

# How Non-Judgemental Engagement Could Reduce Prejudice

Nicholas A.R. Fraser

A joint publication from Berkeley Interdisciplinary Migration Initiative & the Othering & Belonging Institute at the University of California, Berkeley.

Public support for exclusionary policies is an ongoing challenge for minority groups of all kinds, including immigrant communities. In the U.S., rights advocates and policymakers have struggled to generate support for rights-based initiatives such as protecting minority voting rights, reducing discrimination against LGBTQ communities, and providing hearings for asylum-seekers. Even within a blue state like California, local public opinion differs on whether to make accommodations for undocumented immigrants<sup>1</sup>.

Research on the politics of immigration shows that rights-restrictive or rights-expansion policies depend on mobilizing public opinion – by activists, but also by political parties or via referendums that focus public attention on immigration.<sup>2</sup> But to what extent can policymakers and rights advocates change public attitudes and what is the most effective way to reach people? Recent research suggests that one effective strategy is to have ordinary voters listen to a member of a minority group talk about their personal experiences with discrimination. This can change people’s opinions to be more inclusive.

1 García, Angela S. *Legal Passing: Navigating Undocumented Life and Local Immigration Law*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019.

2 Howard, Marc Morje. *The Politics of Citizenship in Europe*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

## “Does the type of non-judgemental conversation matter?”

### Experiments In Persuasion

UC-Berkeley Professor Dr. David E. Broockman and his colleague Dr. Joshua L. Kalla (Yale University) explore these questions in their recent studies “Reducing Exclusionary Attitudes through Interpersonal Conversation: Evidence from Three Field Experiments,”<sup>3</sup> and “Outside Lobbying” over the Airwaves: A Randomized Field Experiment on Televised Issue Ads.”<sup>4</sup> These studies highlight what works and what does not when attempting to persuade people to support more inclusive policies that benefit minorities. Their research shows that the most effective way to campaign for inclusive policies is to engage members of the public in non-judgemental conversations.

Working with organizations promoting the rights of LGBTQ and immigrant residents in various parts of the US, Kalla and Broockman designed a series of experiments to test the persuasiveness of door-to-door canvassing and TV ads with voters. These studies build on earlier work in which the authors

3 Kalla, Joshua L. and David E. Broockman. “Reducing Exclusionary Attitudes through Interpersonal Conversation: Evidence from Three Field Experiments.” *American Political Science Review* 114(2): 410-425, 2020.

4 Kalla, Joshua L. and David E. Broockman. “Outside Lobbying” over the Airwaves: A Randomized Field Experiment on Televised Issue Ads.” *American Political Science Review*: 1-7, 2021.



## “It helps those who might hold prejudicial attitudes understand the individual experiences of people who belong to minority communities”



studied the persuasive effects of canvassers who shared stories about transgender people and asked voters in South Florida to share personal accounts of instances when others criticized them for being different<sup>5</sup>. The researchers compared conversations in which canvassers used non-judgemental exchanges (in which they provided or elicited personal stories about people from LGBTQ and/or immigrant communities) and conversations where such a strategy was not deployed.

### The Power of Hearing Others’ Experiences

Does the type of non-judgemental conversation matter? In their latest article, Kalla and Broockman compare the results from several experimental studies that involve different kinds of non-judgemental conversation strategies. These include reflecting on personal experiences with discrimination; imagining what it would be like to experience discrimination as a member of an outgroup; recounting a known outgroup member’s experiences with discrimination; and, listening to an outgroup member talk about their personal experiences with discrimination<sup>6</sup>. Unlike the first three modes of narrative exchange – that is, those that involve prompting the audience to imagine or recall experiences -- the fourth type, also known as perspective-getting, cannot be self-generated but

instead depends on actively engaging with another person who shares new information. They find that the fourth type, also known as perspective-getting, is the most reliable way to reduce prejudicial attitudes. Kalla and Broockman point out that the audience need not directly engage with an outgroup member as their experiences with discrimination can be presented by a fellow ingroup member.

### Implications for Policymakers and Rights Advocates

For those seeking to build public support for inclusive policies, Kalla and Broockman’s findings suggest that the best approach is to reach out to prospective voters directly, either in-person or over the phone to engage them in a judgement-free exchange based on perspective-getting. This approach has several advantages.

Primarily, it helps those who might hold prejudicial attitudes understand the individual experiences of people who belong to minority communities.

This allows the speaker to correct misinformation and dispel group stereotypes. Furthermore, perspective-getting enables the audience to better understand structural bases of discrimination that may exist despite one’s personal attributes. In this way, successful minority rights advocacy depends critically on the ability to give skeptics the benefit of the doubt attitudes understand the individual experiences of people who belong to minority communities.

<sup>5</sup> Broockman, David E., and Joshua L. Kalla. 2016. “Durably Reducing Transphobia: A Field Experiment on Door-to-Door Canvassing.” *Science* 352(6282): 220–4.

<sup>6</sup> Kalla, Joshua L. and David E. Broockman. “Which Narrative Strategies Durably Reduce Prejudice? Evidence from Field and Survey Experiments Supporting the Efficacy of Perspective-Getting.” *American Journal of Political Science*: 1-21, 2020.

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## About the Author

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Dr. Fraser received his Ph.D. in political science at the University of Toronto, with a specialty in comparative politics and public policy. He holds a B.A. in political science from the University of Calgary, as well as M.A.s in political science from the University of British Columbia and Waseda University in Japan. His research focuses on how states attempt to control and manage the long-term impacts of immigration; it also engages questions about how interest groups, agencies, and courts influence policy and public attitudes in these fields. He has received numerous previous research grants, including the SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship, and was formerly a fellow at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy in Toronto.