

Decision Processes Colloquia

Monday, October 27, 2025

Where: JMHH G50

When: 12:00 – 1:20 pm

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What Builds Public Opposition to Anti-Democratic Actions and Leaders? Findings from the Strengthening Democracy Challenge and Beyond

ABSTRACT:

American democracy is under grave threat, in part because many voters accept, or even reward, leaders who flout democratic norms. To test what, if anything, can move these attitudes, I present results from a preregistered experiment ($N = 32,000$) evaluating 25 interventions designed by researchers and practitioners to lower partisan animosity, reduce support for political violence, and discourage acceptance of politicians' anti-democratic actions. Several approaches yielded reliable, though modest, improvements. I identify boundary conditions and design principles that clarify when and why these shifts occur, and assess the limits of political communication alone. I then discuss subsequent field and survey experiments, including work conducted with the National Governors Association. Taken together, results point to strategies for reinforcing democratic norms amid rising polarization, violence, and backsliding in the U.S.

