

Interventions Reducing Affective Polarization Do Not Address Anti-Democratic Attitudes

Webinar by Professor James Chu, Columbia University



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Webinar via ZOOM



About the Webinar

Rising affective polarization, or contempt for members of opposing political parties, is often assumed to drive anti-democratic attitudes, such as support for undemocratic candidates, support for partisan violence, and prioritizing partisan ends over democratic means. Researchers have identified interventions that successfully reduce affective polarization, but it remains unclear whether these interventions reduce anti-democratic attitudes. In this talk, I will present results from high-powered experimental tests of two previously established depolarization interventions, one a correction of misperceptions of the views of outpartisans, the other an invitation to think about interpartisan friendships (total $N = 4,512$). While we find that these depolarization interventions reliably reduce affective polarization, we do not find compelling evidence that these reductions translate into reduced support for undemocratic candidates, support for partisan violence, or prioritizing partisan ends over democratic means. Thus, efforts to strengthen pro-democratic attitudes should target these outcomes directly, rather than following the current practice of focusing on affective polarization as a proxy. More broadly, these findings call into question the previously assumed causal link of affective polarization on anti-democratic attitudes.

About the Speaker

Prof. James Chu is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Columbia University, where he studies social stratification, economic and organizational sociology, political polarization, and the sociology of education. He writes about social institutions and their role in reproducing inequality and conflict. He also evaluates potential solutions to these problems. He relies on social network analysis, field experiments, and quasi-experimental methods of causal inference. Prof. Chu is currently a co-organizer of the Strengthening Democracy Challenge, which crowdsources interventions to reduce anti-democratic attitudes, support for partisan violence, and partisan animosity from practitioners and academics from across the social sciences. They will run a massive online experiment to test these interventions. Prof. Chu's work can be found in journals like the American Journal of Sociology, Social Forces, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Journal of Public Analysis and Management, and Journal of Labor Economics.

Registration



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