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PEOPLE MORE WILLING TO LEAVE COMMENTS WHEN GIVEN PRO-CON ARGUMENTS, ACCORDING TO NEW REPORT

Young people are more willing to get involved in political discussion when they're provided with background information containing pro and con arguments, according to a new report from the Engaging News Project (ENP) and the National Institute for Civil Discourse (NICD). This is in comparison to facts combined with pro-con arguments appearing prior to an online discussion space.

The two organizations conducted an experiment that tested whether having facts (verified information about an issue), background information that included pro and con arguments, or both affected study participants' thoughts and behaviors. Participants were asked to interact with an online discussion site on illegal immigration that the researchers created for the experiment, and then provide their reactions.

Sixty percent of participants left a comment when background information with pro and con arguments was provided. By comparison, 51 percent commented when facts were included and 44 percent when both the background and factual information were presented.

Other results featured in the report include:

- Background information containing pro and con arguments made participants feel 7 percent calmer and more satisfied than factual information.
- When participants thought that the discussion would be civil, they expressed more interest in returning to the site.
- When participants thought that the information was accurate and the site was balanced, they expressed more interest in returning to the site.

"The pro and con arguments may have helped people feel comfortable commenting by giving them a way to organize their thoughts about illegal immigration," said ENP Research Associate Cynthia Peacock. "Although people learned from the factual information, it didn't make them feel satisfied."

Inspiration for the experiment came from a series of focus groups conducted by ENP, based at the University of Texas at Austin, and NICD, based at the University of Arizona. [In a report](#) released earlier this year, the organizations shared results from the focus groups, detailing the finding that young people view online spaces as somewhat treacherous for interacting politically.

Based on the findings from this experiment, our next research step is to examine the substance of comments to understand if they varied depending on the presence of factual or background information.

| *The Engaging News Project provides research-based techniques for engaging online audiences in commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways. Learn more at engagingnewsproject.org.*

The National Institute for Civil Discourse is committed to fostering an open exchange of ideas and expression of values that will lead to better problem-solving and more effective government. Learn more at nicd.arizona.edu.