

Supplemental Online Materials

Study 1

Demographic Information

Participants reported:

Political affiliation (frequencies reported in main text).

Gender and age (descriptive statistics reported in main text).

Whether English was their first language: 98% said “yes”, “2%” said no.

Whether they have asthma: 11% said “yes”, “89%” said no.

Table S1. Highest level of education completed.

Education Level	Percentage of sample
No formal qualifications	0.28%
Secondary education (e.g. GED/GCSE)	0.57%
High school diploma / A-levels	19.26%
Technical/community college	14.16%
Undergraduate degree (BA/BSc/other)	43.91%
Graduate degree (MA/MSc/MPhil/other)	18.98%
Doctorate degree (PhD/other)	2.83%
Don't know / not applicable	0%

Table S2. Previous meditation experience.

Frequency of meditation practice	Percentage of sample
Daily	5.10%
Four to six times per week	3.97%
Two to three times per week	7.08%
Once per week	5.10%
Two to three times per month	10.20%
Once per month	13.88%
Never	54.67%

Table S3. Equipment used to listen to the audio clip (i.e. the intervention).

Equipment	Percentage of sample
Headphones	72.52%
Speakers	27.20%
Other	0.30%

The individual that selected ‘Other’ reported using a “Mix of speakers and headphones.”

Questionnaire Scores

CAMS-R: $M = 59.32$, $SD = 10.56$, Range = 19-82, Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$ SCBCS: $M = 25.09$, $SD = 5.92$, Range = 7-35, Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$

Political Identity Strength: $M = 15.32$, $SD = 4.72$, Range = 5-25, Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$

Randomization Checks

Table S4. Balance tests for demographic, political, trait, and polarization variables.

Variable (statistical test)	Test statistics
Age (ANOVA)	$F(2,350) = 0.38$, $p = .68$
Gender (Chi Square)	$X^2(4, N = 353) = 3.07$, $p = .55$
First language (Chi Square)	$X^2(2, N = 353) = 3.53$, $p = .17$
Education (Chi Square)	$X^2(12, N = 353) = 17.43$, $p = .13$
Meditation practice (Chi Square)	$X^2(12, N = 353) = 12.78$, $p = .39$
Asthma (Chi Square)	$X^2(2, N = 353) = 0.87$, $p = .65$
Audio equipment (Chi Square)	$X^2(4, N = 353) = 6.94$, $p = .14$
Political affiliation: Democrat, Republican (Chi Square)	$X^2(2, N = 353) = 0.16$, $p = .93$
Strength of party identification (ANOVA)	$F(2,350) = 1.07$, $p = .34$
Trait compassion (ANOVA)	$F(2,350) = 1.37$, $p = .26$
Trait mindfulness (ANOVA)	$F(2,350) = 0.65$, $p = .52$
Time 1 AP for voters on feeling thermometer (ANOVA)	$F(2,350) = 0.23$, $p = .79$
Time 1 AP for voters on net trait rating (ANOVA)	$F(2,350) = 0.14$, $p = .87$
Time 1 AP for voters on trust measure (ANOVA)	$F(2,350) = 0.58$, $p = .56$
Time 1 AP for candidates and officials on feeling thermometer (ANOVA)	$F(2,350) = 0.56$, $p = .58$
Time 1 AP for candidates and officials on net trait rating (ANOVA)	$F(2,350) = 1.34$, $p = .26$
Time 1 AP for candidates and officials on trust measure (ANOVA)	$F(2,350) = 0.58$, $p = .25$

Note: AP = Affective Polarization.

Deviations from the Preregistered Analysis

In our preregistered analysis plan, we specified that we would enter the composite measure of affective polarization as the dependent variable into a 3 (condition: befriending, mindfulness, control) x 2 (time: pre-intervention, post-intervention) mixed ANCOVA, controlling for age, gender, education and language, and examine the pairwise comparisons for any significant effects. In response to peer-reviewers' comments, we altered the analysis

strategy in the following ways: First, ratings on the feeling thermometer, net trait rating, and trust measures were standardized, as the ratings were provided on different scales. Reliability analyses and inter-item correlations were also performed to assess the internal consistency and the relationships between these measures. Second, we did not include the above covariates in the model. As participants were randomly assigned to the between-subjects (contemplative practice) conditions, and the randomization checks show that the conditions were balanced on demographic, political, trait, and polarization variables (see Table S4), including these covariates is unnecessary and may bias the results (Mutz and Pemantle 2015; Mutz, Pemantle, and Pham 2019). Third, we calculated the change in affective polarization per participant, by subtracting the Time 1 affective polarization composite scores from the Time 2 scores, and entered these change scores into a one-way ANOVA, rather than using a repeated-measures model. This was done to allow for a comparison of the change in affective polarization between conditions, rather than a comparison of the Time 1 vs Time 2 affective polarization scores across conditions. Post-hoc Tukey's HSD tests were then used to examine the pairwise comparisons, rather than paired-samples t-tests.

Running the analysis set out in our preregistration (after linearly scaling each dependent variable) produces the same results as those reported in the main text. Entering the Time 1 and Time 2 composite measures of affective polarization (using ratings of in-group and out-group *voters*) into a 3 (condition: befriending, mindfulness, control) x 2 (time: pre-intervention, post-intervention) mixed ANCOVA, controlling for age, gender, education and language, revealed a marginal interaction between the condition and time ($F(2,345) = 2.59$, $p = .077$, $\eta_p^2 = .015$).

Re-running this analysis using ratings of each party's candidates and elected officials revealed a significant interaction between the condition and time ($F(2,345) = 3.86$, $p = .022$, $\eta_p^2 = .022$). Bonferroni corrected pairwise comparisons indicated that there was a reduction in

affective polarization at Time 2 relative to Time 1 in the befriending condition ($F(1,345) = 6.20, p = .013, \eta_p^2 = .018$) but not the mindfulness condition ($F(1,345) = 2.26, p = .134, \eta_p^2 = .006$) or the control condition ($F(1,345) = 1.68, p = .196, \eta_p^2 = .005$).

Inclusion of Participants Who Failed Attention Checks

To test whether our decision to exclude participants who failed attention checks affected the results, we re-ran the main analyses reported in the main text with participants who exhibited inattentive responding (for whom we have data from both session one and two) included. The results are reported in Table S5. The final column of Table S5 indicates whether the result reported here matches the one in the main text.

Table S5. Results of main analyses without exclusions.

Analysis	Result	Replicates main text
Bivariate correlation between trait compassion and Time 1 AP (voters)	$r(360) = .034, p = .262$	Yes
Bivariate correlation between trait compassion and Time 1 AP (candidates and officials)	$r(360) = .055, p = .148$	Yes
Bivariate correlation between trait mindfulness and Time 1 AP (voters)	$r(360) = -.051, p = .168$	Yes
Bivariate correlation between trait mindfulness and Time 1 AP (candidates and officials)	$r(360) = -.039, p = .230$	Yes
Partial correlation between trait compassion and Time 1 AP (voters)	$r_{\text{partial}}(357) = .037, p = .243$	Yes
Partial correlation between trait compassion and Time 1 AP (candidates and officials)	$r_{\text{partial}}(357) = .058, p = .138$	Yes
Partial correlation between trait mindfulness and Time 1 AP (voters)	$r_{\text{partial}}(357) = -.053, p = .158$	Yes
Partial correlation between trait mindfulness and Time 1 AP (candidates and officials)	$r_{\text{partial}}(357) = -.043, p = .211$	Yes
Change in composite AP (voters) between conditions	$F(2,359) = 2.74, p = .066, \eta_p^2 = .015$	Yes
Change in composite AP (candidates and officials) between conditions	$F(2,359) = 3.46, p = .033, \eta_p^2 = .019$	Yes
Post hoc Tukey HSD test comparing the befriending and control conditions	Mean difference = 3.84, SE = 1.63, $p = .050$.	Yes
Post hoc Tukey HSD test comparing the mindfulness and control conditions	Mean difference = 0.29, SE = 1.63, $p = .983$.	Yes

Note: AP = Affective Polarization.

Differences Between Dropouts and Participants Who Completed Both Sessions

We tested whether there were differences between participants who completed both sessions of the experiment and those who only completed session one on the variables recorded at Time 1. The results are reported in Table S6. The final column of Table S6 indicates whether there is a significant difference on the given variable between the two groups.

Table S6. Differences between dropouts and participants who completed both sessions.

Variable (statistical test)	Test statistics	Significant difference
Political affiliation: Democrat, Republican (Chi Square)	$X^2 (1, N = 451) = 1.07, p = .302$	No
Strength of party identification (T-Test)	$t(449) = 0.15, p = .880$	No
Trait compassion (T- Test)	$t(449) = 1.05, p = .293$	No
Trait mindfulness (T- Test)	$t(449) = 0.16, p = .872$	No
Time 1 AP for voters on feeling thermometer (T- Test)	$t(449) = 0.30, p = .767$	No
Time 1 AP for voters on net trait rating (T- Test)	$t(449) = -0.98, p = .329$	No
Time 1 AP for voters on trust measure (T- Test)	$t(449) = -0.83, p = .410$	No
Time 1 AP for candidates and officials on feeling thermometer (T- Test)	$t(449) = 0.15, p = .881$	No
Time 1 AP for candidates and officials on net trait rating (T- Test)	$t(449) = -0.12, p = .908$	No
Time 1 AP for candidates and officials on trust measure (T- Test)	$t(449) = -0.14, p = .891$	No

Note: AP = Affective Polarization.

Hypothetical Helping Behaviour

In addition to measuring affective polarization, we also included a measure of helping intentions as an additional exploratory analysis to see whether affective changes are reflected in individuals' behavioral intentions. The participants were asked to rate how likely they would be to help someone from their own party and someone from the rival party in a

hypothetical scenario: “Laura is a [political party affiliation]. If you were walking down the street and saw Laura fall over, how likely would you be to go over and offer assistance?”

Participants were asked to rate how likely they would be to go over and offer assistance on a scale from 0 (“Not at all likely”) to 100 (“Extremely likely”). As the experiment period took place during the covid-19 outbreak, the participants were also asked if they took the new guidance on social distancing into account when answering the hypothetical helping question at Time 2 (but not at Time 1).

To compute a measure of ‘helping polarization’ (i.e. the difference between participants’ willingness to help someone from their own party compared to someone from the rival party) we subtracted the out-group ratings from the in-group ratings. This was done separately for ratings at Time 1 and Time 2. We then computed change scores by calculating the difference between helping polarization at Time 1 and Time 2.

To assess whether there were differences in hypothetical helping across the meditation practice conditions at Time 1, we performed a one-way ANOVA. This revealed that there were no significant differences in helping polarization at the pre-intervention stage between the conditions ($F(2,350) = 1.40, p = .25$).

We next tested whether changes in helping polarization over time were influenced by the meditation practice condition to which participants were randomly assigned by entering the helping polarization change scores into a one-way ANOVA. This revealed that the effect of the condition was not significant ($F(2,352) = 1.40, p = .248, \eta_p^2 = .008$). This suggests that neither befriending meditation nor mindfulness meditation influenced participant’s greater willingness to help someone from their own party.

As the hypothetical helping behavior involved interacting with someone during outbreak of the covid-19 outbreak, it is possible that social distancing guidelines may have influenced responses on this question. We therefore excluded participants who reported that

they took the guidance on social distancing into account when answering this question and re-ran the analysis. This did not change the result: we again found no effect of the condition on helping polarization change scores ($F(2,323) = 0.17$, $p = .846$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$).

Study 2

Demographic Information

Participants reported:

Political affiliation (frequencies reported in main text).

Gender and age (descriptive statistics reported in main text).

Whether English was their first language: 97% said “yes”, “3%” said no.

Whether they have asthma: 12% said “yes”, “88%” said no.

Table S7. Highest level of education completed.

Education Level	Percentage of sample
No formal qualifications	0.80%
Secondary education (e.g. GED/GCSE)	2.44%
High school diploma / A-levels	22.36%
Technical/community college	14.63%
Undergraduate degree (BA/BSc/other)	40.65%
Graduate degree (MA/MSc/MPhil/other)	13.82%
Doctorate degree (PhD/other)	5.28%
Don't know / not applicable	0%

Table S8. Previous meditation experience.

Frequency of meditation practice	Percentage of sample
Daily	4.88%
Four to six times per week	2.44%
Two to three times per week	10.98%
Once per week	7.32%
Two to three times per month	8.94%
Once per month	19.11%
Never	46.34%

Table S9. Equipment used to listen to the audio clip (i.e. the intervention).

Equipment	Percentage of sample
Headphones	67.07%
Speakers	32.11%
Other	0.81%

One individual that selected ‘Other’ reported using a “Built in Laptop speakers”, while the other reported using “Computer speaker for the first half then headphones for the last half.”

Randomization Checks

Table S10. Balance tests for demographic, political, trait, and polarization variables.

Variable (statistical test)	Test statistics
Age (T-Test)	$t(244) = 0.36, p = .718$
Gender (Chi Square)	$X^2 (3, N = 246) = 2.95, p = .399$
First language (Chi Square)	$X^2 (1, N = 246) = 1.53, p = .216$
Education (Chi Square)	$X^2 (6, N = 246) = 18.52, p = .006$
Meditation practice (Chi Square)	$X^2 (6, N = 246) = 3.66, p = .728$
Asthma (Chi Square)	$X^2 (1, N = 246) = 0.04, p = .84$
Audio equipment (Chi Square)	$X^2 (2, N = 246) = 2.07, p = .356$
Political affiliation: Democrat, Republican (Chi Square)	$X^2 (1, N = 246) = 0.02, p = .892$
Strength of party identification (T-Test)	$t(244) = -0.70, p = .487$
Time 1 AP for voters on feeling thermometer (T-Test)	$t(244) = -0.02, p = .986$

Note: AP = Affective Polarization.

As education varied between the conditions at Time 1, we ran a regression analysis to test whether this difference affected our main result. Specifically, we entered the feeling thermometer polarization change scores as the dependent variable in a linear regression and entered the meditation practice condition (befriending = 1, control = 0) and level of education as independent variables. This revealed a significant effect of the condition ($\beta = -6.66, SE = 2.43, t(243) = -2.74, p = .007$), suggesting that impact of befriending meditation on affective polarization was not due to pre-existing differences in education between the intervention and control groups. The effect of education was not significant ($\beta = -1.59, SE = 0.98, t(243) = -1.62, p = .107$).

Inclusion of Participants Who Failed Attention Checks

We re-ran the main analysis to assess whether the effect held when participants who failed the attention checks (for whom we have data from both session one and two) were included. An independent samples t-test revealed a greater reduction in affective polarization in the befriending condition ($M = -6.65, SD = 19.63$) than in the control condition ($M = -$

0.28, SD = 19.28; $t(267) = 2.69$, $p = .008$, $d = 0.33$), indicating that excluding participants who failed the attention checks did not affect the result.

Differences Between Dropouts and Participants Who Completed Both Sessions

We tested whether there were differences between participants who completed both sessions of the experiment and those who only completed session one on the variables recorded at Time 1. The results are reported in Table S11. The final column of Table S11 indicates whether there is a significant difference on the given variable between the two groups.

Table S11. Differences between dropouts and participants who completed both sessions.

Variable (statistical test)	Test statistics	Significant difference
Political affiliation: Democrat, Republican (Chi Square)	$X^2 (1, N = 350) = 1.30$, $p = .254$	No
Strength of party identification (T-Test)	$t(348) = 0.55$, $p = .583$	No
Time 1 AP for voters on feeling thermometer (T-Test)	$t(348) = 1.93$, $p = .055$	No
Time 1 AP for voters on net trait rating (T- Test)	$t(348) = 0.87$, $p = .383$	No
Time 1 AP for voters on trust measure (T- Test)	$t(348) = 0.96$, $p = .340$	No
Time 1 AP for candidates and officials on feeling thermometer (T- Test)	$t(348) = 2.41$, $p = .016$	Yes
Time 1 AP for candidates and officials on net trait rating (T- Test)	$t(348) = 1.22$, $p = .223$	No
Time 1 AP for candidates and officials on trust measure (T- Test)	$t(348) = 1.93$, $p = .054$	No

Note: AP = Affective Polarization.