M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.80$, skewness $= .64$, kurtosis $= -.08$). This enabled us to test whether issue divisiveness moderated the effects of balance and pragmatism.

We examined the interactions between balance and divisiveness and between pragmatism and divisiveness while collapsing across all target types (i.e., ratings of allies, opponents, and ratings from participants with no political party).[5] Overall, both pragmatism, test of interaction, $b = 0.04$, $t(14{,}547) = 5.87$, $p < .001$, and balance, test of interaction, $b = 0.02$, $t(14{,}561) = 3.97$, $p < .001$, were stronger predictors of respect for tweets about more divisive issues. This suggests that balance and pragmatism may be especially important for garnering respect in messages about divisive issues.

**Testing the Interaction Between Balance and Pragmatism.** Study 4 found evidence that balanced and pragmatic quotes were better at increasing respect than quotes that were only balanced. However, it was unclear whether this was because balance on its own is ineffective at fostering respect when it is not accompanied by pragmatism (an interaction effect) or because balance and pragmatism both uniquely contribute to respect (an additive effect). Study 5 enabled us to better examine this interaction effect across a larger set of real-world messages.

We examined the interaction between perceived balance and pragmatism while collapsing across target type (i.e., ratings of allies, opponents, and ratings from participants with no political party).[6] This revealed a negative interaction, $b = -0.05$, $t(14{,}793) = 8.08$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the effects of balance were smaller at high levels of pragmatism (and vice versa). However, probing this interaction revealed that the effects of pragmatism were still significant at high levels of balance, $b = 0.16$, $t(14{,}416) = 20.36$,

[5] We also examined three-way interactions including target type. The interaction between pragmatism and divisiveness did not differ across allied and opposing politicians, test of three-way interaction: $b = 0.01$, $t(14372) = 0.97$, $p = .331$. Pragmatism always corresponded to especially large increases in respect among tweets about more (versus less) divisive issue. However, the interaction between balance and divisiveness did differ in tweets authored by political opponents (versus allies), test of three-way interaction: $b = 0.17$, $t(14367) = 13.07$, $p < .001$. Perceived balance was an especially strong predictor of respect for more (versus less) divisive issues, but this two-way interaction only existed among tweets from political opponents. These results suggest that in tweets divisive issues, pragmatism was always especially helpful for fostering respect, and balance was especially helpful when opposing politicians tweeted about divisive issues.

[6] We also examined whether the interaction between balance and pragmatism differed when participants were rating allied versus opposing politicians. The three-way interaction between balance, pragmatism, and allied versus opposing tweets was significant, $b = -0.04$, $t(14435) = -3.89$, $p < .001$. However, even looking specifically within ratings of opposing politicians, the effects of pragmatism were still significant at high levels of balance, $b = 0.16$, $t(14492) = 11.14$, $p < .001$, and effects of balance were still significant at high levels of pragmatism, $b = 27$, $t(14436) = 22.28$, $p < .001$.

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$p < .001$, and effects of balance were still significant at high levels of pragmatism, $b = 0.20$, $t(13{,}854) = 24.24$, $p < .001$. These results suggest that politicians who are either balanced or pragmatic alone still garner more respect, but politicians who are both balanced and pragmatic garner the most respect overall.

## Discussion

Perceptions of balance and pragmatism both predicted respect and willingness to engage with opposing political leaders. These results helped address the limitations of Studies 1–4 by examining a larger set of externally valid stimuli: 120 tweets from current members of the U.S. congress. The results also revealed the relative importance of balance and pragmatism. Studies 3 and 4 suggested that pragmatism may be more effective at increasing cross-partisan respect. However, Study 5 suggested that for political opponents' messages about divisive issues, balance is especially helpful for fostering cross-partisan respect. Pragmatism also was especially helpful for fostering respect in response to messages about divisive issues, but pragmatism was equally helpful in messages from allies and opponents. Importantly, even examining contexts when balance might be most likely to backfire (i.e., seeing a political ally balancing opposing perspectives on a divisive issue), balance still had a positive relationship with respect. Of course, participants in Study 5 also received more information about balance and pragmatism prior to rating tweets, which could help explain why our measures of balance and pragmatism better distinguished between these two constructs in Study 5. But Study 5 also contained more stimuli that were likely better able to tease apart balance and pragmatism; previous work also suggests that people do distinguish between balance and pragmatism (Brienza et al., 2018); and our own data suggested that most of our participants easily understood and applied the definitions of balance and pragmatism we gave them. Combined with Studies 1–4, the present results suggest that political leaders who deploy balance and pragmatism—across a variety of issues and problems—foster greater cross-partisan respect.

# Study 6

Partisan animosity not only impedes engagement with candidates and elected officials; it also disrupts interactions between ordinary Americans who disagree on contentious issues. It is one thing to employ balanced pragmatism in hypothetical dilemmas or to endorse it in short quotes, but it may be more difficult to propose balanced and practical solutions to contentious and complex issues like gun control and immigration. Our remaining studies examine whether ordinary Americans can foster respectful, cross-partisan engagement by incorporating balanced pragmatism into everyday discussions.

## Method

### *Participants*

We recruited 100 antigun Democrats from Amazon's Mechanical Turk ($M_{age} = 40.86$; $SD_{age} = 13.82$; 45 women, 54 men, one other gender). As a first step in generalizing the effectiveness of balanced pragmatism to contentious issues, we collected participants on one side of the gun debate to simplify the materials created. In Studies 6 and 7, we test comments written by Americans on both sides.

### *Procedure*

In a within-subjects design, we showed participants four comments—written by the researchers to appear like comments from a previous study—about how lawmakers should respond to mass shootings. They included (a) a progun comment that exhibited balanced pragmatism, (b) a progun comment that gave detailed reasons supporting their side (i.e., the logical analysis condition), (c) a baseline progun comment that neither exhibited balanced pragmatism, nor did it give reasons supporting their side and (d) a comment that shared participants' antigun stance but did not exhibit balanced pragmatism.

The balanced pragmatism comment stated they strongly supported gun rights but also acknowledged the importance of weighing different perspectives. They also stated they were open to gun laws that would realistically reduce gun violence affecting many Americans (rather than laws responding to mass shootings, which account for a small fraction of gun violence). The logical analysis comment argued that gun control laws would have little impact on mass shootings because most shooters use guns that belong to someone else or have little trouble passing background checks. The baseline comment discussed how the right to bear arms is what makes America great. Lastly, the antigun comment expressed support for gun control (as all participants did) and claimed that people who are against gun control do not understand the problem (see the online supplemental materials for full paragraphs).

### *Measure*

After reading each comment, participants completed the same three items measuring respect, and willingness to engage used in Studies 3 and 4. Last, participants were asked to choose which of the four commenters they would most like to have a hypothetical discussion about guns with.

## Results

We conducted repeated measures ANOVAs to compare evaluations of the balanced pragmatism commenter, to the logical analysis, baseline, and antigun (or ingroup) commenters. Results showed that comment type had significant effects upon respect, $F(3, 297) = 56.86$, $p < .001$, and willingness to engage, $F(3, 297) = 64.54$, $p < .001$. Post hoc tests with Tukey adjustments indicated that the balanced pragmatism commenter elicited more respect than the baseline, $M_{diff} = 1.93$, $t(99) = 12.79$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.28$, and the logical analysis commenters, $M_{diff} = 1.21$, $t(99) = 7.81$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.78$. It also led to more willingness to engage compared to the baseline, $M_{diff} = 2.00$, $t(99) = 12.16$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.22$, and logical analysis commenters, $M_{diff} = 1.10$, $t(99) = 7.94$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.79$. The balanced pragmatism commenter did not differ from the antigun commenter on respect, $M_{diff} = -0.03$, $t(99) = -0.15$, $p = .99$, $d = -0.01$, or on willingness to engage, $M_{diff} = -0.13$, $t(99) = -0.74$, $p = .88$, $d = -0.07$.

Most strikingly, significantly more participants said they would rather have a conversation about guns with the balanced pragmatism commenter who took an opposing stance than an antigun commenter who agreed with them (but who was not balanced and pragmatic), 56% versus 32%, $\chi^2(1) = 6.55$, $p = .011$.

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## Discussion

These results provide initial evidence that balanced pragmatism can be used to craft respect building comments about divisive issues. However, whether ordinary Americans can—or are even willing to—craft similar comments with less knowledge of these constructs is unclear. Our final two studies examine whether simple instructions can help partisans employ balanced pragmatism when explaining their views (Study 7). We then attempt to replicate the effects of Study 6 using new examples of balanced and pragmatic comments that were written by participants (Study 8).

## Study 7

Balanced and pragmatic comments helped foster respect. These findings may suggest that balanced pragmatism is a simple solution to help bridge political divides in America. However, employing balanced pragmatism in political conversations may not be easy. If people are unwilling or unable to employ balanced pragmatism, then balanced pragmatism may not be a practical solution to bridging divides. Study 6 tested how difficult it was for participants to write balanced and pragmatic comments (vs. standard arguments for their side or respectful comments) about a divisive issue—immigration. This task also provided additional examples of how ordinary people deploy balanced pragmatism (which we then showed to political opponents in Study 7).

### Method

#### *Participants*

We collected 275 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk ($M_{age} = 44.20$; $SD_{age} = 14.30$; 140 women, 134 men, one other gender; 133 Democrats, 142 Republicans). We only included participants who either identified as Republican or Democrat and whose position on increasing deportations of illegal immigrants aligned with the position most commonly endorsed by their respective party (e.g., Democrats who supported increasing deportations were excluded). We collected a roughly even number of participants from both parties.

#### *Procedure*

Participants were instructed to write a comment describing their views on immigration to a political outgroup member. They also learned that their anonymized comment might be shown to participants in a future study (i.e., Study 8).

In a between-subjects design, participants were assigned to one of three comment strategies. In the balanced pragmatism condition, they were told to focus on being both balanced and pragmatic. Specifically, they were instructed to "explicitly consider multiple stances on immigration, recognize the limits of your own knowledge, and describe a workable solution that addresses everyone's concerns." They were also told future participants would rate their comment on each of these qualities (with items such as, "This comment tries to see things from different points of view"). In the logical analysis condition, participants were told to try to "write something that shows your ability to think logically about the issues and put together a cohesive argument." They were also told to try to write a comment that future participants would rate highly on items such as, "This comment makes a cohesive argument." The respect condition instructed participants to "describe their views in a way that will help you each respect each other even if you disagree," and were told that future participants would rate their comment on items such as "I could have a conversation with this person even if we disagreed."

#### *Measures*

After writing three to five sentences, participants rated how easy the task was (two items, e.g., "It was easy to describe my views on immigration as instructed"), how much the comment reflected their true self (two items, e.g., "The comment I wrote is a true reflection of my actual views on immigration"), and how effective they thought their comment would be at building respect, willingness to engage, agreement, perceived rationality, perceived morality, and perceived balanced pragmatism.

#### *Coding Balanced Pragmatism*

Two independent coders rated each comment on balanced pragmatism, logical analysis, and general respect. Balanced pragmatism was scored on three items, "This comment tries to see things from both sides of the issue," "…recognized the limits of their knowledge," and "…tries to come up with a workable solution that addresses both sides concerns." Analytic thinking was scored on the items, "…shows their line of reasoning," "…explains either the harms or benefits of immigration to society," and "…sounds intelligent." General respect was scored on the items, "…is polite," "…is tolerant of people who disagree with them," and "…is kind to people who disagree with them." All items were rated on a 3-point scale from 0—*not at all*, to 1—*moderately so*, to 2—*very much*.

Following guidelines from interrater reliability (Hallgren, 2012), we calculated intraclass correlations for all nine items. The average intraclass correlations were .73 for the three balanced pragmatism items, .63 for the logical analysis items, and .55 for the general respect items—indicating good agreement for both balanced pragmatism and logical analysis and fair agreement for general respect. Coders' ratings were averaged for each item and the three items for each measure were summed, creating scales ranging from 0 to 6.

### Results

We preregistered two open research questions. First, how easy will it be for participants to write balanced and pragmatic comments? Second, will participants expect balanced and pragmatic comments to foster positive cross-partisan attitudes relative to the logical analysis and generally respectful comments? We had no confirmatory hypotheses.

#### *How Good Are Ordinary Americans at Balanced Pragmatism?*

We first tested how successful participants were at writing balanced and pragmatic comments by examining ratings of independent coders. Participants who received the balanced pragmatism instructions wrote comments that were coded significantly higher on balanced pragmatism, $M = 2.21$, $SD = 1.43$, than those instructed to write logical analysis comments, $M = 0.74$, $SD = 0.95$, $t(264) = 8.59$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.23$, or respectful comments, $M = 0.92$, $SD = 1.00$, $t(264) =$

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7.51, $p < .001$, $d = 1.05$. Participants in the balanced pragmatism condition also wrote more respectful comments compared to the logical analysis condition, balanced pragmatism, $M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.25$; logical analysis, $M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.08$, $t(265) = 5.40$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.78$ as did participants in the respect condition, $M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.03$, $t(265) = 3.55$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.56$. Ratings of logical analysis did not significantly differ across conditions, balanced pragmatism, $M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.30$; logical analysis, $M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.34$; respect, $M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.36$. In sum, participants were on average less likely to write comments that scored high on balanced pragmatism than on either respect or logical analysis. Even when not explicitly instructed, many participants still wrote comments that were high on respect and logical analysis. In contrast, participants tended to only use balanced pragmatism when told to do so, and even then, their scores on balanced pragmatism still tended to be lower than their scores on respect or logical analysis (see Figure 4), suggesting that balanced pragmatism is neither particularly intuitive nor easy to use—explaining why interventions are required to encourage it.

### *Do People Expect Balanced Pragmatism to Be Worth the Effort?*

We next examined whether participants thought writing balanced and pragmatic comments would be more effective at improving political opponents' attitudes toward them. Participants in the balanced pragmatism condition forecasted that political opponents who read their comments would view them as more balanced and pragmatic (see Table 3 for descriptives and pairwise tests); however, they did not expect this to increase perceptions of rationality and morality or to elicit greater respect and engagement.

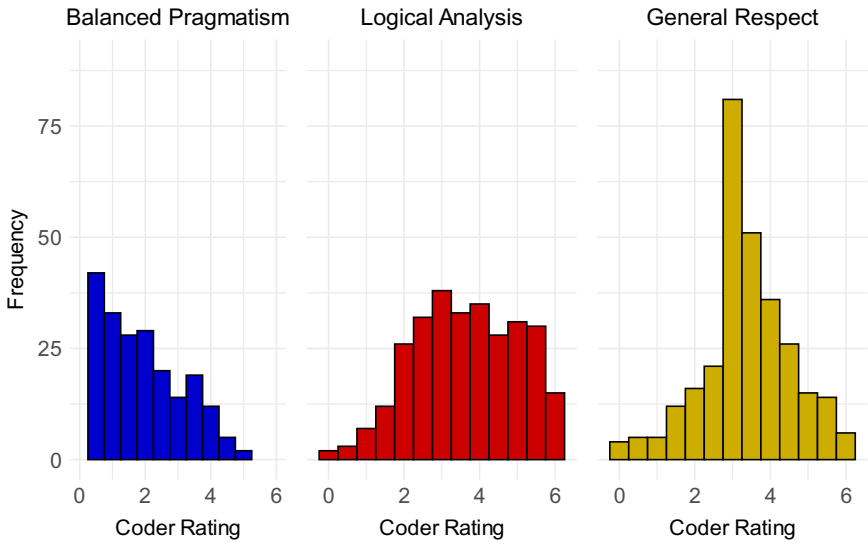
In addition to seeing no benefits of balanced pragmatism, participants also found it significantly easier to write logical analysis than balanced and pragmatic comments, logical analysis, $M = 5.92$, $SD = 1.03$; balanced pragmatism, $M = 5.41$, $SD = 1.32$; $t(272) = 2.84$, $p = .005$, $d = 0.43$. They also found it easier to write broadly respectful comments, $M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.21$; $t(272) = 1.98$, $p = .049$, $d = 0.28$. Given that balanced pragmatism substantially improved cross-partisan attitudes compared to other approaches to sharing political views in our previous studies, these expectations may cause people to overlook an effective approach for building respect while talking substantively about issues.

### *Relationships Between Coder Ratings*

We also examined whether participants who employed balanced pragmatism or logical analyses were more likely to be more respectful. Coders ratings for respect and balanced pragmatism were positively correlated ($r = .56$, $p < .001$), but logical analysis and respect were not ($r = .11$, $p = .06$). Balanced pragmatism and logical analysis also did not correlate with each other ($r = .09$, $p = .14$). Though participants did not expect balanced pragmatism to foster more cross-partisan respect than logical analysis, employing the former lead participants to also be more generally respectful—possibly without realizing it. Our final study tests whether participants in Study 7 who succeeded at writing balanced and pragmatic comments are more successful at building cross-partisan

**Figure 4**

*Participants' Success at Writing Each Type of Comment When Instructed*




*Note.* Scores represent the sums of three items with a range from 0 to 2 (a range of 0–6 when summed). Two trained coders rated each comment on all nine items. Coder's ratings were summed for each construct (balanced pragmatism, logical analysis, and respectfulness) and then averaged. To illustrate how successful participants were at writing each type of comment, the histograms above only include participants who were instructed to write that type of comment (e.g., scores in the histogram with balanced pragmatism scores only show participants who were instructed to write balanced pragmatism comments). See the online article for the color version of this figure.

**Table 3**
*Participants' Forecasts for How Their Comments Would Be Perceived by a Political Opponent*

| Condition | Forecast: balanced *M* (*SD*) | Forecast: pragmatic *M* (*SD*) | Forecast: rational *M* (*SD*) | Forecast: moral *M* (*SD*) | Forecast: respect *M* (*SD*) | Forecast: engage *M* (*SD*) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Logical analysis | 4.01 (1.60)[a] | 3.94 (1.62)[a] | 4.46 (1.60)[a] | 4.35 (1.63)[a] | 3.98 (1.62)[a] | 4.42 (1.52)[a] |
| Balanced pragmatism | 4.81 (1.40)[b] | 4.58 (1.56)[b] | 4.28 (1.59)[a] | 4.44 (1.67)[a] | 4.41 (1.65)[a] | 4.70 (1.63)[a] |
| General respect | 4.21 (1.50)[a] | 4.22 (1.59)[a,b] | 4.40 (1.29)[a] | 4.57 (1.49)[a] | 4.29 (1.42)[a] | 4.54 (1.41)[a] |

*Note.* Means within columns that do not share a superscript letter in common are significantly different from one another at $p < .05$.

respect than comments containing respectful, well-reasoned arguments for their own side.

## Study 8

Participants in Study 7 believed that employing balanced pragmatism was challenging and did little to foster respect. This study tested whether this belief was wrong. Similar to Study 6, we again tested the effectiveness of balanced pragmatism in fostering cross-partisan respect. However, Study 8 included participants from both political parties. Study 8 also used comments written by participants in Study 7, which helped ensure our materials captured multiple ways people may deploy balanced pragmatism in political discussion. We were especially interested in whether balanced pragmatism provides benefits to partisans trying to advance solutions. For this reason, we compared partisans' reactions to two strategies for finding policy solutions—balanced pragmatism versus making a cohesive, respectful argument for one side's solution. We compared reactions to comments written by participants in Study 7 that scored high on balanced pragmatism or logical analysis, while ensuring all comments were highly respectful.

### Method

#### *Participants*

We collected 296 participants (after excluding three for missing multiple attention checks) from Amazon's Mechanical Turk ($M_{age} = 39.80$, $SD_{age} = 12.55$; 135 women, 158 men, three other gender; 211 Democrats, 85 Republicans). We only included Republicans and Democrats whose position on increasing deportations of illegal immigrants aligned with the position most commonly endorsed by their respective party (e.g., decreasing deportations for Democrats).

#### *Procedure*

In a within-subjects design, participants were told they would see four comments written by a participant from a previous study. We showed participants two comments high on balanced pragmatism and two high on logical analysis. For both types of comments, participants saw one from a political ingroup member and one from a political opponent. After reading each comment, participants rated the author using the same measures of balanced pragmatism, morality, intelligence, respect, and willingness to engage that were used in Study 3.

**Comment Selection.** Each comment participants saw was selected at random from a pool of four comments of the same type (i.e., the four combinations of balanced pragmatism vs. logical analysis and outgroup vs. ingroup). To select our pool of 16 total comments, we first excluded all comments that were at or below the midpoint on coders' respect score (i.e., scored a 3 or below on the 0–6 scale). For balanced pragmatism comments, we then excluded all comments that were above the midpoint on logical analysis and selected the four comments with the highest balanced pragmatism ratings (ties were decided by minimizing logical analysis scores). We followed the same process for selecting logical analysis comments—choosing the comments scoring highest on logical analysis, while also minimizing balanced pragmatism.

Balanced pragmatism comments tended to have slightly higher respect scores than logical analysis comments (likely due to the positive relationship between coders balanced pragmatism ratings and their respect ratings). Still, comments primarily differed on logical analysis and balanced pragmatism, and all scored above the midpoint (3) on respect. Overall, balanced pragmatism comments averaged scores of 4.44 for respect, 2.69 for logical analysis, and 4.06 for balanced pragmatism. Logical analysis comments averaged scores of 3.81 for respect, 5 for logical analysis, and 0.19 for balanced pragmatism.

### Results

#### *Analytic Approach*

Our primary analyses consisted of 2 (balanced pragmatism vs. logical analysis) × 2 (ingroup vs. outgroup) within-subjects ANOVAs and included all participants collected. However, to ensure that our results were not driven by differences in respect, we report two additional analyses in the online supplemental materials. One analysis replicated our primary results in a subset of participants who saw logical analysis and balanced pragmatism comments that had nearly identical respect ratings (3.80 vs. 4.00). A second analysis controlled for the respect ratings of each comment in a multilevel model. Across these additional analyses, all of the effects of the balanced pragmatism condition replicated (i.e., effects upon perceived intelligence, morality, willingness to engage, and respect), except for the effect of the balanced pragmatism condition upon perceived morality in the second analysis.

#### *Comparing Balanced and Pragmatic Opponents to Analytic Opponents*

Our confirmatory hypotheses predicted that participants would view balanced and pragmatic opponents as more moral and rational and be more willing to respect and engage with them compared to opponents who made well-reasoned, logical arguments. Again, all comments were highly respectful. We conducted 2 (balanced pragmatism vs. logical analysis) × 2 (ingroup vs. outgroup) within-subject ANOVAs for each of these four outcomes. These ANOVAs revealed significant interaction effects upon perceived morality, $F(1, 295) = 93.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_G = .046$; intelligence, $F(1, 294) = 63.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_G = .030$; respect, $F(1, 294) = 70.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_G = .026$; and willingness to engage, $F(1, 295) = 94.81$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_G = .040$.

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These interaction effects were due to the fact that we observed no effects of balanced pragmatism versus logical analyses in response to ingroup comments (see the online supplemental materials for these results). Consistent with our previous studies, these results again suggested that balanced pragmatism may not be especially effective at building respect with ingroup members, but it also does not appear to backfire.

We next examined effects of balanced pragmatism in evaluations of outgroup comments—the primary focus of our analyses. Overall, participants formed much more positive impressions of opponents who employed balanced pragmatism (vs. logical analysis). Authors of balanced pragmatism comments were seen as more moral, $M_{diff} = 0.99$, $t(585) = 13.14$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.67$, and intelligent, $M_{diff} = 0.98$, $t(586) = 12.33$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.65$. Participants were also more willing to engage with the balanced pragmatism commenter, $M_{diff} = 1.16$, $t(590) = 13.20$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.67$, and to treat them with greater respect, $M_{diff} = 0.90$, $t(588) = 11.53$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.59$.

Last, we again tested whether perceptions of morality and intelligence each uniquely predicted our outcomes (specifically for opponents). We first regressed respect upon both morality and intelligence in a mixed effect model, entering participant ID as a random intercept (since the data for this analysis contained two ratings from each participant, one for each outgroup comment they evaluated). Perceived morality, $b = 0.50$, $t(558) = 10.70$, $p < .001$, and perceived intelligence, $b = 0.40$, $t(561) = 8.69$, $p < .001$, both predicted respect. Fitting the same model with willingness to engage as the outcome also found significant relationships with perceived morality, $b = 0.31$, $t(558) = 6.45$, $p < .001$, and intelligence, $b = 0.63$, $t(561) = 13.50$, $p < .001$. Consistent with our previous studies, these results suggest that perceived morality and intelligence may both help explain how balanced pragmatism fosters respect and willingness to engage.

### *Hypothetical Partner Choice*

Last, we preregistered a confirmatory hypothesis predicting that participants would be significantly less likely to choose to have a hypothetical conversation about immigration with an opponent who employed balanced pragmatism versus logical analyses. Of our 296 participants, 38 (12.8%) chose the logical analysis outgroup member, 73 (24.7%) chose the balanced pragmatism outgroup member, 97 (32.8%) chose the logical analysis ingroup member, and 88 (29.7%) chose the balanced pragmatism ingroup member. Supporting our hypothesis, participants were twice as likely to choose to have a conversation with an outgroup member who employed balanced pragmatism versus logical analyses. We next tested whether participants were equally likely to choose the balanced pragmatism outgroup member, the balanced pragmatism ingroup member, and the logical analyses ingroup member. A chi-square test revealed that participants were no more likely to choose one of these three conditions over another, $\chi^2(2) = 3.42$, $p = .181$. In other words, participants were no more likely to choose to have a conversation with an ingroup member than to have a conversation with an outgroup member who employed balanced pragmatism. Conversations with outgroup members who employ balanced pragmatism may be no less appealing than conversations with ingroup members.

## General Discussion

Drawing from work on wisdom (Grossmann et al., 2020), eight studies explored whether employing balanced pragmatism encourages respectful cross-partisan engagement. Studies 1–3 found that watching political elites employ balanced pragmatism to solve dilemmas increased Americans' willingness to respectfully engage with them. Study 4 revealed that simply endorsing balanced pragmatism in short quotes still improved willingness to engage with political elites—even compared to endorsing respect generally—among both partisans and independents. Study 5 demonstrated that perceptions of balance and pragmatism both uniquely predict respect for political leaders across a large pool of real-world messages about a wide range of political issues. Studies 6–8 tested whether balanced pragmatism can also foster cross-partisan respect in discussions about contentious issues (e.g., immigration). Comments employing balanced pragmatism (vs. logical analyses) that were crafted by the researchers (Study 6) and ordinary Americans (Studies 7 and 8) increased opponents' willingness to engage respectfully with commenters. Strikingly, participants were as willing to have a hypothetical conversation with an opponent who employed balanced pragmatism as they were commenters who agreed with them. Though participants found it difficult to employ balanced pragmatism, doing so successfully substantially increased opponents' willingness to respect and engage with them.

This research builds upon emerging work examining strategies for fostering cross-partisan respect and engagement—especially recent work highlighting the importance of receptivity to opposing views (Chen et al., 2010; Minson et al., 2020; Yeomans et al., 2020). Consistent with this work, Studies 6–8 provide further evidence that giving other perspectives due consideration is an important piece of cross-partisan communication. But the present work—specifically Studies 1–3—suggests any opportunities to illustrate political opponents' capacities for wisdom may help to combat partisan animosity. Even watching political opponents balance multiple perspectives in hypothetical dilemmas—where being balanced does not entail being receptive to opposing views on contentious political conversations—may help them seem more moral, rational, intelligent, and authentic. Taking advantage of every opportunity to help people across the aisle see our own sides' capacity for wisdom may be vital to combating partisan animosity.

### Implications

To reduce polarization, it is important to understand our political opponents, but we should also present ourselves in ways that foster understanding. Drawing from work on wisdom, we outline a scalable strategy for presenting one's views that encourages opponents to engage respectfully. Considering others' perspectives and focusing on pragmatic solutions are two components of wisdom that can improve cross-partisan discussions. Beyond the dilemmas and guides used to encourage balanced pragmatism here, the wisdom literature contains additional strategies—such as daily reflections on alternative perspectives and values (Bruya & Ardelt, 2018; Grossmann et al., 2021)—that may also be useful for developing wisdom-related interventions for political animosity.

The present findings also speak to the importance of both balance and pragmatism. Study 4 found that quotes endorsing pragmatism were significantly better at fostering respect with opposing politicians than quotes that only endorsed balancing perspectives. However, Study 5 found that in real-world tweets from political leaders discussing divisive issues, perceived balance is an especially strong predictor of cross-partisan respect. Combined, these results suggested that both

balance and pragmatism play important roles in perceptions of political leaders.

The present work also demonstrates the potential of working in tandem with practitioner organizations. By looking to the real-world successes of organizations with practical goals and applied methods, psychological scientists can uncover both new phenomena and/or new mechanisms for scientific study. We started with an ostensibly successful video series used by a practitioner organization and then tested our best explanation of how this series bridged divides (i.e., wisdom). Drawing inspiration from real-world solutions is one way we can engage with society and enhance our practical relevance.

## Limitations and Future Directions

It is important to note limitations in the current work. First, we focused on building respect for one target at a time. Though this is good first step, combating polarization requires improving attitudes toward the opposing party more broadly. We did measure some of these attitudes for exploratory analyses, but we found little evidence that seeing a single video with a balanced and pragmatic politician was enough to reduce intolerance for political opponents in general. However, having wise political leaders representing each party could still foster more positive perceptions across the aisle. And if one political group shows a greater willingness to consider the interests of others across the aisles, it may even cause the opposing party to reciprocate. The present studies were not designed to test this idea, but we think this is a promising direction for future research. Nevertheless, making individual political interactions more respectful and encouraging engagement remain worthy aims for depolarization work.

Another promising direction of future work may explore whether training wise reasoning can help make deploying balanced pragmatism in political conversation more effortless. Study 7 revealed that participants found it difficult to be balanced and pragmatic, but existing work suggests that training-wise reasoning is possible (Grossmann et al., 2021). However, training people to be balanced and pragmatic in the context of politics may face additional obstacles, which future work should examine. First, many Americans harbor animosity toward political opponents (Finkel et al., 2020). Distorted perceptions of political outgroups are also common (Ahler & Sood, 2018). This may make many partisans especially resistant to balanced reasoning. Second, pragmatism requires thinking about solutions that actually work in a specific context, rather than in terms of abstract, moral ideals. And strong, black-and-white moral convictions are a powerful motivator for political engagement (Skitka, 2010). In short, training wise reasoning in politics may face obstacles to balanced reasoning (i.e., people do not want to consider perspectives they think are immoral) and to pragmatism (i.e., abstract more mandates are often more motivating than contextualized problem solving). Of course, not every person needs to be trained in wise reasoning for it improve the political climate. If only some people develop stronger habits for deploying wisdom in political interactions, this may also cause those they interact with to reciprocate.

The present work also found other ways to improve cross-partisan respect. Videos that depicted politicians (the same politicians from our other videos) from opposing parties working together and talking about the importance of solving political gridlock had the strongest effects of materials we looked at. Endorsing mutual respect in short quotes was also effective at improving respect in Study 4. In practice, people could combine these strategies, and the videos of politicians working together to end political gridlock appeared to signal both general respect and pragmatism. Nevertheless, Study 4 provided direct evidence that balanced pragmatism, even when simply endorsed in short quotes, can improve respect beyond endorsing mutual respect. Simply encouraging respect can be beneficial. However, focusing on finding practical solutions is not only important to resolve issues; it can make people across the aisle more likely to engage with these efforts.

Studies 1–3 compared the balanced pragmatism videos to other typical ways people encounter politicians (i.e., Wikipedia bios, campaign ads, and news clips). Though we were able to find videos that featured the same politicians, it was difficult to control for every way the videos differed that was not directly relevant to balanced pragmatism. We took steps some precautions to help address this, like avoiding comparing against negative news clips and negative campaign ads which may have made the politicians seem less likeable. We also considered other ways the balanced pragmatism videos may have made the politicians seem more likeable. Perhaps they discussed fewer divisive issues in the balanced pragmatism videos. Looking closely at each of the news clips in our materials, one of the clips we used seemed to help address this limitation. In this clip, the conservative politician argued for reducing the amount of time politicians spend raising money—a point that polling suggests many liberals agree with (Jones, 2018). The balanced pragmatism videos still fostered more cross-partisan respect than this condition, which provided some assurance that the effects we observed were not simply because our control videos contained more divisive comments.

We also thought that the informal setting in the balanced pragmatism videos could also have made the politicians seem more authentic, which could make them more likeable. We measured perceptions of authenticity, which we originally framed a potential outcome of exhibiting wise reasoning (e.g., people who are pragmatic could look more like they genuinely care about solving problems). But this could also represent an alternative explanation (i.e., the context of the balanced pragmatism videos causing the politicians to seem more authentic and likable rather than wise). Importantly, our mediation analyses suggested that authenticity could not fully explain the changes in our outcomes. We observed indirect effects through morality in Studies 2–3 and also through perceived intelligence in Studies 3. Of course, there may be other alternative explanations for the differences in the videos we used, and this was an important limitation of Studies 1–3. However, we were able to address some of these alternative explanations and results from our other studies provided further evidence that balanced pragmatism helps foster respect.

### *Constraints on Generalizability*

The present studies were also limited by their reliance on Amazon's Mechanical Turk. However, some of America's most toxic political discourse is found among anonymous online respondents. Using a sample of these participants further reveals the promise of balanced pragmatism. Moreover, MTurk samples are typically less vulnerable to concerns about representativeness and demand characteristics relative to other convenience samples (Berinsky et al., 2012; Cheung et al., 2017; Difallah et al., 2018; Moss et al., 2020). Still, future work should test whether balanced pragmatism is similarly effective across other populations, including those outside the United States.

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## Conclusion

Reversing trends in partisan animosity is challenging, but new solutions are constantly presenting themselves, whether through research from other fields and subfields, or through the innovations of practitioners. Here we sought to connect the science of wisdom scholars with the work of a bridge-building organization to develop a strategy for presenting political views that encourages respect and willingness to engage with political opponents. We hope many other strategies follow.

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