Appendix B: Pretest Results

We pretested the potentially uncivil attacks on a convenience sample of American respondents (N = 1845, after excluding straight-liners and respondents who failed an attention check) collected in September 2023 via the online platform CloudResearch. 59.9% of respondents are female, and the average respondent is 46.2 years old (SD = 14.0). 38.3% of respondents say they are very interested in politics, and 49.7% say they are somewhat interested; only 2.1% of respondents declare that they are not interested at all. Respondents are highly skewed to the left on a self-reported 0-10 left-right scale (M = 4.6, SD = 3.2). 44.2 of respondents self-identify as a Democrat, 27.7% as a Republican, and 23.5 as an independent.

Participants were shown a series of statements framed as short messages "posted on social media by various political candidates currently campaigning for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives." Respondents were shown a random selection of four messages: either a negative or a civil message (to be used in future studies), two out of four potentially uncivil messages including insults, and two out of four potentially uncivil messages including ridicule. They were asked to rate each message on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 "Very respectful" to 9 "Very disrespectful." Table B1 below shows the average scores for each message. Average scores indicate that the manipulations were perceived as quite disrespectful across the board. This is especially the case for texts that include insults towards the opponent (e.g., "Idiots, the lot of them! #Morons", M = 7.9, SD = 1.7), but texts including ridicule were also rated as relatively disrespectful (e.g., "Frankly, what a bunch of total geniuses… #Einstein", M = 5.9, SD = 2.0).

Table B1. Conjoint messages, average disrespect scores. Pre-test results.

Type	Message	N	M	SD
insults #1	What my opponents say about this issue is untenable. What a bunch of dimwits! #Morons	941	7.76	1.73
insults #2	What my opponents say about this issue is untenable. Idiots, the lot of them! #Morons	895	7.84	1.73
insults #3	What my opponents say about this issue is untenable. These people really are nothing but halfwits! #Morons	926	7.71	1.74
insults #4	What my opponents say about this issue is untenable. You'd almost feel bad for those nincompoops! #Morons	928	7.51	1.81
ridicule #1	What my opponents say about this issue is untenable. Frankly, what a bunch of total geniuses… #Einstein	942	5.90	1.99
ridicule #2	What my opponents say about this issue is untenable. Come on, these people are really in a league of their own… #Einstein	945	5.63	1.89
ridicule #3	What my opponents say about this issue is untenable. Such concentration of bright minds must be blinding… #Einstein	914	5.76	2.09
ridicule #4	What my opponents say about this issue is untenable. Great times ahead with those superior thinkers… #Einstein	889	5.64	2.11

Figure B1 and Figure B2 visually present mean differences for messages that include insulting language (Figure B1) and for messages featuring ridicule (Figure B2). While there are not significant differences for ridicule messages, insult message #4 is rated as significantly less disrespectful than insult message #1 and insult message #2. As such, insult message #4 was excluded from the incivility manipulation to ensure comparability within each incivility type. To maintain balance between the two forms of incivility, we also excluded one of the ridicule messages, notably the one that was rated the least disrespectful.

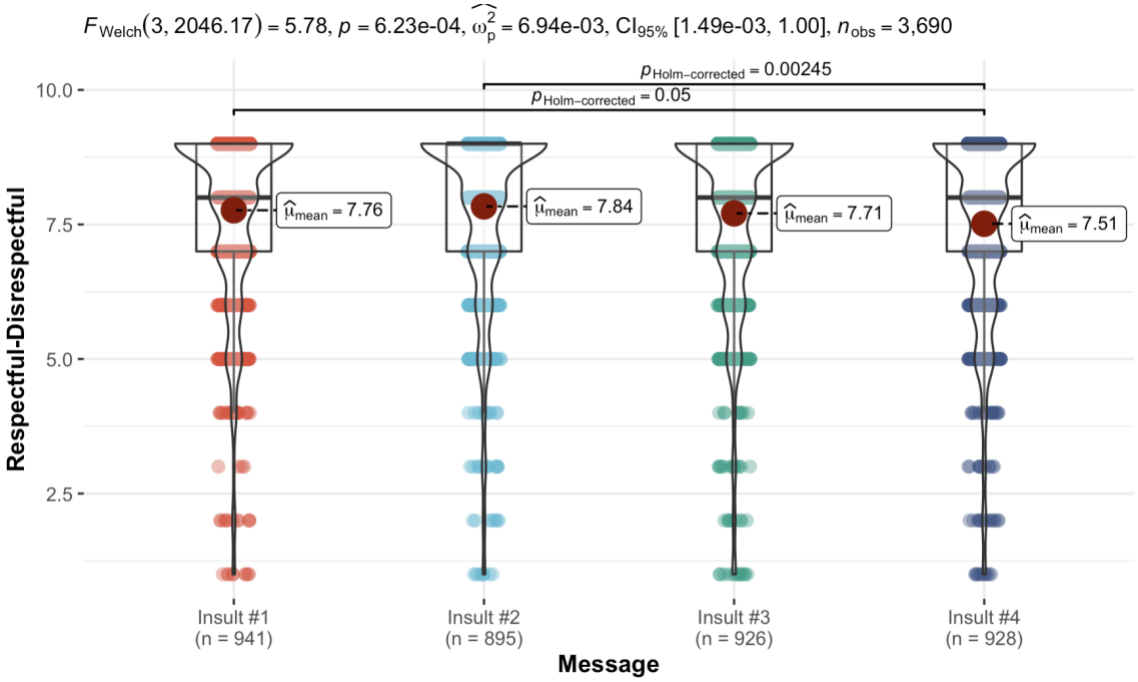

Figure B1. Differences in mean incivility ratings between message including insulting language. Pre-test results.

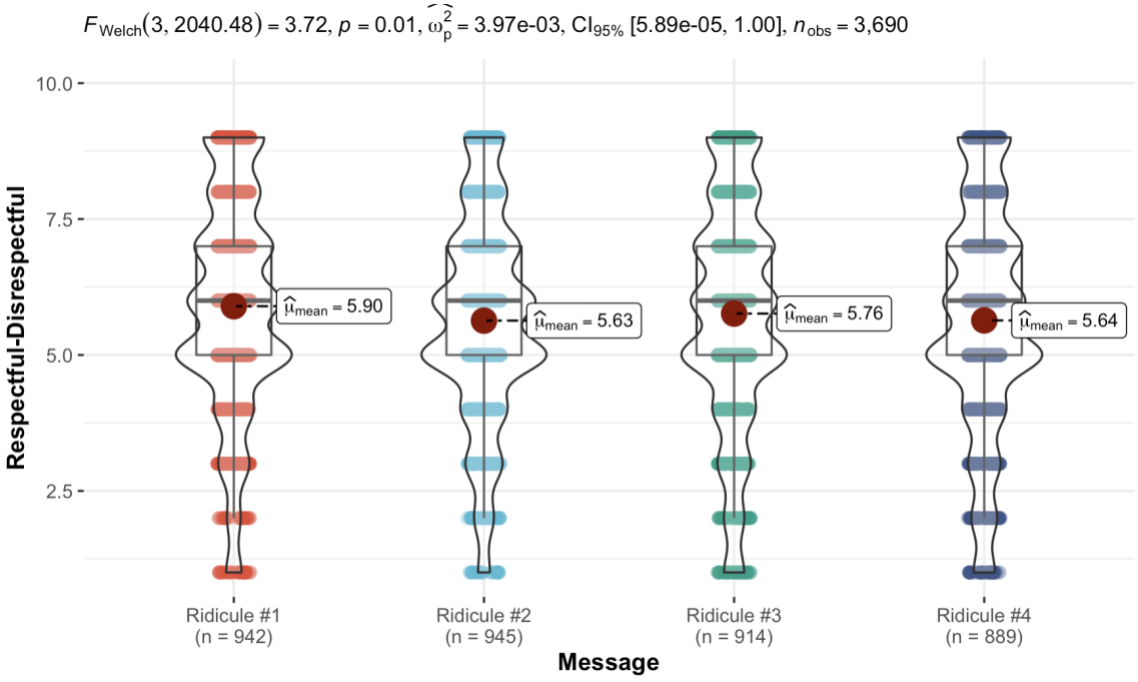

Figure B2. Differences in mean incivility ratings between message including ridicule. Pre-test results.