

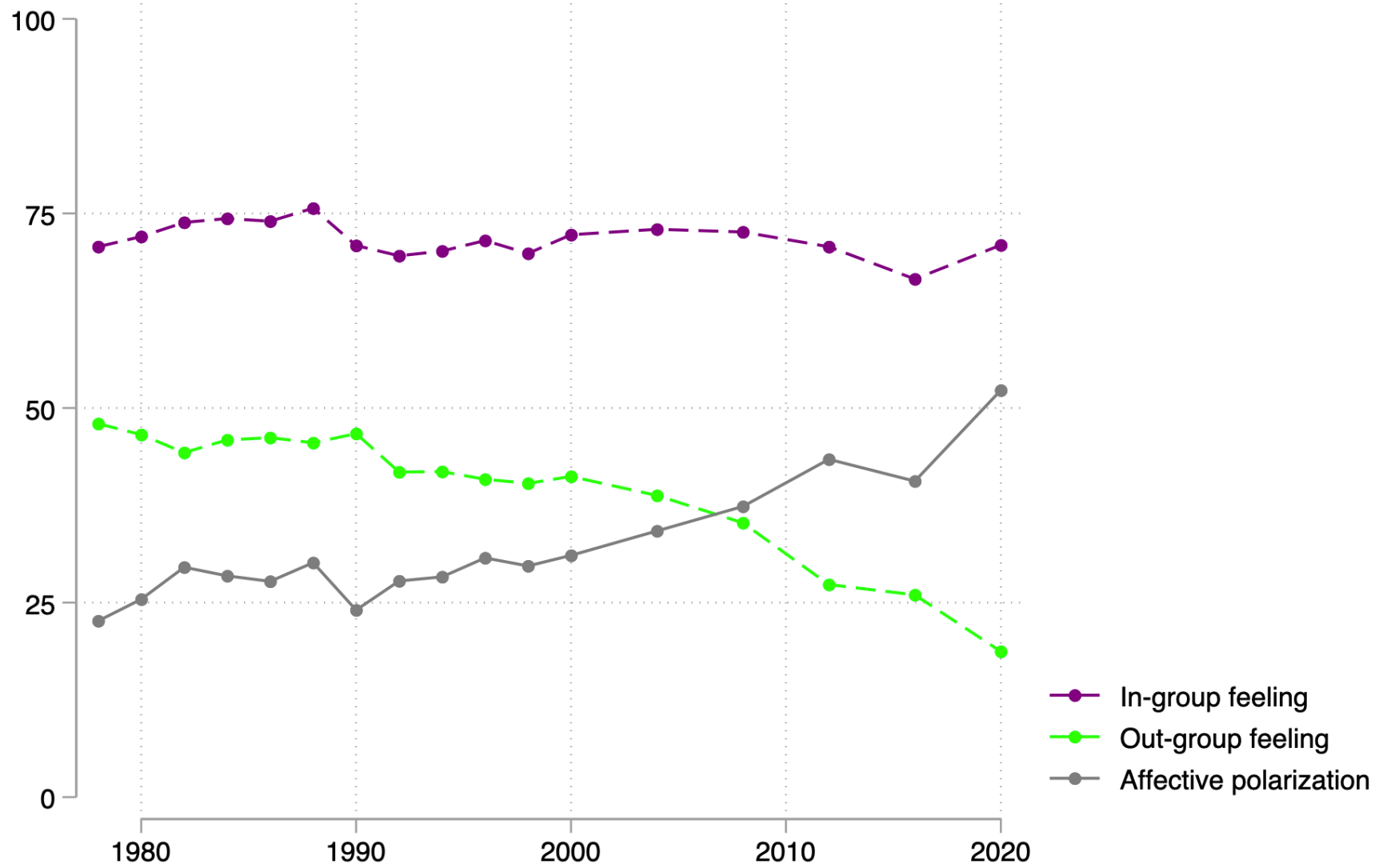
# Finding Common Ground through Civil Conversation and Honest Dialogue

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# Affective Polarization Over-Time

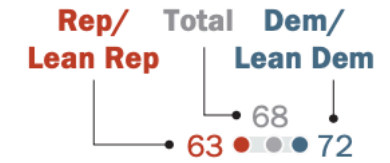




## Democrats and Republicans place less importance on respectful conduct from officials in their own party

% who say it is *very important* for ...

Elected officials to treat opponents with respect



Republican elected officials to treat Democratic officials with respect

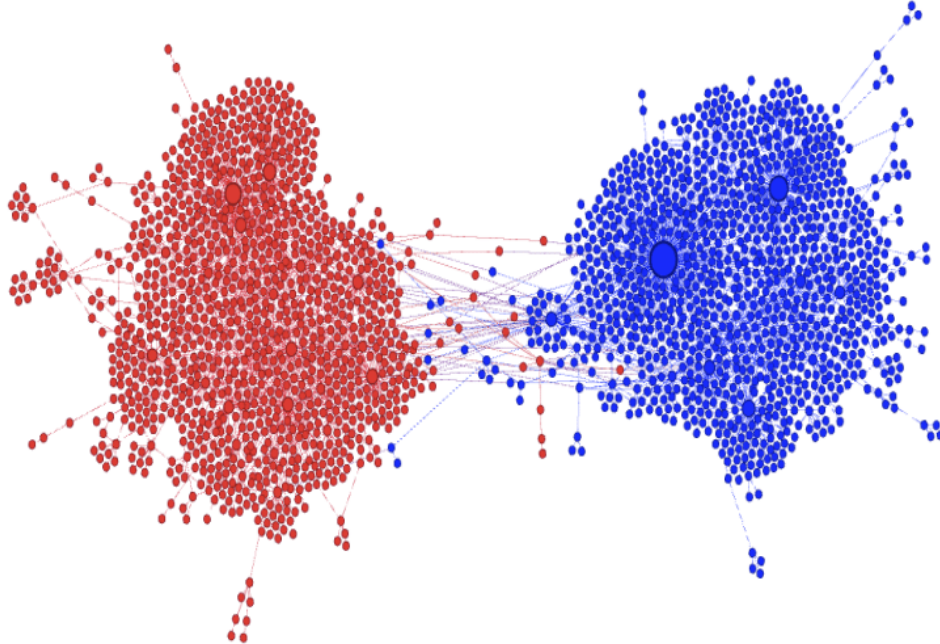


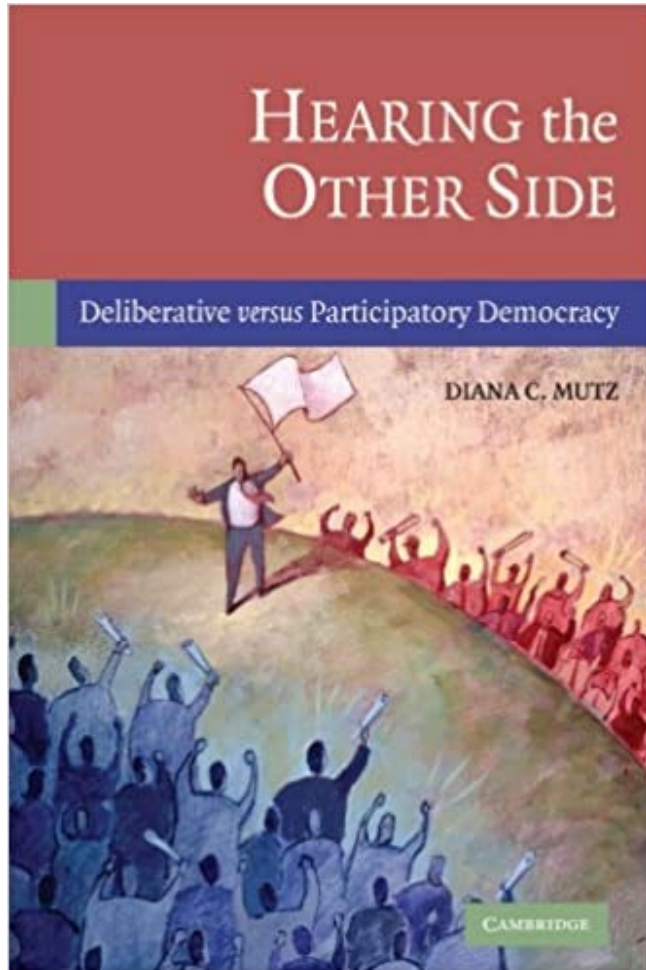
Democratic elected officials to treat Republican officials with respect



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 29-May 13, 2019.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER





# Marquette Civic Dialogues Program

**Goal:** Advance the honest and deliberative exchange of ideas about pressing contemporary issues

Guided by our **values** and **ideals**, including empathy, equality, liberty, mutual respect and reciprocity

“Jesuit education is an invitation to venture into those cracks of questions, issues and situations that shape and define life at its most basic and concrete manifestation, locally and globally.”

*Rev. Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, S.J.,  
President of Jesuit Superiors of Africa and Madagascar,  
Marquette University, February 11, 2019*

# What should we do?

Climate  
change?

Future of  
work?

Migration  
and  
borders?

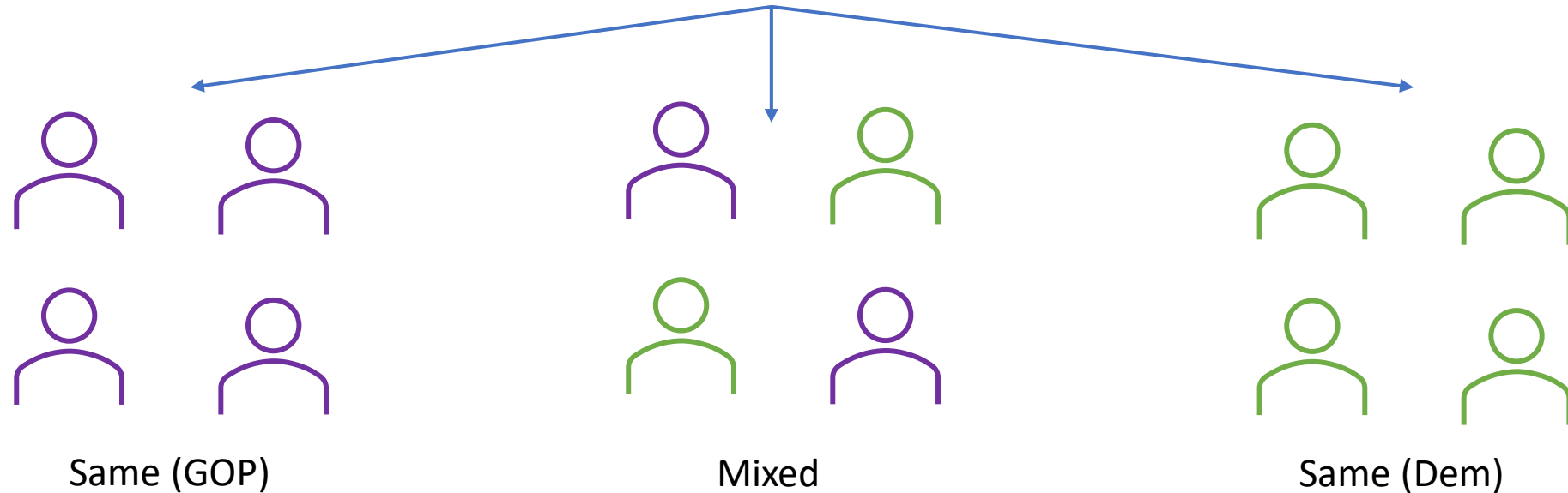
Individual  
rights and  
public  
health?





**Step 1.** Participants complete a pre-survey: demographics, party identification, ideological placements (Self, Republican, Democrat), opinions about social welfare policies.

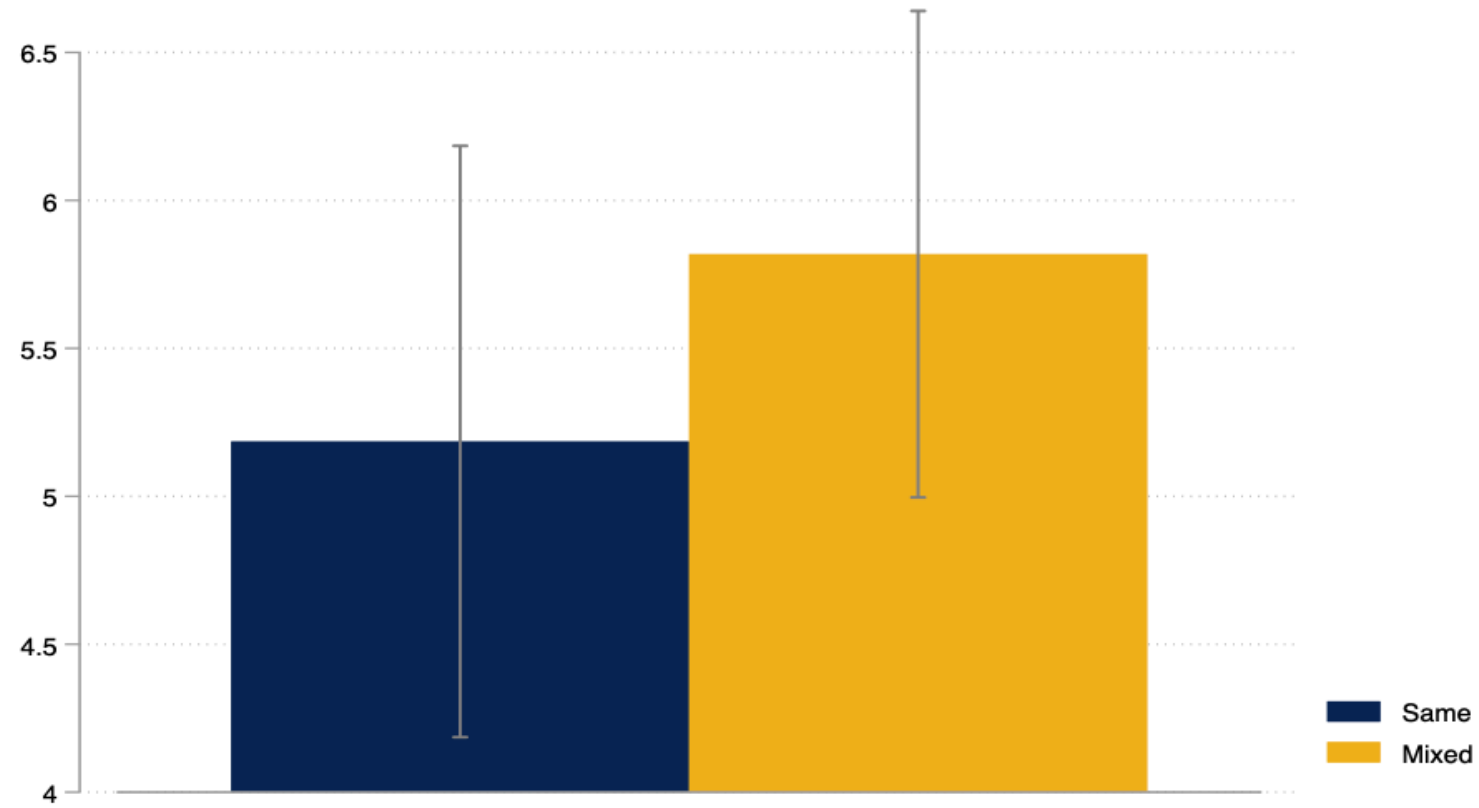
**Step 2.** Participants randomly assigned to one of three groups and engage in (facilitated) small-group deliberation about what we should do about economic opportunity and inequality. (conversations recorded)



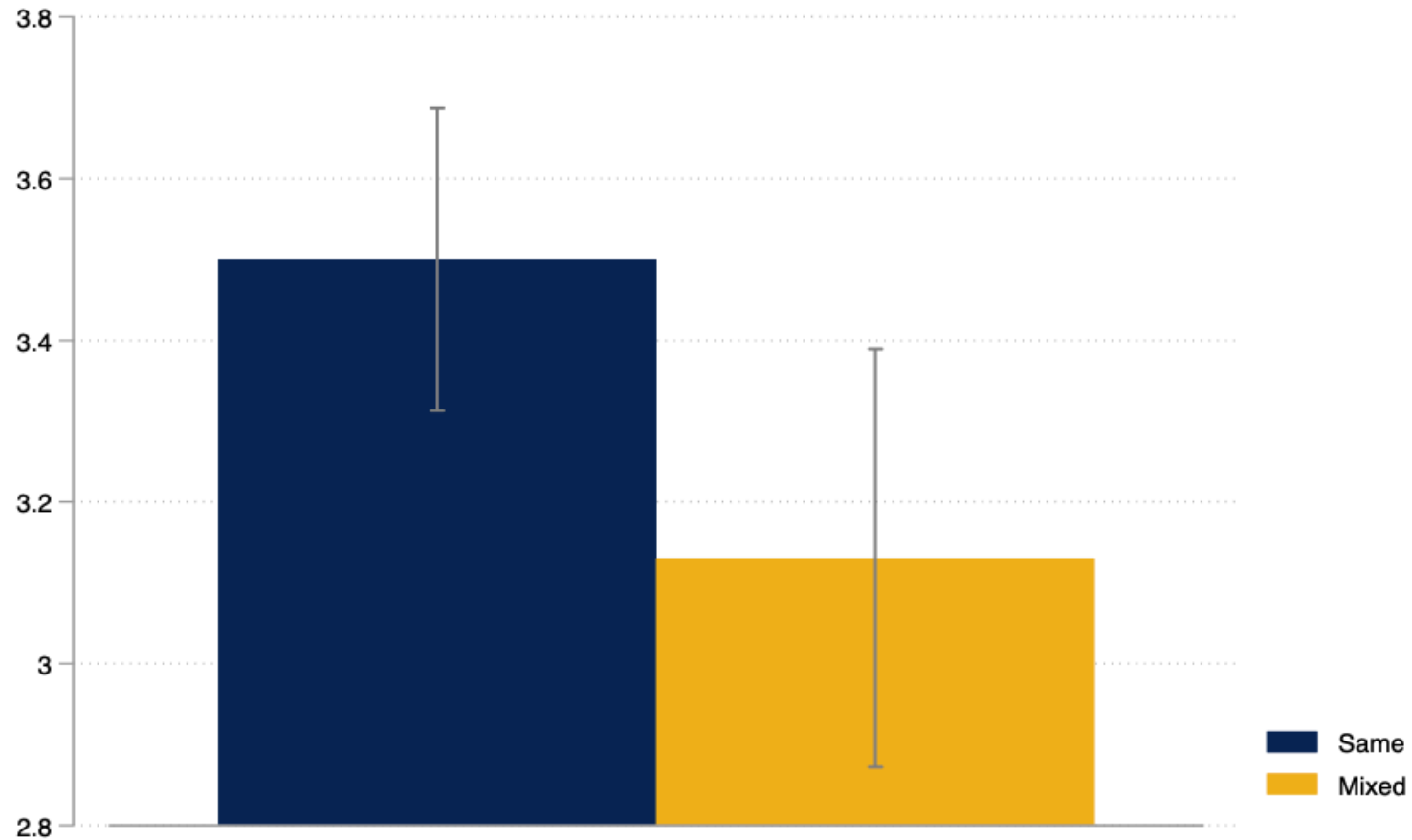
**Step 3.** Participants complete a post-survey: ideological placements (Self, Republican, Democrat), opinions about social welfare policies, evaluations of the discussion.

**Step 4.** Transcribe and code transcripts.

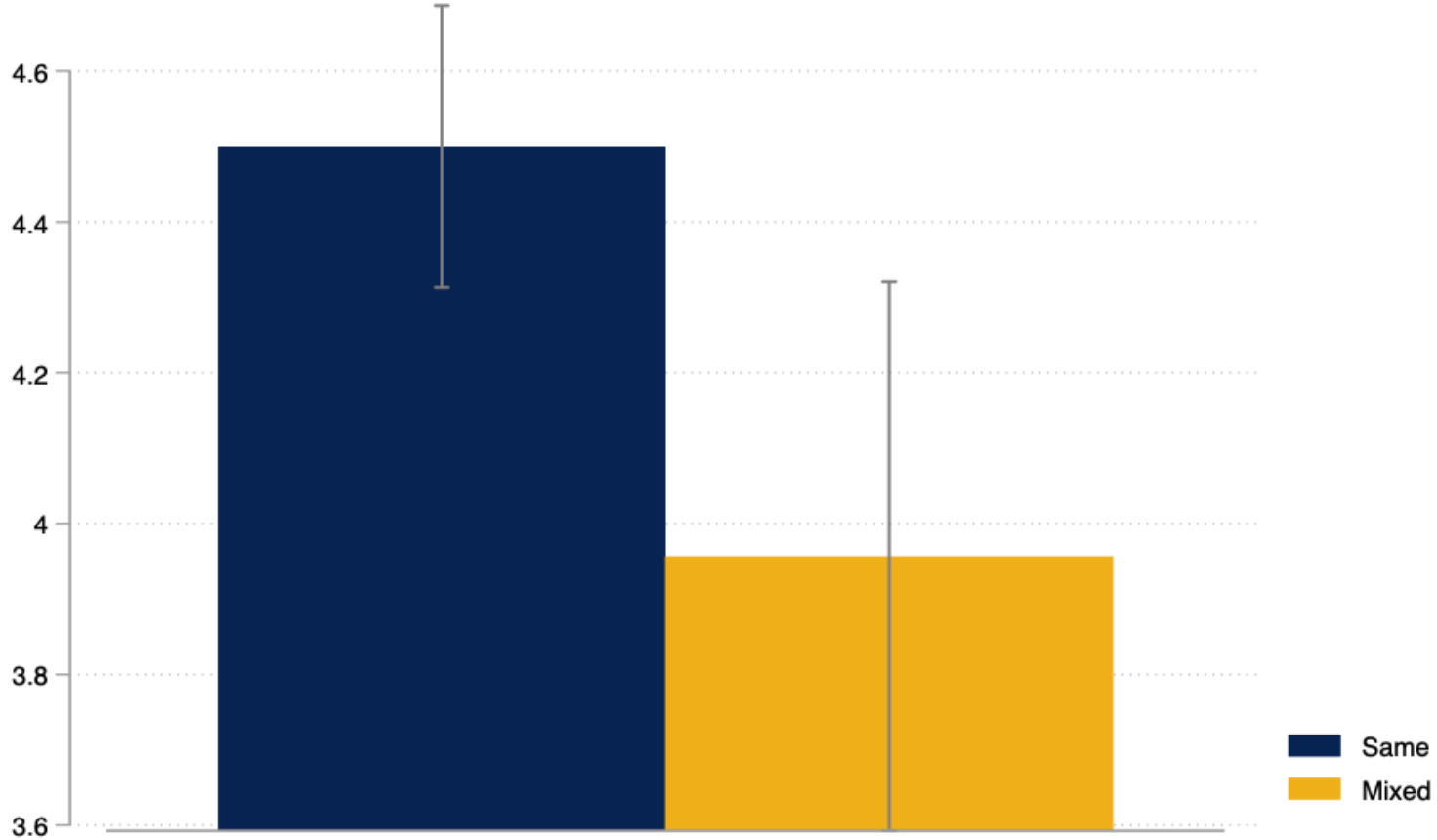
Average opinion change (pre-post discussion)



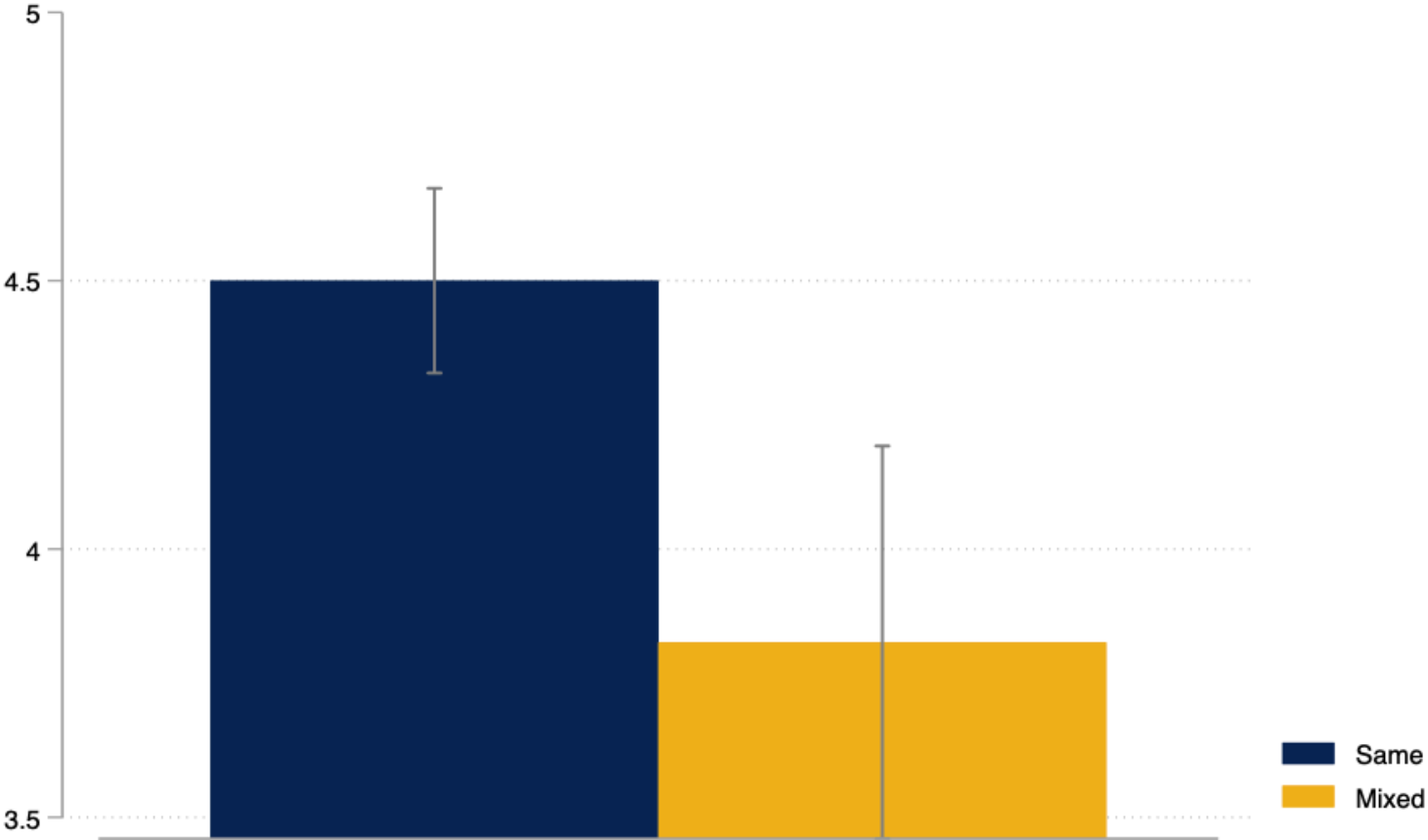
### How would you rate the experience?



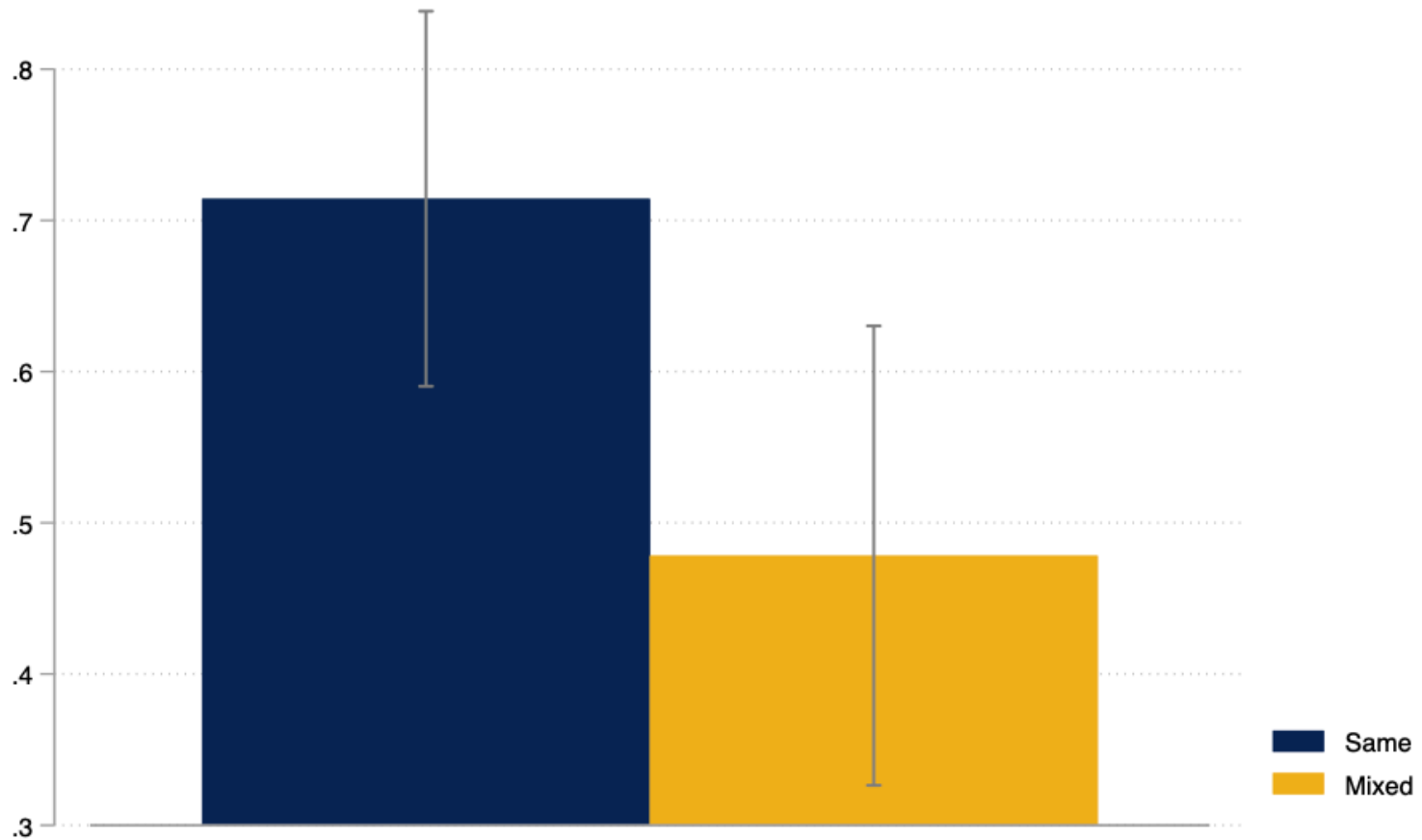
Comfort level with discussion



### How would you rate the quality of discussion?



### Did the conversation affect your views on the topic?

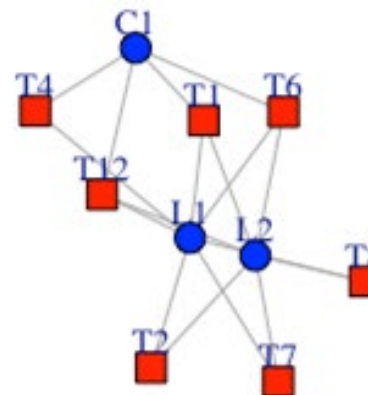


Mapped discussions as **epistemic networks** (blue circles are students; red squares are topics).

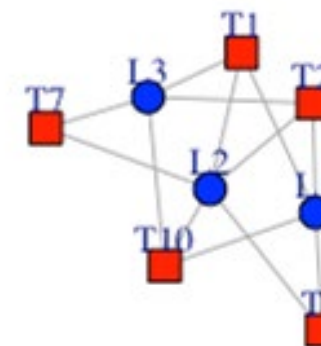
Students discussed a wider-range of topics in politically diverse groups.

No evidence that these were polarized discussions.

Politically Diverse (Mixed)



Politically Homogeneous (Same)

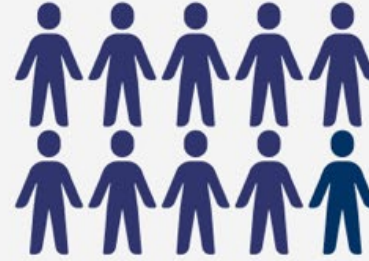






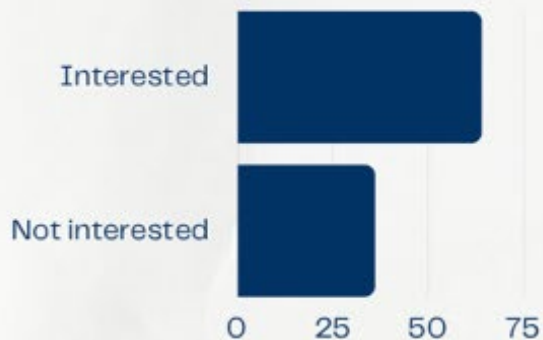
## SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

90% of survey respondents at our Civic Dialogue Dinners talked about aspects of the issue they hadn't considered before



## UNDERSTANDING

85% of respondents said the discussion improved their understanding of the issue



### **Future Discussion Leaders**

64% of survey respondents said they would be interested in leading a future discussion

93

### **Tolerance for disagreement**

93% of survey respondents said they felt comfortable contributing to the conversation

### **Come Again**

98% of survey respondents said they would be somewhat likely or extremely likely to attend another Civic Dialogue Dinner

## **OVERALL EXPERIENCE**

95% of respondents were satisfied with the overall experience of the Civic Dialogue Dinner



### **Bring a Friend**

95% of attendees said they would be likely to recommend a Civic Dialogue Dinner to a friend



# What can you do? Some tips and strategies

## Practice intellectual humility

- Focus on the reasonable criticisms of your own views
  - “He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that” (J.S. Mill)
- Take time away from the political fray...
- How? Read about other times and places
- [Support local journalism]

## Have more effective discussions

- Highlight shared identities
- Ask others to explain their *reasoning* (don't just ask them their *reasons* for supporting/opposing something)
- Actively listen (restate, paraphrase, manage your own internal dialogue)
- [Work together toward a shared goal]