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Faculty of Psychology

Colloquium lecture by Jan Voelkel, Ph.D.

The Strengthening Democracy Challenge: Reducing Americans' Anti-Democratic Attitudes

Scholars warn that partisan divisions in the mass public threaten the health of American democracy. We conducted a megastudy (n=32,059) testing 25 treatments designed by academics and practitioners to reduce Americans' partisan animosity and anti-democratic attitudes. We find nearly every treatment reduced partisan animosity, most strongly by highlighting sympathetic and relatable individuals with different political beliefs, or emphasizing common, cross-partisan identities. We also identify several treatments that reduced support for undemocratic practices – most strongly by correcting misperceptions of outpartisans' views, or by highlighting the threat of democratic collapse – showing that anti-democratic attitudes are not intractable. Further, analysis of patterns of covariance among 200 treatment effects provide evidence that – contrary to popular belief – different strategies are most effective for reducing partisan animosity versus anti-democratic attitudes. Taken together, these findings identify promising strategies for improving partisan division and democratic attitudes and shed new theoretical light on challenges facing American democracy.

Jan Voelkel, Ph.D.
Stanford University



**This lecture takes place at Liebiggasse 5, 1010 Vienna,
Lecture Hall G 2nd floor and will be streamed.**

Thursday, January 09, 2025; 3pm