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CIVIL POLITICS ANNUAL REPORT

2013-14

*Improving the knowledge and practice of evidence-based methods toward
improving inter-group relations.*

TO OUR STAKEHOLDERS

To Our Stakeholders

OVERVIEW

As of the end of 2014, CivilPolitics had been incorporated for roughly 15 months. In that time, we have made significant progress in terms of both contributing to our collective understanding of moral conflict and defining our organizations' unique niche within this world, where numerous other organizations already exist that do complimentary work. In this report, we'll talk first about what we have done in 2014, including both what has and what has not worked, and then what that has meant as far as defining CP's niche going forward. We will then talk about our plans for 2015.

2013-14 IN REVIEW

Our organization's mission is to facilitate the application of evidence-based methods for improving inter-group relationships. Our methodology for doing this leverages the unique place that we start from, as a group of academics that also have experience with educating the public about research. The diagram below illustrates how we expect this to occur, with academic research informing those who are attempting to bridge gaps in the real world, but also with information from real world practitioners informing the questions that need more study by academics.



In 2013-14, we have worked with a number of practice partners directly, providing recommendations as to the best practices suggested from our research. Some examples include:

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- The film makers behind [Bring It To The Table](#), which humanizes both sides of the American political divide
- [A2Ethics](#), which hosts community events designed to illuminate moral issues in non-partisan ways
- [Living Room Conversations](#), which has been focused on creating events in California where people can civilly discuss issues concerning prison reform
- [The Nathan Cummings Foundation](#), with whom we hosted an explicitly cross-partisan dialogue
- [The Village Square](#), which hosts numerous events in the community designed to bring people together to discuss important issues without rancor

For these organizations, we have provided tactical advice on bridging moral divides, based on moral psychology research. In most of these cases, we have also worked with these organizations to collect data (examples [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) as to how their work has impacted the people who attend their events. The results of this data collection has been mixed in that in each case, we have found evidence for the positive effects that these organizations' events have on attendees, but the difficulties in collecting the data at scale from relatively busy attendees, whether we tried technological or old-school methods, necessarily limited our sample sizes and therefore limits the breadth of conclusions we can make based on this data alone. Still, we have published several studies based on this work online, with the idea that all evidence has value.

To further take advantage of what academics can learn from real-world practitioners, we have taken what we have learned from these organizations informally, and sought to formalize that process ([see example here](#)) so that we can more directly leverage these groups' experiences. The hope is that if the results of empirical work with these groups converges with the specific lessons that practitioners have learned intuitively in the everyday course of their work, then we can be even more confident that the methods used by these organizations should indeed be shared with a wider audience.

Ideally, the best evidence-based practices should be supported by both the experience of practitioners and more highly controlled studies done in academic labs. Both to provide this convergence and to support our work advising organizations and the public, we have spent a lot of time in 2013-14 examining the existing research for the best recommendations that we could make to practitioners. We also [commissioned a study by Professor Jesse Graham at the University of Southern California](#), where he and his lab reviewed existing research and made their own independent recommendations. One of the most encouraging signs for CivilPolitics' path forward is that the results of this independent research were similar to our own findings and also matched what we found in talking with practitioners, and even what the data we collected from practitioners suggested.

Specifically, there are two recommendations that we feel especially confident about: improving personal relationships and emphasizing super-ordinate goals. Both of these recommendations make intuitive sense to those who are caught up in moral conflicts, yet situations are often setup such that personal relationships across groups are made a secondary concern (e.g. politicians have less time to socialize with each other) and competition is emphasized (e.g. the permanent campaign). We see a great opportunity in focusing on these two specific recommendations when communicating with both practitioners and the general public.

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Early in 2014, we launched [a newly designed website](#) and over the course of the year saw a roughly 50% increase in site visitors from approximately ~2000 visitors per month to over 3000/month on average. Our internet presence is well indexed by search engines, such that we are able to answer many formal and informal requests for information and ideas that can be used by anyone seeking to improve relations in their community. Based on requests we have received for follow-up information, some number of these site visitors are [journalists seeking information to share with others](#) or [educators seeking to make an impact in their classrooms](#), such that the extended impact of the information we provide goes beyond those who explicitly visit our internet presence. Still, in 2015, we hope to expand our outreach, leveraging the fact that we are more confident in the specific recommendations to offer that have been shown to be evidence-based from numerous perspectives from both academia and the real-world.

Lastly, we continued to publish and support research in this domain at both the applied and basic levels. Among the published articles we have published in top peer reviewed psychology journals include research showing how [moral elevation can reduce prejudice](#), [how cognitive style can illuminate ideological differences](#), [how nature can lead to altruism](#), [how values can shape foreign policy attitudes](#) and [how ideology can lead people to geographically separate](#). We also commissioned research from graduate students at the University of Virginia to specifically test five separate ideas for improving intergroup relations. Beyond the work we have directly led or supported, we have continued to maintain our primary research platform, [yourmorals.org](#), which continues to reach hundreds of thousands of visitors each year and educate them as to moral psychology, with an eye toward greater understanding of those we disagree with. It also collects data that has led to dozens of research publications that inform our understanding of our collective morality. Building upon this success, we have sought to export this same model of education + data collection to the scientific understanding of religion (at [exploringmyreligion.org](#)) in collaboration with the [Institute for the Bio-Cultural Study of Religion](#) at Boston University.

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

In 2013-14, Civil Politics incorporated and successfully applied for non-profit status as a 501c(3) charity under the US tax code, with contributions tax deductible. We received approximately \$70,000 in 2013-14 from The Village Square, Reid Hoffman and the Nathan Cummings Foundation, of which we spent \$40,000 during this period, primarily on revamping our website, legal/administrative startup costs, technical costs to support YourMorals.org, and contracted research. As of January 1, 2015, we have approximately \$30,000 remaining and expect our budget for 2015 to be lower than 2013-14, given that some of our initial year expenses were one-time expenditures to set up technical and administrative systems. We expect to be able to maintain our operations going forward with approximately the same level of resources while continuing to improve the ratio of dollars spent per person reached, keeping that well under the cost of a postage stamp, and also continuing to support more published research on evidence-based techniques for improving inter-group relations, whether on our site or in peer-reviewed journals.

OUR NICHE GOING FORWARD

In 2015, we would like to build upon what worked in 2013-14 and continue to leverage our unique positioning between academia and the public. We still plan to offer measurement exercises for partner

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groups, but will also offer structured interviews that enable partners to share what they have learned systematically. We will build upon the literature review that we completed in 2014 by finding and/or supporting research that will complement areas that need more research. We will continue to leverage our platforms at YourMorals.org and CivilPolitics.org to educate hundreds of thousands of people. Now that we have more focused, well-supported recommendations to offer, we plan to leverage social media and the press more. In summary, we plan to continue to spread what we already know about evidence-based methods for improving intergroup relations, while also continuing to support new research in areas where we ought to know more.

Ravi Iyer
Executive Director
January 27, 2015

ABOUT US

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