It's All Relative: Perceptions of (Comparative) Candidate Incivility and Candidate Sympathy in Three Multiparty Elections
Vargiu, Chiara

Article

It's All Relative: Perceptions of (Comparative) Candidate Incivility and Candidate Sympathy in Three Multiparty Elections

Chiara Vargiu

Institute of Political Studies, University of Lausanne, Switzerland; chiara.vargiu@unil.ch

Abstract
While growing attention has been devoted to candidates' use of incivility in campaigns, its role in informing voters' feelings toward candidates is still debated. This study embraces a constructionist perspective on incivility and focuses on the relationship between perceptions of candidate incivility and candidate sympathy. Its contribution is twofold. First, it extends incivility research generalizability by testing the association between voters' perceptions of candidate incivility and candidate sympathy during three election campaigns beyond the US context. Second, it builds upon the notion of incivility as a norm violation and tests the hypothesis that perceptions of a candidate's uncivil behavior are negatively associated with candidate sympathy when this behavior is inappropriate (i.e., it violates injunctive civility norms) and especially when it is uncommon (i.e., it violates descriptive civility norms). These interests are pursued through post-electoral survey data collected in the Netherlands, Germany, and France. Findings show that incivility perceptions can, but not always, correspond to more negative feelings toward candidates. Furthermore, it is the incivility of candidates relative to that of their competitors that really counts for candidate sympathy.

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Negative Politics: Leader Personality, Negative Campaigning, and the Oppositional Dynamics of Contemporary Politics" edited by Alessandro Nai (University of Amsterdam), Diego Garzia (University of Lausanne), Loes Aaldering (Free University Amsterdam), Frederico Ferreira da Silva (University of Lausanne), and Katjana Gattermann (University of Amsterdam).

1. Introduction

As studies confirm that candidates' sympathy can be decisive for the outcome of elections (Garzia, 2014, 2017), the criteria voters employ to form their feelings toward candidates are of great interest. In this regard, the apparent "coarsening of campaigns" (Stephens et al., 2019) has attracted scholarly attention to candidates' use of incivility—i.e., norm-violating conduct conveying disrespect toward political opponents (Maisel, 2012)—and its effect on candidate sympathy (Druckman et al., 2019; Gervais, 2015; Mutz, 2015). While experimental research generally confirms that incivility lowers candidate sympathy, incivility is still strategically employed

(Herbst, 2010), and the electoral success of "roaring candidates" (Maier & Nai, 2020) puts experimental findings into question. Starting from the assumption that voters form their feelings toward candidates based on many considerations, this article investigates the relevance of incivility perceptions in voters' minds by testing their association with candidate sympathy alongside its well-established predictors. I do so through post-election survey data collected after the latest general elections in the Netherlands, Germany, and France. I aim to contribute to incivility research in two ways.

First, I extend incivility research generalizability. Research on political incivility is restricted mainly to the US. However, given the contextual nature of civility

norms, US findings cannot be haphazardly applied to other political systems (Walter, 2021). By interviewing samples of Dutch, German, and French voters, I extend incivility research beyond the US context. Additionally, our knowledge of the effects of incivility on candidate sympathy is primarily based on experimental studies, where participants are usually exposed to an artificial stimulus in the form of a civil or uncivil message from a fictitious politician and then asked to state their feelings toward them (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Druckman et al., 2019; Mutz & Reeves, 2005). While this approach has the advantage of isolating causal mechanisms, it does not account for the fact that voters form their feelings toward candidates based on many considerations. Thus, little is known about the relevance of incivility perceptions in voters' minds. By including perceptions of candidate incivility within traditional models of candidate sympathy, I shed light on their importance in informing candidate sympathy alongside its usual predictors.

Secondly, while scholars agree that incivility is norm-violating conduct, only a few studies have directly drawn from normative theories in their accounts. Based on Muddiman et al.'s (2021) distinction between injunctive civility norms (i.e., what is appropriate when campaigning) and descriptive civility norms (i.e., what is common when campaigning), I argue that candidates' perceived behavior should correspond to more negative feelings toward candidates not only when this behavior deviates from what is perceived as appropriate, but especially when this behavior deviates from what is perceived as common. Thus, this article tests the relationship between candidate sympathy and not only perceived violations of injunctive civility norms (i.e., how uncivil candidates are perceived) but also perceived violations of descriptive civility norms (i.e., how uncivil candidates are perceived relative to their competitors).

Findings show that perceptions of candidate incivility often, but not always, corresponded to more negative feelings toward candidates. There were instances in which perceptions of candidate incivility did not matter for candidate sympathy, and the strength of this relationship varied across candidates and countries. This provides further evidence that incivility is contextual. Additionally, compared to voters' partisan predispositions and their perceptions of candidates' personalities, the role of perceived incivility in informing candidate sympathy was often marginal. Most importantly, results confirmed that the association between perceptions of candidate incivility and candidate sympathy was more consistent and much stronger when candidate incivility perceptions were measured by comparing candidates to one another rather than considering them individually. These results confirm that incivility is a contextual feature of political discourse that could be better understood as a relative rather than an absolute concept.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. A Constructionist Perspective on Candidate Incivility

While the concept is still debated, political incivility is broadly regarded as a violation of the norms of political discussion (Maisel, 2012). Norms are rules that define what is acceptable behavior among the members of a group (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Therefore, incivility is contextual and whether a behavior is uncivil depends on factors such as the context of the uncivil speech (Roseman et al., 2021), the individual characteristics of its speaker (Muddiman et al., 2021; Sydnor, 2019), and its audience (Kenski et al., 2020). Thus, scholars have advocated for a constructionist approach, emphasizing the role of contextual differences in shaping perceptions and effects of incivility (Jamieson et al., 2017). Following this, I regard incivility as a perceived norm violation that varies according to what is considered normative in each context.

Regarding the nature of the norm violation, scholars distinguish between "public" and "personal" levels of incivility (Muddiman, 2017). The former relates civility to the ideals of deliberative democracies, including behaviors that threaten democratic functioning—e.g., racism, misinformation, or uncompromising conduct (Papacharissi, 2004). Some argue that these behaviors describe intolerant rather than uncivil discourse and deserve attention in their own right (Rossini, 2020). I follow this view and restrict this article's scope to the "personal'' level of incivility. From this perspective, in the same way that during private conversations individuals wish to maintain a "positive face" and expressions of disrespect are considered "face-threatening" (Brown & Levinson, 1987), in public discourse, politicians' disrespectful behavior is considered non-normative (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). Hence, I equate incivility to disrespectful conduct and focus on behavior such as the use of derogatory language, aggressive speech, or ridicule.

2.2. The Role of Voters' Perceptions of Candidate Incivility Within Models of Candidate Sympathy

Abundant evidence shows that voters develop mental images of politicians based on a set of personal characteristics (Funk, 1996, 1999; Ohr & Oscarsson, 2013). While different trait dimensions have been suggested (Conover, 1981; Funk, 1999; Miller et al., 1986), an influential account has reduced them to four—competence, empathy, leadership, and integrity/honesty (Kinder et al., 1979). Based on this categorization, numerous scholars investigated how perceptions of candidate traits affect feelings toward candidates (e.g., Funk, 1999; Ohr & Oscarsson, 2013; Pancer et al., 1999). In these studies, voters' sympathy toward candidates—usually in the form of feeling thermometers or like-dislike scores—is regressed on voters' partisan predispositions and perceptions of candidate traits. While the relevance of each trait depends on the candidate and the electoral

context (Bittner, 2007; Funk, 1999; Pancer et al., 1999), this empirical work demonstrates that a high score on the feeling thermometer or like–dislike scale is associated with politicians' perceived competence, leadership, empathy, and integrity (Funk, 1999; Ohr & Oscarsson, 2013; Pancer et al., 1999).

Building upon this research, this article tests whether voters' perceptions of candidate incivility are a relevant dimension—alongside partisan predispositions and traits' perceptions—upon which voters base their feelings toward candidates. Considering the widespread concerns over the "coarsening of campaigns" (Stephens et al., 2019), perceptions of a candidate's incivility may have become an important criterion alongside partisanship and perceptions of candidates' personalities. At the same time, it is possible that while citizens generally dislike incivility, incivility perceptions are less relevant for candidate sympathy compared to other considerations. Thus, this article asks whether perceptions of candidate incivility inform candidate sympathy alongside the predictors already identified in the literature. As the role of incivility in models of candidate sympathy remains untested, I keep this question exploratory. Nevertheless, expectations on the direction of the relationship between candidate sympathy and incivility perceptions are formulated in the following subsection.

2.3. The Relationship Between Voters' Perceptions of (Comparative) Candidate Incivility and Candidate Sympathy

Norms are rules that guide behavior, and deviations from such rules are condemned as a threat to social relationships (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Thus, citizens are expected to "punish" behaviors that defy civility norms. US experimental research confirms this view. When exposed to uncivil messages, Americans report lower evaluations of (Gervais, 2015; Maier, 2021; Mutz, 2015) and lower voting intentions for disrespectful candidates (Mutz, 2015). This is true even for partisans, who evaluate uncivil politicians on their side more unfavorably (Druckman et al., 2019; Frimer & Skitka, 2018). A few studies confirm that incivility is punished by the non-US public too. For example, an online experiment on a sample of German voters shows that exposure to incivility from a politician lowers their approval ratings (Maier, 2021). Similarly, Mölders et al. (2017) found that German voters were less willing to vote for disrespectful candidates. Thus, I expect the following:

> H1: There is a direct negative association between voters' perceptions of individual candidate incivility and candidate sympathy.

Despite this theoretical expectation, candidates still employ incivility in their campaigns. To address this paradox, Muddiman et al. (2021) suggest that people may have different opinions on how politicians *should* act and how they *do* act. Drawing from normative theories (Kallgren et al., 2000), they note that scholars have narrowed their definition of incivility to behaviors deviating from what voters approve. However, norms arise not only from what is approved by community members but also from observing what members do. In the former case, scholars refer to *injunctive norms*, i.e., how people *ought to* behave, and in the latter, to *descriptive norms*, i.e., how people do behave (Kallgren et al., 2000). Based on this, Muddiman et al. (2021, p. 13) suggest—but do not directly test—that "if voters feel that uncivil actions are common in campaigns, they may not alter their behaviors even if they do not think the actions are appropriate."

Building upon this, I suggest that the relationship between candidate incivility perceptions and candidate sympathy could be better understood if we consider not only perceptions of uncivil behavior from single candidates but also from their competitors, as these contribute to determining what is normative. Voters may dislike candidates more not only when they are perceived as violating their injunctive norm of respecting opponents but especially when their injunctively uncivil behavior deviates from what is perceived as common. Hence, this article not only focuses on voters' perceptions of *individual candidate incivility* but also considers voters' perceptions of *comparative candidate incivility*. I propose a comparative measure of candidate incivility perceptions (i.e., how uncivil a candidate is perceived relative to their competitors) and test whether this is more strongly associated with candidate sympathy than an individual measure of candidate incivility perceptions (i.e., how uncivil a single candidate is perceived). I expect the following:

> H2: There is a direct negative association between voters' perceptions of comparative candidate incivility and candidate sympathy.

> H3: Voters' perceptions of comparative (versus individual) candidate incivility are more strongly associated with candidate sympathy.

2.4. The Role of Partisan Sympathy

Considering the well-documented partisan biases in political information acquisition and processing (Campbell et al., 1960), I also consider partisan differences. Voters are motivated reasoners and process information in a way that complies with their partisan predispositions (Taber & Lodge, 2006). At the same time, partisanship, as a relevant social identity, can generate positive feelings for in-parties, and negative feelings for out-parties, thus strengthening intergroup biases (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). Furthermore, preliminary evidence confirms that incivility is perceived through partisan lenses (Liang & Zhang, 2021). Thus, I expect perceptions of incivility to matter more in negatively evaluating candidates far away from oneself than those closer. I hypothesize the following:

H4: The negative association between voters' perceptions of (individual and comparative) candidate incivility and candidate sympathy is weaker for respondents with more positive feelings toward the candidate's party, while it is stronger for respondents with more negative feelings toward the candidate's party.

2.5. The Role of Candidate Differences: Gender, Populism, Incumbency

Following the constructionist approach, scholars have also suggested that the same behavior may be perceived differently depending on the characteristics of the person engaging in it (Jamieson et al., 2017; Muddiman et al., 2021; Sydnor, 2019). Three features seem particularly relevant. First, the stereotype content model predicts that women are associated with communal traits (e.g., warmth), while men are associated with agentic traits (e.g., dominance; Fiske et al., 2002). As incivility goes against the expectations of women being kind, perceptions of incivility by female candidates should lead to stronger backlashes. Secondly, populist candidates are known for their transgressive style of campaigning (Moffitt & Tormey, 2013); thus, people should respond less negatively to perceptions of incivility from populists as these align with what is expected of them (Nai et al., 2022). Finally, incumbents prefer to rely on their political records to promote themselves rather than attack and risk a backlash (Nai, 2018). Because being uncivil is rarer for incumbents, they pay a higher price when they do so (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011). Based on this, I hypothesize the following:

H5: The negative association between voters' perceptions of (individual and comparative) candidate incivility and candidate sympathy is stronger for (a) female (versus male) candidates, (b) populist (versus non-populist) candidates, and (c) incumbents (versus challengers).

3. Data and Methods

3.1. Case Selection

The hypotheses are tested on Dutch, German, and French samples. Doing so adds to the study of incivility in multiparty systems. Here, the necessity to engage in cross-partisan compromise may not only discourage the use of incivility against potential coalition partners but also strengthen individuals' negative reactions to it. These features set multiparty democracies apart in using and processing incivility, making them relevant cases to extend our knowledge on incivility. Additionally, these cases are characterized by crucial variations in terms of electoral competition, including an entirely proportional system (the Netherlands), a mixed system (Germany), and a semi-presidential majoritarian system (France). As in contexts with high party fragmentation incivility more

directly threatens negotiations for government formation between parties, this selection allows me to assess the robustness of my findings across party structures.

3.2. Sample

Online samples of the Dutch (from 22–03–2021 to 05–04–2021; N = 1,007), German (from 28–09–2021 to 12–10–2021; N = 999), and French (from 06–05–2022 to 19–05–2022; N = 1,246) populations eligible to vote were collected within three larger post-election surveys distributed through private survey companies (Kantar in the Netherlands, Dynata in Germany and France). Inattentive respondents (i.e., respondents whose completion time was less than half of the median of the country's sample) and straightliners (i.e., respondents whose responses on the candidate incivility perceptions and the candidates like–dislike batteries had a standard deviation of zero) were excluded. This resulted in three final samples of $n = 898$ (NL), $n = 804$ (DE), and $n = 1,063$ (FR). As a robustness check, main analyses are replicated with the inclusion of straightliners, providing consistent results (see Appendix C of the Supplementary File, Table C1). The online samples do not represent the general voting population but employ stratification quotas for gender, age, and macro-region of residence (see Supplementary File, Table A1).

Respondents were interviewed about a selection of six candidates in the Netherlands and Germany and eight in France (see Supplementary File, Table A2). While it was not feasible to interview respondents about the entire population of candidates, this selection covered almost 70% of the electoral preferences in the Netherlands (Kiesraad, 2021), more than 85% in Germany (The Federal Returning Officer, 2021), and almost 90% in France (AFP, 2022), and included representatives of all relevant party families in the West European context.

3.3. Candidate Sympathy

Candidate sympathy was measured through like-dislike scores, widely employed in electoral research to gauge voters' overall feelings toward political leaders (Garzia, 2017) and in incivility research to test the effects of incivility on sponsor perceptions (e.g., Druckman et al., 2019; Gervais, 2015; Mutz, 2015). Concretely, respondents were asked to assign a score from 0 (*dislike*) to 10 (*like*) to each candidate, and the *candidate sympathy* scale was used as the dependent variable in all models (for summary statistics, see Supplementary File, Table A3).

3.4. Candidate Incivility Perceptions

3.4.1. Individual Candidate Incivility Perceptions

Incivility can take many forms, and this article focuses on behaviors commonly employed in previous research (e.g., Muddiman, 2021; Mutz, 2015; Otto et al., 2020).

Respondents rated candidates on a scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*) on the extent to which during the campaign they engaged in three kinds of uncivil behaviors: (a) They used insulting or derogatory language; (b) they employed forms of emotionalized speech, such as by shouting; and (c) they ridiculed their opponents (see Supplementary File, Table A4 for the full question text, and Table A5 for summary statistics). For each candidate, a scale of *individual candidate incivility perceptions* was computed by calculating the means of the three incivility items. Summary statistics, including reliability scores (all above 0.80), are summarized in the Supplementary File (Table A6).

3.4.2. Comparative Candidate Incivility Perceptions

A measure of *comparative candidate incivility perceptions* was computed by subtracting from candidates' individual incivility perceptions the average incivility perceptions of their competitors. For example, Rutte's comparative incivility perceptions score was built by subtracting the average individual incivility perceptions scores voters assigned to the other five candidates from the individual incivility perceptions' score they assigned to Rutte. This resulted in a scale ranging from −10 to +10, recoded to range from 0 to 10 to ease comparisons. A score of five means that Rutte is perceived *as uncivil as his competitors*; increasing scores above five mean that Rutte is perceived as *increasingly more uncivil than his competitors*; decreasing scores below five mean that Rutte is perceived as *increasingly less uncivil than his competitors* (for summary statistics, see Supplementary File, Table A7).

3.5. Other Predictors of Candidate Sympathy

Models include the usual predictors of candidate sympathy as identified in the literature summarized above, i.e., partisan predispositions and perceptions of candidate traits. Respondents indicated on a scale from 0 (*dislike*) to 10 (*like*) how much they liked each candidate's party (for summary statistics, see Supplementary File, Table A8). This measure of *partisan sympathy* was included in the models as a control variable and then to test its interaction with perceptions of candidate incivility. Regarding perceptions of candidate traits, I focus on the four main criteria identified by Kinder et al. (1979): empathy, honesty, competence, and leadership skills. Respondents were asked to rate candidates on these attributes on a scale from 1 to 5. The *leadership*, *competence*, *empathy*, and *honesty perceptions scales* were computed (see Supplementary File, Table A9) and included in the models.

3.6. Candidates' Characteristics

Candidates were categorized based on gender, populism, and incumbency status. Populist candidates were

selected based on the categorization by Rooduijn et al. (2019), while incumbency was defined as candidates who held a position within the government before the elections. Three nominal levels variables (Gender: 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*; Populism: 0 = *non-populist*, 1 = *populist*; Incumbency: 0 = *challenger*, 1 = *incumbent*) were computed (see Supplementary File, Table A10).

3.7. Analysis Plan and Modelling Strategy

After presenting the results of a descriptive analysis exploring how much incivility was perceived during the three elections, I test the bivariate relationship between individual and comparative candidate incivility perceptions and candidate sympathy. Then, I formally test H1, H2, and H3 following previous work on candidate authenticity by Stiers et al. (2021). In their account of trait authenticity, they test the relevance of candidates' perceived authenticity by regressing candidate sympathy on its traditional predictors—partisan predispositions and candidate traits—with the addition of their newly developed scale of trait authenticity. Following this modelling strategy, I conduct two OLS multiple regression models per country predicting candidate sympathy from perceptions of individual (M1) and comparative (M2) candidate incivility, including socio-demographics (age, gender, and education) and perceptions of candidate traits and partisan sympathy. I subsequently test H4 by including an interaction term (candidate incivility perceptions * party sympathy) to M1 and M2. Finally, I test H5 by pooling data from each country and running six additional OLS regression models predicting candidate sympathy from individual and comparative candidate incivility perceptions and their respective interaction with candidates' gender, populism, and incumbency status.

All models are run on a stacked dataset with voter–candidate as the unit of analysis, including robust and clustered standard errors. Voters' characteristics are included following the procedure by van der Eijk et al. (2006). First, each individual measure of candidate sympathy was regressed on gender, age, and education in the unstacked data matrix. Then, the predicted values (y-hats) of each separate regression were included in the stacked data matrix. As a robustness check, models are replicated for each candidate separately, providing consistent results (see Supplementary File, Tables B2–B7).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

Figure 1 shows the means of individual and comparative incivility perceptions. In Germany and the Netherlands, perceptions of individual incivility are relatively low but with large differences across candidates. Notably, right-wing populist candidates are perceived as the most uncivil. In the Netherlands, Wilders (*M* = 6.13, *SD* = 2.83) is perceived more than twice as uncivil as the second
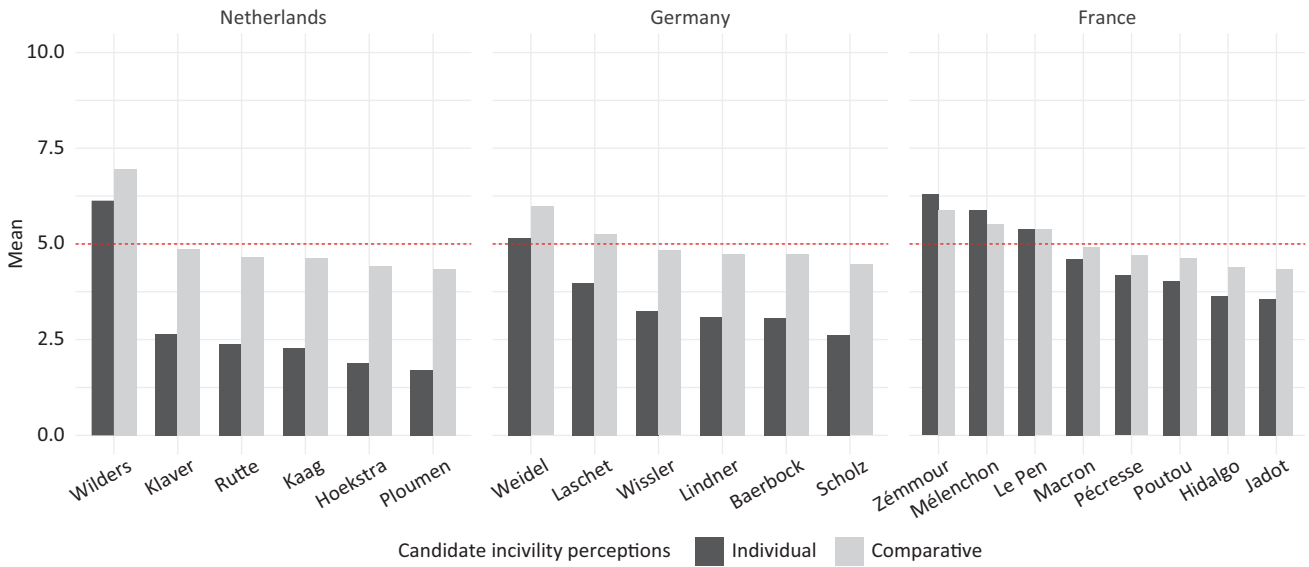
Figure 1. Means of individual and comparative candidate incivility perceptions.

most uncivil candidate (Klaver: *M* = 2.65, *SD* = 2.45) and more than four times as uncivil as the least uncivil candidate (Ploumen: *M* = 1.71, *SD* = 2.08). In Germany, perceptions of individual incivility are more evenly distributed, ranging from 2.63 (*SD* = 2.56) for the least uncivil candidate (Scholz) to 5.16 (*SD* = 3.18) for the most uncivil candidate (Weidel), with a gap of around one unit from the second most uncivil candidate (Laschet: *M* = 3.97, *SD* = 2.76). French candidates are perceived as relatively more uncivil; individual incivility perceptions range between 3.56 (Jadot: *SD* = 2.68) and 6.29 (Zemmour: *SD* = 3.04). While populist leaders are perceived as the most uncivil in France too, this difference is less pronounced, with less than a one-point distance between the least uncivil populist candidate (Le Pen: *M* = 5.39, *SD* = 2.92) and the first most uncivil non-populist candidate (Macron: *M* = 4.61, *SD* = 2.99).

Regarding perceptions of comparative incivility, scores are close to the middle of the scale, suggesting that, on average, voters tend to perceive comparable

levels of incivility across candidates. Again, populists stand out. With the only exception of Germany—where conservative candidate Laschet scored on average as relatively more uncivil than his competitors, and left-wing populist candidate Wissler is on average perceived less uncivil than her competitors—populist candidates are the only ones with comparative incivility perceptions scores above the middle of the scale in all countries.

4.2. Bivariate Analysis

Table 1 presents the results of a bivariate analysis testing the relationship between, on the one hand, individual and comparative candidate incivility perceptions and, on the other, candidate sympathy. Higher scores on the individual incivility perceptions scale always correspond to lower scores on the candidate sympathy scale. Dutch candidates show moderate to strong correlations, while associations are relatively weaker for French and German candidates. Turning to comparative incivility

Table 1. Pearson's *r* correlation coefficients and significance levels for the relationship between individual and comparative candidate incivility perceptions and candidate sympathy.

The Netherlands			Germany			France		
Incivility Perceptions			Incivility Perceptions			Incivility Perceptions		
	Ind.	Comp.		Ind.	Comp.		Ind.	Comp.
Wilders	−0.56***	−0.63 ***	Weidel	−0.38***	−.56 ***	Zemmour	−0.36***	−0.54***
Rutte	−0.52***	−0.55***	Laschet	−0.18***	−.39 ***	Le Pen	−0.36***	−0.40***
Hoekstra	−0.24***	−0.24***	Lindner	−0.15***	−.29 ***	Macron	−0.39***	−0.45***
Kaag	−0.49***	−0.55***	Scholz	−0.16***	−.25 ***	Pécresse	−0.19***	−0.39***
Ploumen	−0.34***	−0.27***	Baerbock	−0.29***	−.46 ***	Hidalgo	−0.17***	−0.34***
Klaver	−0.39***	−0.47***	Wissler	−0.12**	−.33 ***	Jadot	−0.15***	−0.32***
						Mélenchon	−0.36***	−0.48***
						Poutou	−0.26***	−0.39***

Notes: *** *p* < 0.001, ** *p* < 0.01, * *p* < 0.05.

perceptions, candidate sympathy is almost always more strongly negatively associated with comparative rather than individual incivility perceptions. This is especially evident in Germany and France, where the relationship is, in many cases, twice as strong. This is in line with H1, H2, and H3; perceptions of candidate incivility are negatively associated with candidate sympathy, and this association is especially strong when incivility perceptions are measured comparatively.

4.3. Multiple Regression Analysis

While results from the bivariate analysis are consistent with H1, H2, and H3, the relationship between candidate incivility perceptions and candidate sympathy needs to be assessed within more demanding models. Figure 2 presents point estimates and 95% confidence intervals for individual (M1) and comparative (M2) candidate incivility perceptions from two OLS multiple regression models, including socio-demographics (gender, age, education), partisan sympathy, and candidate trait percep-

tions. Figure 3 depicts the marginal effects of individual (M1) and comparative (M2) incivility perceptions on candidate sympathy (full models are summarized in the Supplementary File, Table B1). Table 2 presents the proportion of explained variance in M1 and M2 in each country, in comparison with the base model excluding the incivility perceptions measures (M0). M1 and M2 are replicated for the three forms of incivility (insults, negative emotions, and sarcasm), providing similar results (see Supplementary File, Tables C2, C3, and C4).

Starting with M1, there is a negative statistically significant association between individual incivility perceptions and candidate sympathy in the Netherlands and France but not Germany. In the Netherlands, from the lowest to the highest individual incivility perceptions score, there is a significant decrease in candidate sympathy of 11%. In France, this decrease amounts to only 4%. Comparing regression coefficients across predictors, their size is much smaller for individual incivility perceptions than it is for other predictors. Hence, even if there are significant negative associations
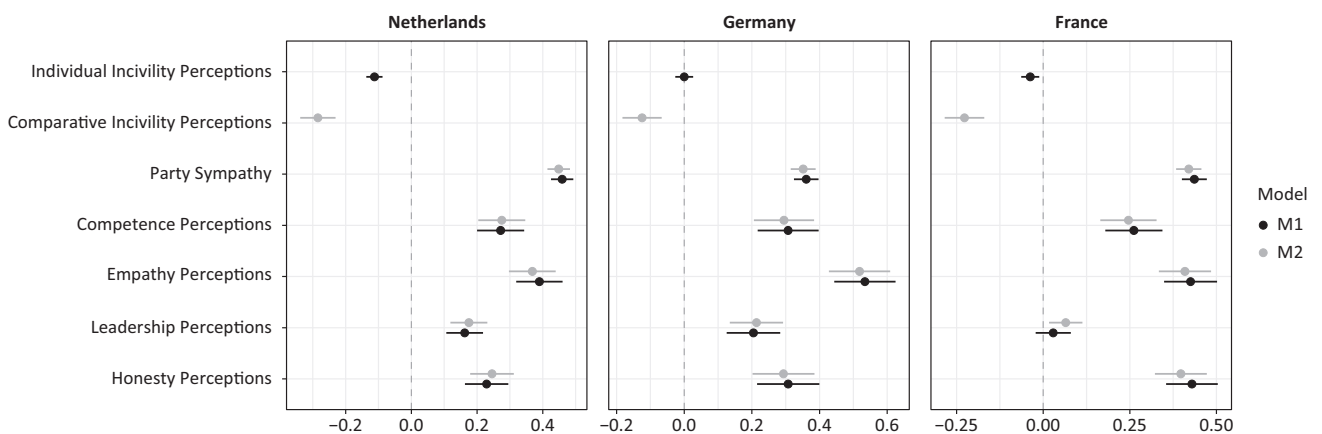

Figure 2. Results of OLS multiple regression models predicting candidate sympathy from individual (M1) and comparative (M2) incivility perceptions.
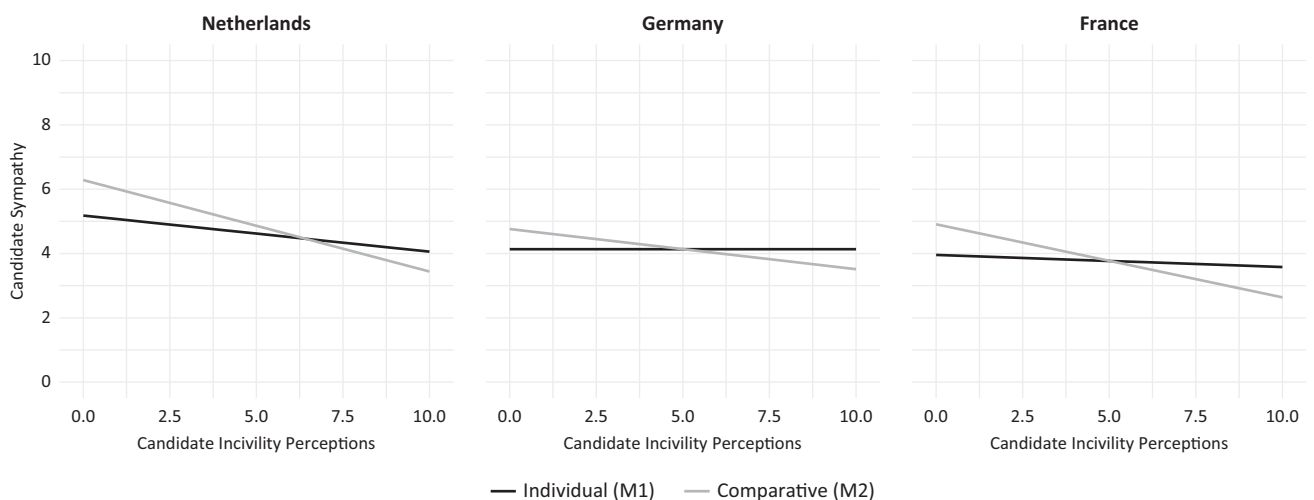

Figure 3. Marginal effects of individual (M1) and comparative (M2) candidate incivility perceptions on candidate sympathy. Note: Results from OLS regression M1 and M2.

Table 2. Adjusted R^2 from OLS regression models predicting candidate sympathy.

	Adjusted R^2		
	M0	M1	M2
The Netherlands	0.73	0.74	0.74
Germany	0.71	0.71	0.71
France	0.65	0.65	0.66

between individual incivility perceptions and candidate sympathy—H1 is confirmed in the Netherlands and France—the role of individual candidate incivility perceptions is marginal compared to those of the other considerations.

Turning to M2, the association between incivility perceptions and candidate incivility is more consistent across countries and much stronger when perceptions of incivility are measured comparatively. Comparative perceptions of incivility are significantly associated with lower levels of candidate sympathy in all three samples, and their regression coefficients are similar in range to other predictors. An additional unit in the comparative incivility perceptions scale corresponds to a significant decrease in candidate sympathy of 28% (vs. 11% in M1) in the Netherlands, 12% in Germany (vs. a non-significant association in M1), and 23% (vs. 4% in M1) in France. These results confirm H2 and H3; higher levels of comparative incivility perceptions correspond to lower levels of candidate sympathy, and the negative association between incivility perceptions and candidate sympathy is much stronger when incivility perceptions are measured comparatively.

Finally, the inclusion of candidate incivility perceptions does not improve the models' explained variances compared to the base models (see Table 2).

4.4. The Role of Partisan Sympathy

I now test for partisan differences by including an interaction term between party sympathy and incivility perceptions to M1 and M2. This resulted in two OLS regression models per country (M1.INT and M2.INT). Figure 4 presents point estimates and confidence intervals of

focal independent variables (for full numerical results, see Supplementary File, Table B1). In the Netherlands, there are no significant differences in the association between individual and comparative incivility perceptions and candidate sympathy at levels of party sympathy. On the contrary, the interaction term is significant for both measures of incivility perceptions in Germany (M1.INT: $b = -0.01$, $p < 0.05$; M2.INT: $b = -0.03$, $p < 0.001$) and only for individual incivility perceptions in France (M1.INT: $b = -0.01$, $p < 0.05$).

Figure 5 graphically presents the slopes of individual and comparative candidate incivility perceptions along the party sympathy scale and the range of values of party sympathy in which these slopes are significant versus insignificant. Table 3 summarizes the slopes of individual and comparative incivility perceptions at levels of party sympathy, calculated at one standard deviation below and above the mean. Starting with M1.INT, at higher levels of partisan sympathy, an additional unit in the individual candidate incivility perceptions scale corresponded to a decrease in the candidate sympathy scale of 3% in Germany and 7% in France. This compares to an insignificant association at lower levels of partisan sympathy and, interestingly, to an increase of 2% in the candidate sympathy scale for every additional unit of individual incivility perceptions in Germany.

Turning to M2.INT, the interaction between comparative incivility perceptions and party sympathy was significant only in Germany, where at higher levels of partisan sympathy, an additional unit in the comparative incivility perceptions scale corresponded to a 23% decrease in candidate sympathy, compared to only a 6% decrease at lower levels of partisan sympathy. While there were no significant differences at different levels
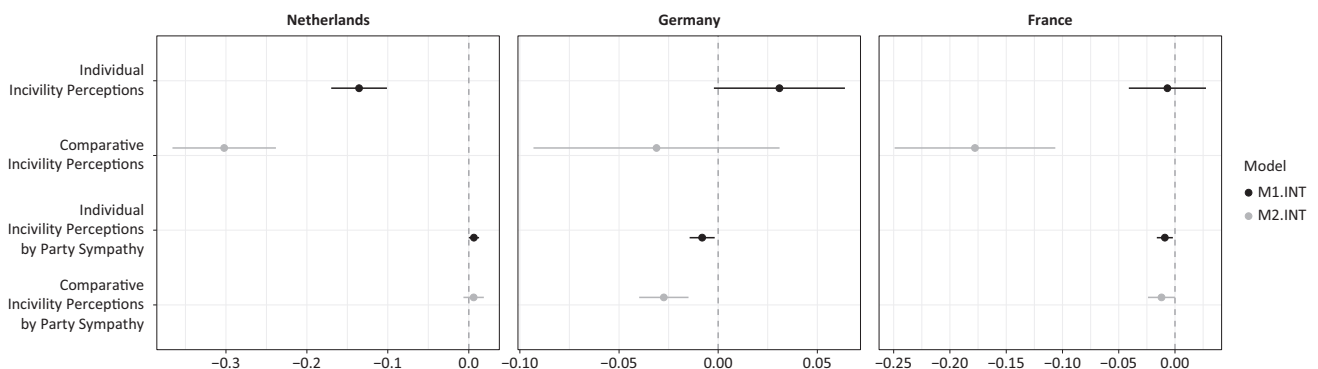

Figure 4. Results of OLS multiple regression models predicting candidate sympathy from individual (M1.INT) and comparative (M2.INT) candidate incivility perceptions and their interaction with party sympathy.
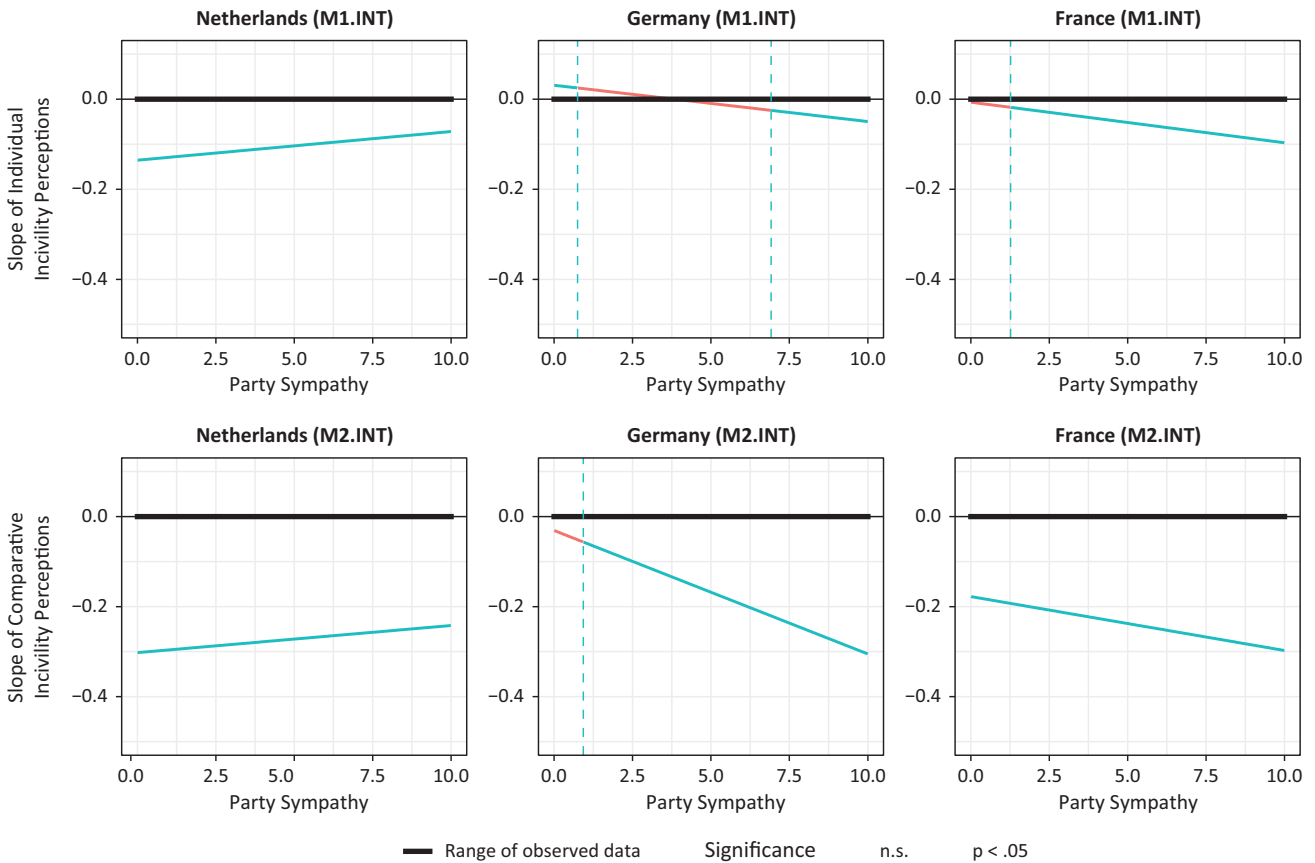
Figure 5. Johnson-Neyman plots. Notes: Results from OLS regression M1.INT and M2.INT; $p < 0.05$.

of party sympathy in France, a similar pattern can be identified. As shown in Figure 5, the slope of comparative incivility perceptions increases as levels of partisan sympathy also increase. Overall, these results disprove H4: When the interaction between candidate incivility perceptions and candidate sympathy was significant, perceptions of candidate incivility mattered more for individuals with more positive rather than negative partisan sympathy.

4.5. The Role of Candidate Characteristics

Finally, I have run six additional OLS regression models predicting candidate sympathy from individual and comparative candidate incivility perceptions and their respec-

tive interaction with candidates' gender, populism, and incumbency status. Table 4 summarizes the coefficients of these interaction terms in each model. Except for the interaction between populism and individual incivility perceptions, all interaction coefficients are significant.

Figure 6 shows the marginal effects of individual and comparative incivility perceptions at the levels of each moderator. The relationship between incivility perceptions and candidate sympathy remains significantly negative for all candidates, regardless of their gender, whether they are populist, and their incumbency status. Differences only arise in the magnitude of this relationship which is significantly more strongly negative for male candidates (H5a is not confirmed), non-populist candidates (only in relation to comparative

Table 3. Slopes of individual (M1) and comparative (M2) candidate incivility perceptions at values of party sympathy.

Party Sympathy	Netherlands		Germany		France	
	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2
Mean − 1 SD	−0.12***	−0.29***	0.02*	−0.06*	−0.01	−0.19***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Mean	−0.11***	−0.27***	0.00	−0.15***	−0.04***	−0.22***
	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Mean + 1 SD	−0.09***	−0.26***	−0.03*	−0.23***	−0.07***	−0.26***
	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.01)

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Table 4. Slopes of individual (M1) and comparative (M2) candidate incivility perceptions at levels of gender, populism, and incumbency.

	Gender			Populism			Incumbency		
	b	se	b	b	b	p	b	se	p
M1	−0.02	0.01	*	−0.02	0.01		−0.04	0.01	**
M2	−0.07	0.02	**	−0.09	0.02	***	−0.08	0.03	**

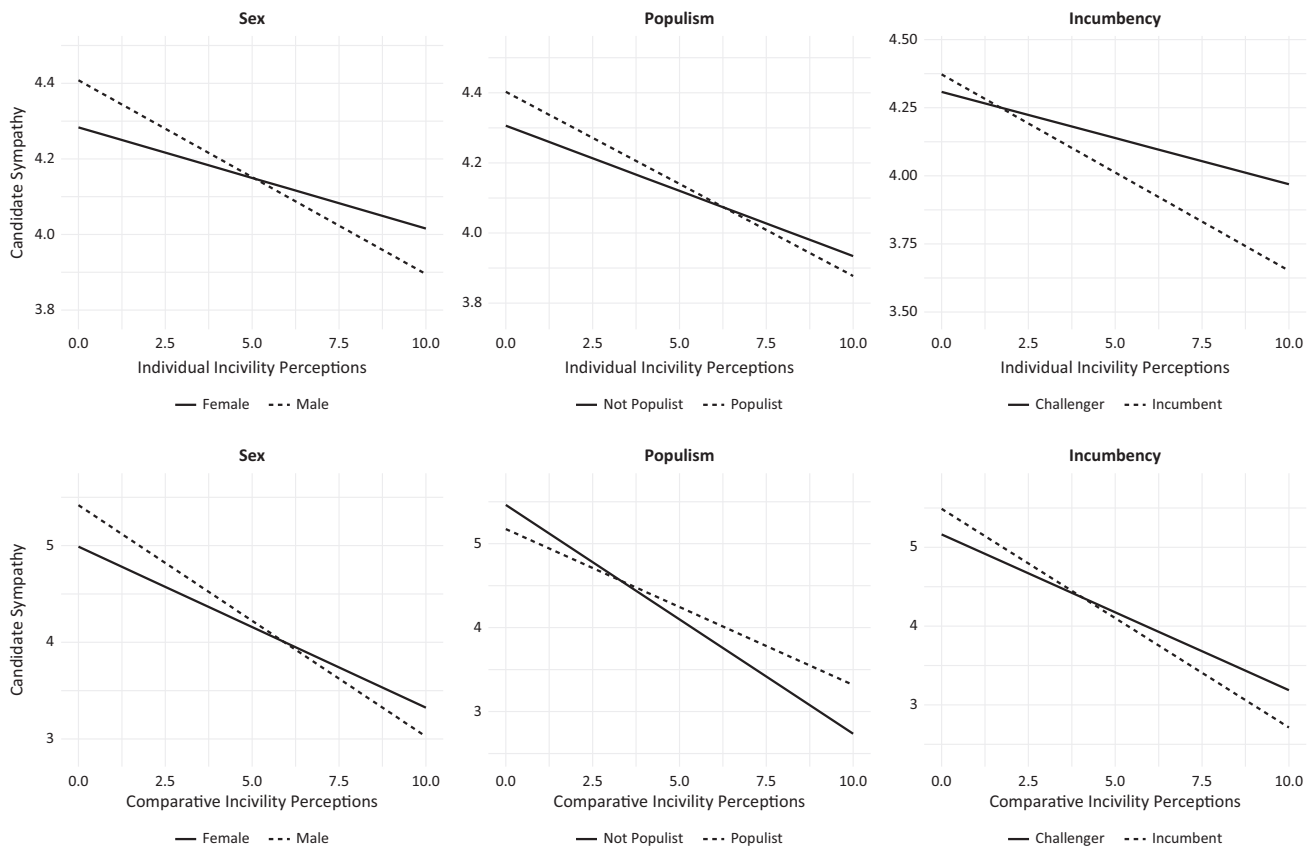Notes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Figure 6. Marginal effects. Note: Results from OLS regression M1 and M2.

incivility; H5b is partially confirmed), and incumbents (H5c is confirmed).

5. Limitations

Before discussing the results of this study, some of its limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, this study is correlational. While experimental evidence has demonstrated a causal relationship from incivility to candidate sympathy, the opposite may also be true. As partisan feelings shape perceptions of incivility (Liang & Zhang, 2021), I cannot exclude the possibility that the hypothesized relationships also go in the opposite direction. Additionally, it cannot be excluded that perceptions of incivility impact voters' impressions of candidate traits and, through them, affect candidate sympathy. Preliminary evidence suggests that incivility can lower voting intentions by lowering communion judgments (e.g., politicians' perceived friendliness), while it does not affect agency judgment (e.g., politicians' perceived confidence; Mölders et al., 2017). Hence, future research should causally test the interplay between incivility perceptions, candidate traits, and candidate sympathy.

Secondly, data were collected in the aftermath of the elections. Research demonstrates that losing an election can negatively affect voters' judgments. For instance, losers show higher dissatisfaction with democracy (Hansen et al., 2019) and more negative opinions about elections' integrity (Cantú & García-Ponce, 2015). Thus, losers may perceive greater incivility than winners. It is also debatable whether voters can recall how uncivil candidates had been once elections are over. Therefore, this study should be replicated with pre-electoral data. This would provide a measure of perceptions of candidate incivility that is not colored by knowing who lost or won or by memory impairments.

Finally, results showed variations based on candidates' characteristics. However, these differences must be carefully considered on account of the small number of candidates and the fact that I could not control for the confounding effect of multiple candidate characteristics (e.g., female populist candidates vs. female non-populist candidates). Further research should replicate these analyses with a larger sample of candidates, and experimental studies should attempt to isolate the effects of candidate characteristics.

6. Discussion

This study embraced a constructionist definition of incivility and focused on perceptions of candidate incivility and their relationship to candidate sympathy during the last general elections in the Netherlands, Germany, and France. Firstly, results showed that perceptions of incivility from a candidate were associated with more negative feelings toward that candidate. While these results corroborated US experimental findings, the magnitude of this negative relationship was relatively weak compared to usual predictors of candidate sympathy. This is important to note as incivility not only has negative consequences but also can be entertaining and attention-grabbing (Borah, 2014; Mutz & Reeves, 2005), thus newsworthy (Muddiman, 2013). This could partially explain the paradox whereby candidates go uncivil even though most people dislike it. Candidates may resort to incivility despite its potential to lower likeability, as this may be counterbalanced by the positive consequences of an increase in visibility.

Secondly, results confirmed that voters have more negative feelings toward candidates if their perceived incivility deviates not only from what is appropriate but especially from what is common. As predicted, the association between candidate sympathy and incivility perceptions was stronger and more consistent when perceptions of candidate incivility were measured in a relative fashion. These results highlight the importance of distinguishing between injunctive and descriptive norm violations, which should take center stage in future studies. They also suggest that incivility could be better understood as a relative rather than an absolute concept. This is in line with the idea of incivility as a contextual feature of political discourse, which not only depends on one's behavior but also on the behavior of relevant others. Extending this logic to intergroup dynamics, future research could investigate people's reactions to intergroup perceptions of candidate incivility, i.e., perceptions of opposition candidates net of perceptions of favorite candidates. Since partisans generally perceive a higher level of incivility from their outgroups than from their ingroups (Liang & Zhang, 2021; Muddiman, 2021), the relative dynamics of incivility may be stronger when comparative perceptions are measured in a partisan fashion.

Thirdly, while results broadly hold across countries, there are some variations. Dutch respondents showed

the strongest negative association between perceptions of candidate incivility and candidate sympathy, which may highlight significant contextual differences. In the Netherlands, the large number of parties makes the political landscape much more fragmented, and the need to form coalitions has pushed political elites into "a style of political accommodation rather than political competition" (Bovens & Wille, 2008, p. 296). In this context, voters may regard incivility as a greater threat to consensual politics, thus punishing it more. Additionally, the three countries differ in the amount of perceived incivility. In Germany, where voters showed the lowest levels of perceived candidate incivility, incivility may be less salient in voters' minds. In France, where voters showed the highest levels of perceived candidate incivility, incivility may be seen as the norm, thus, less relevant. These findings underlie the need to consider differences in party systems and political cultures.

Finally, results showed that candidates' and voters' characteristics matter too. First, there were differences in levels of partisan sympathy. Contrary to expectations, individuals with more positive (rather than negative) partisan feelings showed a stronger negative association between perceptions of candidate incivility and candidate sympathy. This unexpected finding could be related to floor effects. At high levels of partisan dislike, respondents also showed very low levels of candidate sympathy. Hence, they could only move so far in the candidate sympathy scale at levels of incivility perceptions. Nevertheless, this result needs further investigation as it is consistent with the so-called "black-sheep effect" (Reese et al., 2013). Stronger partisans may be more critical toward ingroup deviants to preserve a positive group identity. Secondly, while the association between candidate incivility perceptions and candidate sympathy was consistently negative across candidate types, it was stronger for male candidates, non-populist, and incumbents. These results must be assessed considering the limitations mentioned above. Yet, they provide further evidence that incivility is contextual.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

References

AFP. (2022). *Présidentielle 2022: Les résultats en direct* [Presidential elections 2022. Live results]. https://interactive.afp.com/graphics/Presidentielle-2022-les-resultats-en-direct_622

Bittner, A. (2007, May 30–June 1). *Competence or charisma? The effects of measurement on why some leaders' traits matter more than others* [Paper presentation]. Canadian Political Science Annual Meeting, Saskatoon, Canada.

Borah, P. (2014). Does it matter where you read the news story? Interaction of incivility and news frames in the political blogosphere. *Communication Research*, *41*(6), 809–827. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650212449353

Bovens, M., & Wille, A. (2008). Deciphering the Dutch drop: Ten explanations for decreasing political trust in the Netherlands. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, *74*(2), 283–305. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852308091135

Brooks, J. D., & Geer, J. G. (2007). Beyond negativity: The effects of incivility on the electorate. *American Journal of Political Science*, *51*(1), 1–16. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4122902

Brown, P., & Levinson, C. S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals language usage*. Cambridge University Press.

Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1960). *The American voter*. Wiley.

Cantú, F., & García-Ponce, O. (2015). Partisan losers' effects: Perceptions of electoral integrity in Mexico. *Electoral Studies*, *39*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.ELECTSTUD.2015.03.004

Cialdini, R., & Goldstein, N. (2004). Social influence: Compliance and conformity. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *55*, 591–621. https://doi.org/10.1146/ANNUREV.PSYCH.55.090902.142015

Conover, P. J. (1981). Political cues and the perception of candidates. *American Political Research*, *9*(4), 427–448. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X8100900403

Druckman, J. N., Gubitz, S. R., Levendusky, M. S., & Lloyd, A. M. (2019). How incivility on partisan media (de)polarizes the electorate. *Journal of Politics*, *81*(1), 291–295. https://doi.org/10.1086/699912

Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J. C., Glick, P., & Xu, J. (2002). A model of (often mixed) stereotype content: Competence and warmth respectively follow from perceived status and competition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *82*(6), 878–902. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022–3514.82.6.878

Fridkin, K. L., & Kenney, P. (2011). Variability in citizens' reactions to different types of negative campaigns. *American Journal of Political Science*, *55*(2), 307–325. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540–5907.2010.00494.x

Frimer, J. A., & Skitka, L. J. (2018). The Montagu principle: Incivility decreases politicians' public approval, even with their political base. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *115*(5), 845–866. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000140

Funk, C. L. (1996). Understanding trait inferences in candidate images. In M. X. Delli (Ed.), *Research in micropolitics* (Vol. 5, pp. 97–123). JAI Press.

Funk, C. L. (1999). Bringing the candidate into models of candidate evaluation. *Journal of Politics*, *61*(3), 700–720. https://doi.org/10.2307/2647824

Garzia, D. (2014). *Personalization of politics and electoral change*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Garzia, D. (2017). Voter evaluations of candidates and party leaders. In K. Arzheimer, J. Evans, & M. Lewis-Beck (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of electoral behaviour* (pp. 634–653). SAGE.

Gervais, B. T. (2015). Incivility online: Affective and behavioral reactions to uncivil political posts in a web-based experiment. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*, *12*(2), 167–185. https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2014.997416

Hansen, S. W., Klemmensen, R., & Serritzlew, S. (2019). Losers lose more than winners win: Asymmetrical effects of winning and losing in elections. *European Journal of Political Research*, *58*(4), 1172–1190. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475–6765.12329

Herbst, S. (2010). *Rude democracy: Civility and incivility in American politics*. Temple University Press.

Iyengar, S., & Westwood, S. J. (2015). Fear and loathing across party lines: New evidence on group polarization. *American Journal of Political Science*, *59*(3), 690–707. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12152

Jamieson, K., Volinsky, A., Weitz, I., & Kenski, K. (2017). Political uses and abuses of civility and incivility. In K. Kenski & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political communication* (pp. 205–218). Oxford University Press.

Kallgren, C., Reno, R., & Cialdini, R. (2000). A focus theory of normative conduct: When norms do and do not affect behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *26*(8), 1002–1012. https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672002610009

Kenski, K., Coe, K., & Rains, S. A. (2020). Perceptions of uncivil discourse online: An examination of types and predictors. *Communication Research*, *47*(6), 795–814. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650217699933

Kiesraad. (2021). *Officiële uitslag Tweede Kamerverkiezing 17 maart 2021* [Official results of the parliamentary elections of March 17, 2021]. https://www.kiesraad.nl/actueel/nieuws/2021/03/26/officiele-uitslag-tweede-kamerverkiezing-17-maart-2021

Kinder, D. R., Abelson, R. P., & Fiske, S. T. (1979). *Developmental research on candidate instrumentation: Results and recommendation*. American National Election Studies. https://electionstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/nes002237.pdf

Liang, H., & Zhang, X. (2021). Partisan bias of perceived incivility and its political consequences: Evidence from survey experiments in Hong Kong. *Journal*

of Communication, *71*(3), 357–379. https://doi.org/10.1093/JOC/JQAB008

Maier, J. (2021). Will fouls in politics be punished? An experiment on the effect of incivility on the support for the sender and for the political system. In A. S. Walter (Ed.), *Political incivility in the parliamentary, electoral and media arena* (pp. 200–218). Routledge.

Maier, J., & Nai, A. (2020). Roaring candidates in the spotlight: Campaign negativity, emotions, and media coverage in 107 national elections. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *25*(4), 576–606. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220919093

Maisel, L. S. (2012). The negative consequences of uncivil political discourse. *Political Science and Politics*, *45*(3), 405–411. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096512000467

Miller, A. H., Wattenberg, M. P., & Malanchuk, O. (1986). Schematic assessments of presidential candidates. *American Political Science Review*, *80*(2), 521–540. https://doi.org/10.2307/1958272

Moffitt, B., & Tormey, S. (2013). Rethinking populism: Politics, mediatisation and political style. *Political Studies*, *62*(2), 381–397. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467–9248.12032

Mölders, C., van Quaquebeke, N., & Paladino, M. P. (2017). Consequences of politicians' disrespectful communication depend on social judgment dimensions and voters' moral identity. *Political Psychology*, *38*(1), 119–135. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12311

Muddiman, A. (2013). *The instability of incivility: How news frames and citizen perceptions shape conflict in American politics* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Texas]. Texas ScholarWorks. https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/23311

Muddiman, A. (2017). Personal and public levels of political incivility. *International Journal of Communication*, *11*, 3182–3202. https://doi.org/1932–8036/20170005

Muddiman, A. (2021). Conservatives and incivility. In S. E. Jarvis (Ed.), *Conservative political communication* (pp. 119–136). Routledge.

Muddiman, A., Flores, L., & Boyce, B. (2021). Descriptive and injunctive incivility norms in political campaigns: Differences across behavior type, candidate gender, and candidate party position. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *66*(3), 274–291. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764221996775

Mutz, D. C. (2015). *In-your-face politics: The consequences of uncivil media*. Princeton University Press.

Mutz, D. C., & Reeves, B. (2005). The new videomalaise: Effects of televised incivility on political trust. *American Political Science Review*, *99*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055405051452

Nai, A. (2018). Going negative, worldwide: Towards a general understanding of determinants and targets of negative campaigning. *Government & Opposition*, *55*(3), 430–455. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2018.32

Nai, A., Medeiros, M., Maier, M., & Maier, J. (2022). Euroscepticism and the use of negative, uncivil and emotional campaigns in the 2019 European Parliament election: A winning combination. *European Union Politics*, *23*(1), 21–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/14651165211035675

Ohr, D., & Oscarsson, H. (2013). Leader traits, leader image, and vote choice. In K. Aarts, A. Blais, & H. Schmitt (Eds.), *Political leaders and democratic elections* (pp. 187–214). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/ACPROF:OSOBL/9780199259007.003.0011

Otto, L. P., Lecheler, S., & Schuck, A. R. T. (2020). Is context the key? The (non-)differential effects of mediated incivility in three European countries. *Political Communication*, *37*(1), 88–107. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2019.1663324

Pancer, S. M., Brown, S. D., & Barr, C. W. (1999). Forming impressions of political leaders: A cross-national comparison. *Political Psychology*, *20*(2), 345–368. https://doi.org/10.1111/0162–895X.00148

Papacharissi, Z. (2004). Democracy online: Civility, politeness, and the democratic potential of online political discussion groups. *New Media & Society*, *6*(2), 259–283. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444804041444

Reese, G., Steffens, M. C., & Jonas, K. J. (2013). When black sheep make us think: Information processing and devaluation of in- and outgroup norm deviants. *Social Cognition*, *31*(4), 482–503. https://doi.org/10.1521/SOCO_2012_1005

Rooduijn, M., van Kessel, S., Froio, C., Pirro, A., de Lange, S., Halikiopoulou, D., Lewis, P., Mudde, C., & Taggart, P. (2019). *The PopuList*. https://popu-list.org

Roseman, I. J., Mattes, K., & Redlawsk, D. P. (2021). How the emotion of contempt can help explain political effects of incivility. In A. S. Walter (Ed.), *Political incivility in the parliamentary, electoral and media arena* (pp. 107–123). Routledge.

Rossini, P. (2020). Beyond incivility: Understanding patterns of uncivil and intolerant discourse in online political talk. *Communication Research*, *49*(3), 399–425. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650220921314

Sobieraj, S., & Berry, J. M. (2011). From incivility to outrage: Political discourse in blogs, talk radio, and cable news. *Political Communication*, *28*(1), 19–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2010.542360

Stephens, D., Banducci, S., Horvath, L., & Krouwel, A. (2019). The "coarsening" of campaigns. In D. Jackson, E. Thorsen, D. Lilleker, & N. Weidhase (Eds.), *UK election analysis 2019: Media, voters and the campaign* (p. 15). Centre for Comparative Politics and Media Research. https://www.electionanalysis.uk

Stiers, D., Larner, J., Kenny, J., Breitenstein, S., Vallée-Dubois, F., & Lewis-Beck, M. (2021). Candidate authenticity: "To thine own self be true." *Polit-*

ical Behavior, 43(3), 1181–1204. https://doi.org/
10.1007/S11109–019-09589-Y/TABLES/5

Sydnor, E. (2019). Signaling incivility: The role of speaker, substance, and tone. In R. G. Boatright, T. J. Shaffer, S. Sobieraj, & D. Goldthwaite Young (Eds.), *A crisis of civility? Political discourse and its discontents* (pp. 61–80). Routledge.

Taber, C. S., & Lodge, M. (2006). Motivated skepticism in the evaluation of political beliefs. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(3), 755–769. https://doi.org/
10.1111/j.1540–5907.2006.00214.x

The Federal Returning Officer. (2021). *Bundestag elec-tion 2021*. https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/
bundestagswahlen/2021/ergebnisse.html

van der Eijk, C., van der Brug, W., Kroh, M., & Franklin, M. (2006). Rethinking the dependent variable in vot-ing behavior: On the measurement and analysis of electoral utilities. *Electoral Studies*, 25(3), 424–447. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2005.06.012

Walter, A. (2021). Introduction: The study of political inci-vility and its challenges. In A. S. Walter (Ed.), *Politi-cal incivility in the parliamentary, electoral and media arena* (pp. 1–16). Routledge.

About the Author

Chiara Vargiu is a PhD candidate in political science at the University of Lausanne. Her PhD deals with perceptions and effects of elite incivility, and it is part of the project The rise of Negative Voting, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). Currently, she is conducting a one-year research stay at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR), University of Amsterdam.