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Incivility and intolerance on Twitter

A case study of political tweets about abortion in Ireland (2018) and the United States (2020)

Dayei Oh

A doctoral thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Sciences in the Online Civic Culture Centre at Loughborough University

April 2022

Dedication

To my parents, Saehwa and Hyeunjoo.
This PhD is a product of your unwavering support.

Acknowledgements

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There are so many others who have contributed to this work along the way. Know that I am thinking of you and that I am grateful.

Abstract

In recent years, technology-scepticist views caution that internet technologies are far from utopian places or idealisations of Habermasian public spheres. There are growing concerns about the proliferation of harmful content online, including online hate speech, harassment, abuse, etc. In this thesis, I focus on one of the most concerning and harmful behaviours on Twitter and in politics more broadly: political incivility and intolerance, through a case study of political tweets about abortion in Ireland (2018) and the United States (2020).

The thesis aims to enhance our understanding of the nature and dynamics of political incivility and intolerance in abortion discourse and on Twitter. I make three main contributions to research on these topics. First, I make a critical-normative contribution by discussing online incivility and intolerance in connection with deliberative and critical theorists, including Jürgen Habermas' theories of public spheres, deliberation, and civility as well as Rainer Forst's theories of pluralism and toleration. My thesis establishes a concrete normative vision of what democratic communications ought to be. Furthermore, this normative discussion compensates for the limitations of computer science-driven content regulations, which lack theoretical underpinnings in terms of what they mean by 'toxic,' 'harmful,' or 'uncivil' language in their models. Following Habermas' and Forst's theories, I argue that incivility can have some limited roles in deliberation whereas intolerance is incompatible with fundamental principles of deliberative and pluralist democracy.

Secondly, I make an empirical-descriptive contribution to research, exploring the Irish and U.S. Twitter data both quantitatively and qualitatively. To study the topic from multiple perspectives, I employ an innovative methodological triangulation, combining computational text mining methods and manual qualitative text analysis. Quantitative big data analysis produces a general linear model to predict the relationships between incivility, intolerance, and diverse demographic, political, and communicative contexts, e.g. high-profile political events and issues, abortion issue position, issue partisanship, gender, anonymity, tweeting context. The qualitative analysis explores rhetorical patterns and types of political incivility and intol-

erance, unfolding how Twitter users employ political incivility and intolerance, and what assumptions and ideologies are embedded in them. The qualitative analysis reveals that Twitter users construct antagonism and false polarisation between 'Us' versus 'Them,' sabotaging reasonable deliberation and policy compromises. The cross-country comparative analyses indicate that political incivility and intolerance are cross-cultural concepts but also unfold in culture-particular ways with specific talking points and vocabulary.

Thirdly, I discuss the prescriptive implications of my normative and empirical discussions and empirical findings for the health of deliberative politics, illuminating how we should understand incivility and intolerance and deal with them. I make five noteworthy observations for extensions and future scholarship: (1) there is a strong predictive relationship between political incivility and intolerance; (2) Twitter structures can hinder productive sublimation of anger to persuasive arguments; (3) a small set of hyper-active users dominate the uncivil and intolerant communications; (4) there is little relationship between anonymity, political incivility and intolerance; and (5) there is a link between political incivility, intolerance, and the rise of populism and reactionary backlash. I also make social impact recommendations concerning platform redesigns and civic education about online ethics.

Through these three original contributions, this PhD thesis not only benefits ongoing scholarly knowledge and debates on digital culture and online user behaviours, but also contributes to lasting social impacts such as paving the way for future projects on social media platform redesign, the development of ethical and principled content regulation algorithmic models, and civic ethics education for members of public who use social media for political and activist purposes.

Contents

List of Figures **11**

List of Tables **13**

1 Introduction **14**

1.1 Research context 14

1.1.1 Why abortion discourse? 16

1.1.2 Why Ireland (2018) and the United States (2020)? 18

1.1.3 Why Twitter? 18

1.2 Thesis structure 23

2 Conceptualising political incivility and intolerance through deliberative and critical theories **27**

2.1 Conceptualising incivility 28

2.1.1 Jürgen Habermas' theories of civil society and public communication 28

2.1.2 Later deliberative theorists: the (limited) roles of uncivil communication in agonistic deliberation and the deliberative system 33

2.2 Conceptualising intolerance 36

2.2.1 Tolerance as moral-political respect 37

2.2.2 Tolerance as reciprocity and generality; intolerance as violations of the two criteria 39

2.3 Conclusion 43

3 Review of digital media and political communication research on incivility and intolerance **45**

3.1 Levels of analytical emphasis: Individual, structural, contextual . . . 46

3.2 Operationalising incivility and intolerance 51

3.3 Political effects of incivility and intolerance 54

3.4 Conclusion: How should we understand incivility and intolerance? . . 56

4 Abortion discourse in Ireland and the United States 58
4.1 Historical contexts . . . 59
4.1.1 Prologue: 1920-1960s . . . 59
4.1.2 Shifting grounds and the emergence of consensus: 1960-1980s . 61
4.1.3 Continuing struggles: 1980-2000s . . . 63
4.1.4 Resurgence of abortion debates: 2000-2020s . . . 66
4.2 Political and discursive opportunity structures in Ireland and the U.S. 71
4.2.1 Political component . . . 71
4.2.2 Socio-cultural components . . . 73
4.3 Conclusion . . . 79

5 Methodology 81
5.1 Research approach . . . 82
5.1.1 Methodological triangulation . . . 82
5.1.2 Computational social science and traditional social science methods . . . 83
5.1.3 Cross-country comparative study . . . 84
5.2 Method overview and research questions . . . 84
5.2.1 Logistic regression modelling and research question 1 . . . 84
5.2.2 Computer-assisted content analysis of incivility and intolerance on Twitter . . . 86
5.2.3 Computer-assisted coding of issue positions of Twitter users . 91
5.2.4 Computer-assisted coding of the gender of Twitter users . . . 94
5.2.5 Qualitative content analysis and research questions 2 and 3 . . 96
5.2.6 Normative-critical theories to interpret empirical findings, research question 4 . . . 97
5.3 Data . . . 97
5.3.1 Ireland data collection & spam filtering . . . 98
5.3.2 The U.S. data collection & spam filtering . . . 99
5.4 Research hypotheses . . . 100
5.4.1 H1 for a cross-country comparison . . . 100
5.4.2 H2 and 3: External political events and timeline . . . 100
5.4.3 H4: Abortion issue position . . . 101
5.4.4 H5: Abortion issue partisanship . . . 101
5.4.5 H6: The gender of users . . . 103
5.4.6 H7: Anonymity . . . 103
5.4.7 H8, 9, and 10: Tweet affordances and contexts . . . 104

5.5 Social media research ethics . . . 105
5.5.1 Consent . . . 105
5.5.2 Protection of human subjects: Anonymisation, avoiding direct quotations, and reconstruction . . . 106
5.5.3 Harm . . . 106
5.6 Conclusion . . . 107

6 Modelling uncivil and intolerant Twittersphere 109
6.1 Data overview & descriptive analysis of the Irish and U.S. datasets . 110
6.2 Generalised Linear Model of incivility and intolerance in abortion discourse on the Irish and U.S. Twittersphere . . . 113
6.2.1 H2 and H3 accepted: impacts of high-profile political and media events on incivility and intolerance . . . 113
6.2.2 H4 partially accepted: issue position, incivility, and intolerance 121
6.2.3 H5 accepted: Issue partisanship, incivility, and intolerance . . 121
6.2.4 H6 partially accepted: gender, incivility, and intolerance . . . 125
6.2.5 H7 rejected: anonymity, incivility, and intolerance . . . 125
6.2.6 H8 and H10 accepted, H9 rejected: Tweet context, incivility, and intolerance . . . 126
6.3 Conclusion . . . 127
6.3.1 Discussion and conclusion . . . 128
6.3.2 Limitations and extensions . . . 136

7 Rhetorical patterns and types of incivility 138
7.1 Contrasting Us with Them . . . 139
7.1.1 'It is Them who are uncivil!': Contrasting Our civility with Their incivility . . . 139
7.1.2 'They lie but We don't': Criticising the mendacity of the opponent . . . 140
7.1.3 'They are morons, We are intelligent': Belittling, demeaning, and ridiculing the opponent . . . 141
7.1.4 'They benefit from the rigged establishment, We are the victim of the establishment': Perceived victimisation by mainstream & social media . . . 142
7.1.5 'They are un-American socialists, We are patriots': Red scare in the U.S. sample . . . 143
7.2 Ambiguous rhetorical functions of incivility . . . 145

7.2.1 Fuck, shit, bitch: Swear words for intensifier, exclamation, informality 145
7.2.2 'N****s on Twitter don't think': Context-dependent use of racial slurs 146
7.2.3 'Shut the fuck up you dickhead': Heated criticism or unreasonable incivility 147
7.2.4 Warmth, empathy, and engagement with others: Civility coexists with incivility 152
7.2.5 Incivility as witticism, satire, and in-group laughter 153
7.3 Conclusion 156
7.3.1 Discussion and conclusion 157

8 Rhetorical patterns and types of intolerance 159
8.1 Demonisation 159
8.1.1 Evil, demon, bloodthirsty: Demonisation and a dualistic worldview 160
8.1.2 Hitler, Nazi, KKK, Islamic terrorist organisations: Demonisation via political extremist analogy 162
8.2 Exclusion, ostracism, and excommunication 165
8.2.1 Gendered othering and exclusion: Men have no say in abortion discourse 165
8.2.2 Religious exclusion: 'Excommunicate those fake Christians!' . 167
8.3 Reactionary perceptions of 'the threats' and victimhood: 'They are destroying the nation and We are defending it against Them' 170
8.4 Violence: 'Who wants to have a bonfire?' 171
8.5 Conclusion 173
8.5.1 Discussion and conclusion 174

9 Discussion and Conclusion 178
9.1 The theoretical argument 179
9.2 Evidence and key findings 181
9.3 Discussions 188
9.3.1 Incivility and intolerance are strong predictors of each other . 188
9.3.2 Redesigning platforms for productive incivility: Sublimating anger into constructive-persuasive arguments 190
9.3.3 Understanding the small set of partisan superposters in online political discourse 192

9.3.4 Rethinking anonymity and the online harm of political incivility and intolerance . . . 193
9.3.5 The link between intolerance, conservative reactionary backlash, and populism . . . 195
9.4 Transferability of the thesis findings . . . 197
9.5 Intervention and education: Can we fix online incivility and intolerance? 199
9.5.1 Cross-cutting exposure and contact: Reducing inter-group hostility and conflicts . . . 199
9.5.2 Platform efforts: Regulation, censorship, and redirection . . . 201
9.5.3 Self-affirmation: Dealing with grievances and resentment . . . 202
9.5.4 Education about online ethics: Towards the building of self-critical online communities . . . 203
9.6 Thesis limitations and future research . . . 204
9.7 Conclusion . . . 206

References **209**

A Quantitative content analysis coding scheme **239**

B Incivility, intolerance, and digital media ecologies **243**
B.1 Mis- and disinformation provokes anti-abortion intolerance . . . 244
B.2 Distrust in mainstream media and big social media companies . . . 245
B.3 Outrage media and politicians provoke outrage and intolerance . . . 247

List of Figures

3.1 Visualisation of the analytical framework in this thesis. The crisis of healthy digital public deliberation consists of concerns over rude and emotional tone (incivility) and anti-liberal and anti-pluralist ideas and practices (intolerance). . . . 55

6.1 The distribution of total tweets, incivility, and intolerance between 13th April and 4th June 2018 in the Irish Twitter data 115

6.2 The distribution of incivility and intolerance tweeted by pro-abortion, anti-abortion, and position-unidentifiable users between 13th April and 4th June 2018 in the Irish Twitter data 116

6.3 The distribution of total tweets, incivility, and intolerance between 4th March and 20th October 2020 in the U.S. Twitter data 117

6.4 The distribution of incivility and intolerance tweeted by pro-abortion, anti-abortion, and position-unidentifiable users between 4th March and 20th October 2020 in the U.S. Twitter data 118

6.5 Lorenz curves for user coordination dynamics in the Irish data 123

6.6 Lorenz curves for user coordination dynamics in the U.S. data 124

6.7 Visualisation of odds ratio and 95% CI of incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. datasets 128

7.1 YouTuber Logan Paul's tweet on 17th May 2019 where he drew dicks on the photos of 25 male senators who voted to ban abortion in Alabama. Paul wrote: 'I took the liberty of drawing tiny dicks on the 25 male senators who voted to ban abortion in Alabama.' This tweet was posted before my data collection period but one of its many retweets were made during the data collection. 155

7.2 Satire website The Babylon Bee's tweet (28th September 2020), sharing their satire article 'ACB racing to get dinner ready for husband so he'll let her out to overturn Roe v Wade.' The article contains a photoshopped image in which Barett is cooking in the kitchen, smiling. 155

B.1 independent.ie news headline change from from ‘"Make rape victims keep babies and help them" – says midwife’ (15th May 2018) (image on the left) to ‘"Rape victims should be helped keep their babies" – says midwife’ (18th September 2021) (image on the right) 248
B.2 NewstalkFM’s official account’s tweet: ’The Bishop of Ossory Dermot Farrell has claimed "abortion can be far worse than rape"’ 249

List of Tables

6.1 Descriptive characteristics of the Irish and U.S. Twitter data 111
6.2 Odds ratio and 95% CI of incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. Twitter data 122

Chapter 1

Introduction

Twitter makes us empathize. It makes us part of [a political revolution]. Even if it's just retweeting, you're aiding the goal that dissidents have always sought: the awareness that the outside world is paying attention is really valuable. Of course the downside of this emotional engagement is that while this is happening, I feel like I can't in good conscience tweet about anything else!

—Clay Shirky (Ted blog, 2009)

The revolution will be Twittered. [...] Twitter will doubtless be cast as a protagonal technology that enabled the powerless to survive a brutal crackdown and information blackout by the ruling authorities.

—Marc Ambinder (The Atlantic, 2009)

To see the attack of a pack on here [Twitter] check out my mentions 600 odd notifications talking about my rape in one night. I think Twitter is dead. [. . .] People who don't like this feral side of the Internet are just going to walk away.

—Jess Phillips, Labour MP for Birmingham Yardley (Huffington Post, 2016)

Abuse is not part of civil discourse. It shuts down conversation and prevents us from understanding one another. No one deserves to be a target of abuse online and it doesn't have a place on Twitter.

—Jack Dorsey, Twitter CEO (Amnesty International, 2018a)

1.1 Research context

Since the advance of internet technologies and social media, the role and power of social media platforms for or against democracy have been extensively discussed in academic debates and political commentary. During the early 2000s, there was some technological optimism about the long-term power of social media platforms to strengthen civil society, the public sphere, and counter-public spheres (Downey

& Fenton, 2003; Foreign Affairs, 2011; Papacharissi, 2004). The results of the 2009 Iranian uprising and the 2010-12 Arab Spring – a series of anti-government protests, uprisings, and rebellions – were largely celebrated as the 'Twitter revolution' by many academics, journalists, and pundits (Ted blog, 2009; The Atlantic, 2009). However, in the most recent years, more sceptic views caution that internet technologies and social media platforms are far from utopian places or idealisations of Habermasian public spheres (Fuchs, 2017).

There are growing concerns about the proliferation of harmful and anti-democratic content online, including online incivility and intolerance. A number of citizens and online users have witnessed and experienced online incivility and harassment in politics in recent years (Pew Research Centre, 2014a; Public Religion Research Institute, 2010). 73 per cent of online users in the United States report that they have observed online incivility and 40 per cent report that they have personally experienced it (Pew Research Centre, 2014a). Eight out of ten U.S. citizens assess that the lack of civil and respectful discourse in the political system is a serious problem (Public Religion Research Institute, 2010). Further studies reveal that this dark side of the Internet is especially daunting for socially disadvantaged and marginalised groups of people. The U.K. government Committee on Standards in Public Life (2017) report shows that politicians who are female, from a racial or ethnic minority or LGBTQ+ are disproportionately targeted for online intimidation and abuse. An Amnesty International (2018a) report argues that Twitter is a toxic place for women, in which they experience many forms of misogynistic abuse including direct or indirect threats of physical or sexual violence, discriminatory abuse targeting one or more aspects of a woman's identity, targeted harassment, etc. This uncivil and intolerant Twitter communication does not always come from the far- and radical-right Twitter users, but it also comes from 'the decent middle,' from those who consider themselves as unprejudiced and reasonable, distancing themselves from the violent, extreme imagery of the far-right (Tileagă, 2019, p.3).

For these reasons, a substantial amount of research has been conducted to explore the volume, intensity, and dynamics of uncivil and intolerant political discourse online (Askanius, 2021; Coe et al., 2014; Krzyżanowski et al., 2021; Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017; Masullo et al., 2020; Rossini, 2019, 2020; Sydnor, 2018; Theocharis et al., 2020). Many research projects have investigated how we should deal with the crisis of online incivility and intolerance in the polarised politics, engaging in normative discussions (Masullo Chen et al., 2019; Rossini, 2019; Tileagă, 2019) as well as empirical experiments which test possible ways in which online incivility and

intolerance can be reduced (Herbst, 2010; Munger, 2020; Ziegele & Jost, 2020).

This thesis aims to contribute to scholarship of incivility, intolerance, and broader fields of political communication and digital culture by providing new insights about online incivility and intolerance in public deliberation. From this overall research aim, this thesis has two main objectives: the first is to examine the domain-specific dynamics, nature, and texture of online incivility and intolerance. I have chosen to investigate incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse as a case study. I employ a mixed-method approach combining quantitative content analysis at a big data scale for statistically powerful regression modelling and qualitative content analysis on smaller random samples for in-depth analysis of uncivil and intolerant rhetoric. The second objective is to discuss possible implications of my findings for academic debates and public engagements around the intersection of digital technologies and deliberative politics.

By addressing these aims and objectives, my contribution is threefold. First, I make a critical-normative contribution, discussing online incivility and intolerance in connection with political and critical theories of civil society, public spheres, and deliberative and pluralist democracy (Habermas, 1996, 2006a; Mansbridge et al., 2012; Parkinson, 2012; I. M. Young, 2002). Second, I make an empirical-descriptive contribution, exploring the Irish and U.S. Twitter data both quantitatively and qualitatively. Thirdly, I contribute to scholarship by discussing the implications of my theoretical and empirical findings for the health of deliberative politics. The findings and discussions in this thesis will illustrate several loci for further academic research, platform redesigns, and other social interventions to mitigate online harm.

The remainder of this chapter serves as an introduction to this PhD project. Section 1.1 introduces the overall research context of this thesis: why abortion discourse, why Ireland and the U.S., and why Twitter? This section also explains the limitations and concerns of Twitter research. Section 1.2 outlines the structure of this thesis.

1.1.1 Why abortion discourse?

Previous research shows that incivility is topic-specific. Serious, ‘hard’ news topics like economy, politics, law and order garner considerably more incivility than other ‘softer’ topics like health, lifestyle, and such. (Coe et al., 2014). Even amongst diverse political topics, certain policy issues (e.g., foreign policies, immigration, abortion) and political events and scandals (e.g., Donald Trump’s Presidential inauguration in the U.S. in 2016, the Charlottesville white nationalist rally in the

U.S. in 2017) lead to a large increase in incivility, relative to other political topics (Theocharis et al., 2020). For this reason, a rich volume of studies on uncivil and intolerant politics is connected to racism and populism studies as exclusionary political discourse becomes normalised and invades mainstream political spaces (e.g., anti-immigration and asylum discourse in Austria and Sweden in Krzyżanowski & Ledin (2017); electoral success of authoritarian populist policy agendas in the U.S., U.K., other European and Asian countries in Norris & Inglehart (2019); and EU-scepticism in Ruzza (2009)).

Meanwhile, gendered rhetoric in populism has remained under-researched (Wodak, 2015). We are witnessing an upsurge in gendered political ideas in radical-right populism such as anti-feminism, attacks on gender equality, intolerance of diverse lifestyles and gender-fluid identities (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Spierings et al., 2015). Abortion discourse is also a highly worthwhile case study to map the contours of hyper-polarised, uncivil, and intolerant online discourse. Anti-abortion movements often contain the reactionary sentiment of 'cultural backlash' (Norris & Inglehart, 2019) that channels the conservatives' resentment towards, and intolerance of, liberal values and policies. These reactionary right-wing movements often represent a conservative reaction against the widespread and rapid 'erosion' of traditional values and norms (e.g., religious teachings about sexual morality, chastity before marriage, traditional sex roles of women as mothers, and such) (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Furthermore, abortion issues create strong social identities and emotion-charged political actions around the issue advocacy; pro-choice (hereinafter referred to as 'pro-abortion' in the remainder of the thesis) and pro-life ('anti-abortion') identities are distinct from other issue advocacy groups such as taxes or healthcare reforms (Mason, 2018).

While studying incivility and intolerance in abortion discourse, my interest is not confined to right-wing incivility or intolerance from anti-abortion users. Incivility and intolerance are often associated with right-wing political culture and conservative personalities (e.g., valuing obedience, conformity, authoritarian tendencies), but studies show that left-wing political discourse is not free from the concerns of incivility and intolerance (Berry & Sobieraj, 2013; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Reviewing both left and right-wing incivility and intolerance in abortion discourse can help us to see in which political and communicative contexts Twitter users resort to incivility and intolerance more easily. Hence this thesis can provide comprehensive insights about what encourages the public's uncivil and intolerant behaviours in abortion discourse.

1.1.2 Why Ireland (2018) and the United States (2020)?

This thesis takes a comparative research approach, comparing incivility and intolerance in abortion discourse in Ireland and the U.S. Ireland and the U.S. are chosen as case study countries, given that abortion policies have been a hot political topic in recent years in both countries. Ireland in 2018 held a referendum to decide whether to repeal the constitutional abortion ban (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019; Field, 2018). In the U.S., legal abortions have been under attack during the Trump administration, and similarly during the coronavirus outbreaks. A so-called 'heartbeat bill' proposed to ban abortion from six weeks gestation (The Guardian, 2020) and many states banned or restricted legal abortion during the coronavirus pandemic (Anchorage Daily News, 2020; Bloomberg Law, 2020b; CNN, 2020; Montgomery Advertiser, 2020). Abortion policies were also an important political battle ground for single-issue voters in the 2020 U.S. presidential election (Gallup, 2020).

Furthermore, Ireland and the U.S. share some parallels and differences in terms of their complex discursive structures and political opportunities for abortion debates. These parallels and differences can be interesting to compare in terms of how these structures affect the contemporary Irish and U.S. Twitter users' incivility and intolerance. To mention briefly, the two countries have had different legal status quo (the Irish constitution banned abortion until 2018 whereas the U.S. Supreme Court decision on *Roe v Wade* since 1973 protected legal abortion); different political systems (centralised vs. decentralised); different values about the state (welfare state vs. libertarian small government); different dominant framing of abortion (women's right vs. individual liberty); different weight to different framings of abortion in terms of the foetal right to life, religious framing, and social justice framing (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019; Ferree et al., 2002). A comparative perspective on Irish and U.S. abortion discourse provides an in-depth understanding of how historical discourses in these two countries affect the recent abortion battles in Ireland in 2018 and in the U.S. in 2020. A detailed discussion of the history of abortion discourse, policies, legal battles in Ireland and the U.S. is provided in Chapter 4.

1.1.3 Why Twitter?

Among diverse social media platforms, this thesis focuses on Twitter for mainly two reasons. First, Twitter can be seen as a form of 'issue publics' (Habermas, 2006a) where citizens gather, share information, and discuss socio-political issues to generate a public opinion. Second, there is something unique about Twitter structures

and logic that makes the platform especially prone to attract emotional, uncivil, and intolerant communications (Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017; Papacharissi, 2015). The following subsections will explain each of these points. Lastly, the limitations and concerns of Twitter research will also be discussed at the end of this section.

Twitter as Habermas' 'issue publics'

Twitter is a micro-blogging and social networking service on which users post and interact with other users through messages known as 'tweets.' Registered users can post tweets, and also like and share other users' tweets (known as 'retweet'). Users can subscribe to other users – known as 'following' and users who follow other users are known as 'followers.' When a user follows another user, the followed user's new tweets appear in a follower's Twitter timeline. Twitter is one of the most popular websites and social media platforms in the world, following YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram (Alexa Internet, Inc., 2021). Twitter has more than 340 million monthly active users and 186 million daily active users, and the platform hosts on average 500 million tweets per day – corresponding to over 350,000 tweets sent per minute (Live Stats, 2021; Omnicore, 2021). The high volume of users and new tweets generated every day makes Twitter a suitable platform for diverse data mining projects for many businesses, journalists, and academic research.

Moreover, there are many reasons why Twitter is an especially popular platform for many social scientists and political communication researchers. Twitter is an important social media platform for news and information dissemination. In the Internet age, news often breaks on Twitter first (Hu et al., 2012; Wu et al., 2011). For many people on social media, Twitter is a preferred platform for news and real-time information consumption (Statistia, 2019). Furthermore, Twitter users are also involved in the circulation and further development of everyday news (Weller et al., 2014). Hashtags on Twitter helps users respond to breaking news events, coming together around common topics (Bruns & Highfield, 2015). These user responses on Twitter can further influence the news coverage in mainstream news media by signalling what events are trending and newsworthy (Elayan et al., 2020).

Twitter is also a place for political actions and public deliberation, frequently used for elections, campaigning, and activism (Weller et al., 2014). Elected politicians use Twitter to communicate with their electorates (Jungherr, 2016), and the public use the platform to engage in political conversations (Wright et al., 2017) and to form deliberative publics (McKelvey et al., 2014). Tweeting, retweeting, and networking affordances on Twitter allow users to participate in a public debate and

discussion. Therefore, Twitter research is an effective way to monitor public opinions and to monitor how the public discuss diverse issues online (Pak & Paroubek, 2010).

For these reasons, Twitter can be seen as what Habermas envisioned as 'issue publics' (Bruns & Highfield, 2015; Habermas, 2006a). Habermas is sceptical about the operations of mass media and mediated political communication because it is 'carried out by an elite' and the role of ordinary people is relegated to that of audiences watching the mediated communication (Habermas, 2006a, p.415, also Bruns & Highfield (2015)). In his 2006 essay, Habermas argues that 'the Internet [...] counterbalances the seeming deficits that stem from the impersonal and asymmetrical character of broadcasting by reintroducing deliberative elements in electronic communication. The Internet has certainly reactivated the grassroots of an egalitarian public of writers and readers' (Habermas, 2006a, p.423, note 2). Internet technologies and new media result in the rise of 'subaltern counter-publics' (Fraser, 1992) and counter-publicity that can challenge the dominant mass media public sphere (Downey & Fenton, 2003).

However, while making a passing remark about the deliberative potentials of the Internet, Habermas (2006a) is also concerned about the fragmentation of the online public into a huge number of small, isolated issue publics (p.423, note 2) – or 'the danger of pluralistic publics without unity' (Fuchs, 2017). Alternative and new media can be unsuccessful in reaching out beyond a fragmented radical ghetto (Downey & Fenton, 2003). For strong democracy, a common communicative sphere is needed for building solidarity and intersubjectivity (Downey & Fenton, 2003; Fuchs, 2017). Hence, the Internet sphere needs a more comprehensive, widely accessible, and widely consumed broad arena in which members of different counter-publics can deliberate across lines of differences about public policy (Downey & Fenton, 2003; Fraser, 1992).

Twitter, as one of the most popular networking and information-sharing platforms in the world, can be seen as an 'issue public' that can bridge between official political discourse and civil societies, and between elite-commercial media and public communication. While connected and related to the wider national public sphere, Twitter issue publics are formed around more specific, short-lived topics and events and are thus temporary and dissolve faster as the broader public debate moves on (Bruns & Highfield, 2015; Dahlgren, 2009). For instance, when the wider public sphere addresses climate change, the topical issue publics would form around specific climate policies, research projects, etc., driving the topic of public debate (Bruns &

Highfield, 2015). These issue publics, and discussions within them, are important in deliberative democracy since the attitudes of the public are 'influenced by everyday talk in the informal settings or episodic publics of civil society at least as much as they are by paying attention to print or electronic media' (Habermas, 2006a).

Abortion discourse on Twitter constitutes an issue public that invites and incorporates a number of key actors in abortion discourse in Ireland and the U.S. (e.g., pro- and anti-abortion civil societies, political and media elites, religious organisations), and ad hoc clusters of citizens whose political interests are stimulated by the current abortion issues. Twitter affordances such as hashtags, keywords, and following-follower networks enable the formation and transformation of abortion issue publics.

The structure of Twitter, incivility, and intolerance

Another interesting aspect of Twitter is that there is something unique about the platform when it comes to online incivility and intolerance (Sydnor, 2018). Several studies have found that people perceive and respond to incivility on Twitter differently compared to incivility on other media channels (Oz et al., 2018; Sydnor, 2018). Sydnor (2018) finds that people notice certain forms of incivility more on Twitter than on other text-based platforms. Oz et al. (2018) find that exchanges on Twitter are more uncivil and less deliberative than communications on Facebook. Twitter is a popular venue for incivility in elite discourse as well. Coe & Park-Ozee (2020) find that Donald Trump expressed name-calling more frequently on Twitter than in other venues and he also used several terms on Twitter that he never used anywhere else. The authors conclude that Twitter was an incivility accelerating vehicle for Trump (Coe et al., 2014). Sydnor (2018) suggests that 'uncivil exchange on Twitter might be the most entertaining of all' (p.122).

The three structural factors of Twitter can explain why Twitter exchanges draw a large volume of incivility. First of all, the Twitter structure requires simplicity (Ott, 2017). Twitter's character limitation structurally demands communications to be greatly short and simple. A tweet can deliver messages in clever and witty ways, but it cannot be detailed or sophisticated (Ott, 2017). People can also use multiple tweets to deliver a more complex message, but it has not been studied how much of a common, popular behaviour it is among Twitter users to write multiple tweets to build one argument, especially in a context of ongoing arguments. (Oz et al., 2018)'s Twitter-Facebook comparative research conducted in 2016 finds that Twitter exchanges are often more uncivil and less deliberative than Facebook comments,

possibly due to the 140-character limit on Twitter. This finding indicates that the Twitter character limit hampers more sophisticated deliberation among users in general, even when users can construct a complex argument using multiple tweets.

This effect of Twitter character limit might have been reduced. Twitter decided to extend the platform's character limit from 140 to 280 characters on 7th November 2017. This character-length change has led Twitter communication to be less uncivil, more polite, and more constructive compared to the 140-character limit period (Jaidka et al., 2019). However, Jaidka et al. (2019) also find that the Twitter network built through users who replied to U.S. congresswomen and men contains more non-compliers (users who never tweeted more than 140 characters despite the character limit extension) than compliers (who tweeted more than 140 characters after the character limit change). The average number of words per tweet in Jaidka et al.'s (2019) data is 21.4, with standard error 12.6.

While hard to accommodate sophisticated, lengthy rational discussions, Twitter is an 'affective public' (Papacharissi, 2015) that invites emotional reactions. Negativity, aggressiveness, and moral outrage often generate large engagements (e.g., likes, retweets) on Twitter (Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017). This quantifiable social feedback teaches the users that emotional and uncivil expressions are acceptable or even rewarded, and users construct their uncivil and intolerant language according to the norm of Twitter culture (Brady et al., 2021). This explains in part why we see so much incivility, personal attacks, aggression, harassment, and hate speech on Twitter (Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017).

Lastly, Twitter promotes impulsivity because of the 'ephemeral' nature of the platform (Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017). The Twitter feed is fast-moving, with the emergence of new trending topics and high numbers of new tweets. Therefore, tweeting behaviour often takes little time and effort. When there is a new trending issue on Twitter, it does not require much forethought, reflection, or consideration of consequences before people tweet about it (Ott, 2017). Tweeting is a highly impulsive activity sparked by affectivity and a shared sense of outrage (Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017; Papacharissi, 2015). All of these points imply that Twitter research can mine large and rich insights about online incivility and intolerance.

Limitations and concerns of Twitter research

However, Twitter research is not without its limitations and biases. Twitter research has many limitations and concerns due to the nature of social media research, but also due to the unique affordances of Twitter. In this section, I address several

common biases and methodological pitfalls of Twitter research and social media research in general. First of all, social media research generally has issues with population bias because it is not representative of the population as a whole. The Twitter user population represents narrow demographics who tend to be younger, men, highly educated, high-income, urban-residing, and politically liberal (Omnicore, 2021). Hence, in my Twitter datasets, some Irish and U.S. voices from specific demographics are amplified whilst some other demographics might be underrepresented (e.g., over 60s, women, working-class, low education level, rural residing). Therefore, any findings of this thesis should not be automatically generalised to infer attitudes and behaviours among the Irish and U.S. general population as a whole.

Furthermore, social media research can be distorted by behavioural biases such as self-selection bias and content production biases (Olteanu et al., 2019). Namely, user behaviours captured on Twitter are dependent on what users choose to report, when they report it, and how they choose to do so. Meanwhile, user activities that are not visible (e.g., reading tweets without participating in the discussion or self-censorship due to fear of online harassment or privacy concerns) are not captured (Olteanu et al., 2019). Also, different populations of users have different propensities to talk more about certain topics. Selecting political tweets during the 2012 U.S. election can result in a population bias towards Washington, DC., for example (Diaz et al., 2016; Olteanu et al., 2019). Similarly, choosing the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag would attract more African American users' tweets than users from other racial backgrounds (Olteanu et al., 2019). Since my research is specific to abortion policy discussions, users captured in my dataset might overrepresent the issue publics who are deeply interested in and committed to the pro- or anti-abortion issues in Ireland and the U.S., whereas the public who are relatively indifferent or have moderate views on abortion discourse are not as extensively captured as issue partisans. Therefore, the analysis and discussions of my Twitter data should not be generalised to the Irish and U.S. public at a national scale, but rather carefully understood as a representation of this specific abortion issue public on Twitter.

1.2 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of nine chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 comprise the literature review. Chapter 4 reviews the history of the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse and their political and discursive opportunities for pro- or anti-abortion movements.

Chapter 5 provides a research design overview. In Chapters 6, 7, and 8, I report on empirical findings. This comprises quantitative big data analysis in Chapter 6, and qualitative content analysis of rhetorical patterns and types of incivility and intolerance in Chapters 7 and 8, respectively. Chapter 9 is a conclusion and discussion chapter in which I synthesise the results and conclude the research. The content of each chapter is further outlined below.

In Chapter 2, I review deliberative democracy and critical theories to provide an overview of what this thesis considers an important question when it comes to political incivility and intolerance. By reviewing theories of civil societies, public spheres, and deliberation, I argue that incivility and intolerance is less about which words and ideas are inherently wrong or should not be said, and more about procedural norms and criteria for healthy and productive deliberation: namely, to consider what types of communications can foster or hinder the deliberative process for the public to create a 'considered public opinion' (Habermas, 2006a).

In Chapter 3, I review interdisciplinary literature on political incivility and intolerance for mainly three purposes. First, this chapter reviews three different levels of analysis in incivility and intolerance research: micro-individual, meso-contextual, and macro-structural. Second, this chapter reviews diverse definitions and operationalisations of incivility and intolerance in existing studies. Third, political and communicative implications of incivility and intolerance are examined to understand why it is urgent to study incivility and intolerance and pave paths to mitigate their harm. In combination with the normative discussions in Chapter 2, this thesis assumes that incivility can have ambivalent potentials and harms in public deliberation, whereas intolerant behaviours are counterproductive for pluralistic deliberation.

In Chapter 4, I review the history of abortion discourse in Ireland and the U.S. In the first half of the chapter, I summarise 'critical discourse moments' (Ferree et al., 2002) in the Irish and U.S. abortion policy history between the 1920s and early 2020s. In the second half of the chapter, I analyse political and discursive opportunity structures in Ireland and the U.S., which have influenced how the Irish and U.S. public perceive and discuss the national abortion policy issues.

In Chapter 5, I outline and justify the research approach and design, which can be understood as a form of 'methodological triangulation' (Olsen, 2004), combining both quantitative and qualitative, big data analysis and conventional social science methods as well as cross-country comparative research to enhance our knowledge on the subject. I then elaborate on individual research methods and steps: computer-

assisted content analysis on big data, and qualitative content analysis on smaller random samples. I also explain my data collection, research hypotheses and questions, and relevant Internet research ethics issues.

In Chapter 6, I conduct a computer-assisted content analysis on my big Irish and U.S. datasets. The big data analysis produces a general linear model to test ten hypotheses and explore the relationships between different variables, incivility, and intolerance. The cross-country comparison shows that U.S. abortion discourse contains more incivility and intolerance than Irish discourse. Timeline analysis shows that incivility and intolerance are influenced by external political events and media stories. The predictive regression modelling shows that anti-abortion issue position and Twitter affordances (e.g., Reply, Retweet, Quote) are strong predictors of incivility and intolerance. Coordination dynamic analysis finds that most uncivil and intolerant behaviours on Twitter are mobilised by a small number of issue partisan users.

In Chapters 7 and 8, I study rhetorical patterns and types of political incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse on Twitter. The qualitative analysis explores how the Irish and U.S. users employ political incivility and intolerance, who are the targets of incivility and intolerance, what vocabulary is used, and what are the assumptions and ideologies embedded in the uncivil and intolerant rhetoric. The qualitative analysis reveals that Twitter users construct antagonism and false polarisation between 'Us' and 'Them,' sabotaging reasonable deliberation and policy compromises. The cross-country comparative analyses reveal that political incivility and intolerance are both cross-cultural concepts but also unfold in culture-particular ways with specific talking points and vocabulary.

In Chapter 9, I discuss and synthesise the findings with the normative discussions and conclude the research. I summarise the findings related to my ten hypotheses and three research questions that guided my research. I then discuss the implications of my findings for the health of Twitter deliberation. I make five noteworthy observations to advance the scholarship: (1) that there is a strong relationship between political incivility and intolerance; (2) that Twitter structures can hinder productive sublimation of anger to persuasive arguments; (3) that a small set of hyper-active citizens dominate the uncivil and intolerant Twitter communications; (4) that we need to rethink the relationship between anonymity and online harm; and (5) that there are links between political incivility, intolerance, and the rise of populism and reactionary backlash. I also consider some practical suggestions in terms of platform redesigns and civic education of online ethics. Finally, I discuss

the thesis limitations and extensions. Limitations are also discussed at the end of each individual chapter.

Chapter 2

Conceptualising political incivility and intolerance through deliberative and critical theories

In this chapter, I review and revisit the works of German Philosopher Jürgen Habermas and those of other deliberative and critical theorists, in order to theorise political incivility and intolerance based on the normative bedrock. Habermas' theories of civil society, public spheres, deliberation, and pluralism are at the centre of this chapter due to his proceduralist vision of democracy and social justice (Habermas, 1996). A discussion of normative critical theories will enable this thesis to understand complex dimensions of incivility and intolerance in our digital public spheres and political communication. This can be achieved by providing a moral compass and applying to empirical political communications research: what are the democratic purposes of civil societies, public spheres, and public deliberation? Why are the norms of civility and tolerance important for deliberative and pluralist democracy? And then, are there any ideological works hidden in the common-sense conception of civility and tolerance, putting undue burden on the socially marginalised and disadvantaged groups against their oppositional movements?

Answering these normative questions helps this thesis to detect the incongruencies between normative ideals and existing political realities. Critical understanding of civility and tolerance questions the hidden ideological works and oppression under the common-sense conception. And thereby the critical understanding raises an important 'so what' question: so what if there is a lot of (or very little) incivility and intolerance in our online public spheres? What does it mean for our deliberative politics and the quality of public deliberation on social media platforms? What kind

of incivility and intolerance should we be concerned about? All these questions can guide the later empirical analysis chapter to analyse incivility and intolerance based on normative ideals.

In the first section, I conceptualise incivility through Habermas and later deliberative theorists like Irish Marion Young (I. M. Young, 2002), Jane Mansbridge (Mansbridge et al., 2012), and John Parkinson (Parkinson, 2012). In the second section, I theorise intolerance through Jürgen Habermas' (2003; 2004; 2006b) and Rainer Forst's (2003; 2008; 2017) theories of toleration as a norm of moral-political respect in pluralist democracy and for procedural justice. Lastly, in the conclusion, I summarise the chapter and consider possible references of such normative theories to empirical research of existing politics and political communication.

2.1 Conceptualising incivility

2.1.1 Jürgen Habermas' theories of civil society and public communication

German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1996) idealises the power of deliberation to solve socially shared problems and conflicts. His understanding of democracy is proceduralist, in that a political claim or decision-making acquires its legitimacy and validity only through the reasonable and fair structures of communication where the public and the state influence one another in decision-making processes. Habermas (2006a) recognises that deliberative politics consists of a multilevel system, from everyday talks at the periphery of the public sphere, mediated communication by media elites, to the institutionalised discourse (official state) at the centre of the political system. These different levels and arenas in deliberative politics take on different processes and purposes. First, the deliberative system mobilises relevant issues and pools diverse perspectives and information from public spheres, from civil societies, experts, and such. Second, the deliberative system processes a wide range of perspectives and contributions. And finally, by weighing diverse perspectives and arguments for and against a political agenda, the institutionalised deliberation of law- and policymakers generates rationally motivated, procedurally correct decisions (Habermas, 2006a, p.416). In this way, the public and the state hold one another accountable. Here, Habermas (2006a) argues that the role of the public sphere is mainly to fulfil the first one, thematising a new social problem and mobilising diverse information and perspectives for official political institutions and

their institutionalised political decision-making. This multilevel perspective to the deliberative model of democracy grants leeway and flexibility for the democratic requirements for the pro-democratic communications and political actions among civil societies and 'weak' and 'wild' public spheres (Habermas, 1996).

In doing so, civility as mutual respect is the basic norm of public communication. Habermas theorises an 'ideal speech situation' (Habermas, 1991) where one cultivates the capacity for understanding and willingness to deliberate and to show respect for others who hold different opinions. Civil exchanges help to persuade one another in a free and equal communicative context. The better arguments win out in such circumstances through the power of better arguments, not by coercion, threats, deception, or any other non-rational means. Hence, in a strictly Habermasian sense, incivility is a violation of important deliberative norms.

However, Habermas' normative ideals are criticised by radical democratic theorists like Chantal Mouffe (2000) who insist on the value of vibrant clashes between different (often contradicting) political identities and passions. Mouffe's 'agonistic democracy' and 'radical pluralism' see that antagonism and conflicts are an 'ineradicable' and 'unavoidable' possibility in politics (Mouffe, 2000). In her theory, politics always entails tension and demarcation between Us and Them. Such a demarcation does not need to be antagonistic, yet there is always a possibility that such a frontier turns into an antagonistic one. Mouffe (2000) argues that deep differences are accompanied by passions that cannot be resolved by rational deliberation and the pursuit of consensus (Dryzek, 2005). Mouffe's agonistic democracy attends to collective decision-making as a temporary resolution of social problems, but it is only to point to the need for them to be open to further contestation (Dryzek, 2005, p.221; Mouffe, 2000). Mouffe suggests that the outcome of agonistic democracy and radical pluralism is not an 'agreement' but rather 'relationships' – 'continued contestation with deep respect for the adversary' (Dryzek, 2005, p.220). Namely, the main task of agonistic democracy for Mouffe is to convert antagonism into agonism, enemies into adversaries, so that political passions and identities can fight over political rights, socioeconomic resources, and so forth without destroying one another (Dryzek, 2005; Mouffe, 2000).

The 'emotional turn' in media and communication studies also challenges the strictly Habermasian understandings of rational-critical deliberation (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Wahl-Jorgensen (2018) argues that the 'emotional structure' of social media facilitates and privileges emotional engagements, especially anger. Anger in public spheres can be used for pro-democratic purposes, though it can also be used to

fuel hatred and exclusion. Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) concludes that the new vision of public spheres must recognise the central and inevitable place of emotion. Papacharissi (2015) defines 'affective publics' as networked publics that are formed, mobilised, identified, and connected through emotive expressions. Affective publics present a departure from the rational-deliberative public spheres and help us reimagine how we may understand affective structures of civic engagement that are relatively neglected in the rationality-based model of deliberation and public spheres (Papacharissi, 2015).

However, this does not mean that we should discard Habermas' theories completely. Instead, this urges academics to recalibrate and complement his theories of civility and public deliberation. With few exceptions like Habermas (2006a) recent essay *Political Communication in Media Society*, the focus of Habermas has not been on the media and communication as such and in this regard, it is up to communication scholars to read and reconstruct Habermas' ideas further and apply them to the analysis of digital communications (Karppinen et al., 2008). In the rest of this section, I explain my reading of Habermas' books and essays on civil society and his defence of non-deliberative political means, such as protests and civil disobedience to envision the (limited) role of incivility in civil society and public deliberation.

In *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas (1996) explains the relations between civil society and the public sphere and their communicative power in politics. In the public sphere, the streams of communication among citizens enable civil society to identify new problems and transform different viewpoints into 'public opinions,' which thematise and even politicise social problems in a public way so that they are taken up and dealt with by the elites (e.g., parliament, courts, mass media) (Habermas, 1996, p.359). Social movements such as feminist movements can be explained in the same light as feminist topics that are usually brought from the periphery of the public sphere (or feminist counter publics) by a smaller number of intellectuals, concerned citizens, and radical professionals, and get politicised effectively so that they reach to the centre of the public sphere, to a wider public, and gain a place on the public agenda (Habermas, 1996, p.381, Fraser, 1992).

Establishing and maintaining the fair and just structures of the public sphere and rational-critical deliberation is necessary in this regard to detect new needs floating underneath the surface of a supposed political consensus, tranquillity, and order. The criteria of the reasonable public sphere and deliberation give fair and just chances to the voices of the hitherto marginalised and disregarded. This means that what Habermas advocates for is not rational and disinterested politics as such, but

the potential of the open and inclusive public sphere to perceive new social problems more sensitively and throw off 'the millennia-old shackles of social stratification and exploitation' (Habermas, 1996, pp.307-8, Klein, 2018). Even when Habermas gives great importance to the capacity for civil and rational communications, he has 'an activist's view of politics' (Klein, 2018, online).

Habermas' procedural norms are against the black-and-white, obdurate thinking in the false unambiguity of dichotomies where civic political engagements are divided into either the norm-following, 'orderly parade of mature, decently-dressed middle-class citizens' versus the norm-breaking, 'troublemaker,' 'agitator' and even 'the violent criminal' (Habermas, 1985, p.97). Habermas explains that sometimes the support of 'sensational actions, mass protests, and incessant campaigning' is required for a movement to receive formal consideration (Habermas, 1996, p.381; Habermas, 1985). In his 1983 speech he gave at a meeting of the Cultural Forum of the German Social Democratic Party, shortly before the peace movement demonstrations against the stationing of new U.S. missiles in Germany, he defended the peace movement, their protests, and civil disobedience (including diverging enthusiastic and noisy demonstrations, die-ins, blockades, human chains to disrupt traffic, etc.) as 'the guardian of democracy' (Habermas, 1985, pp.103-5).

Habermas (1985, 1996) legitimises these new social movements such as the German peace movement and feminist movements and their resort to non-deliberative means (e.g., illegal protests, civil disobedience) on various grounds, inspired by U.S. moral philosopher John Rawls' theories of justice (Rawls, 1973). Following Rawls (1973), (Habermas, 1985, 1996) defends some forms of illegal, civil disobedience: given that (1) such non-deliberative but still pro-democratic means are directed toward well-defined injustice; (2) they appeal to the capacity for reason and sense of justice of the populace in order to persuade public opinion in civil and political society. Furthermore, (3) for the oppressed who often lack privileges and opportunities for influence (e.g., membership to parliament, access to mass media, etc.), civil disobedience is often the last-ditch to correct perceived wrongs. (4) Also, civil disobedience in German peace movements was a non-violent and symbolic act of expression (Habermas, 1985, 1996; Rawls, 1973). Habermas adds that his defence of civil disobedience is different from an exhortation to it. Rather, it is crucial in his theories to acknowledge that some non-deliberative and illegal means of civic engagements are necessary for some exceptional situations. Citizens with 'sensibility' (the measure of judgment and willingness to take a risk) might need to 'act illegally out of moral insight' (Habermas, 1985, p.103). Otherwise, the adherence to

law and norms becomes a 'pseudo-legal repression of the unjust state' (Habermas, 1985, p.112). But while sympathetic with students' activism and political demands, Habermas also criticised militant protests and violence such as in his criticism of the 60s German student revolts, which he labelled self-delusory and pernicious (Bohman & Rehg, 2014).

So, while defending or criticising non-deliberative political means, Habermas emphasises the process of public justification. Habermas adds that 'the legitimacy of actors of resistance cannot simply be deduced from the ethical seriousness of the actors' motives' (Habermas, 1985, p.105). Instead, the legitimacy of protest and civil disobedience comes from the clarity of reasons and public justifications that the actors provide. Habermas suggests that the disobedient must scrupulously examine and justify whether their extraordinary means are appropriate, and whether all other alternatives of legal attempts of influencing public opinion have failed and been exhausted (Habermas, 1985, 1996). Fraser (2007) similarly discusses the responsibility of the claimants in political struggles to show that they are denied full participatory parity in deliberation and their claim does not impose another disparity upon other marginalised. Moreover, Habermas argues that the state (or the powerful) is also obliged to restrain from obstinate legalism (i.e., 'law is law, violation is violation') and instead respect others' right to public justification, even towards those who 'act illegally today and perhaps remain in the wrong tomorrow' (Habermas, 1985, p.105).

I share Habermas' intuition that non-deliberative means like protest and civil disobedience can be defended as a resource to uphold democratic principles because such non-violent, symbolic public engagements intend to appeal to the formal institutions of the state on one hand and the sense of reason and justice of the wider civic community on the other (Habermas, 1985; Smith, 2008). I also expand this sympathetic and principled understanding to politcal incivility – rude and emotional tone and style – in public deliberation. Even if uncivil, one might be able to provide new perspectives to a pool of different claims in a public sphere and help society to identify new social problems and insights. I am not defending every form of incivility here, but I am suggesting that sometimes exceptional uncivil means might be utilised by protesters and citizens to raise awareness about, or bring attention to, a socio-political issue. Even if uncivil, such civic actions can still aim for communication and persuasion. Here I acknowledge some of Mouffe's (2000) theories of agonistic politics while I endorse and admire Habermas' vision of cooperative and critical-rational public deliberation. I do not attempt to reconcile the differences

between the two theories, integrate their democratic visions or champion one theorist over the other (Craig, 2018; Kapoor, 2002). But the tensions between the two theorists are 'fruitful and educative' - eclectically highlighting 'some of the limits, strains, and possibilities' of contemporary democratic politics (Kapoor, 2002, p.460; also Craig, 2018; Karpinnen et al., 2018). I give more flexibility in my understanding and definition of 'reasonable' public communication, similar to Young and other later deliberative theorists.

2.1.2 Later deliberative theorists: the (limited) roles of uncivil communication in agonistic deliberation and the deliberative system

Later deliberative theorists (e.g., Iris Marion Young, Jane Mansbridge, John Parkinson) have expanded Habermas' theories of civility and deliberation to move beyond a reason-centred and consensus-oriented emphasis (Karppinen et al., 2008). In doing so, some non- and anti-deliberative rhetoric and uncivil exchanges can still be viewed as productive or valuable to the political struggles of the socially marginalised and disadvantaged (I. M. Young, 2002) and the deliberative system as a whole (Mansbridge et al., 2012; Parkinson, 2012). Iris Marion Young pushes deliberative democracy in an agonistic direction (Dryzek, 2005). I. M. Young (2002) emphasises the 'reasonable' motivation of the public to communicate and persuade other participants in political struggles. So here, 'reasonableness' is not for the specific content of polite, orderly, dispassionate arguments. Instead, it is a norm for motivation to communicate (Dryzek, 2005; I. M. Young, 2002). I. M. Young (2002) accepts a wider range of alternative communicative forms in political struggles as reasonable, including 'disorderly, disruptive, or distracting means of communication,' as long as stakeholders are willing to communicate and listen to others in turn (pp.48-50).

I. M. Young (2002) in this regard argues that a narrow image of civility is exploited to condemn protesters and demonstrators that their non-deliberative but still reasonable political actions are viewed as a weaker form of violence (pp.48-50). Feminist scholar Linda Zerilli (2014) argues in a similar vein that the trope of civility is largely weaponised against historically disenfranchised and disadvantaged groups of people (such as racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+, and feminists women. Zerilli (2014)argues that so many times, in mass media and mainstream discourse about the uncivil behaviours of the public, we are told that the socially marginalised are silencing and harassing the free speech of the more powerful. For instance, in

2010 several Muslim college students interrupted Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren's speech at the University of California by shouting and jeering. The Muslim students were criticised by media and political blogs for their 'vitriolic totalitarian tactics [...] silencing free speech' (Zerilli, 2014, p.111). The emphasis on the narrow definition of civility disregards the reality that those disorderly and disruptive means are often necessary for the disadvantaged to 'struggle for greater justice under conditions of inequality' (I. M. Young, 2002, p.50; Zerilli, 2014). Zerilli argues: 'Uncivil public behaviour is symptomatic of a more general democratic deficit of public space in which grievances can legitimately be raised and meaningfully addressed by fellow citizens and their elected representatives. If some citizens are more prone to shout, that may well be because those in power are not listening' (Zerilli, 2014, p.112).

Later deliberative theorists pay bigger attention to the systematic analysis of deliberative politics, beyond individual deliberation instances. A more systemic view shifts our paradigm to understand incivility. Instead of nit-picking individual instances of a perceived violation of civility, the quality and success of public deliberation are assessed at a systemic level – whether uncivil exchanges can be productive to the 'deliberative system' as a whole to make a considered policy-making or law-making decision (Mansbridge et al., 2012; Parkinson, 2012). Similar to Habermas' multilevel systemic view of deliberative arenas from a wild public to formal legislative deliberation, the deliberative system approach acknowledges that the deliberative system consists of many parts in society: from the legislature, expert commissions, executive branches, courts, universities, citizen deliberations, and so on (Mansbridge et al., 2012).

There exists a hierarchy between different parts of the deliberative system. Therefore, not every contribution to the pool of perspectives is treated equally (Parkinson, 2012). Parkinson (2012) discusses that public perspectives that are generated by more reliable processes weigh more in the official decision-making processes than everyday talks and opinions in disorganised conversations in the periphery of the public sphere: the hierarchy that 'with unmanaged public discourse near the bottom, qualitative social science higher, survey research further up, deliberative minipublics higher still, and so on' (Parkinson, 2012, p.155). All of these parts mutually influence and adjust each other's reasons and proposals, and influence the decision-makers in the governmental and legislative bodies with different weights. In doing so, not every component of a deliberative system needs to meet all of the demands and criteria of ideal deliberation at once (Mansbridge et al., 2012).

What might be considered low quality, non-deliberative, or even undemocratic

deliberation (e.g., closed-circle discussion among partisans) in an individual instance might still be beneficial to the overall deliberative system to the extent that it increases the pool of perspectives, claims, reasons, decision-makers and arguments available to the system (Mansbridge et al., 2012; Parkinson, 2012). Fung (2003) classifies two settings of deliberations: 'cold' or 'hot' deliberation. 'Cold' deliberative settings consist of ordinary, non-partisan citizens. 'Cold' deliberation is a means of 'cooling down the debate, of replacing passion with reason and of favouring a constructive dialogue among people' (Bobbio, 2019, p.50). However, such 'cold' deliberation risks being too detached from the real world to gain legitimacy. In contrast, 'hot' deliberation forums are open to partisan actors – Bobbio (2019) calls it 'a stormy (but real) sea' which might be preferred to the 'safe (but artificial) haven' of 'cold' deliberation (p.50). Fung (2003) also argues that 'hot' deliberation with partisan participants can make for better deliberation, more enthusiastic participation, and hence be more sustainable over time (p.187).

All of these theories suggest that it might be too hasty a judgment to disregard every uncivil, rude, emotional, partisan-style language as 'harming deliberative politics' per se. Deliberative processes cannot be studied only in terms of micro-deliberative criteria (e.g., 'does this individual instance meet full deliberation criteria?'), set apart from the systemic context (Mansbridge et al., 2012; Parkinson, 2012). The systemic understanding can get even more comprehensive by adding the time axis. In this regard, Dryzek (2005) seeks deliberation as 'reflection.' He insists that reflection is a diffusive process, taking effect over time. Contentious issues can be revisited in multiple deliberations over time, and individuals shift from partisanship to moderation to apathy and vice versa, adopting different opinions in different times and places (Dryzek, 2005). The comprehensive assessment can only be made by weighing possible pluses and minuses and possible results of an individual deliberation case to the whole deliberative system. For example, partisan heckling in parliaments violates many norms of good deliberation, but the very culture of heckling can be an important tool to frame and steer future public deliberation (Mansbridge et al., 2012). Some partisan journalism has low deliberative quality, but it can bring out perspectives that have not been raised or addressed by other non-partisan media. But in some other contexts, problems of hyper-partisanship and political radicalisation can create a toxic atmosphere for deliberation and therefore be counterproductive to the whole deliberative system (Mansbridge et al., 2012). The (limited) benefit of non- and anti-deliberative communications can arise only when there are audiences who themselves possess deliberative qualities for listen

to and weighing different reasons and arguments by other participants. Otherwise, the non- and anti-deliberative rhetoric falls on deaf ears or reaches only the already convinced like-minded communities (Mansbridge et al., 2012, p.24).

In summary, the later deliberative theories have complemented Habermas' earlier theories of rational-critical deliberation and civility. The more agonistic and systemic understanding of deliberation gives more flexibility and leeway to the roles and values of some forms of uncivil, emotional, and partisan political engagements in digital public spheres. While acknowledging the value of non-deliberative and uncivil communications in public deliberation, the later deliberative theories do not romanticise any kind of participation as a valuable input to the whole deliberative system. Uncivil communications should meet some basic norms of deliberation to be beneficial to the whole deliberative system. I. M. Young (2002) emphasises the receptive, reasonable motivations of the public to communicate with and persuade one another. So, even when individuals resort to incivility, their purpose should be to communicate with others – by calling attention to an issue and addressing others in a rowdy way (I. M. Young, 2002, p.48). In Mansbridge et al. (2012) and Parkinson's (2012) theories, it takes a careful calculation of possible pluses and minuses of impacts to judge if a cluster of uncivil communication in public spheres hinders the creation of an informed, considered public opinion.

2.2 Conceptualising intolerance

Historically, tolerance in the Western philosophy is often discussed in connection with religious tolerance within the Christian framework: from intolerance of heresy (Aquinas, 1225-1274; Augustine, 408) to tolerance for the coexistence of different religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam in the Middle Ages (Aquinas, 1225-1274; Averroes, 1180/1987), to separation of church and secular state (Forst, 2017). John Stuart Mill's (1859/1892) *On Liberty* made the transition to a modern conception of tolerance which is not restricted to the discussion of religious tolerance (Forst, 2017). Mill argues that in modern society tolerance is required to cope with diverse forms of irreconcilable cultural, social, religious, and political plurality (Forst, 2017; Mill, 1859/1892). Modern societies cohabit people from different socio-cultural, politico-economic, religious-secular backgrounds with different (and sometimes deeply clashing) beliefs and values. Liberalising and secularising tendencies have weakened the power of the Church and monarch who once had absolute power to dictate how values should be taught or how resources should be

distributed in society (Mouffe, 2000). However, at the same time, the modernist-secularity certainty that religion will disappear in the West is losing ground and religious communities continue to have, to some extent, influence and relevance in the 'post-secular society' (Habermas, 2008). Immigration has also brought ethnic and racial diversities to many White-dominant countries in Europe and North America. Politics becomes competition and cooperation between different groups of people – a complex interlocking of racial, ethnic, religious-secular, economic interests and so forth.

Tolerance as respect for pluralism has become a prescription to what modern democracy should be so that parties in conflict live together with equality and rights, without having to rely on antagonism and violence (Habermas, 2004; Mouffe, 2000). Habermas has written several essays in particular about religious tolerance and the role of religion in post-secular societies (Habermas, 2003, 2004, 2006b, 2008). Rainer Forst also theorises different conceptions and politics of toleration (Forst, 2003, 2008, 2017). Habermas' essays about religious tolerance frequently cite Forst's theories of toleration, and thereby I introduce Habermas and Forst's theories together in the following section.

2.2.1 Tolerance as moral-political respect

In their essays, Habermas and Forst distinguish between toleration and tolerance. Habermas (2003) explains that in English the word tolerance refers to a form of tolerant behaviours, e.g., mutual recognition of everyone's religious freedom, while toleration means the legal acts which governments issue to state officials and the population to be tolerant in their behaviours toward minorities. In Habermas' wording, toleration can be a concept of unilateral-authoritarian permission whereas tolerance involves mutual-equal respect. Similarly, Forst (2003) defines toleration as a legal-political practice and tolerance as a personal attitude and practice. Their political-structural philosophy of toleration is inspirational for the discussion of tolerance as civic attitudes and behaviours in public communication. Forst (2003) says: 'An analysis of toleration [...] leaves open the crucial question as to what kind of attitude or virtue of tolerance citizens of a state can expect from one another' (p.73).

According to Forst (2003, 2008, 2017), there are four different conceptions of toleration. The permission conception of toleration can be understood as the legal acceptance or non-interference with others. This permission can arise regardless of reciprocity and mutual recognition among different groups. The limit of permission-toleration is unilateral as it is largely defined by the authority and the racial, ethnic,

or religious-cultural majority alone. A society that cannot suppress heterodoxy of minorities or find an implementation of the suppression too costly can rely on toleration by granting the minorities the right to live according to their beliefs within certain limits, e.g., in the private realm. Permission-toleration is hierarchical: there is the tolerator who grants permission on the one hand and the tolerated on the other hand (Forst, 2017). Similarly, non-reciprocal toleration can happen between groups that are roughly equal in power, tolerating one another for the sake of social peace—the coexistence conception of toleration (Forst, 2003, 2008, 2017). (Forst, 2017) argues that this coexistence-toleration is horizontal only temporarily. Once power changes, the more powerful group may see no reason to tolerate the other anymore, who is actually 'wrong' but tolerated so far (Forst, 2017).

Then Forst (2003, 2008, 2017) explains the ideal toleration as moral-political respect. The respect conception of toleration requires citizens to accept each other as moral and political equals who deserve the same equality and rights in both social and political spheres despite deep differences in ethical-cultural beliefs (Forst, 2003, 2008, 2017). Due to the acceptance of moral-political equality among different citizens, a tolerant political system should be guided by norms that do not favour one specific ethical-cultural community. Instead, it should come up with laws and policies that can be equally accepted by all ethical communities involved in the matter (Forst, 2017). Hence, toleration in Forst (2003, 2017) and Habermas (2003, 2004, 2006b)' theories are connected by the neutrality principle of constitutional states. This does not mean there cannot be a valid norm until literally every single person in society agrees with it. Rather, it means that a norm is insufficiently established as long as the norm can be reasonably rejected by other arguments and claims (Forst, 2003). Mansbridge states that the practice of deliberative democracy must not demand 'absolute legitimacy' but only 'rough' or 'good enough' legitimacy (Mansbridge, 1996). For instance, the 'secular republicanism' in France can be criticised for violating the tolerance norm as moral-political respect and equality (Forst, 2017). The French rule of 'no religious symbol in public space' favours those ethical-cultural lifestyles whose beliefs can be more easily accommodated into the conventional European dichotomy of public-private distinction (Forst, 2017). Meanwhile, the French law puts an unfair burden on specific ethical minorities whose beliefs are harder to be separated into the European public-private dichotomy (Forst, 2017). Tolerant citizens are required to accept the moral and political equal rights and freedom of different ethical-cultural communities. Tolerant citizens understand that justification for one's personal ethical-cultural beliefs and justification for generally binding

laws are different (Forst, 2003).

This moral-political respect of toleration is different from an ethical appraisal or appreciation. (Forst, 2003, 2017) explains that another conception of toleration thinks tolerance means having some ethical esteem for their beliefs, taking the out-group values to be ethically valuable and held for good reasons (Forst, 2003, 2017, esteem conception of toleration). Forst (2003) argues that the esteem conception of toleration can lead to an extremely relativist view of toleration. It also gives tolerance a paradox where one is morally required to tolerate or even appreciate what seems to them to be morally wrong (Forst, 2017). This paradox can only be resolved when there is a distinction between ethics and morality and a limit to tolerance: a limit to when tolerance should be practised and when it should not. Forst (2008) draws a limit with the help of procedural justice.

Toleration as moral-political respect means we give each other moral autonomy, the right of each moral person to a public justification of their political claims, and then we critically weigh legitimate reasons and arguments for whether to accept or reject competing claims (Forst, 2008, 2017; Habermas, 2004). Habermas says 'We can only exercise tolerance towards other people's beliefs if we reject them for subjectively *good* reasons' (Habermas, 2004, p.10, emphasis in original). So when a White person rejects the same standard of citizenship for people of colour due to their skin colour, those racist views must not be tolerated or ethically appreciated, but their prejudices and discrimination must be critiqued and rejected (Habermas, 2004).

2.2.2 Tolerance as reciprocity and generality; intolerance as violations of the two criteria

Habermas and Forst's respect conception of toleration shares the fundamental tenet of the criteria of tolerance as procedural justice for implementing neutrality of states and establishing generally and reciprocally acceptable general-binding laws (Forst, 2003, 2008, 2017; Habermas, 2006b, 2008). Then, intolerance is a violation of reciprocity and generality. Forst (2003) insists that intolerance is a form of injustice, favouring one ethical community over others without enough reciprocal questioning using generally legitimate reasons and arguments (p.76).

Reciprocity in the context of justice means respecting each other's right to make public claims and provide public justification. Hence, one does not make claims about social rights and resources one denies to others (Forst, 2003, 2008). One gives reasons for their political claim that are open to questioning. One party should

not force another party to accept one's own ethical view as true because it violates reciprocity and the demand for mutual justifiability. Also, one does not reject others from providing their own reasons about their claims (Forst, 2003, 2008). Reciprocity requires that one cannot merely benefit from the toleration from others, but they themselves must practise toleration (Habermas, 2003). In this regard the just public deliberation can reject group ideologies and actions that lack the reciprocity norm, such as: religious fundamentalist, racist, sexual chauvinist, radical nationalist, and xenophobic views that stem from prejudice and discrimination, lacking the reciprocal efforts to recognise others (e.g., people of colour, immigrants, women, LGBTQ+) as moral-political equals (Habermas, 2003, 2004). These intolerant group ideologies often refuse to engage in mutual justification and questioning processes, but simply force others to accept their view as true.

The generality criteria of toleration mean that reasons and arguments provided in public discourse need to be generally acceptable, valid, and legitimate (generally non-rejectable) (Forst, 2003, 2008, 2017). The basic tenet of generality is that a person gives reasons for their claim that can be understood and accepted by members of other communities, and those who are outside of one's own particular ethical-cultural belief system. Otherwise, it means one only appeals to a particular ethical claim that is heavily dependent on a particular community belief (Forst, 2008). Advocating for establishing a national policy, law, or social norm that only appeals to one particular ethical community is again a violation of the neutrality norm of the state, which is vital in the peaceful maintenance of pluralist society.

Habermas argues for the duties of citizens to translate their ethico-particular claims (whether religious or secular/non-religious) into publicly accessible reasons (Habermas, 2006b, 2008). Habermas has written about the conception and processes of religious tolerance and he argues that religious citizens should 'translate' their claims into publicly accessible language (Habermas, 2006b, 2008). This perspective is criticised by sociologists of religion like Michele Dillon (2012). Dillon (2012) argues that due to Habermas' cognitivist terms, he underappreciates the nature of religion and religious ideas and tends to treat religion as a monolithic pre-Enlightenment phenomenon. Dillon (2012) critiques that Habermas treats religious and non-religious citizens as if they are separate, clear-cut identities. Instead, cultural and feminist theories highlight that individuals and groups entail multiple intersecting and contradictory identities simultaneously (Dillon, 2012). In other words, it is hard to distinguish religious and secular citizens in a strictly cognitivist sense (Dillon, 2012). Religious citizens and Church use non-religious arguments

(Dillon, 1996b), and non-believing citizens use Western philosophical and moral concepts which owe a lot to its Christian heritage.

Habermas himself is aware of this kind of criticism. Habermas (2006b) asserts that the cognitive burden of translating ethico-particular ideas into generally acceptable language applies to both citizens with and without a religion. The non-religious, secular citizens must engage in complementary, mutual learning processes with religious counterparts, escaping the scientifically limited conception of reason and being open to learning from religion (Habermas, 2006b). The secular awareness should hold an agonistic position and refrain from passing prejudiced judgment on religious ideas (Habermas, 2006b). In this regard, my Habermas and Forst-inspired proceduralist conception of tolerance does not imply a reductionist dichotomy between religious and non-religious communities. It is not as if religious ideas and identities are inherently ethico-particular and therefore need to be relegated to a private sphere and secular ideas and identities are generally acceptable in a public sphere. Rather, some behaviours are intolerant if one, when facing a pluralism of differences, does not aim to communicate and persuade others by following the norms of tolerant behaviours – engaging in reciprocal communication and providing generally acceptable arguments. According to Voltaire (1763/1994), 'men must avoid fanaticism in order to deserve toleration' but also avoid violent atheism, for a 'violent atheist would be as great a plague as a violent superstitious man' (Forst, 2003, p.18).

Furthermore, (Habermas, 2006b) argues that the demand for 'translation' pertains only to politicians and public officials with institutional power to make and execute laws. This perspective follows Habermas' (1996) two-track understanding of public discourse which consists of a 'wild' and 'weak' public and an official legislative body. Forst (2003) similarly clarifies that the reciprocity and generality criteria of toleration do not imply that religious views have no legitimate role in public discourse. It instead says that an ethico-particular argument should not be the basis of a generally binding law if it cannot pass the test of reciprocity and generality (Forst, 2003, p.84).

Here are some examples of conflicts in religious (in)tolerance discussed in Forst's and Habermas' writings. When it comes to banning schoolteachers from wearing religious symbols like headscarves, this law is intolerant if it does not equally respect the religious liberty of those who wear other religious-ethical symbols and those who wear Christian symbols (e.g., rosaries) (Forst, 2008). Reciprocity points out that allowing crosses but not headscarves in schools can be religious-cultural repression

and discrimination based on prejudice. The hijab can be 'a sign of oppression of women' but it can also be a sign of one's religious identity and liberty (Forst, 2008, p.24). In terms of conflicts over same-sex marriage, a mere 'toleration' of homosexual lifestyles by the religious community, while not accepting their marital rights, can be criticised by the same criteria of reciprocity and generality as one side asking for their own marital rights while denying the same right to others.

The norms of reciprocity and generality can define what should be tolerated through deliberative and inclusive procedures of democratic will formation. Habermas (2003) insists that multiculturalism and the coexistence of different ethical-religious values as equals require the integration of citizens within the framework of a common political culture (p.10). This includes when religious minorities demand the freedom of religious expressions in situations like the following: (a) a Muslim parent rejects co-ed sports for his daughter at public schools or (b) a Christian parent (Jehovah's Witnesses or Christian Scientists) wishes to prevent their child from receiving medical treatment. Habermas (2004) argues that these parents do not suffice to appeal to religious tolerance since these practices intervene in the basic rights of the dependent persons-—their children. Again, it is not that the religion-particular ideas about sex segregation or medical treatments are inherently wrong. Such topics can be contested reasonably to draw a limit of permissibility (e.g., in case it was a grown adult deciding for themselves about their medical options), but it becomes an intolerant attitude and practice when one fails to pass the reciprocity and generality test when they argue for a general norm or law binding for everyone in society. This is why intolerance is contingently associated with authoritarian conservatism such as advocating for restrictive, authoritarian state policies and punishment to control unconventional lifestyles such as abortion and LGBTQ+ issues (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). But this relationship is not inherent: people can hold socially conservative attitudes such as endorsing traditional views on marriage and sex roles within the family, without adhering to authoritarian and intolerant values (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

In short, my take on Habermas' and Forst's theories of toleration is proceduralist and communicative. I do not propose a reductionist dichotomy where secular/non-religious arguments are tolerant and generally valid but religious arguments are intolerant and ethico-particular (hence not generally valid). Rather, the distinction between tolerance and intolerance is in one's language and claim building processes. An argument is tolerant only when it considers reciprocity and generality engaging in public justification without absolutising one's ethical value as moral truth. Forst

(2003) says, 'This is why toleration is *a virtue of justice* and *a demand for reason*' (p.78, emphasis in original). Hence, in this thesis, intolerance means any civic communication lacking such efforts for reciprocity and generality, attempting to make one's particular ethical view the norm for generally binding law. Unlike incivility that can have limited roles in public deliberation in a system enhancing way, intolerance profoundly damages the core process of deliberation offering justification and arguments to one another.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the normative critical theorises of Jürgen Habermas and other deliberative (Iris Marion Young, Jane Mansbridge, and John Parkinson) and critical theorists (Rainer Forst). I argue that an ideal purpose of civil societies, public spheres, and deliberation is to mobilise diverse issues, information, and perspectives that are ultimately designed to generate an informed, considered public opinion (Habermas, 2006a) and thereby affect the agendas for formal political institutions and their institutionalised deliberation. This multilevel systemic understanding of deliberative democracy gives more flexibility and leeway to forms of public discussions at the 'wild' and 'weak' periphery of the public sphere (e.g., disorganised public opinion expressions and exchanges on Twitter) compared to formal institutions at the centre of the political system. That is why some (but not every) uncivil instances can have limited places in public deliberation so long as it increases the pool of perspectives in the overall system and in the long-run they aid in the emergence of well-considered public opinion and official policy decision-making. We also take into account existing power inequalities between different groups of people, holding different levels of power and influence on wider public discourse. And because of those inequalities, some people, especially those who are socially disadvantaged and marginalised, rely on uncivil and disorderly means of communication for their political struggles (I. M. Young, 2002; Zerilli, 2014).

This chapter also discusses tolerance as a procedural norm for deliberative and pluralist politics. Tolerance as moral-political respect is to listen and engage with different claims and worldviews as an equal citizen in the same society, and then reject the other views only based on reciprocally and generally acceptable reasons and arguments (Forst, 2003, 2008, 2017; Habermas, 2003). Hence, tolerance is different from merely enduring or appreciating the existence of differences and their ethical contributions. This thesis considers that, just like civility, tolerance itself

is not the end goal, but it is a procedural criterion to make public communication processes inclusive and fair to different groups of actors. Tolerance as a procedural norm prevents the socially disadvantaged or marginalised voices from being excluded due to unreasonable prejudices or neglected in state policies and laws favouring one particular ethical community (i.e., often the values of the racial, ethnic, ethical-cultural majority). Intolerance as a violation of reciprocal and generally acceptable communications is therefore incompatible with the cardinal principle of a neutral state in a pluralist society. Public reason in civil society and the deliberative system is not entirely about the narrow notion of reason as impersonal, value-free, instrumental rationality; it is about 'figuring out what to do at a given moment for a given people with particular concerns, experiences, desires' – it is *public* reason, to reason together, communicative rationality, to deepen our democracy (Parkinson, 2012, pp.153-4; Habermas, 1991).

Chapter 3

Review of digital media and political communication research on incivility and intolerance

This chapter reviews existing empirical research in the field of digital media and political communication to provide an analytical and operational framework of political incivility and intolerance for an empirical research design. I mainly review three aspects: (1) different levels of analytical emphases in existing incivility and intolerance research; (2) diverse definitions and operationalisations of incivility and intolerance; and (3) empirical findings of impacts and implications of incivility and intolerance to online political discourse and politics in general.

In the first section, I outline different but complementary analytical emphases in existing incivility and intolerance studies: (a) a micro-individual approach in terms of individual psychometric traits and cognition; (b) a macro-structural approach exploring systemic and societal forces driving our politics uncivil, intolerant, and populist; and (c) a meso-contextual approach exploring incivility and intolerance in connection with digital media ecologies, social media platform affordances, and online discussion context. This thesis considers mainly micro- and meso-level analytical dimensions when analysing and interpreting empirical data later in this thesis (Chapters 6, 7, and 8) while acknowledging the macro forces influencing incivility and intolerance (Chapter 4).

In the second section, I compare overlaps and differences among diverse definitions and operationalisations of incivility and intolerance in existing political communication studies. Mainly there have been three strands of research perspectives on uncivil political communications: (i) incivility mostly as emotional and rude

tone and style and (ii) un-civility as anti-liberal and anti-pluralist ideologies and movements. Some scholars define (iii) incivility as a multi-faceted phenomenon, encompassing both rudeness and anti-deliberativeness. For analytical clarity, this thesis separates this complex political issue into incivility and intolerance. I use uncivil/incivility to refer to the rude, emotional style of speech and use intolerant/intolerance instead to refer to anti-liberal and anti-pluralist practices, following Rossini's (2019) analytical categories. In the third section, I examine the empirical findings of the effects of incivility and intolerance in political communication. In the final section, I summarise these three sections and make a concluding remark about how this thesis understands incivility and intolerance.

3.1 Levels of analytical emphasis: Individual, structural, contextual

Within the field of political communication research investigating dark, degrading, dehumanising, uncivil, and intolerant discourse, there are mainly three levels of analytical emphases: some scholars explore (a) the relationship between individual psychometric elements, incivility, and intolerance; others explore (b) the macro-structural, populist forces behind incivility and intolerance; and (c) some examine the contextual dimension of incivility and intolerance – namely how media ecologies and communicative structures influence users' incivility and intolerance. This thesis mainly takes micro- and meso-level approaches, but it also considers the macro-level analytical dimension when analysing and interpreting empirical data later in this thesis (Chapters 6, 7, and 8).

First, some scholars suggest that uncivil and intolerant discourse on Twitter is affected by individual psychometrics and personality traits (Ott, 2017). Many studies have investigated the relationships between the Big Five personality traits – Extraversion, Agreeableness, Openness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism – and Dark Triad construct – Narcissism, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy – and people's Twitter use and language (Goodboy & Martin, 2015; Sumner et al., 2012). Sumner et al. (2012) for instance find that people scoring high in Psychopathy and Machiavellianism use more swear words and words associated with anger and negative emotions. People who have a highly Narcissist personality are more likely to exert influence over others through language and behaviour (Sumner et al., 2012). Goodboy & Martin (2015) similarly argue that people with strong Dark Triad traits (especially high Psychopathy scores) are positively associated with cyberbullying behaviours.

Other studies also find that people who engage in cyberbullying behaviours tend to lack self-control, sensitivity, score high in psychoticism (Ozden & Icellioglu, 2014), verbal aggressiveness (Roberto et al., 2014), and low empathy (Doane et al., 2014). Personality also affects how people perceive and respond to incivility differently. People who are conflict-avoidant (Mutz & Reeves, 2005) and who have high scores on Agreeableness on the Big Five personality test (Kenski et al., 2020) react more strongly to incivility than others. Not only personality, but individual political identities affect their perception of incivility. Muddiman (2017) finds that users' partisan identities influence their perception of incivility. People with partisan identities are more likely to believe that figures from their own side are more civil than people from an opposing side even when they engage in the exact same behaviours (Masullo Chen et al., 2019; Muddiman, 2017). Political psychological works find links between authoritarian personality and socio-political intolerance (Adorno et al., 1950/2019; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Sidanius, 1978).

This individual-psychometric approach provides insights that some people, with certain psychological traits, authoritarian tendencies, and some partisan identities, can be more susceptible than others to express incivility and intolerance more frequently or more easily. This thesis partly explores such an individualistic dimension of incivility and intolerance to some extent: how gender, political-ideological position, and issue partisanship affect people's use of incivility and intolerance (will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 Methodology). However, the psychological approach may risk essentialising people's psychology based on the language on Twitter. Human behaviour can be motivated and influenced by communication contexts and norms in a given situation. People may engage in cyberbullying, online incivility and intolerance because they see such behaviours as acceptable or desirable in some online communication contexts, more than simply driven by their 'dark' personality. People adopt different identities and behaviours depending on social contexts. People who are otherwise civil and calm can tweet emotional, uncivil, intolerant things on the internet (especially in anonymous spaces) since they hold different expectations about standards of arguing on Twitter than in other offline contexts. Fundamentally, one's true personal character or intention is not something a social researcher can properly infer from one's language on Twitter.

Other scholars study the macro-structural forces of political incivility and intolerance. In this perspective, the major threat to liberal democracy comes from multiple, structured determination, rather than just from the will of a single illiberal agency (L. Whitehead, 1997, p.104). This includes the crisis of neoliberal

capitalism, unemployment, a flux of immigration, multiculturalism, secularisation and the decreasing importance of religion, all of which provoke the reactionary reflex from many citizens, especially social conservatives. After the downfall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, many Eastern and Central European countries experienced unemployment, crime, and marginalisation, which made many citizens and youths abandon mainstream parties and turn to alternative subcultures and even violent nationalist groups (Kopecký & Mudde, 2005; Kürti, 2005). For more recent examples in Europe and North America, the rise of populism is appealing to the frustration and grievances of a group of people who tend to be White, religious, less educated, working-class, and reside in rural areas. These people feel estranged from their own countries by the tides of sociocultural changes in the last few decades (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). These estranged and resentful people call for populist parties and leaders who can listen to the voice of 'the real people.' These collective grievances, determined and provoked by the structural changes, bred the election of former U.S. President Donald Trump, Brexit, and other electoral successes for populist and ethno-nationalist parties and candidates in the U.S., U.K., and many European countries (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). The rise of populism and racism is examined hand in hand with discursive practices of incivility and intolerance in this regard (Krzyżanowski et al., 2021; Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017; Ruzza, 2009).

The structural approach provides valuable insights about the problem of our political communication at its root. This thesis understands that the structural determinations in Ireland and the U.S. (e.g., the political system, public discourse and history of abortion policies) shape how Irish and U.S. Twitter users express political incivility and intolerance (this will be explored in Chapter 4). However, structural analysis is not the main focus of the analysis in this thesis. Instead, the thesis focuses on a meso-level analysis. If our political communication itself is also responsible for the feelings of outrage and expressions of incivility and intolerance, then we should seek for the explanation in the 'content and formats of a degenerating kind of political communication itself,' the very mode of communication that contributes to the pathologies of public political discourse (Habermas, 2006a, p.422). That is, political incivility and intolerance can be studied through a more discursive-contextual approach, looking at how media and communication technologies and affordances shape our political communication.

Media ecologies. Berry & Sobieraj (2013), for example, examine incivility as being embedded and strengthened by the structure of 'outrage media' and 'outrage politics.' Cammaerts (2020) argues that the business model of contemporary media

is complicit in the recent rise of neo-fascism across the world. Journalists tend to use all of the emotional spectacle and drama, controversy and outrageous social media content posted by neo-fascist politicians as primary source material to produce their media content (Cammaerts, 2020). It may help the media to get more clicks, shares and engagements which they can turn into ad revenue, but such media coverage eventually amplifies the neo-fascist voices and discourse even when its intention is to criticise such fascist discourse (Cammaerts, 2020; Milner & Phillips, 2018). This outrage media provokes uncivil and intolerant behaviours from the general public.

Digital platform affordances. Several studies investigate the relationship between social media and website structures and the prevalence of incivility and intolerance. Many studies argue that anonymity in many online spaces explains the prevalence of online incivility to some extent (Coe et al., 2014; Fox et al., 2015; Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Rowe, 2015; Santana, 2014). It is argued that anonymity encourages deindividuated and disinhibited behaviours without worrying about being identified and held accountable (Rowe, 2015). The degree of user anonymity (e.g., whether the account has full name, profile picture, biography) impacts a user's tendency to change their uncivil behaviours when intervened by others (e.g., when they are told 'you shouldn't use language like that') (Munger, 2020). Cross-platform studies reveal how platform affordances attract more uncivil engagements in one platform than in others. For instance, Twitter exchanges are more impolite, uncivil, and less deliberative than Facebook comments (Oz et al., 2018). This might be because Twitter focuses mainly on interactions amongst strangers whereas Facebook communications gather friends and acquaintances (Oz et al., 2018, p.3414). Furthermore, the simple, quick, and emotional structures of Twitter attract more incivility than any other text, audio, and video-based media (Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017; Sydnor, 2018). Internet culture seems to influence people's perception of acceptability of incivility, such that users who spend a lot of time online and engage in frequent commenting on political online news sites are more likely to find incivility acceptable (Hmielowski et al., 2014; Kwon & Cho, 2017).

Discussion context. Discussion topics influence people's perception and use of incivility. Coe et al. (2014) find that serious 'hard news' topics garner greater incivility than lighter topics like health and lifestyle. Theocharis et al. (2020) similarly find that certain high-profile political events, scandals, and economic and social issues attract a high volume of incivility towards politicians from Twitter users. Theocharis et al. (2020) also find that most forms of incivility are expressed by many frustrated citizens as a means of angrily criticising and insulting politicians,

and not by a small set of organised trolls. Wang & Silva (2018) find that people respond differently over insults on ideological differences (e.g., gun control) and moral differences (e.g., abortion). Wang and Silva's participants (2018) do not feel bad seeing insults over moral or religious differences, possibly because insulting another's moral standard is seen as 'fair game.' In contrast, they feel bad after seeing insults over ideological differences, perceiving them as uncalled for (p.77-8).

Discussion dynamics also affect how people perceive and respond to incivility. Rains et al. (2017) explore partisan political identities and inter-group dynamics as predictors of incivility in online news discussion forums. In general, the authors find that conservative users do not change how they express themselves (whether civil or uncivil), whereas non-conservative users (including liberals) are reactive to inter-group dynamics in the forum and the presence of incivility expressed by other users. For instance, non-conservatives become more uncivil when the number of conservative users increases and when non-conservatives have been targets of previous incivility. Rains et al. (2017) in this regard argue that incivility is a form of identity performance in partisan politics. Rossini's (2020) research finds that different discussion atmospheres influence the volume and intensity of incivility and intolerance in a given online discussion space. Incivility tends to occur in a heterogeneous discussion environment due to the heated arguments and engagements between users holding different opinions, whereas intolerance occurs in a homogeneous environment, propagating and consolidating one's intolerant views with like-minded people in a collective bubble (Rossini, 2020).

Incivility and intolerance as rhetorical practices. One of the strong points of the discursive-contextual perspective is that it understands incivility and intolerance as performance in flux and shifts, not a static state of society or individual psychology. Therefore, the discursive approach allows exploring 'borderline discourse' (Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017) at the verge of civil-uncivil and tolerant-intolerant ideas and rhetoric. Krzyżanowski & Ledin (2017) explore how bad civil societies in Austria and Sweden normalise anti-immigration and anti-refugee discourse on Twitter by combining extreme radical political statements with seemingly civil, quasi-academic, more palatable language to the mainstream audience. The authors argue that this 'borderline discourse' tests and stretches the norms of publicly acceptable language in society and politics (Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017). Other scholars investigate such discursive strategies and genres within far- and radical-right political discourse. Askanius (2021) investigates the discursive processes and tactics of online neo-Nazism in Sweden. The author finds that the Swedish online neo-Nazism

makes use of the blurry boundary between what is acceptable on the internet and what is not. Neo-Nazis successfully adapt to the internet culture in which transgressional and dark humour is both expected and rewarded W. Phillips & Milner (2018). Askanius (2021) proposes that the online neo-Nazi narratives are saturated less with explicitly militant and racist messages, but more with lighter, seemingly civil, ordinary, and harmless forms of podcasts, entertainment shows, and so forth. Far- and radical-right discourse exploits fundamental democratic norms as a shield to make their extreme ideas more palatable. Titley (2020) examines that racist discourse continuously stretches the notion of free speech right to cover their racism. Cammaerts (2020) finds that neo-fascist discourse is normalised through the cultivation of victimhood and the will of 'the people' against the 'liberal elite establishment.' While taking the discursive approach to incivility and intolerance, this thesis will explore what rhetorical strategies people employ to make their uncivil and intolerant messages legitimate or more palatable.

3.2 Operationalising incivility and intolerance

This section discusses some of the literature from an ongoing and growing body of international research on incivility and intolerance. With the rise of uncivil and intolerant political discourse in Europe, America, and elsewhere, there has been a wide range of different definitions and operationalisations regarding what exactly constitutes uncivil and intolerant discourse. Here I mainly review three strands of definitions: incivility, un-civility, and intolerance. These strands put somewhat different emphasis on different aspects of the crisis of healthy political deliberation on the Internet and public spheres in general (Krzyżanowski et al., 2021).

Incivility research has been interested in defining what exactly makes incivility in politics a distinctive, new form of public and political discourse that brings more attention from audiences and guarantees more success for politicians (Krzyżanowski et al., 2021). Incivility is largely defined as rude, aggressive, emotional, in-your-face style and tone in political rhetoric rather than the substance of political discourse (Mutz, 2015). Key elements of incivility are the growth of impoliteness, lack of mutual respect, and the frequent use of emotion-provoking language in politics and journalism (Berry & Sobieraj, 2013; Herbst, 2010; Mutz, 2015; Theocharis et al., 2020). Incivility is commonly theorised in terms of violations of social norms of politeness. Sociologist Erving Goffman's 'face' theory (1982) is frequently borrowed by incivility researchers whose definition of incivility involves social norms of re-

lationship and politeness (e.g., Muddiman, 2017; Stryker et al., 2016). Coe et al. (2014) define incivility broadly as 'features of discussion that convey an unnecessarily disrespectful tone toward the discussion forum, its participants, or its topics' (p.660). Gervais (2015) similarly defines incivility as insulting language and 'the inclusion of superfluous adverbs and adjectives that add no new information, but are purposefully insulting, belittling, and condescending' (p.171).

Incivility is also measured by emotional elements in political discourse. Scholars (e.g., Berry & Sobieraj, 2013; Mutz, 2015) argue that 'in-your-face politics' and 'outrage media' have distinctive tactics and characters that are different from other emotional speech in previous political discourse. Mutz & Reeves (2005) use five continua to evaluate uncivil political debates: friendly or hostile; polite or rude; unemotional or emotional; cooperative or quarrelsome; and calm or agitated. This emotion and rudeness-based definition of incivility is further categorised by more specific forms of uncivil behaviours, e.g., name-calling, aspersion, lying, vulgarity, pejorative for speech (Coe et al., 2014); public-level and personal level incivility (Muddiman, 2017); utterance incivility, deliberative incivility, and deception (Stryker et al., 2016). Sobieraj et al. (2013) schematise 13 different manifestations of 'outrage language', including insulting language, name-calling, emotional display, verbal sparring, misrepresentation, mockery, and sarcasm.

However, several scholars criticise the politeness or emotion-based definition of incivility. Some scholars caution against confusing civility with politeness and incivility with impoliteness, rudeness, or political passion (Papacharissi, 2004). Condemning impoliteness or rudeness as incivility per se – something anti-democratic – can be misleading, as it undervalues the democratic potential of rude rhetoric in contentious politics where political disagreements are passionately debated (Papacharissi, 2004). 'Reasonable hostility,' face-threatening attack, and political criticism are important for serving the needs of civil society (Tracy, 2008). Incivility, insults, and invectives are powerful means of differentiating an in-group from an outgroup, building solidarity and mobilising political participation from the in-group 'Us' (Jamieson et al., 2017). Incivility has an expressive function to call attention to a political issue, to be louder and assertive (Jamieson et al., 2017; Rossini, 2019). Mockery and sarcastic satire are entertainment devices that cultivate solidarity at the expense of the other side's legitimacy (Wang & Silva, 2018).

Some scholars define incivility as a violation of liberal and deliberative democracy norms. Hence, incivility is something more serious than mere interpersonal rudeness and hostility. Papacharissi (2004) distinguishes impoliteness and incivility,

showing that many online messages are impolite without being uncivil. The distinction points to the fact that even seemingly polite and rational arguments can be extremely anti-democratic and hateful and seemingly impolite messages can serve as a passionate political participation that benefits civil societies and deliberative politics. Papacharissi's (2004) definition of incivility is based on the following three questions. (a) Does the discussant verbalise a threat to democracy (e.g., proposing to overthrow a democratic government by force)? (b) Does the discussant assign stereotypes (e.g., associating person with a group by using labels whether those are mild or more offensive (e.g., faggot))? (c) Does the discussant threaten other individuals' rights (e.g., freedom to speak)? (p.274) Others have understood incivility as a multi-faceted concept consisting of utterance incivility (e.g., personal attacks, insulting language), anti-deliberative incivility (e.g., detracting from inclusive and ongoing discussion), and deception (e.g., outright lying) (Stryker et al., 2016).

Other scholars separate incivility and intolerance (Rossini, 2019; Tromble, 2018). Rossini (2019) argues that incivility – its foul language and anti-normative intensity – can be a rhetorical tool in public deliberation. Incivility does not prevent public deliberation from having positive and productive outcomes such as increasing political knowledge, building solidarity, etc. (c.f. Mansbridge et al., 2012; Parkinson, 2012). Rossini (2019) in this regard critiques Papacharissi's (2004) perspective that incivility is a threat to democratic norms might be too strong. Rossini (2019) instead argues that the core problem of liberal democracy is intolerance which is incompatible with norms of democratic pluralism, civil liberty, and equality. Rossini operationalises intolerance by several sub-categories such as xenophobia, racism, hate speech, violence, religious intolerance, attacks towards gender, sexual preferences, or economic status (Rossini, 2019). Rossini's works empirically reveal that incivility and intolerance are clearly different in terms of their discursive characteristics and patterns. When it comes to targets of incivility and intolerance, intolerant comments are mostly targeting minorities such as LGBTQ+ and women whereas the target of incivility is often politicians, political parties, and institutions (Rossini, 2019). Furthermore, incivility commonly occurs in a heterogeneous discussion environment when users engage in heated disagreements and arguments. In contrast, intolerance occurs in homogeneous discussions about minorities and civil society (Rossini, 2020). Tromble (2018) similarly distinguishes between incivility as 'profanity or crude language' and intolerance which 'targets categories of people for discrimination, hate, abuse, etc.'

Scholars who study un-civility share common grounds with Papacharissi's (2004)

understanding of incivility and Rossini's (2019) understanding of intolerance; as something anti-liberal, anti-pluralist, exclusionary, and hence anti-democratic. The academic focus on uncivility lies in the study of the mobilisation of radical- and far-right ideas and trends of populist parties and electoral candidates across the globe, from Europe, America to elsewhere (Krzyżanowski et al., 2021; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Ruzza, 2009). For instance, early scholars of uncivility in the 1990s paid attention to how the post-authoritarian and post-communist political changes in Eastern and Central European countries witnessed the weakness and 'dark side' of civil societies (Kopecký & Mudde, 2005; L. Whitehead, 1997). Civil societies in the post-communist European states not only gave rise to bottom-up civic participation such as progressive social movements but also resulted in the simultaneous rise of uncivil, extremist movements promoting and fostering anti-liberal and exclusionary ideologies (Kopecký & Mudde, 2005; L. Whitehead, 1997). More recently, Carlo Ruzza's (2009) work suggests that the essential structures and nature of uncivil society rests on 'a self-professed antidemocratic and exclusionary political identity,' (p.88) promoting anti-liberal and anti-pluralist values (Krzyżanowski et al., 2021).

There are some overlaps between the three strands of definitions of uncivility, incivility and intolerance, but it is relevant to note that differences in how scholars operationalise this wide range of anti-deliberative and anti-democratic civic behaviours pose a challenge for collating and comparing research results. To combine these theoretical insights and discussions in one thread, I unpack the umbrella phenomenon, the crisis of healthy digital public deliberation, into two components: incivility as rude, emotional, aggressive, and vulgar tone in public deliberation on the one hand, and intolerance as anti-liberal and anti-pluralist practices on the other hand (an earlier version of my framework is published in Oh et al. (2021)). In this thesis, when I use the adjective uncivil it refers to incivility. I use intolerance and intolerant instead to refer to un-civility. Figure 3.1 visualises this analytical framework.

3.3 Political effects of incivility and intolerance

In Chapter 2, my critical theory-inspired conceptualisation argues that political incivility can have both positive and negative impacts on the health of public deliberation, - enhancing and distorting the generation of considered public opinion - whereas intolerance disrupts the deliberative system (also Rossini, 2019, 2020). Existing empirical findings can examine the evidence for the theories. Many scholars have investigated the impact of emotional, uncivil political rhetoric on citizens'

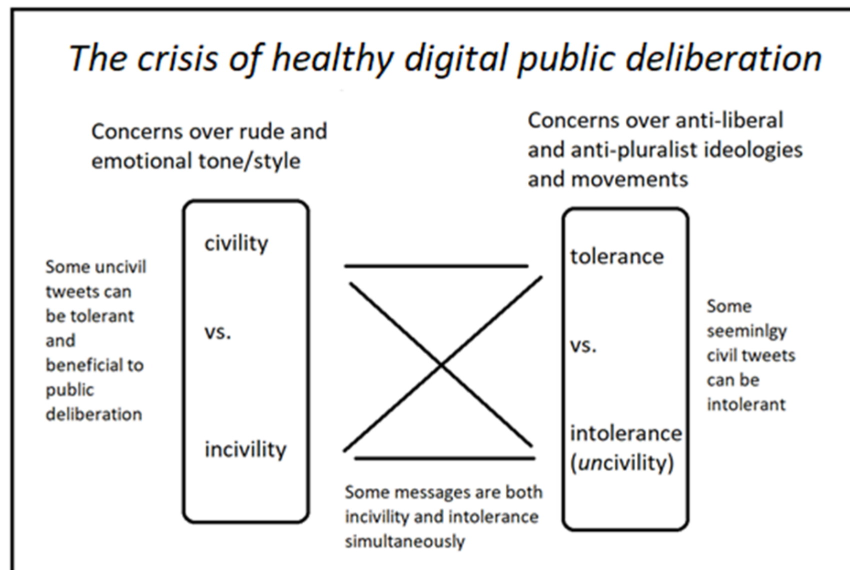


Figure 3.1: Visualisation of the analytical framework in this thesis. The crisis of healthy digital public deliberation consists of concerns over rude and emotional tone (incivility) and anti-liberal and anti-pluralist ideas and practices (intolerance).

political knowledge and intention to partake in political actions. The findings have been ambivalent: some are positive, and some are negative, just as anticipated in the normative discussions. Mutz (2015) documents that 'in-your-face politics' and incivility on television attract more attention, help the audience remember political messages better, and promote more engagements and sharing behaviours from the audience. Masullo Chen & Lu (2017) discover that uncivil disagreements arouse aggressive feelings, which indirectly lead people to a greater intention to participate politically. Such uncivil, heated discussions can be more engaging than dispassionate ones (Berry & Sobieraj, 2013; Fung, 2003).

However, incivility also has an adverse effect on the democratic qualities of public deliberation since it provokes defensive reactions and anxiety among the public, instead of engaging in deliberation with others. Mutz (2015) warns that in-your-face politics and media are accompanied by the exacerbation of political polarisation and low political trust. Incivility undermines the legitimacy and integrity of competing opinions (Mutz, 2015). Berry & Sobieraj (2013) note that 'outrage discourse' in politics and media provokes emotional responses from the audience such as anger, fear and moral indignation while sidestepping the complex nuances of political issues. Hence, incivility can encourage political passion and public engagements that are necessary for a healthy democracy although it can also lead to a 'dangerous escalation of aggressiveness' (Masullo Chen & Lu, 2017, p.122).

Political consequences of intolerance can be showcased by the rise of support for authoritarian populism and the implementations of more punitive and repressive policies in many countries, including the U.S., Europe, and elsewhere (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Gibson's (1988; 1989) earlier studies argue that even when mass political intolerance does not directly set repressive policies, it nonetheless constricts the choices of policymakers by setting limits to acceptable and popular policies. Mass political intolerance also constrains the actions of other citizens by creating a culture of conformity, a culture in which political liberty is limited by the intolerance of dissents (Gibson, 1992, p.339). More recently, the U.S., U.K., and other European politics are witnessing that the rise of far- and radical-right parties, candidates, and their extreme ideas are leading more centre-right parties to adopt authoritarian policy agendas such as harsher restrictions on immigration, asylum seekers and refugees, and more extreme xenophobic and nativist laws and policies (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Political consequences of intolerance can be especially alarming since Gibson's experiment (1998) shows that political tolerance is more pliable than intolerance. That is, tolerant people are more readily persuaded to abandon their tolerance than intolerant people are convinced to be tolerant (Gibson, 1998). All of these empirical findings suggest that incivility and intolerance should be carefully dealt with, not simply because some words and ideas are inherently uncivil or intolerant, but because of the detrimental consequences they can cause to deliberative politics and policymaking agendas.

3.4 Conclusion: How should we understand incivility and intolerance?

This chapter reviews political communication research on incivility and intolerance to compare different levels of analytical focus in incivility and intolerance studies and diverse operationalisation of the political concepts. First, this thesis considers diverse analytical levels (i.e., psychological, structural, and discursive) but puts the main emphasis on an individual and discursive-contextual level, investigating incivility and intolerance in terms of user demographics, communication contexts, and platform affordances: e.g., gender, anonymity, abortion issue position, partisanship, discussion context, and presence of other high-profile public events and issues. This perspective also helps us to see these political concepts as rhetorical practices that are beyond the dichotomous categories of what is civil/uncivil or tolerant/intolerant. Instead, the discursive approach allows us to see complex nuances of it – how people

express incivility and intolerance, in what context, in which ways, for what political and rhetorical purposes, etc. It helps to avoid the hasty judgement that 'uncivil discourse is all offensive and anti-democratic'.

Second, it is relevant to note that differences in how scholars operationalise this wide range of uncivil and intolerant attitudes and behaviours pose a challenge for collating and comparing research results: e.g., incivility as rude tone and style (Berry & Sobieraj, 2013; Coe et al., 2014; Mutz, 2015; Rossini, 2019); incivility as violations of democratic norms of liberalism and pluralism (Papacharissi, 2004); or incivility as a multi-faceted phenomenon encompassing violations of both politeness and deliberation norms (Stryker et al., 2016). Many European scholars treat un-civility as intolerant, anti-pluralist, and anti-liberal ideologies and movements (Kopecký & Mudde, 2005; Krzyżanowski et al., 2021; Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017; Ruzza, 2009; L. Whitehead, 1997). My framework combines these theoretical insights and discussions in one thread, following Rossini's (2018) analytical distinctions, that the crisis of healthy public deliberation has concerns over incivility (rude and emotional tone) and intolerance (anti-liberal, anti-pluralist attitudes and practices).

Lastly, this chapter reviews empirical findings of the impact and political consequences of uncivil and intolerant political communications. Incivility can have both negative and positive consequences for civic engagements and the qualities of deliberation (Berry & Sobieraj, 2013; Masullo Chen & Lu, 2017; Mutz, 2015), but intolerance has negative consequences such as influencing punitive and repressive policies indirectly and creating a civic culture where political freedom is restricted (Gibson, 1988, 1989; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Empirical chapters in this thesis will provide more evidence for what parts of uncivil and intolerant communications should be dealt with, and in which ways they can be effectively remedied.

Overall, this chapter establishes an analytical and operational framework for the empirical research design. Before examining the empirical data about incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. Twittersphere, the next chapter will elaborate on the history of abortion discourse and policies in the two countries.

Chapter 4

Abortion discourse in Ireland and the United States

In this chapter, I review the history of abortion policies in Ireland and the U.S. as well as the two countries' discursive and political opportunity structures for pro- and anti-abortion movements. As of 2021, abortion is legal in both Ireland and the U.S., but the two countries have arrived at legal abortion through different historical paths, and they are facing different challenges. In the first section, I trace the paths by which law and policy have been shaped in each country over the past century. I will review the 'critical discourse moments' (Ferree et al., 2002) that have occurred in the two countries during the 20th and 21st centuries. Critical discourse moments are 'events that stimulate news articles and commentary in various public forums – in this case, especially legislative actions and court decisions' (Ferree et al., 2002, p.24). These events influence and change the discursive opportunity structures, framing of abortion, who become key players in the abortion debates, and their discursive strategies, etc. I divide the decades of legal and political battles over abortion policy into four periods: (1) prologue: 1920-60s; (2) emergence of consensus: 1960-80s; (3) continuing struggles: 1980-2000s; and (4) resurgence of abortion debates: 2000-2000s.

In the second section, I outline and compare 'political' and 'discursive opportunity structures' (Ferree et al., 2002) for pro- and anti-abortion actors in Ireland and the U.S. Ferree et al. (2002) state that 'political opportunity structures' are institutional and cultural structures that make certain institutions and actors more prominent in abortion discourse and movements than others. Meanwhile, 'discursive opportunity structures' refer to the character of the complex playing field where diverse framings and meaning-makings of abortion are contested (p.62). Examining

'political' and 'discursive opportunity structures' in the Irish and U.S. abortion policy discussions can demonstrate why different frames and actors are more prominent in the abortion discourse in each country, and help us understand in the later chapters (Chapter 6, 7, and 8) why incivility and intolerance in the abortion discourse unfold in different ways in Ireland and the U.S. Like Ferree et al. (2002) say: 'Many of the findings that [I] will report cannot be understood without a clear sense of the special features of the context in which the framing contest in each country was occurring' (p.62). I discuss six components of political and discursive opportunity structures. The two political components – political system, deliberative democracy – are examined and then the four socio-cultural components – state, gender, religion, social justice – are examined closely in terms of their relevance to the framing of the abortion issue in Ireland and the U.S. Lastly, in the concluding section, I summarise some key comparisons between Ireland and the U.S. of the history of the critical discourse moments and political and discursive opportunity structures.

4.1 Historical contexts

As of 2021, abortion is legal in both Ireland and the United States. The Irish Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 defines the circumstances and processes within which abortion may be legally performed in Ireland. The Act permits termination under medical supervision, up to 12 weeks gestation, and at a later term if the pregnancy poses a serious health risk to the mother or the foetus has a fatal foetal abnormality (RTÉ, 2018). In the U.S., the Supreme Court decisions of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 (discussed in section 4.1.2) decriminalised abortion nationwide, and abortion has since been legal throughout the country, although restrictions can vary for individual states. Ireland and the U.S. have arrived at the national policy for legal abortion via different historical paths, and they are facing different challenges.

4.1.1 Prologue: 1920-1960s

Ireland

Earner-Byrne & Urquhart (2019) define this period as the 'maternal and moral migration' of Irish women to Britain. Ireland, as a Catholic country, emphasised sexual purity as a characteristic of 'Irishness'. Especially after the independence of southern Ireland in 1922, the country pushed the narrative of sexual purity in order to differentiate 'morally superior Ireland' from 'sexually wanton and materialistic

Britain.' (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, p.59) Under legislation in accordance with Catholic moral values, unmarried mothers were shamed and stigmatised, which led many of them to emigrate to Britain to flee the 'moral intolerance' of Ireland. Initially, this travel was undertaken to hide their pregnancy or to seek adoption, rather than an abortion. However, as Britain passed the legislation of abortion in 1967, Irish women began travelling to Britain for the termination of pregnancy as well (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, pp.9-10).

The Irish state was embarrassed by this movement of Irish women to Britain. Towards the end of the Second World War, the Irish Minister for External Affairs noted that this was 'humiliating for the country.' (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, p.15). The government took an incarceration approach towards unwed mothers. Unmarried mothers were sent to 'homes,' which were often old workhouses, convents, and mother-and-baby homes and refuges. These actions sought to morally reform these fallen women, rather than protect the welfare of the mothers and babies. When women had multiple out of wedlock pregnancies, they were sent to prison, presumably because they were deemed 'beyond redemption' (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, p.44).

Women in Ireland had few choices when facing an unwanted pregnancy. Birth control was prohibited in Ireland until 1980, and abortion was illegal. Even the discussion of therapeutic abortion (to save the life of the mother) was restricted in the Irish Free State due to the 1929 Censorship Act and the 1935 Criminal Law Amendment Act (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019). Single mothers in Ireland committed acts of desperation, such as infanticide, abandonment of a baby, self-induced and backstreet abortion, etc. (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, pp.43-4). Irish abortion discourse between 1920-1960s can be summarised in the following three points: (1) The exporting of abortion to Britain is intertwined with Ireland's Catholic moral orthodoxy. (2) Restrictions on contraception and abortion impacted women's health and cost lives. (3) Women's health was hardly at the centre of the abortion debate (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019).

The U.S.

The 19th and early 20th centuries in the U.S. can be characterised as a 'century of silence' (Ferree et al., 2002; Luker, 1985) when it comes to abortion discourse. There was rarely any open public discussion of abortion until the late 1950s, although almost every state had passed their own abortion restrictions from the late 19th century. In some individual states, no exception was permitted, but in some other

states, therapeutic abortions were legally performed. Illegal abortions were common, despite sporadic prosecutions of illegal abortion providers (Ferree et al., 2002).

Since the 1950s, Planned Parenthood, a voluntary health organisation, attempted to challenge the status quo. The organisation approached the abortion issue from eugenic and population control themes, drawing on alliances with doctors. During this period, Planned Parenthood hardly defended abortion as a woman's right or women's own decision making (Ferree et al., 2002). In 1957, Planned Parenthood held a conference on the medical practice of abortion. This conference made public a 'secret' about the reality of abortion practices in the U.S., including the fact that abortions were frequently performed in cases of incest, rape, mental illness, health risks of the mother, etc. (Ferree et al., 2002). This conference encouraged the American Law Institute (ALI) to create model legislation that reflected actual abortion practices. Ferree et al. (2002) note that: 'The century of silence was ending but the abortion issue had not quite become visible' (p.26).

4.1.2 Shifting grounds and the emergence of consensus: 1960-1980s

Ireland: An anti-abortion constitutional amendment

Since the 1960s, Ireland went through structural changes and demographic transformation from a predominantly rural to an urban society. The educational gender gap substantially narrowed (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019). Family structures changed, as Irish people were having fewer children. The percentage of families with ten or more children decreased from 14 per cent to 3 per cent between 1911 and 1971 (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, p.53). Changes were also visible in the culture and value system of the Irish society, as public anger about the country's sexually repressive culture grew. The emergence of second-wave feminism in the 1970s focused on different understandings of gender and morality, e.g., new social movements promoted the rights of single mothers and called for legal birth control (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, p.58). In addition to these internal forces, international developments also impacted the Irish debate around sexual freedom, e.g., the *Roe v, Wade* Supreme Court Ruling in the U.S. in 1973, which protected a pregnant woman's liberty to terminate a pregnancy (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019).

Worried about the influence of liberalism and secularising tendencies both from within and abroad, conservative Irish Catholic groups organised the Society for

Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) in 1980 to campaign and lobby for a constitutional amendment to prevent the legalisation of abortion in Ireland. Amongst political parties, only Fianna Fáil (a centre-right party that largely represents Catholic conservatives) held a unified pro-amendment position, whereas Fine Gael (a centre-right party that adopted more liberal viewpoints since the 1960s) was divided. Left-wing parties such as the Labour Party were mostly against the amendment, but they were not in power (Mahon, 2001). SPUC and the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC) campaigned throughout 1981-83, arguing that human life begins at conception and advocating that an absolute right to life must be protected by the constitution. To stop the amendment of the constitution, the Women's Right to Choose Group (WRCG) joined the moderate and liberal group the Anti-Amendment Campaign (AAC) and opted to promote a neutral liberal argument that the amendment is 'an unwanted intrusion of a moral issue into the Constitution' (Mahon, 2001, p.162). Their central argument avoided any direct advocation of abortion as women's rights but rather opposed the amendment itself. This liberal stance helped women's rights activists mobilise support among the general public who thought the amendment would violate freedom of conscience, although not necessarily agreeing with abortion rights (Mahon, 2001).

In 1983, the amendment was carried by 66.9 per cent to 33.1 per cent, with a relatively low turnout of 53.67 per cent, ratifying Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, p.79). Article 40.3.3 reads as follows: *'The state acknowledges the right to life of the unborn, and, with the due regard to the right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate the right.'* (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2018) This amendment made abortion a constitutional matter in Ireland, which in turn enabled the Irish anti-abortion movements 'to make further demands and adopt new goals' to challenge abortion referrals, information, travelling, and other abortion-related services provided in Ireland (Mahon, 2001).

The U.S.: *Roe v. Wade*, pro-abortion Supreme Court decision

In the 1960s, public silence on the abortion issue in the U.S. ended. By 1970, a number of states, including California, North Carolina, Colorado, and other states in the South, adopted the ALI model abortion law. Under the ALI law, abortion was not a crime when performed by a licensed physician and based on several situations such as to save the physical or mental health of the mother, or that the child would be born with severe defects, or in cases of pregnancy from incest and rape. The New

York law, however, was more controversial: it legalised most abortion in the first trimester (Ferree et al., 2002). Meanwhile, the National Association for the Repeal of the Abortion Law (NARAL) was formed in 1969. Whereas the ALI law's goal was to reinforce doctors' and hospital committees' authority over abortion, NARAL attempted to frame abortion as a women's right to choose (Ferree et al., 2002).

In 1973, *Roe v. Wade, 410 U.S. 113* was a landmark decision in which the Supreme Court ruled that the constitution of the U.S. protects a pregnant woman's liberty to have a legal abortion without excessive government restrictions. A 7-2 majority of Supreme Court justices found that the right to privacy of a married couple could extend to cover the decision of a woman to terminate her pregnancy. Furthermore, the court attempted to balance the mother's right to self-determination in the second trimester and the state's legitimate interest in the life of the foetus in the third trimester. This decision left individual state legislatures with little power to restrict abortion in the first two trimesters. Following the decision, the battle arena shifted from the state to the national level, opening up a playing field for new stakeholders, debates, and conflicts in abortion policy discussions (Ferree et al., 2002).

Following the *Roe v. Wade* decision, several Christian anti-abortion organisations were established (Ferree et al., 2002). The National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) was organised as an independent, non-denominational organisation. The Catholic bishops sought a constitutional amendment, with letters of protest submitted to Congress and the Supreme Court. The first conservative Protestant anti-abortion organisation, the Christian Action Council, was founded. Within the pro-abortion movement, NARAL renamed itself the National Abortion Rights Action League, and built alliances with Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), preparing for the next round of legal battles and conflicts. Christian and religious pro-abortion organisations were established, such as Catholics for Free Choice and the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (Ferree et al., 2002).

4.1.3 Continuing struggles: 1980-2000s

Ireland: blocking several abortion restriction attempts

Since the 8th amendment of the Irish constitution in 1983, there have been five more referendums on abortion until the 8th amendment was finally repealed in the 2018 referendum. These further referendums tried to impose more restrictions on Irish

women's rights to travel abroad for abortion and their rights to access information about abortion clinics abroad. X's case was one of the key events in the 1990s that prompted the legislature's abortion restriction efforts. In 1992, a 14-year-old girl known as X became pregnant due to rape, and her case made Irish women's rights to travel abroad for abortion a big political issue. While her parents made travel arrangements for her to have an abortion in England, the High Court restrained her from travelling abroad for nine months. X's family appealed to the Irish Supreme Court, arguing that X's pregnancy made her feel suicidal and put her life at severe risk. The Supreme Court decided that X could go abroad for abortion because the risk of suicide is 'a real and substantial risk to the life, as distinct from the health, of the mother, which can only be avoided by the termination of her pregnancy' (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, p.86).

Amid the uproar surrounding X's case, it became controversial whether self-induced harm such as suicide could be considered a legitimate ground for legal abortion. It appalled religious and conservative anti-abortion actors that Irish women could obtain abortion in Ireland by 'pretending' to be suicidal (Reid, 1992). In the same year of 1992, the government held three more abortion referendums (12th, 13th, and 14th amendment bills) for the Irish public to vote on such matters. Having a Fine Gael, Labour, and Democratic Left coalition in power, the referendums had a different tone from that of the more conservative Fianna Fáil government in the 1980s (Mahon, 2001). The 12th amendment proposed that the possibility of suicide is not sufficient to justify an abortion. This was rejected. The 13th and 14th amendments were passed, which specified and protected Irish women's right to travel for abortion and to access information about abortion services abroad. The controversy over the threat of suicide as a legitimate reason for abortion was reignited in another referendum, the 25th amendment in 2002, to remove the threat of suicide as a ground for abortion in Ireland. This proposal narrowly failed at 50.4 per cent versus 49.6 per cent (Field, 2018, p.612).

In summary, although abortion was still illegal in Ireland since the 8th amendment, the Irish public repeatedly rejected conservative attempts to further restrict women's right to access to information about abortion clinics abroad and the right to travel abroad for abortion. The public also refused to exclude the risk of suicide as a ground for legal abortion. This may reflect the sentiment that the Irish public did not accept to prioritise the rights of the unborn over the right of pregnant women (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, p.87).

The U.S.: Reintroduction of anti-abortion restrictions

Although the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision prevented individual states from criminalising abortion services, anti-abortion groups and politicians found creative ways to introduce restrictions on abortion. In 1976, Henry Hyde, a Republican congressman from Illinois, introduced an amendment that prohibited all federal funding for abortions through federal programmes such as Medicaid except when it is a medically necessary abortion. Under the Hyde Amendment, neither state nor federal governments were obliged to pay for abortion for economically disadvantaged women (Ferree et al., 2002, pp.35-6). In 1989, the Supreme Court upheld, regarding the case of *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services, 492 U.S. 490*, that some restrictions on the use of state funds and facilities in performing abortions were allowable. The court decision further emphasised, however, that such restrictions should not create 'an undue burden' on pregnant women. Individual state legislatures became an important arena to test new abortion restrictions and test the boundaries of an 'undue burden' (Ferree et al., 2002, p.39).

Abortion policies and legislation have rather frequently changed, depending on the political flavour of government administrations. The first Bush administration provided additional abortion limitations, which were referred to as a 'gag rule' (Ferree et al., 2002, p.39). This executive order forbade health care providers paid by federal funds from mentioning abortion options to their patients. However, with Clinton's election, the abortion debate field changed again with his appointment of two liberal Supreme Court justices, Stephen Breyer and Ruth Bader Ginsburg (RBG), making it harder for the anti-abortion movement to overturn *Roe v. Wade* (Ferree et al., 2002).

On top of the struggles with the anti-abortion restrictions and policies, since the late 1970s, the U.S. has also witnessed a rise in anti-abortion violence such as the bombing and arson of abortion clinics, physical violence and death threats against medical practitioners, and anti-abortion protests such as invading and blocking access to clinics (Ferree et al., 2002). Due to the violence and protests, fewer and fewer doctors have provided abortion services and the usual costs of abortion has increased due to the insurance and security burdens of the abortion clinics. These anti-abortion actions were effectively deterring women from getting abortions. As Ferree et al. (2002) argue, these protests were more successful at restricting abortions than changes in state laws (p.40).

4.1.4 Resurgence of abortion debates: 2000-2020s

Ireland: Repeal the 8th and legalise abortion

After the 2002 referendum, abortion remained largely absent from mainstream priorities in Irish politics (Field, 2018) – until the death of Savita Halappanavar in October 2012. Halappanavar, then 17 weeks pregnant, was diagnosed with a miscarriage but was denied a legal abortion because the heart of the foetus was still beating. She developed sepsis and died in a week. The nation's reaction to her tragic death opened another referendum to discuss the country's constitutional abortion ban. In the 2016 General Election, the 8th amendment was a key issue in numerous political parties' election manifestos, from left- to right-wing. Fine Gael, which had established a minority government after the 2016 election, specified in their manifesto that if re-elected, the Fine Gael government would establish a Citizen's Committee in six months to examine crisis pregnancy cases which are not referred to in the existing legislation and to work on future change (De Londras & Enright, 2018).

In 2016, the Citizens' Assembly was established to deliberate on how to change the Irish abortion constitution and laws. The assembly consisted of 100 members, the Chairperson (Ms Justice Mary Laffoy) and 99 citizens randomly selected to represent different ages, genders, classes, regional spread, etc. After multiple weeks and sessions of deliberation, the Citizens' Assembly provided a set of recommendations to the Oireachtas (the legislature of Ireland). The key outcomes from the Citizens' Assembly deliberation include the following options (Field, 2018, pp.616-7):

- Not retaining the 8th amendment in full
- Removing or replacing the 8th amendment
- Replacing the 8th with an enabling provision for the Oireachtas to legislate on abortion
- For legislation to specify a period of pregnancy wherein access to abortion would be unrestricted
- Otherwise, access to abortion on the basis of:
  - Real and substantial physical risk to life
  - Real and substantial risk of death by suicide
  - Serious risk to physical health; mental health; health

- Risk to physical health; mental health; health
- Pregnancy as a result of rape
- Foetal abnormality likely to result in death before or shortly after birth; significant other foetal abnormality
- Socio-economic reasons

In 2017, the Committee on the 8th Amendment of the Constitution Debate heard from maternal health experts that 'if it were not for the 8th amendment, Savita Halappanavar would be alive today' (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, p.121). Many Irish Catholics stood by women, trusting women to make moral decisions about their pregnancies – although the Church hierarchy still rejected women's right to end pregnancy, even in the case of rape (The Irish Times, 2018b). On 4th April 2017, Dáil Éireann (the lower house, Dáil in short) agreed to establish a committee to consider the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly. The Joint Oireachtas Committee on the 8th amendment of the Constitution published a report of its proceedings and recommendations to the Irish government on 20th December 2017 (Field, 2018).

On 29th January 2018, Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar announced that the government would propose a referendum on Ireland's constitutional abortion ban. The government approved the wording of the referendum question on 8th March 2018: 'The proposed 36th amendment to the constitution would repeal the 8th, 13th, and 14th amendments, and replace them with the following wording: Provision may be made by law for the regulation of termination of pregnancies.' The Referendum bill was passed by the Dáil on 21st March, and by the Seanad Éireann (the upper house, Seanad in short) on 28th March. In the following press conference, Minister for Health Simon Harris and Minister for Housing Eoghan Murphy confirmed that the public vote would take place on 25th May 2018 (Field, 2018).

To win this historical referendum, both pro- and anti-abortion sides organised national campaigns: Yes (to repeal the 8th) and No (not to repeal the 8th) campaigns. The Yes campaign was dominated by strong civil society campaigns such as Together for Yes. The campaign was supported by the majority of political parties in Ireland including Fine Gael, Sinn Féin, Labour, the Green Party, Solidarity, and People Before Profit. There were also professional organisations supporting the yes campaign such as Doctors Together for Yes, Psychologists Together for Yes, the Artists' Campaign to Repeal the 8th, etc. The campaign had regional branches as well like Cork Together for Yes, the Galway Together for Yes, and so on (Field, 2018).

The Yes campaign put forward many medical arguments, particularly in terms of a diagnosis of fatal foetal abnormality (FFA). The campaign attracted many supportive obstetricians and gynaecologists such as Dr Rhona Mahony, Dr Peter Boylan, and Professor Louise Kenny, all of whom were key actors throughout the campaign (Field, 2018). Furthermore, the message of the Yes campaign was to encourage the zeitgeist of a 'new Ireland', with an emphasis on care, compassion, change, and love (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019; Field, 2018). The Yes campaign argued how traumatising and dangerous travelling for abortion is for a lot of women, and also how the travelling and illegality of abortion disproportionately affects people in lower socio-economic strata. Minister for Health Harris stressed that these women were 'our friends, neighbours, sisters, cousins, mothers, aunts and wives', and that the referendum would decide 'what kind of a country we want to be and what kind of a society we are' (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, p.125).

In contrast, the No campaign had two major organisations: Love Both and Save the 8th. Love Both was run by the Pro-Life Campaign, the successor to 1983's PLAC. Save the 8th drew support from conservative, religious groups such as Youth Defence, the Life Institute, the Iona Institute, and other local anti-abortion groups. The No campaign received limited support from political parties and politicians. The only registered political party to fully support the No campaign was Renua Ireland (Field, 2018). The main messages of the No campaign focused on how 'extreme' the amendment would be and how the referendum would result in a 'floodgate' to an even more liberal abortion regime in the future, where 'abortion on demand' would be a casual option for women (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019). Furthermore, their claims often invoked children with disabilities and with particular medical conditions, arguing that if the 8th amendment is repealed, a number of future abortions would be performed for eugenic reasons. However, they did not attract huge support from doctors and nurses unlike the Yes campaign (Field, 2018).

On 25th May 2018, Yes won by a margin of 66.4 to 33.6 per cent - 'almost an exact reversal of the 1983 result' (Field, 2018, p.624). An exit poll found that Yes votes formed the majority in almost every demographic: both women (72.1%) and men (65.9%), both urban (72.3%) and rural (63.3%), both younger (87.6% for the 18-24 cohort) and older voters (63.7% for the 50-64 cohort) were mostly pro-abortion (Field, 2018, p.624). The Yes vote was carried in 39 out of 40 constituencies, and Donegal was the only constituency to vote No (51.87%) (Field, 2018, p.624). The main reason for people to vote yes was because of a belief in women's right to choose (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, p.128).

On 20th December 2018, the President of Ireland signed the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, defining the circumstances and processes within which abortion is legally performed in Ireland. Abortion services commenced on 1st January 2019. The Act permits abortion where there is a risk to the life or of serious harm to the health of the pregnant woman; or where there is a condition present which is likely to lead to the death of the foetus either before or within 28 days of birth; or without restrictions up to 12 weeks of pregnancy (RTÉ, 2018).

The U.S.: Further attempts to restrict abortion and overturn Roe

Abortion has become central to the U.S. 'culture wars' (Hunter et al., 2006), becoming emblematic of fundamental clashes over moral norms. Since *Webster* in 1989 allowed some forms of abortion restrictions justified unless they cause an 'undue burden' to pregnant women, the anti-abortion movements in the late 20th and 21st centuries have focused on pushing the limits of what constitutes 'undue burdens' on pregnant women and making legal abortion as hard as possible to obtain. Some individual states have, for example, introduced various requirements and steps for abortion such as mandatory waiting periods, abortion counselling, ultrasounds, requiring parental consent for pregnant teenagers, and the ability of individual health care providers and institutions to refuse to perform abortion services. Furthermore, some states have imposed Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers (TRAP) laws, which require abortion service facilities to meet the same standards as ambulatory surgical centres even though these standards are not medically necessary for abortion procedures (Rohlinger, 2015).

On top of the anti-abortion policy and legislative actions, anti-abortion violence has also hampered U.S. citizens' safe and legal access to abortion in the 21st century. The most recent anti-abortion murder in the U.S. happened in 2015, by Robert Lewis Dear, who killed two civilians and a police officer at a Planned Parenthood facility in Colorado (NBC news, 2015). In 2021, an unknown person fired a shotgun at a Tennessee Planned Parenthood clinic (Knox News, 2021). Arsons and bombings are still committed against various Planned Parenthood facilities across the U.S. (The Spokesman Review, 2015; The Washington Post, 2012). The increased regulations and continued anti-abortion violence have made it harder for clinics to stay open and harder for women to find an abortion provider. When there is no clinic in their home state, people must travel to different states for abortion. For many people, the costs of petrol, accommodation, a required ultrasound, and the procedure itself have been too expensive (Rohlinger, 2015, p.156).

Other anti-abortion legislative efforts have aimed at shifting the framing of abortion policy away from women's health to taxpayers' rights, parental rights, medical practitioner and pharmacist rights. In 2009, some stakeholders in the battle over the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) contended that the Act was forcing anti-abortion U.S. citizens to pay for other's abortions. Conservatives were also challenging contraception and sterilisation coverage in the ACA on religious grounds. With the conservative mantra of a 'smaller government,' anti-abortion actors have aimed at introducing additional restrictions to access to reproductive healthcare (Rohlinger, 2015).

The battle over *Roe v. Wade* has ramped up since the election of President Donald Trump. In January 2019, hundreds and thousands of anti-abortion citizens and activists gathered in Washington D.C. for the March for Life, the nation's largest anti-abortion protest. Moreover, since May 2019, nearly thirty states have introduced or proposed some forms of abortion bans, e.g., Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri (The Guardian, 2020). These 2019 abortion bans were called the 'heartbeat bill' because they proposed to ban abortion as soon as a foetal heartbeat can be detected, which is around six weeks gestation. Such banning did not only concern legal periods of abortion, but also what methods and rationales were permissible for legal abortion. Alabama, for example, attempted to ban abortion almost completely, including in cases of pregnancy from rape and incest. Ohio has introduced a bill to charge doctors with 'abortion murder' if they do not try to 'reimplant ectopic pregnancy' (The Guardian, 2020). All of these legislative attempts have sought to limit the range of legal abortions in the second trimester and ultimately to overturn the *Roe* decision. The above-mentioned bills have all been blocked and struck down in courts. For example, Ohio's six-week abortion ban was blocked by the U.S. Federal Court on 3rd July 2019; the Alabama law banning almost all abortions was temporarily blocked on 29th October 2019; and other states' bills have been blocked by temporary injunctions: including Kentucky (16th March 2019), Utah (19th April 2019), Arkansas (7th August 2019), Missouri (27th August 2019), and Georgia (2nd October 2019) (The New York Times, 2019).

In 2020, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, several states enacted or attempted to enact restrictions on abortions, classifying abortion as 'non-essential medical procedures.' For example, Alaska ordered that surgical abortion can be temporarily suspended to preserve medical resources and personal protective equipment for health care workers during the pandemic (Anchorage Daily News, 2020). Similar orders were issued by other states including Alabama (Montgomery Advertiser, 2020),

Tennessee (Bloomberg Law, 2020b), Arkansas (CNN, 2020), and so on. The orders received criticism and legal challenges from diverse medical organisations and abortion rights groups. The American Medical Association (AMA) stated that 'it is unfortunate that elected officials in some states are exploiting this moment to ban or dramatically limit women's reproductive health care, labelling procedures as "non-urgent"' (AMA, 2020). Together, the ACLU and Planned Parenthood have filed lawsuits representing abortion providers and clinics, successfully stopping some of the orders on a temporary basis (The Hill, 2020a).

Another crucial point in the U.S. abortion discourse was when Donald Trump nominated Amy Coney Barrett to replace liberal Justice RBG on the Supreme Court after RBG died in September 2020. This decision excited anti-abortion people and worried pro-abortion advocates because Barrett, a devout Catholic and conservative, could support the de-legalisation of abortion nationwide and a reversal of the *Roe v. Wade* decision (Sky News, 2020). To fight against these anti-abortion campaigns to restrict abortion, U.S. pro-abortion movements in the 21st century have worked on connecting abortion to wider reproductive justice, reframing how inequality affects reproductive options for women with different socio-economic backgrounds (Rohlinger, 2015, p.158). This change is noteworthy given that the language of 'class warfare' or 'social justice' was historically largely absent in the U.S. political culture (Ferree et al., 2002). I discuss this point further in the following section.

4.2 Political and discursive opportunity structures in Ireland and the U.S.

4.2.1 Political component

National, federal, and state: Centralised vs. decentralised political system

There is a major difference between the political systems in Ireland and the U.S. With a parliamentary democracy, the Irish political system is highly centralised at the federal level and individual county and city councils have little independent control (Collins, 2004). Even when the Irish government reformed to decentralise, it involved little transfer of power from central government but simply the relocation of government departments to provincial locations (Collins, 2004). In contrast, the U.S. presidential democracy is decentralised with 50 governors and state legislatures that are independent of the federal level actors (Ferree et al., 2002). In the U.S., legal

and policy battles over abortion are stimulated at many different levels, i.e., national, federal, and state levels. Hence, whilst the abolition of the 8th amendment was the central issue in Ireland, the Supreme Court battle over *Roe v Wade* is one of the many battlegrounds in the U.S. abortion discourse. In the U.S., state governments, legislatures, and lower courts play a strong role in the process of passing bills. For instance, in the U.S., on 18th March 2020 during the rapid spread of Covid-19, the federal Centres for Medicare and Medicaid Services recommended states suspend non-essential medical procedures. Here, the specific decisions were made at the local level, e.g., by local state and local health departments. Individual states (e.g., Texas, Ohio, Alabama, Oklahoma) interpreted the CMS order in their own ways to ban abortion (Planned Parenthood, 2020).

Deliberative minipublics and the referendum in Ireland

Another political structural difference between Ireland and the U.S. is the countries' experiences with 'minipublics' in deliberative politics. The idea of minipublics was first proposed by political scientist Robert Dahl (1989) (Escobar & Elstub, 2017). Dahl (1989) envisioned 'minipopulus': an assembly of citizens who learn and deliberate on a topic in order to inform public opinion and decision making. Minipublics are made of randomly selected citizens, brought together to deliberate on a specific issue and dissolved when the deliberation is finished. Citizens' Juries in the U.S. is a form of minipublics made to deliberate and produce a collective recommendation or verdict (Escobar & Elstub, 2017).

Ireland has been at the forefront of deliberative experiments amongst European democracies, employing Citizens' Assemblies for constitutional reviews (Farrell et al., 2019). Citizens' Assemblies (CA) are the most 'radical and democratically robust' of all minipublics (Escobar & Elstub, 2017, para 9). CA largely consists of three phases: the learning phase, the consultation phase (public hearing to gather information and opinions from other members of the public), and the deliberative phase (discuss the evidence and agree on their final proposal). Following the deliberations, a vote amongst the participants decides the outcome of the CA, and this decision determines the options on the referendum, as well as making recommendations for the referendum outcome. The frequent use of referenda is one of the unusual elements of the Irish political system (Suiter, 2016). The Convention on the Constitution, a set of deliberative minipublics held in 2012-14, recommended to the Irish government that the Constitution be amended to introduce marriage equality. This was the first time in Irish history that a process of deliberation involving

ordinary citizens resulted in a referendum (Elkink et al., 2017).

Following the success of the deliberative minipublics during the marriage equality referendum, Ireland employed another set of minipublics on the abortion issue, called the Irish Citizens' Assembly (CA). In 2016, CA was composed of 99 randomly selected citizens, and chaired by Supreme Court Judge Mary Laffoy. The members heard over 80 hours-worth of material from 25 experts, written submissions from members of the public, pre-recorded personal testimony interviews from women affected by the 8th amendment, and presentations from advocacy groups from both sides of the abortion issue (Field, 2018). The learn-hear-deliberate model helped the CA participants create a set of recommendations to the Oireachtas (Field, 2018). By the end of the minipublics, Ms Justice Laffoy said the citizens had an 'almost uniquely comprehensive understanding' of abortion (Suiter, 2018, p.31). These deliberative minipublics provided the Irish citizens with hands-on experiences with the learn-hear-deliberate model, compared to the U.S. citizens who have not experienced CA or minipublics in law and policy-making processes.

4.2.2 Socio-cultural components

State's role and responsibility: a provider of social rights versus a necessary evil

There is some historical parallel between Ireland and the U.S. that the history of both countries is closely related to colonialism and independence from Great Britain. The Irish Republic was a revolutionary state declaring its independence from Great Britain in 1919. The U.S. was born in a revolution against a crown colony within the British Empire in the late 18th century. However, such colonial experiences have paved somewhat different traditions for the Irish and U.S. public perception of the state. A somewhat positive or romanticised view of the state in Ireland contrasts with a negative perception of the role of the state in the U.S.

In Ireland, the nationalist writing portrays Ireland as Mother Ireland and Irishness as feminine, mirroring the anti-British colonial discourses (Arrowsmith, 1999). Arrowsmith (1999) adds the idealisation of the 'female Ireland' went hand in hand with the confinement of Irish women, concretised in the 1937 constitution. Irish constitution Article 41.2 states:

'The State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity

to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home' (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2018).

The Irish state consolidated traditional Catholic values through state-sponsored morality. In Ireland, it is assumed that the role of the state is to enhance society by imposing certain moral standards, regulating civil life, and taking responsibility for the well-being and social rights (e.g., welfare, equality, and security) of its citizens. O'Connell & Rottman (1992) analyse the expansion of the welfare state in Ireland since 1960. Although this 'expansion' does not mean that inequalities have vastly improved nor that these policies have always improved women's conditions[1], the state favoured the fundamental principle of social rights and welfare institutions to all citizens (O'Connell & Rottman, 1992).

In contrast, the U.S. has historically espoused a libertarian tradition that perceives a state as a necessary evil whose role should be kept to a minimum. The colonial discourse in the U.S. was concerned about the possibility of abuse of power by the state. Hence, the ideal role of the state is limited to carrying out basic functions of maintaining social order and ensuring that people's choices do not unfairly interfere with other people's freedom. Ferree et al. (2002) label this as 'the historical legacy of distrust' and explain that this legacy across the political spectrum made the support for a welfare state susceptible to counterattacks in the U.S. political discourse (p.67). This libertarian sentiment and distrust of the state are some of the contributors to the *Roe* decision. The Supreme Court decision protected women's freedom to terminate pregnancy without excessive government interventions. But at the same time, libertarian values and framing were also frequently employed for the justification of successful restrictions on abortion. The Hyde amendment, for instance, justified the abortion funding cut, arguing that religious freedom of conservatives should be protected and they should not be forced by the government to fund abortions through tax.

Gendered vs individualist framing of abortion

Historically, the gendered framing of abortion as a woman's issue is more prominent in Ireland than in the U.S. In the U.S., abortion is rather defended as individual liberty and autonomy for a person of any gender (Ferree et al., 2002). In contrast, in Ireland, the abortion issue became gendered over time. In the early 20th century, the abortion issue was largely about Catholic morality and Irish women's health was

[1] For example, recruitment policies tried to counter discrimination by gender or race, but the same policies inhibited married women from work (O'Connell & Rottman, 1992)

secondary to that. Even pro-abortion movements chose, during the 8th amendment referendum in 1983, not to bring ideas about abortion as women's rights to choose, but instead to emphasise more gender-neutral and liberal arguments: an argument that 'a constitutional amendment is an intrusion on freedom of conscience' (Mahon, 2001). The framing of abortion became gendered over time, especially through diverse stories about difficult abortion cases. Examples of such cases include that of X's in 1992 (a 14-year-old girl who became pregnant from rape but whose travel to the U.K. for abortion was banned by the High Court), and C's case in 1997 (a 13-year-old girl who became pregnant from rape but her parents opposed their daughter's abortion). These judicial cases afforded the Irish public opportunities to see abortion as embedded in a gendered society (Mahon, 2001).

Further tragic stories have informed the public about how the criminalisation of abortion threatens women's lives. Cancer patient Michelle Harte died in 2010 because she missed cancer treatment for several weeks while arranging for an abortion in the U.K. A number of Irish women suffering complications and heavy bleeding after an abortion procedure have been unable to seek medical advice at Irish hospitals and clinics due to the fear of their illegal abortions being found out. In 2012, Savita Halapannavar died of sepsis a week after her request for legal abortion was rejected (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019). These stories argued for the mother's life being deserving of constitutional protection. Abortion was argued as a treatment for women's crisis pregnancies (Mahon, 2001).

During the repeal of the 8th amendment referendum in 2018, women's willingness to speak of their crisis pregnancies and abortion experiences was one of the most crucial strategies to win the Irish public's sympathy, care, and votes (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019). In this regard, 'Trust women' was one of the main slogans of the repeal campaign. The Minister, after the repeal of the 8th amendment was announced, said: 'Women have been told take the plane, take the boat. Today we say take our hand. Women have been told you are on your own. Today we say we stand with you' (The Irish Times, 2018b).

By contrast, in the U.S., a gendered framing of abortion has historically been unpopular. In other words, even the pro-abortion groups and coalitions have rarely highlighted 'women' as a special category with special needs and interests, nor brought up abortion as a specifically woman's issue (Ferree et al., 2002). Instead, they have emphasised women as 'individuals' who have a right to privacy and liberty to make decisions for themselves without excessive state interventions (Ferree et al., 2002). Obscuring women's interests helped U.S. pro-abortion feminists to facilitate

alliances with other civil society groups interested in civil liberties and family planning groups. ACLU for instance had a significant feminist presence within their own organisation, but the group itself did not identify as a feminist or women's rights group. This does not mean U.S. feminists did not see abortion as a woman's issue at all, but rather it reflects the strategic choice of U.S. feminists to produce a message that resonated the most with a wider audience and to get more support (Ferree et al., 2002).

Religious-moral framing of abortion

Both Ireland and the U.S. have large Christian constituencies, but the two countries have different opportunities for religious framing of abortion. First of all, the Catholic conception that life begins from the moment of conception can be more popular in Irish abortion discourse than U.S. discourse. The U.S. religious constituencies are more pluralistic than the Irish religious communities. Ireland is a strongly Roman Catholic country, with 78.3 per cent of the population identifying as Catholic and only 9.84 per cent answering they do not have a particular faith (Faith Survey, 2016). So, the Catholic moral framing of abortion, abortion as a sexual sin and against the Catholic view on life was pivotal to Irish anti-abortion policies (Hogan, 1992).

In contrast, the Catholic conception of life from conception is not widely accepted in the U.S. abortion discourse. The U.S. is a Protestant country (46.5%) with religious pluralism (20.8% Catholic, 5.9% non-Christian faith, 22.8% religiously unaffiliated) (Pew Research Centre, 2015). Amongst the U.S. protestants, the country has a variety of denominations with 25.4 per cent Evangelical tradition (e.g., Adventist, Baptist), 14.7 per cent Mainline tradition (e.g., Anglican, Methodist), and 6.5 per cent historically black Protestant tradition (e.g., National Baptist Convention, the Church of God in Christ) (Pew Research Centre, 2015). Hence, religious pluralism in the U.S. affects how the public perceives religious framing of life and abortion, for instance regarding when human life begins. In the *Roe* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court asserted that the matter of when life begins is one of religious and philosophical controversy where the state cannot make a definite answer favouring one particular religious viewpoint. Even U.S. religious speakers were against establishing a national law based on one particular religious interpretation of life. Carroll Cannon of the Disciples of Christ saw that the idea that life begins at conception is Catholic and therefore, banning abortion from conception prioritises the Catholic worldview, thereby jeopardising religious freedom (Ferree et al., 2002, p.161). How-

ever, such separation of religion and politics has been changing since the rise of the U.S. Christian nationalism movements calling for laws in accordance with Christian morality (Ferree et al., 2002; A. L. Whitehead & Perry, 2020).

Second, the standing of the Church and religious actors (e.g., priests, reverends) can have different opportunities and handicaps in Ireland and the U.S. In Ireland, historically, diverse social policies were influenced by the rules of the Roman Catholic Church, e.g., forbidding family planning, contraceptives, divorce, and abortion (Galligan, 1998). In the 1960s, when Ireland embarked on a path of gradual liberalisation, Minister for Justice Brian Lenihan argued that 'the whole subject of contraception is very much a live issue at the moment and [...] Catholics were waiting for a definitive ruling on the subject' (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, p.54). This underscores the Irish state's reluctance to make legislative decisions before papal approval. The Pope's ruling in 1968 reaffirmed the Catholic Church's ban on contraception, divorce, and abortion, and all of them indeed remained illegal in Ireland for a long time. Contraception was illegal until 1980, divorce until 1992, and abortion until 2018 (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019). Although the importance of the Church and Catholic teachings in Irish everyday lives has shrunk (Galligan, 1998), the Church can still have an insider position from which to talk about politics and social policies by appealing to the Catholic Irish identity, unlike the U.S. (Dillon, 1996b).

In contrast, the U.S. has a constitutional sanction that religion and politics must be institutionally separated with no official relationship between church and state (Ferree et al., 2002). Making specific references to religious scripture for socio-political claims might lead to a rhetorical disadvantage for anti-abortion movements. Furthermore, who exactly can speak to represent a religious point of view could be less clearly institutionalised in the U.S., whereas Irish anti-abortion actors with Catholic faith had the Vatican Church and Pope as institutionalised political representatives of their anti-abortion views (Dillon, 1996b; Ferree et al., 2002). However, this disadvantage in the U.S. has been shifting since the 1970s following the rise of Christian nationalist movements and the rapid political coalition between the Christian Right and Republican Party (Ferree et al., 2002). The rise of reactionary right-wing populist tendencies in the U.S. also calls for socially conservative, religious citizens to advocate for policies for white Christian U.S. (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; A. L. Whitehead & Perry, 2020). From these differences, the carriers of explicitly Christian-religious frames of abortion historically had greater opportunities in Ireland than in the U.S., but that situation is changing, and religious framing of abortion does not carry disadvantages at the same level.

Last but not least, it should be noted that religious communities in Ireland and the U.S. are not monolithic; there has been support for abortion rights within religious communities. Both Ireland and the U.S. have religious pro-abortion organisations using religious frameworks to support progressive change for women and social justice. In Ireland, following Savita's death, some practising Catholics argued that 'the majority of Catholics trust women to grapple with tough moral questions about when and whether to continue a pregnancy, and to make decisions for themselves' – although the Church hierarchy in Ireland reiterated its opposition to abortion (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, pp.121-2). In the U.S., outside the formal church groups, pro-abortion organisations were established since the 1970s, such as the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights and Catholics for a Free Choice. These U.S. groups defended abortion in terms of religious freedom and conscience, insisting that an abortion decision represents a woman's relationship with God and a realm of individual conscience, not a domain in which the state should interfere (Ferree et al., 2002).

Social justice framing of abortion

A social justice framing of abortion argues that the costs and burdens of abortion banning and restrictions often fall more heavily on the disadvantaged groups such as racial and ethnic minorities, working-class women from rural areas, etc. (Ferree et al., 2002). Both Irish and U.S. pro-abortion activists argue for safe and legal access to abortion using social justice framing, but they face different advantages and disadvantages.

In Ireland, women's experiences of abortion are largely connected to the experiences of travelling to Britain (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019). Abortion experiences include the processes of finding an abortion clinic abroad and arranging for travel and accommodation. This abortion journey is both stressful and expensive for all women but is especially harder for women in the lower socio-economic bracket, who live in rural areas, and migrant and asylum-seeking women who do not have legal documents to travel abroad and with language difficulties (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019). Irish pro-abortion citizens and activists advocate for the state welfare and safety net for those socially disadvantaged women in crisis pregnancies.

In the U.S., abortion is largely related to race as well as poverty. Black U.S. scholar and activist Angela Davis (1983) writes in her book *Women, race, and class* that the U.S. population policy and birth control movements were intertwined by blatantly racist and classist arguments. Poverty rates for Blacks and Hispanics have

been higher than those of Asians or non-Hispanic Whites in the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2020). Davis (1983) argues that birth control and abortion had been robbed of their progressive potentials and came to be interpreted as a 'duty' for the poor and the racial minorities. Davis (1983) and other scholars (Roberts et al., 2005) argue that what is urgently required is a campaign defending reproductive rights, not the liberalist 'choice' rhetoric. The 21st century U.S. pro-abortion movement has been working on connecting social justice themes such as class, gender, and race to reproductive justice movements (Rohlinger, 2015). Reproductive rights protect people in low economic-social strata to have children, not to have children, and parent the children in safe and sustainable communities (Davis, 1983; Roberts et al., 2005). However, in the U.S. social justice framing was prone to counterattacks (Ferree et al., 2002).

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed the history of abortion discourse in Ireland and the U.S. and described the general contours of political and discursive opportunities in the two countries' abortion discourse. These histories and political and discursive opportunity structures influence how Irish citizens in 2018 and U.S. citizens in 2020 talk about abortion on Twitter, with different rhetorical patterns and types of incivility and intolerance.

The chapter summarises a century-long history (1920-2020) of abortion policies and critical discourse moments in Ireland and the U.S. In a nutshell, Ireland remained a conservative anti-abortion country throughout the 20th century in terms of its anti-abortion policies and constitution, influenced by Catholic moral teachings. But in 2018, Ireland finally overturned the constitutional ban on abortion through a referendum. Meanwhile, the U.S. constitutionally affirmed women's freedom to terminate pregnancy by the Supreme Court decision on *Roe v Wade* in 1973. However, since then, access to safe and affordable abortion has constantly been under attack from reactionary anti-abortion policies, movements, and violence.

This chapter also provides my reading with important differences in political and discursive opportunity structures in the two countries. To summarise: the U.S. political system is more decentralised than Ireland, thus involving a wider range of battlegrounds for abortion policies (national, federal, state levels) and actors in abortion movements. In addition, public deliberation as a democratic tool might be more familiar to the Irish public through Citizens' Assembly in the two recent refer-

enda (2015 marriage equality referendum and 2018 abortion referendum), whereas Citizens' Juries in the U.S. are often confined to court cases.

Regarding socio-cultural components, there are some differences between the popular framing of abortion in Ireland and the U.S, in terms of the dominant views on state, gender, religion, and social justice. First, in Ireland, abortion policies are viewed via a social welfare framework, where the state is asked to intervene and protect its citizens. In the U.S., on the other hand, abortion is largely perceived as a matter of individual freedom, in that individuals should be free from the state's intervention when it comes to their private life decisions. The same value of freedom is popularly utilised by both pro-abortion (freedom to abortion) and anti-abortion stakeholders (freedom not to pay tax to fund abortions) in the U.S.

Second, the framing of abortion is more gendered in Ireland than in the U.S. Abortion is a women's rights issue in Ireland, whereas it is often a matter of civil liberty regardless of one's gender in the U.S. Third, religious-moral framing of abortion has different advantages and disadvantages in the two countries. Ireland might have institutional advantages for Catholic framing of abortion and religious actors like the Church and priests, but the growing liberalisation and secularisation shrink the importance of religious teachings to everyday Irish lives. The constitutional separation of the church and state and religious pluralism in the U.S. hinders the ability of one particular religious framing to dominate abortion discourse, but the rise of the Evangelical Christian Right movements might give advantages to the religious framing of abortion.

Finally, social justice claims might be more easily accepted in Ireland than in the U.S. In European democracies including Ireland, arguing abortion rights in connection with class inequalities is understood as classic left-wing political language. The U.S. pro-abortion activists are also employing social justice framing of abortion to call for safe and legal access to abortion and reproductive rights for the marginalised. But the social justice framing might be prone to counterattacks in the U.S. due to its libertarian-individualist political culture. All of these differences in the history of abortion policies, political and discursive opportunity structures influence how Irish and U.S. people debate abortion policy issues, and what themes and keywords of incivility and intolerance they employ in the Twittersphere. These will be analysed and presented in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

Chapter 5

Methodology

In this chapter, I define and justify my research questions and hypotheses, research approach, and methods. I also explain the data collection process for my Irish and U.S. datasets and discuss several key issues in social media research ethics. In section 5.1, I outline an overview of the research approach applied in this thesis: that of methodological triangulation (Olsen, 2004), combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. I also triangulate computational research methods onto big datasets with conventional social science research methods onto smaller-sized samples. This section also explains the strong points of cross-country comparative research.

In section 5.2, I provide a detailed explanation of each research method: manual and computer-assisted content analysis of incivility and intolerance, computer-assisted coding of the gender and issue position of Twitter users, and logistic regression modelling to answer research question 1 and ten hypotheses. This section also elaborates on the limitations and cautions when interpreting computational results. Furthermore, this section explains qualitative content analysis and the application of normative-critical theories to interpret empirical findings and answer research questions 2, 3, and 4.

In section 5.3, I describe my data collection and data tidying and filtering processes that take place before the analysis commences. The Irish dataset rehydrates a dataset shared by Littman (2018), collected via Twitter livestream API using a list of partisan hashtags (e.g., #togetherforyes, #lovebothvoteno, #savethe8th, #8thref). The U.S. dataset is collected via five keywords that are relevant to the U.S. abortion discourse: abortion ban, Planned Parenthood, pro-choice, pro-life, and *Roe v. Wade*. After the collection, I reduce the size of the datasets by removing possible spam[1] and abortion-irrelevant tweets.

[1] Spamming is an act of spreading unsolicited content in bulk indiscriminately for commercial advertising or fraudulent purposes such as phishing (Hayati et al., 2010). In my datasets, spam

In section 5.4, I provide ten research hypotheses for this thesis. These hypotheses explore quantitative aspects of online incivility and intolerance, as well as cross-country comparisons. Lastly, in section 5.5, I consider diverse ethical issues that are particularly important in social media research including consent, user protection, and harm. For the ethical integrity of this thesis, I have opted to anonymise individuals captured in the dataset and not to present any personal information that can identify individuals. I have also paraphrased and reconstructed tweets instead of quoting them verbatim.

5.1 Research approach

5.1.1 Methodological triangulation

Triangulation in social science is defined as mixing different data or methods so that diverse viewpoints help to validate the claims that arise from the study (Olsen, 2004). Olsen (2004) states that triangulation improves our knowledge of a social phenomenon by a dialectic of learning and studying different facets of the same research topic. In this thesis, I triangulate:

- Quantitative content analysis, logistic regression modelling and qualitative content analysis
- Computational methods onto big data (computer-assisted content analysis, classification, modelling) and conventional, manual communication research methods onto smaller samples (quantitative and qualitative content analysis)

I also design a cross-country comparative communication study between Ireland and the U.S. and hence provide a more comprehensive understanding of political incivility and intolerance, adding cultural nuances to the study. Cross-country comparisons can explore cross-cultural commonalities and culture-particular differences in terms of the dynamics, volume, intensity, and textures of political incivility and intolerance.

tweets use abortion related keywords and hashtags to promote abortion-unrelated products and services. Presence of spam tweets in a dataset introduces 'noise' to data and skews statistical results of incivility and intolerance analysis in Twitter abortion discourse. To increase accuracy of statistical analysis, I have removed potential spam tweets from the Irish and U.S. datasets. Spam filtering steps are explained in detail in Section 5.3

5.1.2 Computational social science and traditional social science methods

This thesis combines computational social science and traditional social science methods. Computational social sciences often refer to social studies and research projects that are Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enabled, e.g., research involving ICT-produced data or ICT-assisted data analysis methods, or both. The ICT-enabled data collection, analytical software, and algorithms provide social scientists with a number of rewards and benefits, although none are without limitations, which will be elaborated on later in this chapter.

Computational social sciences can benefit from the huge size of digital data (often called 'big data') that can be collected through various algorithms and software. ICT-enabled data extraction allows researchers to collect a large volume of digital data in a relatively cost- and time-efficient way. Programming languages such as Python, R or commercial software can identify and extract data within web pages. For the Irish dataset, 1.8+ million tweets are rehydrated from Harvard Dataverse (Littman, 2018). 'Rehydration' is an automated process to fetch data from Twitter API. By downloading a list of Tweets IDs from Dataverse and sending them to Twitter's live site, I could access the Twitter data and retrieve full tweets and metadata such as user ID, timestamp, language, number of engagements, etc. in the Irish abortion dataset. For the U.S. abortion discourse, 6+ million tweets are collected through Twitter APIs. However, the range of data and metadata that can be extracted from a website is not in the hands of social science researchers, but determined by the APIs structures and data use policies of the websites (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2017).

Moreover, computational social sciences can take advantage of big data for generating many predictive statistical models to understand diverse social phenomena (Conte et al., 2012). Computational social science methods can analyse social phenomena that are beyond the scope of traditional social science methods, or even beyond earlier statistical and mathematical approaches (Cioffi-Revilla, 2014; Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2017). Although big data often contain many errors and noise, data scientists find that 'massive but error-prone data' are more reliable than 'pristine but small' samples (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2017, p.166). In a messy big dataset, 'any particular reading may be incorrect, but the aggregate of many readings will provide a more comprehensive picture' (Mayer-Schonberger & Cukier, 2013, p.34; Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2017).

Still, computational social sciences and big data studies benefit from collaborat-

ing with conventional and more analogue social science methods. One of the weaknesses of computational studies is that it generates wide but shallow and un-nuanced knowledge. Anthropologist Lee Hoffer (2013) points out that computational social science simulations 'rarely reflect the histories, concepts, relationships, interactions, and other nuances' (p.19). In contrast, conventional social science methods with smaller data sets can generate deep and detailed knowledge. Whereas data science identifies patterns in data, it is in-depth social science methods that interpret the social meanings of the patterns (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2017). In this thesis, I triangulate computer-assisted content analysis of big data with qualitative content analysis on smaller-sized samples. This helps the research to be both extensive (examining a wide range of data) and intensive (examining the topic in-depth), looking at online incivility and intolerance from diverse angles.

5.1.3 Cross-country comparative study

This thesis conducts a comparative study between Ireland and the U.S. abortion discourses on Twitter. Comparative communication study attempts to 'reach conclusions beyond single systems or cultures and explains differences and similarities between objects of analysis against the backdrop of their contextual conditions' (Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012, p.5). Compared to a single-country study, cross-country comparative research has several methodological strongpoints. Only comparative studies can test theories across diverse settings and evaluate the generalisability and particularity of certain phenomena (Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012). It is harder for a single country study to contextualise findings and judge the significance of a particular tendency in the case study due to the lack of a comparison base. Comparative research can develop universally or generally applicable theories across different countries (by looking at cross-country similarities), but at the same time, it gives us culture-specific nuances (by looking at cross-country differences) and hence prevents us from naive universalism and overgeneralisation (Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012).

5.2 Method overview and research questions

5.2.1 Logistic regression modelling and research question 1

Regression analysis is a statistical method for calculating the relationship between a number of independent variables (IVs) and a dependant variable (DV) for quantitative hypotheses testing. Regression analysis can reveal the size and direction

of effects between IVs and a DV, which are often represented by regression coefficients. For instance, if the coefficient is zero, this means there is no relationship between the IVs and DV. If the coefficient is negative, this indicates that the IV has a negative effect on the DV (i.e., for a unit increase in the IV, DV decreases on average). Also, regression analysis can reveal the statistical significance of such a relationship between the IVs and DV, represented by p-values. Very small p-values indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the null hypothesis and the observed results. Null hypotheses can be defined as a null statement like 'there is no relationship between IVs and DV.'

I fit a logistic regression model to explore the dynamics of political incivility and intolerance. For this quantitative investigation, I introduce the first research question:

RQ1. What are the dynamics of political incivility and intolerance in abortion policy discussions in the Irish and U.S. Twittersphere?

RQ1 will be addressed by testing ten hypotheses investigating the dynamics and intensity of political incivility and intolerance (will be discussed later in section 5.4). Logistic regression is chosen since the dependent variables of this study (incivility and intolerance) have binomial categories: civil/uncivil, and tolerant/intolerant, which are coded computationally using the manually-validated incivility and intolerance dictionaries which will be explained in the next section. The independent variables are gender and abortion issue positions of Twitter users – which are also coded computationally, following the steps described above. I also control for the tweet context with four categories: Original Tweet, Reply, Retweet, and Quote. Furthermore, incivility is added to the model as an independent variable when intolerance is the dependent variable, and intolerance becomes an independent variable when incivility is the dependent variable. This will tell us whether the presence of incivility in a tweet is a predictor of intolerance in the same tweet, and vice versa.

However, in big data science, we must be cautious about the risk of spurious correlation where the sheer magnitude of big data finds correlations that are statistically significant even though there might not be any empirically meaningful connection between variables (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2017). In very large samples, even minuscule effects can become statistically significant, making p-values quickly descend to zero. Therefore, solely relying on a low p-value and a regression coefficient is insufficient for supporting research hypotheses in big data studies. Big data research should further investigate whether the small p-value is a by-product of big data, and carefully examine the practical significance of the effect of interest (Lin et

al., 2013). Therefore, in my models, I report 95 per cent confidence intervals (CI) alongside the p-values. Reporting CI instead of p-values is beneficial in big data studies because CI becomes more precise as the size of the data increases, i.e., the bigger the sample, the narrower a CI becomes. This can give a more precise estimate of the true effect of each variable, weighing the magnitude of the big data (Lin et al., 2013). Furthermore, I report odds ratios to help readers understand the effect sizes clearly (Khalilzadeh & Tasci, 2017).

5.2.2 Computer-assisted content analysis of incivility and intolerance on Twitter

Content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002) is often used for a systematic and quantitative analysis of communications. Content analysis aims to identify, quantify, and categorise the presence of certain features in a text (Neuendorf, 2002). Content analysts assume that behavioural patterns, values, and attitudes found by systematic content analysis reflect the behaviours, attitudes, and values of the people who create the messages (Berger, 1998). Information and communications technologies help the content analysis method examine big data that are beyond a human researcher's capacity and provide a more comprehensible picture about a research topic.

To automatically analyse incivility and intolerance in big Twitter data, I build incivility and intolerance dictionaries that include an encompassing list of uncivil and intolerant words and phrases appearing in the Irish and U.S. samples during the manual content analysis. Muddiman et al.'s (2019) work to build 'manually validated organic dictionaries' of incivility has been a great reference for my dictionary building process. Manual labelling and validation can enable the successful construction of incivility and intolerance dictionaries that are theoretically derived and context dependent (Muddiman et al., 2019). This manual labelling-based approach performs better than the preconstructed lexicon approach such as LIWC (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010), and Lexicoder (L. Young & Soroka, 2012), and is especially beneficial in the context of political discussions (Muddiman et al., 2019). A human researcher can make a theoretically grounded decision about which words to add to and remove from their dictionaries.

There are incivility research works that employ more state-of-the-art techniques such as supervised machine learning (e.g., Jigsaw, 2021; Theocharis et al., 2020), but I have chosen a dictionary-based approach over machine learning for several reasons. First, although supervised machine learning algorithms such as SVM and Naïve Bayes tend to achieve higher accuracy, precision, and recall, a lexicon-based

dictionary approach is also very competitive and efficient in terms of economy of time and efforts used in the classifier building process (Mukhtar et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2014). Second, a dictionary approach returns simple binary classes of either civil/uncivil or tolerant/intolerant, which are more straightforward for understanding the classification results. In contrast, interpreting machine learning results can be arbitrary because these algorithms often return probabilistic results. That means, machine learning algorithms return a range of probability (between 0 and 1) of whether a data entry has a certain characteristic or not. Hence, it requires researchers to decide on cut-off points. This can be arbitrary since there is no consensual standard for deciding a cut-off or threshold (i.e., what does it mean that tweet A has a 53 per cent toxicity score in Jigsaw Perspective API?). This is not to quibble with other machine learning-based works, but to point out a rationale for choosing a manually validated dictionary approach (Muddiman et al., 2019).

Lastly, I have built separate Irish and U.S. incivility and intolerance dictionaries. Building separate dictionaries for each country can yield higher accuracy because they contain words and phrases that are particular to the Irish or U.S. political culture and abortion discourse. Furthermore, it is also time-efficient for a dictionary to run when it has a smaller number of words and phrases that are specific to each dataset rather than having a longer list of words and phrases that are not relevant to each dataset. For instance, some popular uncivil words in the Irish dataset might not appear in the U.S. dataset at all. Keeping these Ireland-specific keywords in the U.S. incivility/intolerance dictionaries might make the speed of the classifier slower than necessary. The dictionary building processes through manual content analysis is detailed in the next section.

Coding scheme development

I have conducted manual content analysis on random samples of 3,000 tweets from the Irish and U.S. datasets. Standard practices of Internet research are in flux, meaning that there is little guidance available for how to navigate the gold standard to generate a smaller sample from big data. Instead, the sample size is motivated and decided upon after surveying other online incivility research and Twitter content analysis works that often vary between a few hundred and ten thousand tweets or comments (e.g., Coe et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2018; Papacharissi, 2004; Rossini, 2019; Rowe, 2015). I choose random sampling, as several studies have found that simple random sampling is an efficient strategy to obtain a representative sample, in terms of topic saturation, of the entire dataset (Kim et al., 2018; Le et al., 2019).

Coding scheme development. For content analysis to be objective and systematic, it is crucial to operationalise concepts into measurable entities and to construct a coding scheme: e.g., how do we recognise and define incivility and intolerance in online abortion discourse? In this coding scheme, incivility and intolerance are operationalised following academic discussions explained in Chapter 3. Incivility is defined as speech that has a face-threatening tone, and features 'that convey an unnecessarily disrespectful tone towards the discussion forum, its participants, or its topics' (Coe et al., 2014, p.660). Intolerance is measured by a set of expressions that are threatening the democratic norm of pluralism and tolerance such as prejudice, refusing to engage in mutual deliberation, hateful and violent speech, etc. (Rossini, 2019).

Unit of analysis. There are two units of analysis: users and tweets. Users are coded in terms of their issue position (pro-, anti-abortion, or unidentifiable; further discussed in section 5.2.3), and gender (female, male, or unidentifiable names; further discussed in section 5.2.4). Another unit of coding is a tweet. One tweet is coded as either civil or uncivil, and either tolerant or intolerant. Other incivility research projects have more complex sub-categories for incivility such as name-calling, aspersion, vulgarity, etc. (Coe et al., 2014; Rossini, 2019); or personal- and public-level incivility (Muddiman, 2017); or utterance incivility, discursive incivility, and deception (Stryker et al., 2016). In a previous study by Rossini (2019), intolerance was divided into numerous sub-categories such as threat towards individual rights, intolerance towards political positions and opinions, offensive stereotyping, racism, socio-economic intolerance, religious intolerance, etc. However, instead of having diverse categories, I have chosen to have a simpler binary category for my content analysis.

I have decided to have a binary category since this manual content analysis is primarily conducted to develop dictionaries for computational content analysis. Methodological papers show that computer-assisted coding works best when categories are easy to operationalise, and human coders work better with complex categories (Linderman, 2001). Furthermore, having multiple sub-categories of different types of incivility and intolerance is inefficient as this will require a bigger size of manual coding for the classifier training dataset. It might be challenging to obtain enough cases for each category of incivility and intolerance, such that multiple dictionaries can be trained to the point that they can perform well for each category. Other computational incivility research work has also adopted binary categories, e.g., civil/uncivil (Theocharis et al., 2020). But the future research projects

with more time and resources can build more complex dictionaries (or even machine learning algorithms) that can also detect different types of incivility and intolerance.

Human coders. The full content analysis is conducted by one coder (the author of the thesis), but multiple coders have actively partaken in the process of the coder training and inter-coder reliability testing. Testing inter-coder reliability is important for ensuring that the coding scheme of my project identifies relatively objective (or at least intersubjective) characteristics of uncivil and intolerant tweets. In each round of inter-coder reliability testing, the inter-coders and I label 150 tweets into civility/incivility and tolerance/intolerance and compare our coding decisions. We have pre- and post-coding discussions to share thoughts about the coding scheme and reach agreements about future coding decisions. It takes three rounds of testing, revision, and retesting to achieve the substantial agreements in terms of both Cohen's kappa (.75 average)[2] and per cent agreement (93%). The incivility variable has 93 per cent agreement and .76 kappa, and intolerance has 94 per cent agreement and .74 kappa. Per cent agreement is used to complement the overly conservative measure of beyond-chance agreement of Cohen's kappa (Joyce, 2013).

This study takes multiple 'consensus binding discussions' (Neuendorf, 2002, p.134) among the coders to produce very specific rules for coding incivility and intolerance in relation to abortion discourse. Besides the two coders who actively partake in the inter-coder reliability testing, two other coders join in these rule-making discussions. Discussions are necessary for achieving high inter-coder agreement because, although incivility and intolerance are largely common-sensical and socially shared concepts, they also have individual variances. Many would have a shared notion at an abstract level of what incivility and intolerance are (e.g., swearing in political discussions is incivility, denying others' liberty and rights are intolerance), but there could be many disagreements at an empirical level (e.g., Is 'bloody' an uncivil word? Is it intolerance to call pro-choice women 'baby murderers'?). Having consensus-binding discussions creates more practical rules that can apply to the coding of more common, mundane forms of incivility and intolerance that are particular to the Irish and U.S. abortion discourses. The full coding scheme is provided in Appendix A.

Building classifiers from the findings of the manual content analysis

Based on the manual labels from the manual content analysis, I have built the first versions of incivility and intolerance classifiers that are particular to the Irish and

[2]We have also calculated Krippendorff's alpha, which was equivalent to the Cohen's kappa reported here, achieving substantial level of agreement.

U.S. Twitter datasets. I then tested the accuracy of the classifiers, reviewed false positives and negatives, and added or removed words and phrases accordingly. Next, I randomly sampled another 500-1,000 tweets from the Irish and U.S. datasets, manually labelled them, and added words and phrases to the next version of classifiers, tested them, and revised the classifiers. I iterated these processes until the classifiers achieved reliable performances.

I aim for high 'accuracy' (i.e., how accurately the dictionaries identify true positives and true negatives) and high 'precision' (i.e., among the tweets classified as incivility and intolerance, how many are actual true incivility and intolerance). This thesis does not aim for high 'recall' (amongst actual incivilities and intolerances in the dataset, how many tweets my dictionary accurate classifies) since my preferred approach is to achieve high precision at the expense of low recall. There is always a chance of false negatives since it is not possible to identify every single form of incivility and intolerance in big data (hence low recall). In contrast, minimising false-positive rates (hence high precision) provides a reliable standard for assessing the performance of dictionaries (Muddiman et al., 2019, p.221).

Overall, it took 5,700 tweets to train the Irish dictionaries, and 6,000 tweets to train the US dictionaries. The final versions of the incivility and intolerance dictionaries for the Irish and U.S. datasets achieved a high and stable level of accuracy and precision. The mean accuracy of the Irish incivility dictionary is 93.7 per cent, and the mean precision is 86 per cent (the best precision is 93.2%). The mean accuracy and precision of the Irish intolerance dictionary are 98.3 per cent and 99.2 per cent respectively. The final version of the U.S. incivility dictionary achieves the mean accuracy of 85.8 per cent and the mean precision of 91 per cent. The U.S. intolerance dictionary yields the mean accuracy of 86.5 per cent and the mean precision of 82 per cent (the best precision was 100%).[3] The accuracy and precision are a bit lower for the U.S. incivility and intolerance dictionaries than the Irish ones, which could be because abortion discourse is connected with other diverse political discourse in the U.S. dataset such as the Covid-19 outbreaks and governmental responses, Black Lives Matter movements, etc. Due to this, the U.S. dataset contains a wider range of vocabulary and themes of incivility and intolerance.

I conduct a quick error analysis to show a sample of misclassifications. False positives (labelling civil/tolerant tweets falsely as uncivil/intolerant) occur when a tweet cites other people's incivility or intolerance in order to criticise or refute them.

[3] As anticipated, recall of the Irish and U.S. dictionaries is relatively lower. The Irish dictionaries show the mean recall of 61.8 per cent (for incivility) and 70.8 per cent (for intolerance). The U.S. dictionaries show the mean recall of 73.9 per cent (for incivility) and 67.8 per cent (for intolerance).

For example:

*'#8thref conversation between my dad and a nun at the door. n: "You look like a reasonable person, I believe you are voting no." d: "I'm not." n: "But abortion murders babies!" d: "Do you want us to stay in the Victorian ages?" n: "I guess you want legalised drugs too then?" d: "Yes." n: *shocked*'* (Ireland)

'The yes campaign has provided so many reasons to #voteyes. Meanwhile, #votenotoabortion is just based on "abortion is murder" – which is not. If you do not support mandatory organ donation, you are pro-choice.' (Ireland)

These two false-positive 'intolerant' examples include the intolerant phrases 'abortion murders babies' and 'abortion is murder' in order to rebut the intolerant views on abortion. Unfortunately, these kinds of incivility and intolerance uttered in reported speech might be difficult to discern via a dictionary approach.

False negatives in my datasets are closely related to creative forms of sarcasm and irony. Many computational works have discussed the difficulty of automatic sarcasm and irony detection in Twitter data: sarcasm alone can account for as much as a 50 per cent drop in accuracy when automatically detecting sentiment for example (Sykora et al., 2020). The true meanings of irony and sarcasm are not explicit in words but can only be interpreted by incorporating the culture of sarcasm and communicative context. Some sarcastic tweets use polite words whilst intending the opposite meanings (e.g., 'Warm wishes indeed,' 'Some lovely caring words from #savethe8th'). When the Irish Bishop of Ossory went on an Irish radio show talking about rape and abortion, asking for a No vote, one pro-abortion right tweet uttered: 'Says the religious virgin man.' Such a subtle mockery in many tweets is hardly detectable in a simple bag-of-word based incivility and intolerance dictionaries.

5.2.3 Computer-assisted coding of issue positions of Twitter users

In this thesis, the abortion issue positions of Twitter users are coded into pro-abortion, anti-abortion, and unidentifiable, assisted by automatic text classification. Unidentifiable tweets include both politically neutral tweets (e.g., simply sharing information and news articles) and politically ambiguous tweets. This computer-assisted coding of abortion issue positions of Twitter users can model the relation between uncivil and intolerant discourse and the pro- and anti-abortion identities expressed on Twitter. Uncivil and intolerant society is often described as characteristics and strategies of right-wing populism in Europe and the U.S. (Krzyżanowski et al., 2021; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Outrage tactics like insults, name-calling,

vilification, etc. are largely associated with the conservative ideologies and positions – although left-wing messages are not free from uncivil, nasty rhetoric (Berry & Sobieraj, 2013). The computer-assisted coding of abortion issue positions of users can test at a big data scale if conservative users (anti-abortion rights in abortion discourse) are indeed more uncivil and intolerant than more liberal and progressive users (pro-abortion rights in abortion discourse). Since the Irish and U.S. datasets are collected through different routes (based on hashtags vs. keywords) (will be explained in the next section 5.3), two different methods are used to automatically classify issue positions of big Twitter data.

Partisan hashtag-based classification for the Irish dataset

The Irish dataset (Littman, 2018) is collected through 53 key hashtags that are popularly used during the 2018 Irish abortion referendum debates and discussions. These hashtags have clear ideological indications: 32 pro-abortion (e.g., #togetherforyes); 14 anti-abortion (e.g., #savethe8th, #lovebothvoteno); and 7 neutral and ambiguous hashtags (e.g., #8thref, #hometovote). I have classified the Irish dataset into pro, anti, and unidentifiable categories following the partisan hashtags appearing in a tweet. So, if a tweet contains only pro-abortion hashtags, it is labelled as pro-abortion. If a tweet has only anti-abortion hashtags, it is labelled as anti-abortion. If a tweet does not have either pro or anti-abortion hashtags, it is coded as unidentifiable. If a tweet has both pro and anti-abortion hashtags simultaneously, it is also coded as unidentifiable.

I have randomly sampled 1,000 tweets from the Irish dataset and compared the hashtag-based automatic classification and manual classification. The accuracy of the hashtag-based classifier is 84 per cent. This accuracy is as high as the state-of-the-art machine learning classification of abortion ideologies in Sharma et al. (2017). Sharma and colleagues combine multiple machine learning approaches (using predictive unigrams and bigrams, combinations of certain phrases and hashtags with sentiment analysis scores) and achieve a mean accuracy of 67 per cent and best accuracy of 81 per cent. My simple and intuitive classification model can perform as accurately as the best accuracy of a more complex machine learning classifier.

N-gram based classification using tf-idf values for the U.S. dataset

Unlike the Irish dataset collected through partisan hashtags, the U.S. dataset is collected via the use of five keywords: abortion ban, Planned Parenthood, *Roe v Wade*, pro-choice, and pro-life. These keywords are not necessarily partisan in

nature. Abortion ban, Planned Parenthood, *Roe v. Wade* keywords can be discussed both by pro- and anti-abortion users. Furthermore, keywords like pro-choice and pro-life can be talked about by users from opposing sides: e.g., 'pro-life people are disgusting' is not a pro-life tweet. Namely, not every tweet mentioning the keyword pro-life is an anti-abortion tweet.

For the U.S. dataset, I have chosen to build an issue position classifier based on popular unigrams, bigrams, and trigrams[4] that are distinctive to either pro- or anti-abortion tweets in the U.S. data. Sharma et al. (2017) also use the top 5000 predictive n-grams for their machine learning classification of abortion discourse into three ideological categories (i.e., For, Against, and Neutral to abortion). For my classification, the training data contains 3,000 tweets from the U.S. dataset (their issue positions are manually labelled), and the testing dataset contains 708 tweets.

To extract distinctive n-grams that are particular to pro- and anti-abortion tweets, I calculated term frequency and inverse document frequency (tf-idf) of unigrams, bigrams, and trigrams. Term frequency (tf) measures how frequently an n-gram occurs in a document, and inverse document frequency (idf) takes into account the weight for commonly used words and rarely occurring words. The combined tf-idf measures how important an n-gram is to a document (Silge & Robinson, 2017). I tokenise unigrams, bigrams, and trigrams from the 3,000 tweets training set, arranging them in descending order by tf-idf values. I then extract n-grams with the top 2,500 tf-idf values from each pro- and anti-abortion tweet. However, there are many n-grams with the same tf-idf values, and therefore the top n-grams with the top 2,500 tf-idf values are more than 2,500: 2,803 pro-abortion n-grams and 5,178 anti-abortion n-grams. Most of these top n-grams are bigrams and trigrams. Then, I build a simple classifier that follows the logic below:

1. pro = 0, anti= 0
2. If a tweet contains an n-gram from the pro-abortion n-gram list, pro = 1
3. If a tweet contains an n-gram from the anti-abortion n-gram list, anti = 1
4. If pro + anti $\neq$ 1, the tweet = unidentifiable (either neutral or ambiguous)

[4]In the fields of computational linguistics and natural language processing, an N-gram is a parsing of a text or speech into a certain number of sequences of words or characters. For sequences of words, for instance, unigrams (n=1) that can be generated from a sentence 'Nice to meet you' are 'nice,' 'to,' 'meet,' 'you'; possible bigrams (n=2) are 'nice to,' 'to meet,' 'meet you'; and trigrams (n=3) are 'nice to meet,' 'to meet you.' N-gram language modeling enables many statistical analyses of bigger text.

5. Else if pro = 1, the tweet = pro-abortion

6. Else the tweet = anti-abortion

When tested onto the testing set, the accuracy is 71.8 per cent. This accuracy are much higher than the baseline accuracy and as high as Sharma et al. (2017)'s machine learning classifier. Sharma et al.'s (2017) achieves a mean accuracy of 67 per cent and the best accuracy of 81 per cent.

5.2.4 Computer-assisted coding of the gender of Twitter users

Automatic gender recognition

In addition to coding abortion issue positions of Twitter users, another unit of coding is the users' gender. The gender of users is automatically coded based on their first names appearing on their Twitter profile into three nominal categories: female, male, and unidentifiable. Unidentifiable includes both gender-unidentifiable first names and pseudonyms (e.g., 'Old Glory'). I have used one of the R packages for the Automatic Gender Recognition (AGR) studies: the Gender package (Mullen, 2021).

The Gender package predicts gender by name from large historical data, typically population data gathered by the U.S. Census and Social Security data (Mullen, 2021). For instance, if I run the code *gender(c("Hillary"), years = c(2000, 2010), method = "ssa")*, Gender shows the probability of whether Hillary is more likely to be a male or female name. Based on historical data between 2000-2010, Hillary is 0.55 per cent male and 99.4 per cent female, and therefore the package predicts the gender of Hillary as female. If a name is gender-neutral, gender would say 'either' or if it is not a normal first name (e.g., pseudonyms like 'Old Glory') or statistically rare so the algorithm cannot identify its gender, it retrieves a value of 'unknown' (n/a). Hence, Gender is an efficient tool to estimate the gender of millions of Twitter users in my large collection of Twitter data.

Some limitations of this specific operationalisation of anonymity must be acknowledged while interpreting any findings regarding anonymity in the empirical chapters later. In this thesis, users whose names could not be identified with a specific gender were classified as 'anonymous.' This operationalisation of anonymity can have limits that may affect the results of the analysis. For instance, someone could name their account with obvious pseudonyms such as John Doe and Jane

Doe, names typically used by English-speakers who want to hide their identity, but these names will be classified as non-anonymous based on the chosen method in this thesis. Other studies have adopted a more complex operationalisation of anonymity for manual coding: e.g., Munger (2020) infers a degree of Twitter user anonymity by recording if their account has a full name, profile picture, and customised biography. My Irish and U.S. datasets do not contain such user metadata, so it is infeasible to implement a more complex operationalisation of anonymity in this thesis.

Also, it must be noted that the Gender package was developed on the U.S. census data (Mullen, 2021) and thus may not work well for some Irish names and especially Gaelic names. However, when tested with a small list of popular Irish names (top 50 names for boys and 50 for girls in Ireland in 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000; a total of 400 names, from Ireland Central Statistics Office (2021)), the Gender package successfully identifies the gender of all 400 names. Generally, the package works reliably, but there is a possibility that the package can misclassify the gender of rare Gaelic names and names in other languages as gender-unidentifiable (hence anonymous).

Cautions against Automatic Gender Recognition research

While implementing and interpreting the AGR results, their inherent limitations must be acknowledged. The Gender package relies on data that is created by the government, and it is unable to see beyond the state-imposed gender binary (Mullen, 2021). This limitation of AGR fundamentally excludes individuals who do not conform to the societal concept of gender as binary (Mihaljević et al., 2019). Any automatic approach to gender recognition assumes that gender is predictable based on immutable features like one's name. In doing so, the approach denies the notion that one's gender identity is subjective (Butler, 1988; Mihaljević et al., 2019). Hamidi et al. (2018) strongly criticise AGR research by calling it an 'incongruous pairing of futuristic AGR technology with old-fashioned conceptualisations of gender and its value to society' (p.7).

Therefore, the Gender package for the name-to-gender inference method should only be used when there is a good reason to conduct analyses that require assigning gender to individuals (Mihaljević et al., 2019; Mullen, 2021). Gender package developer Lincoln Mullen (2021, online) advises in the package description on GitHub to 'resort to this method only when the alternative [. . .] is not studying gender at all.' I have decided to use the Gender package with caution since it can still be a valuable insight to investigate gendered aspects of political incivility and intolerance on the

Irish and U.S. Twittersphere. There has not been much research on gender and uncivil and intolerant political discourse on Twitter. Some incivility studies have been interested in the gender of the recipients of incivility (e.g., analysis of gendered incivility towards U.K. female MPs on Twitter in Southern & Harmer (2021) and gendered incivility towards U.S. politicians in Theocharis et al. (2020)). The gender of the senders of incivility and intolerance has not been examined much yet, which can be an important aspect of uncivil and intolerant communications on Twitter.

5.2.5 Qualitative content analysis and research questions 2 and 3

Qualitative content analysis is a family of systematic, rule-guided text analysis techniques that analyse the contents of text data and materials (Mayring, 2004). Both quantitative and qualitative content analysis techniques follow the criteria of reliability and validity so that the procedures and results of the methods are intersubjectively replicable and valid for making specific inferences from text (Mayring, 2004). But, since it is a qualitative approach to text data, qualitative content analysis enables interpretative steps of analysis (Mayring, 2004). Quantitative content analysis categorises data using a predetermined coding scheme and categories, but qualitative content analysis use categories that are generated inductively (i.e., derived from the data) and applied to the data through close reading (Forman & Damschroder, 2007). Furthermore, whereas quantitative content analysis examines more manifest content of the material, qualitative content analysis can explore diverse levels of content, e.g., themes, main ideas of the text, context information as latent content (Mayring, 2004).

There are two different approaches in terms of counting. For some authors, the qualitative content analysis still entails counting words and categories for detecting patterns of the data (Forman & Damschroder, 2007; Morgan, 1992; Sandelowski, 2000). For others, qualitative content analysis is solely qualitative, without the use of counting or statistical techniques (Forman & Damschroder, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2004). Beck et al. (2010) argue that qualitative content analysis and interpretivism interrogate information content for its ‘quality,’ ‘richness,’ and ‘qualitative characteristics’ rather than the mechanical counting of volume (p.208).

The qualitative analysis in this thesis adheres to the interpretative aspect, since the quantitative analysis is carried out by the big data content analysis (discussed above). Qualitative content analysis will investigate the rhetorical patterns and types of incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourses on Twit-

ter. This kind of qualitative in-depth analysis is crucial for producing a thorough understanding of a phenomenon that cannot be grasped solely by statistical analysis, such as how people verbally construct incivility and intolerance. Research questions 2 and 3 are as follows:

RQ2. What are the rhetorical patterns and types of incivility expressed in the Irish and U.S. abortion discussions on Twitter?

RQ3. What are the rhetorical patterns and types of intolerance expressed in the Irish and U.S. abortion discussions on Twitter?

5.2.6 Normative-critical theories to interpret empirical findings, research question 4

Habermas (2006a) explains that employing a normative communicative model of deliberative politics helps us interpret empirical findings. The gaps between the normative model and the empirical findings direct our attention specifically to those variables that explain failures in our media system and mode of political communications (Habermas, 2006a). For a final point for future intervention and education-related discussions, this thesis gathers the quantitative and qualitative findings to evaluate the implications of this thesis for the health of deliberative politics and the academic debate around incivility and intolerance in digital political communications. The following research question 3 addresses this research objective:

RQ4. Are there implications of my findings for the health of deliberative politics and the academic debate about the rise of incivility and intolerance in public deliberation?

5.3 Data

The thesis examines two Twitter datasets: one for the Irish abortion discourse and another for the U.S. abortion discourse. It must be noted here that in this thesis, Irish and U.S. datasets refer to a collection of tweets that are discussing either the 2018 Irish abortion referendum or the 2020 U.S. abortion discussions (hence issue-based) and are not defined by physical location of tweets or users (hence not geo-tagging based). This means that the Irish dataset can contain tweets written by non-Irish users or users outside Ireland who nonetheless engaged in the Irish abortion discussion. This issue-based data collection allows more comprehensive and international datasets. During the Irish abortion referendum, Irish expats and people with Irish dual citizenship (e.g., Irish American) actively partook in the

abortion referendum campaign and votes, making #HometoVote one of the most popular hashtags during the referendum (Amnesty International, 2018b). Limiting the range of Irish dataset to tweets with Irish geo-tags can miss abundant data from international users who did not explicitly set their user location as Ireland or did not physically reside in Ireland. The same logic also applies to the U.S. abortion discourse where U.S. expats and people with U.S. dual citizenship still partook in the policy debates. To keep the data of those expats and international citizens, it is necessary to define the boundary of the Irish and U.S. datasets based on the abortion issues and not on geography.

Furthermore, using geo-tagging parameters is not successful measures to attain a large volume of meaningful data in this research. Many tweets in the Irish and U.S. datasets do not contain geo-tagging information. 98.3 per cent of the tweets in the Irish dataset and 99.6 per cent of the tweets in the U.S. dataset lack geo-tagging information about from which country a tweet was written (which can be found in the *place_country_code* column in the Twitter API data). Only 1.23 per cent of the tweets collected in the Irish dataset have explicit an 'IE' (Ireland) country code and only 0.4 per cent of the tweets from the U.S. dataset have a 'US' (United States) country code. This means that location-based data collection will result in losing lots of rows from both datasets. Instead, by collecting data from an issue-based perspective (i.e., collecting tweets talking *about* Irish and U.S. abortion discourse, not tweets *written from* Ireland and the U.S.), I could circumvent this limitation and attain large volume of Twitter data.

5.3.1 Ireland data collection & spam filtering

I use a Twitter dataset shared on Harvard Dataverse (Littman, 2018). This dataset contains 2,279,396 tweets collected between 13 April and 4 June 2018 from the Twitter filter stream API. This rehydrated dataset contains only publicly available data complying with Twitter's public developer guidelines and terms of service. As a form of participant consent, tweets that belong to users who have deleted their tweets or privatised or deactivated their accounts are no longer available (limitations of this simplified approach to 'participant consent' will be discussed in section 5.5.1). This rehydrated dataset was collected via 63 hashtags: 32 pro-abortion (e.g., #togetherforyes); 14 anti-abortion (e.g., #savethe8th, #lovebothvoteno); and 7 hashtags that are neutral or ambiguous in relation to abortion (e.g., #8thref, #hometovote). Littman (2018) notes that the terms changed during the course of data collection. The rehydrated dataset contains 1,842,370 tweets: the lost tweets are due to how

Twitter's APIs and platform works[5].

I filter out possible spam tweets that contain more than nine hashtags, since spammers on Twitter tend to use more hashtags than non-spammers (Chen et al., 2015). The threshold of the number of hashtags is decided after surveying other Twitter spam detection papers. Mitra & Gilbert (2015) for instance filter out tweets containing more than three hashtags. Chatzakou et al. (2017) eliminate tweets with more than five hashtags. However, other Twitter research works show that Twitter users tend to use multiple hashtags for digital activism (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Xiong et al. (2019) find that in hashtag activism and digital social movements, Twitter users use up to eight hashtags in one tweet (mean = 1.8, SD = .97). Since my Twitter data is about political discussions on abortion policy, my dataset also includes a large portion of tweets using multiple hashtags. After a manual inspection of a sample of tweets, I set the limit to nine hashtags, i.e., tweets with nine or more hashtags are flagged as spam tweets and removed from the dataset. This is not a definite cut-off point to be generalised to other research projects, but it is the most practical method for this thesis. I also remove tweets that are not written in English. Twitter API datasets have a language column (*lang*) to tell in what language a tweet is written, and I filter out tweets whose *lang* value is not 'EN' (English). This is because my incivility and intolerance dictionaries are built for the English language. The final size of the Irish dataset for analysis is 1,707,979 tweets.

5.3.2 The U.S. data collection & spam filtering

The U.S. dataset contains 6,305,107 tweets collected between 4 March and 20 October 2020 from the Twitter stream API. The five search keywords for the data collection are abortion ban, Planned Parenthood, pro-choice, pro-life, and *Roe v. Wade*. Possible spam tweets are removed from the dataset using a different approach from the Irish data collection approach. Since the U.S. data was not collected through strongly partisan hashtags like the Irish case, hashtag-based filtering was not possible. Instead, I build a list of spam and irrelevant tweet keywords and eliminated tweets containing the keywords from the dataset for final analysis. This is in line with exclusion filtering approaches utilised by Jashinsky et al. (2014). Reviewing the 6,000 tweets with manual coding labels, I accumulate a list of 222 spam keywords such as PS4 pro, ice hockey, pro skater, etc. I test the accuracy of this spam filter three times, random-sampling 200 tweets each time. After each round of testing,

[5] For official information, see Twitter developer at https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/tweets/post-andengage/api-reference/get-statuses-lookup

the list of spam keywords is revised to increase the performance of the spam filter. The final version of the spam filter achieves 100 per cent precision and 90.8 per cent recall. This accuracy satisfies the general consensus for acceptable spam filtering which is 99 per cent specificity (precision) and 80 per cent sensitivity (recall) (Antonakaki et al., 2021). I also filtered out non-English tweets by only keeping tweets whose *lang* column values are 'EN' (English). After all these filtering and pre-processing processes, the final size of the U.S. dataset contains 6,054,670 tweets.

5.4 Research hypotheses

The quantitative content analysis and statistical modelling in this thesis aim to explore the descriptive dynamics and volume of political incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse on Twitter by examining the following ten hypotheses.

5.4.1 H1 for a cross-country comparison

I propose a hypothesis asking for a cross-country comparison of incivility and intolerance in Ireland and the U.S. Twittersphere. Given the deep polarisation in the U.S. political culture (Pew Research Centre, 2014b) and the history of widespread political violence over the abortion issue in the U.S. (e.g., arson and bombing of abortion clinics, kidnapping, assaults, attempted murders, and murders of staff at abortion clinics) (Ferree et al., 2002), I hypothesise that the U.S. abortion discourse is significantly more intense and violent than the Irish abortion discourse, which will be reflected in more incivility and intolerance in the U.S. abortion discourse on the Twittersphere than in the Irish.

Hypothesis 1. The U.S. dataset will contain significantly more incivility and intolerance than the Irish dataset.

5.4.2 H2 and 3: External political events and timeline

Other research works have shown that incivility is a contextual product affected by the topic of discussions (e.g., politics, sports) and external political and communicative events that can heighten political interests and discussions among the public online (Coe et al., 2014; Theocharis et al., 2020). In this regard, we can assume that incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discussions on Twitter are affected by political and public events happening during the data collection period.

Hypothesis 2. In the Irish dataset, the volume of total tweets posted per day, incivility, and intolerance will significantly increase as the voting day approaches than the earlier days during the referendum.

Hypothesis 3. In the U.S. dataset, the volume of total tweets posted per day, incivility, and intolerance will increase around high-profile abortion-related events (e.g., state/federal court decisions regarding abortion ban, news stories regarding abortion) than during uneventful periods.

5.4.3 H4: Abortion issue position

Uncivil society is often studied in terms of right-wing political topics such as reactionary right-wing populism, anti-immigration, EU scepticism, etc. (Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017; Ruzza, 2009). However, Berry & Sobieraj (2013) find in their study of U.S. left and right-wing political contents that the U.S. liberal political contents are 'quite nasty in character,' but conservatives are 'even nastier' (p.56). Norris & Inglehart (2019) argue that there is a contingent relationship between social conservatism, authoritarianism, and social intolerance. This relationship is not confined specifically to the right-wing political sphere; left-wing discourse can be authoritarian as well. This leads to the hypothesis that in both Ireland and the U.S., the conservatives in abortion discourse (anti-abortion) will be more uncivil and intolerant than their progressive counterparts (pro-abortion), although the progressives are not totally innocent from the problem of uncivil society.

Hypothesis 4. In both Ireland and the U.S., anti-abortion tweets are significantly more likely to express incivility and intolerance than pro-abortion tweets.

5.4.4 H5: Abortion issue partisanship

Political polarisation, issue partisanship, and uncivil society is deemed to go hand in hand. The more polarised our politics are, the more anxiety and grievances the public feels about their core beliefs and values being questioned and violated by an out-group with opposing values. Hence, Portz in an interview (News@Northeastern, 2017) argues that the perceived political polarisation prompts louder and more frequent calls for political action. In the Twitter context, political polarisation may encourage more frequent political tweets. The mobilising effect of polarisation is especially large for citizens who sit in ideological extremes, i.e., far-left and far-right citizens, compared with citizens who hold more moderate views (Klein, 2018).

The more committed citizens are to their beliefs and values, the more susceptible

they become to the perceived threats and dangers of opinion polarisation (Klein, 2018). Living in a polarised social environment pressures individuals to choose a side, leads one to defend one's values, builds solidarity with others who share the same beliefs, and develops antagonism against those who threaten our identity and our ways of life (Klein, 2018). The binary framing of abortion debates in Ireland and the U.S. (you are either pro- or anti-abortion) might have significantly heightened the public's perceived political polarisation. The effect of perceived political polarisation drives the public with already strong issue partisanship to be more susceptible to appealing to incivility and intolerance. It can be assumed that abortion issue public is dominated by such issue partisans with extreme beliefs, but not by the citizens with moderate views.

Hypothesis 5. A large portion of incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse on Twitter is conducted by a small number of highly active users with strong issue partisanship.

This hypothesis can complement the findings from previous incivility research. Previous work on online incivility finds that incivility directed towards politicians is rather sporadically uttered by a large number of users who are angry at politicians, rather than by a small set of 'serial transgressors' who are leading organised trolling activities (Theocharis et al., 2020). Coe et al.'s (2014) study finds that contrary to popular perception, frequent commenters are less uncivil than infrequent commenters on a U.S. local news website. However, these research examples include a wide range of topics from commenting on sports, lifestyle, entertainment news, to economy and politics news (Coe et al., 2014) or across tweeting to politicians regarding diverse policy issues (e.g., health care, immigration, gun control) or political events (e.g., Trump's inauguration, the Clinton email scandal) (Theocharis et al., 2020) and hence are not confined to one specific hyperpolarised issue public. The previous studies' research design did not take into account the possible impacts of political polarisation and issue partisanship around a very specific issue. In this thesis, by exploring the highly emotive and polarised abortion policy issue on its own, we can see whether the highly polarised and partisan nature of abortion discourse makes ideologically partisan individuals (strongly pro- or anti-abortion users who tweet about their abortion opinions frequently) more susceptible to incivility and intolerance. Furthermore, Coe et al.'s (2014) and Theocharis et al.'s (2020) studies are specific to incivility and have not investigated the coordination dynamics of intolerance.

5.4.5 H6: The gender of users

Numerous surveys and academic literature provide inferences that men might be more prone to the appeal of uncivil and intolerant politics. For instance, support for reactionary and authoritarian populist parties and leaders in the U.S. and European countries is especially associated with grievances and frustration of older white men with a lower education degree and lower income (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Another study shows that racism is often overwhelmingly dominated by white male voices (Berry & Sobieraj, 2013). Furthermore, women and men might have different speech styles and expectations for online civic communications. A Pew Research Centre (2017) report finds that women prioritise people feeling welcome and safe online whereas men are more likely to prioritise people being able to speak their minds freely. Moreover, women think offensive content online is too often excused as not a big deal, but in contrast, men think offensive content online is taken too seriously (Pew Research Centre, 2017). All of these resources infer a hypothesis for testing whether incivility and intolerance in abortion discourse are dominated by male voices, similarly to racism and authoritarian populism.

Hypothesis 6. In both Ireland and the U.S., Twitter users with male names are more likely to express incivility and intolerance than users with female names.

5.4.6 H7: Anonymity

Online anonymity is often assumed to be associated with deindividuated and disinhibited behaviours, namely uncivil behaviours without the fear of consequences. Previous research finds that uncivil and intolerant communication occurs more frequently on websites where users are able to maintain their anonymity, compared to social media platforms like Facebook where commenters can be identified with and held accountable for their comments (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Papacharissi, 2004; Rowe, 2015; Santana, 2014). Several papers find that uncivil and sexist contents are created and shared more on anonymous platforms and by anonymous accounts (Fox et al., 2015; Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Rowe, 2015). Regression modelling can test whether such anonymity has a significant impact on political incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discussions on Twitter.

Hypothesis 7. In both Ireland and the U.S., Twitter users with gender-unidentifiable pseudonyms are significantly more likely to express incivility and intolerance than users with gender-identifiable first names.

5.4.7 H8, 9, and 10: Tweet affordances and contexts

This thesis considers incivility and intolerance as communicative practices. Hence, I expect that incivility and intolerance are less likely to rise from non-dialogical communicative contexts like posting an original tweet, and more likely to arise from dialogical contexts like tweeting a reply.

Hypothesis 8. Twitter users in Ireland and the U.S. will be more likely to express incivility and intolerance when they are replying to other users directly than when they are the original poster of a tweet.

Furthermore, based on previous research, I expect that incivility rises from heterogeneous discussion environments whereas intolerance rises from homogeneous environments. Rossini's papers (2019; 2020) show that in Brazilian news websites and Facebook comments, incivility prevails in a heterogeneous conversation environment (when users are passionately disagreeing with each other), whilst intolerance prevails in a homogeneous environment where opposition is absent or silenced by the perception of a hostile discussion environment. I propose H9 and H10 to see if such effects of communicative context onto incivility and intolerance hold true at a big-data scale.

Hypothesis 9. Twitter users in Ireland and the U.S. will be more likely to express incivility when they are replying to other tweets than retweeting and quoting other tweets.

Hypothesis 10. Twitter users in Ireland and the U.S. will be more likely to express intolerance when they are retweeting and quoting other tweets than when they are replying to other tweets.

I assume here the Reply affordance as a proxy for a disagreeing environment and Retweet and Quote affordances as a proxy for an agreeing environment. Previous Twitter network analysis works find that the user networks built through retweets or quotes exhibit fewer disagreements, fewer insults and less hate speech compared to replies (Garimella et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2019; Villa-Cox et al., 2020). There is a lay discourse evidence to substantiate the claim that Retweets and Replies are proxies to agreement and disagreement respectively. There is a Twitter slang called 'being ratioed,' meaning when Replies to a tweet vastly outnumber Likes or Retweets. Being ratioed is often viewed as a sign of barrage of negative comments, dislikes, and disagreement with the original tweet (Dictionary.com, n.d.).

5.5 Social media research ethics

Ethics approval has been given for this thesis by the Loughborough University Ethics sub-committee. In this section, I summarise the three main issues of digital research ethics: (1) consent, (2) protection of human subjects, and (3) harm. Overall, it requires social media researchers to make decisions with due care and consideration to balance between the research goals, relevant ethical principles, and what ethical steps are practically possible for given research.

5.5.1 Consent

In conventional behavioural studies involving human subjects, informed consent is one of the keys to ethical research, respecting research participants' autonomy and decision, who choose to partake in research. However, Internet and social media research cannot expect the same level for the practice of asking for consent, especially when it is big data research. Consent in Internet studies might need to be platform-specific. In academia, Twitter is considered a public, research-friendly platform where explicit user consent is not necessarily required. Twitter's Terms and Conditions and Privacy policy explicitly states that users consent to share their data with third parties when they sign up to the platform. Also, Twitter states that users have the option to set their accounts to private, making their data unavailable to third parties (Twitter, 2021).

Meanwhile, the issue of whether it is truly ethical to harvest 'public' Twitter data without informed consent is controversial. Instead of relying on the 'legal' permission granted by social media Terms and Conditions, Williams et al. (2017) suggest that Internet researchers must take a more 'reflexive ethical approach that puts user expectations, safety, and privacy rights centre stage' (p.48). Some research works find that the majority of Twitter users think researchers should not be able to use their data without explicit consent (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018; Williams et al., 2017). But the users do not share a unitary expectation regarding informed consent and their expectations are also highly contextual, depending on how and where the research is conducted (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018). Internet users feel less concerned about informed consent when it comes to big data studies using computational methods than human researchers (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018). Also, users feel less concerned about consent if their data used in a research project is fully anonymised (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018). These findings justify my thesis' use of big Twitter data without asking for explicit user consent because this thesis is largely a big data study

using computational methods with anonymisation of user data.

5.5.2 Protection of human subjects: Anonymisation, avoiding direct quotations, and reconstruction

Protecting participants from being identified and receiving negative social reprisals is an important ethical issue, especially when research is dealing with sensitive, controversial topics like people's uncivil and intolerant behaviours. This thesis employs qualitative content analysis on smaller samples as well. In doing so, I must be careful about meeting the user expectations on ethical social media research and minimise possibilities where a user or an online interaction can be back-traced on search engines. Internet users feel less uncomfortable about their data being used in research when they are offered anonymity (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018; Williams et al., 2017). Hence, Twitter accounts in my dataset are fully anonymised. Moreover, the accounts mentioned in the tweets are anonymised so that it is impossible to identify who has sent a tweet to whom, except when it is sent by or sent to public figures such as politicians, journalists, celebrities or institutions like political parties, media companies, other non-government organisations, etc.

Some research work further argues that anonymisation alone is not enough and that Internet research should avoid a direct verbatim quotation from online data. Even when users answered that they are less concerned about whether their tweet is quoted verbatim in a research paper (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018; Williams et al., 2017), a direct quotation can help any reader to back-trace the origins of the data on search engines and hence undermine the safety net that the anonymity process provides (Gilbert & Stoneman, 2015). Hence, for my qualitative analysis, I reconstruct tweets in the way that Markham (2012) advocates: 'creative, bricolage-style transfiguration of original data into composite accounts or representational interactions' (p.334). This reconstruction of tweets should be different enough so that it is not traceable back to an individual or interaction on the Twitter search engine, but also should not be too different that it loses or changes the meaning of the original data. Such reconstructing work might not be suitable for fine-grained interaction analysis but works for general qualitative content analysis (Williams et al., 2017).

5.5.3 Harm

Preventing harm is an important ethics issue in research involving human subjects. Research participants should be protected not only from physical harm, but also

from emotional, psychological, and social harms due to research. Some studies can be psychologically distressing and traumatising for participants. Some research works can cause social harm if research topics are highly sensitive or controversial and if participants can be easily identified by others. This thesis takes careful steps such as anonymisation and paraphrasing in order to protect participants from being identified by third parties.

Harm can also be inflicted on Internet researchers who study controversial and distressing topics such as autoethnographic writing of one's anorexia (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010), analysing children and young people's accounts of sexual and physical abuse (Jackson et al., 2013). In my case, reading online content containing incivility and intolerance in abortion discourse has been sometimes emotionally distressing. There have been several techniques or choices that I have employed. First, I found it personally helpful to have some distance between myself and the case study countries I am researching, i.e., Ireland and the U.S. Researching Ireland and the U.S. gives me some safe distance psychologically where I can see myself as more of an outsider and observer, rather than an insider who is deeply embedded in the uncivil and intolerant discourse that is textually being unfolded in front me. Support and guidance from the supervisory team and peer support between doctoral researchers investigating distressing topics (e.g., online misogyny, online far- and radical-right communities) has helped me greatly.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter details the key methodological approaches and method choices. To examine online incivility and intolerance from multiple angles simultaneously and therefore enhance our knowledge of the phenomena, I have argued for methodological triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods, and computational and conventional social science methods. The choice of research methods is made by the nature of research questions and hypotheses. Furthermore, I have pointed out that comparative research of incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse can provide us with a culture-bounded and situated understanding of incivility and intolerance beyond universalistic culture-free theories of the concepts.

I have also discussed the ethics of social media research. For the ethical integrity of this thesis, I fully anonymised Twitter user information in my dataset except publicly verified accounts with a blue tick (e.g., politicians, journalists, institutions). I also avoided direct quotations of any tweet verbatim from my dataset and instead

restructured it to prevent the tweet from being searched and back-traced on search engines.

Chapter 6

Modelling uncivil and intolerant Twittersphere

The purpose of this chapter is to quantitatively investigate the dynamics and volume of incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discussions on Twitter in big-scale data to address the first research question in this thesis:

RQ1. What are the dynamics and intensity of political incivility and intolerance in abortion policy discussions in the Irish and U.S. Twittersphere?

This chapter addresses ten hypotheses examining relationships between incivility, intolerance, and demographic, political, and contextual variables such as political events, issue position and partisanship, gender, anonymity, and Twitter affordances.

In the first section, I describe the overview of the Irish and U.S. datasets. In the second section, I create a generalised linear model of incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. datasets and provide hypotheses testing results. I find that: (1) high-profile events and issues affect incivility and intolerance, and in the U.S. data, the volume of partisan incivility and intolerance are especially affected by specific issues that are relevant to partisan concerns for each abortion issue position. (2) Anti-abortion users are more likely to express intolerance in the Irish dataset and more incivility and intolerance in the U.S. dataset. (3) A smaller set of hyperpartisans are responsible for most of incivility and intolerance in both Irish and U.S. datasets. (4) Gender and anonymity do not have a strong effect on incivility and intolerance. (5) Users express more incivility when replying to another, and more intolerance when retweeting and quoting other tweets. (6) Incivility and intolerance are one of the strongest predictors of each other. Lastly, in the conclusion, I discuss the implications of the results as well as limitations of the research and possible extensions. I also provide a brief cross-country comparative summary of

my quantitative analysis of incivility in the Irish and U.S. datasets.

6.1 Data overview & descriptive analysis of the Irish and U.S. datasets

Table 6.1 summarises the descriptive statistics of independent and dependent variables of this thesis: gender of users, their abortion issue positions, tweet context, incivility, and intolerance. Table 6.1 shows how the Irish and U.S. Twitter data are constructed. The Irish and U.S. datasets are similar in several ways. First, both datasets contain a large volume of tweets posted by users with gender-unidentifiable pseudonyms. The tweets written by gender-unidentifiable users account for 38.6 per cent of the tweets in the Irish dataset and 47.6 per cent in the U.S. dataset. Second, despite the highly emotive and polarised nature of the abortion debate, the size of incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. datasets are not substantial. Only 9 per cent and 1.7 per cent of the tweets in the Irish sample and 15.3 per cent and 10 per cent of the tweets in the U.S. sample contain some form of incivility and intolerance. Although the U.S. dataset contains a larger amount of incivility and intolerance than the Irish Twitter dataset (H1 accepted), both countries' Twitter discussions are largely civil and tolerant.

However, the Twitter datasets from the two countries show many differences. First, the gender distribution of users engaged in abortion discourse are somewhat different. The Irish abortion discourse on Twitter attracts more engagements from users with female names (37.1%) than male names (24.3%). In contrast, the U.S. abortion discourse contains similar percentages of participation from users with female (28.4%) and male names (23.9%) neck and neck. The U.S. abortion discourse on Twitter still attracts more users with female names than male names (6.8% more), but the gap is almost half the size of the gap in the Irish dataset (12.8% more). This might reflect how abortion discourse has been framed and debated in the U.S and in European countries like Ireland. In U.S.-Germany comparative research, Ferree et al. (2002) find that the U.S. often portrays abortion as a non-gender-specific issue for individual freedom and rights whereas Germany frames abortion as a deeply gendered, women's rights issue. The authors find that due to the non-gendered framing of abortion, U.S. men, unlike German men, have a legitimate place in abortion-related organisations and were well represented in broader coalitions over the abortion issue (Ferree et al., 2002). In contrast, Ireland has historically fought over abortion rights as women's rights, led by diverse women-led,

Category		Ireland		U.S.	
		Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Gender	Female	633,267	37.1%	1,722,144	28.4%
	Male	415,413	24.3%	1,449,422	23.9%
	Unidentifiable	659,299	38.6%	2,883,104	47.6%
Issue position	Pro	198,906	11.6%	1,593,090	30.6%
	Anti	1,064,159	62.3%	1,852,511	26.3%
	Unidentifiable	444,914	26%	2,609,069	43.1%
Tweet context	Original tweet	189,505	11.1%	384,013	6.3%
	Retweet	1,121,611	65.7%	4,415,076	72.9%
	Quote	341,506	20%	509,140	8.4%
	Reply	55,357	3.2%	746,441	12.3%
Incivility		153,028	9%	929,032	15.3%
Intolerance		29,469	1.7%	606,542	10%
Total tweets		1,707,979		6,054,670	

Table 6.1: Descriptive characteristics of the Irish and U.S. Twitter data

feminist grassroots movements, and the abortion debate has been gendered with a focus on the mother's life versus the foetus' life (Field, 2018; Mahon, 2001). These different framings of abortion might have influenced how the Irish and U.S. men see abortion discourse in 2018 and 2020 and impacted upon men's engagements in abortion policy discussions on Twitter. Male users in the U.S. might have been more motivated to engage since they see the abortion issue as any individuals' issue whereas men in Ireland might have been less motivated to partake in the abortion debate thinking that it is a women's issue.

Another difference between the Irish and U.S. datasets is the distribution of abortion issue positions in the dataset. The Irish dataset is heavily dominated by pro-abortion tweets (62.3%) with a smaller number of anti-abortion tweets (11.6%). On the contrary, the U.S. dataset contains a large portion of tweets that are neutral or ambiguous to abortion (43.1%)[1], and have slightly more anti-abortion tweets (30.6%) than pro-abortion tweets (26.3%). However, this larger size of anti-abortion

[1]Many of these neutral and ambiguous tweets include tweets criticising the 'pro-life' U.S. government's measures against the covid-19 outbreaks. These tweets criticise the government that their policies do not practise the true pro-life values to save U.S. citizens' lives from the pandemic. These tweets do not specify their stance on abortion, hence they are coded as neutral-ambiguous to abortion.

tweets in the U.S. dataset does not necessarily mean the U.S. public at large is more anti-abortion than the Irish public. At the national level, both countries have a pro-abortion majority. The Irish 2018 abortion referendum had 66.4 per cent Yes votes to decriminalise abortion and 33.6 per cent No votes to keep the constitution to criminalise abortion (Field, 2018). In the U.S., a Pew Research Centre report (2021) finds that the majority of U.S. adults (59%) say abortion should be legal in all or most cases, while 39 per cent think abortion should be illegal in all or most cases. In other words, the general public attitude toward abortion is not that different between the two countries.

The substantial volume of anti-abortion tweets in the U.S. Twitter data might be due to the fact that Twitter is one of the popular channels for the U.S. through which anti-abortion citizens and organisations express their opinions that represent a minority in real life. This finding shows that researching Twitter as a proxy to general public opinions in real life might not be always credible. My thesis presents mixed findings on this matter. In the Irish dataset, the distribution of pro- and anti-abortion tweets (62.3% versus 11.6%) resembles the actual distribution of Yes and No votes in the referendum (66.4% versus 33.6%), and hence in this case, tweets in the Irish Twittersphere are a reliable proxy for offline Irish public opinions. On the other hand, in my U.S. dataset, although the national consensus is for pro-abortion rights (59% versus 39%; Pew Research Centre (2021b)), my Twitter dataset contains slightly more anti-abortion tweets than pro-abortion (30.6% versus 26.3%). Therefore, when researching Twitter to make inferences about offline social phenomena, it is essential to check the composition and distribution of the collected digital data in comparison to other offline census and poll results with a more representative sample of the entire population.

It is interesting that the U.S. anti-abortion users take to Twitter and participate in abortion discussions to the extent that their tweets outnumber pro-abortion tweets. The Irish anti-abortion users somehow lack the same level of enthusiasm. Why are anti-abortion publics in the U.S. so much more vocal on Twitter than the Irish counterparts? The rise of reactionary populism (Norris & Inglehart, 2019) and the ongoing Christian nationalist movements for the last couple of decades in the U.S. (Ferree et al., 2002; A. L. Whitehead & Perry, 2020) help the socially conservative communities in the country feel a sense of support from, and feel connected to, like-minded others, which consequently pushes them into political actions. It is not that Ireland does not have any reactionary right-wing populist tendencies, but the size and momentum of such populism might be much stronger in the U.S. than in

Ireland. In Ireland, the political momentum has been going rather in the opposite direction. Conservativism in Ireland has been fading, and the country has already experienced, in the 2015 same-sex marriage referendum, a large number of progressive citizens voting for a new zeitgeist of new Ireland which is for care, compassion, change, and love (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019; Field, 2018).

Lastly, another difference between the Irish and U.S. datasets is the distribution of different Twitter exchange dynamics. Twitter offers diverging communicative affordances, from tweeting one's original tweets, retweeting, quoting, and replying to other tweets. These affordances can indicate different discussion environments (e.g., dialogical vs. non-dialogical; agreeing vs. disagreeing environment) which can influence users' inclination to express incivility and intolerance. The Irish dataset seems to be less directly dialogical than the U.S. dataset. The Irish dataset is largely composed of retweets (65.7%), followed by quotes (20%), original tweets (11.1%), and lastly replies (3.2%). In the U.S. dataset, replies – which are the least popular affordance in the Irish dataset – are the second most popular affordance (12.3%), following retweets (72.9%). Quotes (8.4%) are less popular and original tweets (6.3%) are the least popular communicative option in the U.S. dataset. In short, the U.S. dataset consists more of dialogical and heterogeneous communications built through Replies, whereas the Irish dataset consists of less dialogical, homogeneous communications built through Quotes and Original tweets with few direct Replies.

6.2 Generalised Linear Model of incivility and intolerance in abortion discourse on the Irish and U.S. Twittersphere

6.2.1 H2 and H3 accepted: impacts of high-profile political and media events on incivility and intolerance

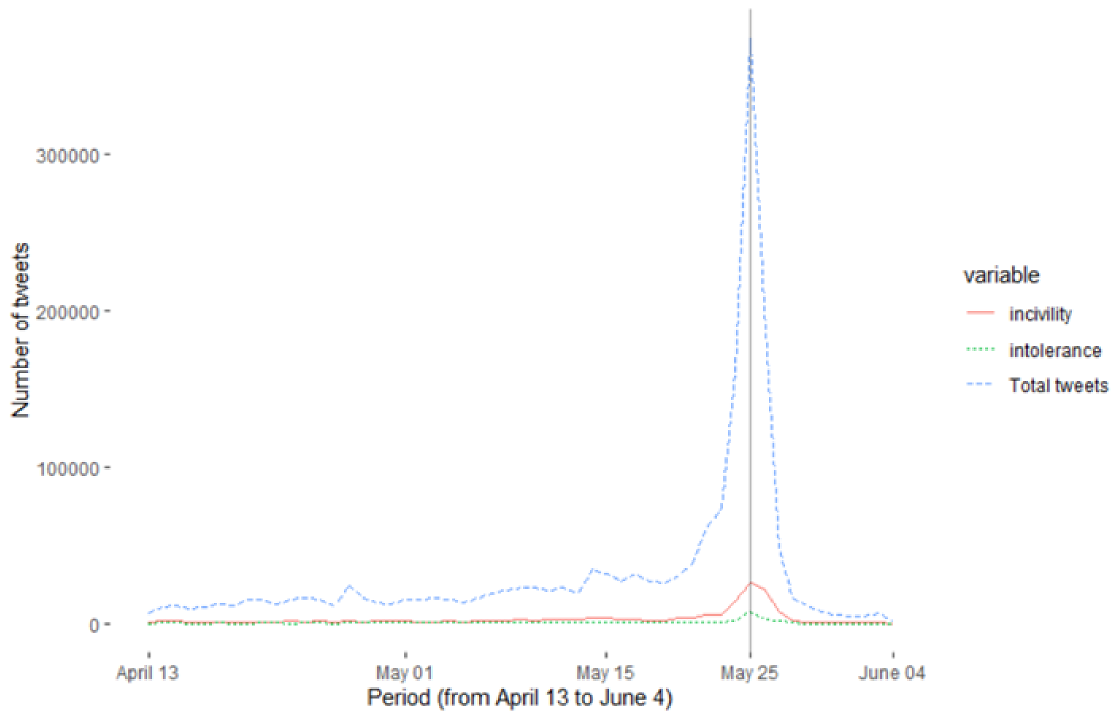
Timeline analysis results accept H2 and H3 that political events and media stories have impacts on the volume of incivility and intolerance. The following figure (Figure 6.1) shows the distribution of total tweets, incivility, and intolerance in the Irish Twitter dataset between 13th April and 4th June 2018. The number of total tweets, incivility, and intolerance drastically increased from the 24th (a day before the vote) and peaks on the voting day (the 25th). The impact of the referendum lingered on a day after the vote (the 26th), having a higher number of tweets than other days

across the referendum. A substantial proportion of total tweets (43%), incivility (39.27%) and intolerance (42.77%) in the Irish dataset were posted in these three days, 24-26th May 2018. The impact of the Irish referendum timeline on incivility and intolerance was consistent across users with different political positions (Figure 6.2). All pro-, anti-abortion, and neutral or ambiguous tweets had the highest peaks of incivility and intolerance around 25th May.

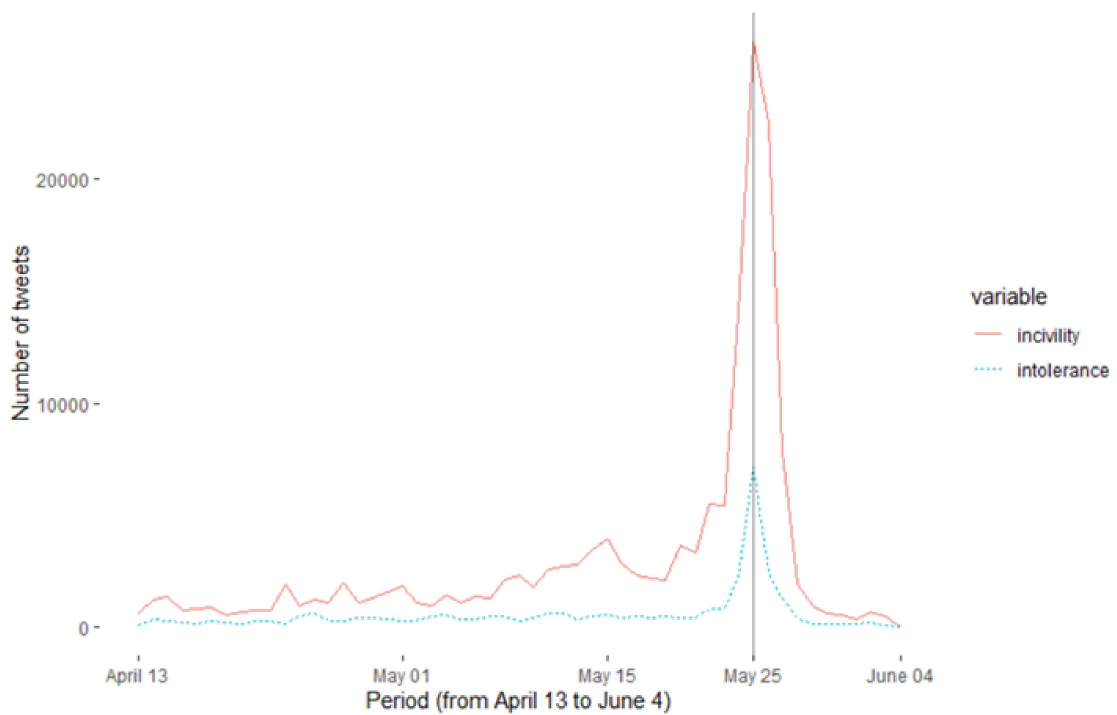
It can be inferred that pro- and anti-abortion Twitter users in the Irish abortion discourse expressed incivility and intolerance as the last spurt to promote their side to win the referendum. In the Irish Twittersphere, even when debating such an emotive topic as abortion, it was only during the final days and in the immediate aftermath that discourse took an uncivil and intolerant turn. This time-series analysis substantiates H2 that incivility and intolerance in the Irish abortion discourse significantly increase as it gets closer to the voting day than the earlier days in the referendum. Incivility and intolerance are political products that are hugely influenced by the polarised nature of abortion discourse and the heightened political tension as the referendum progresses.

Analysing the external political events and their impacts on incivility and intolerance in the U.S. abortion discourse is more challenging than in the Irish dataset. Total participation, incivility, and intolerance in the U.S. dataset had multiple peaks across the whole data collection period (Figure 6.3). I have explained earlier that more than a third of total incivility and intolerance in the Irish dataset was exhibited during the final days of the referendum. In contrast, in the U.S. dataset, the top three days with the highest number of total tweets per day, incivility, and intolerance only account for 5.2 per cent, 1 per cent, and 1 per cent respectively. In other words, incivility and intolerance in the Irish abortion discourse were largely concentrated around the referendum issue alone, whereas incivility and intolerance in the 2020 U.S. abortion discourse were related to multiple high-profile events dispersed throughout the data collection period. These events range from abortion bans during the Covid-19 outbreaks, Supreme Court Justice nomination after the death of Justice RBG, the presidential election in November, etc. The Black Lives Matter movement, ignited by the death of George Floyd Jr., an African American man murdered by police during an arrest on 25th May 2020, also impacted the public discussions about the racialised dimension of parenthood and abortion in the U.S.

Another noteworthy feature in the U.S. dataset is that the days with the maximum total participation did not always coincide with the days with the highest



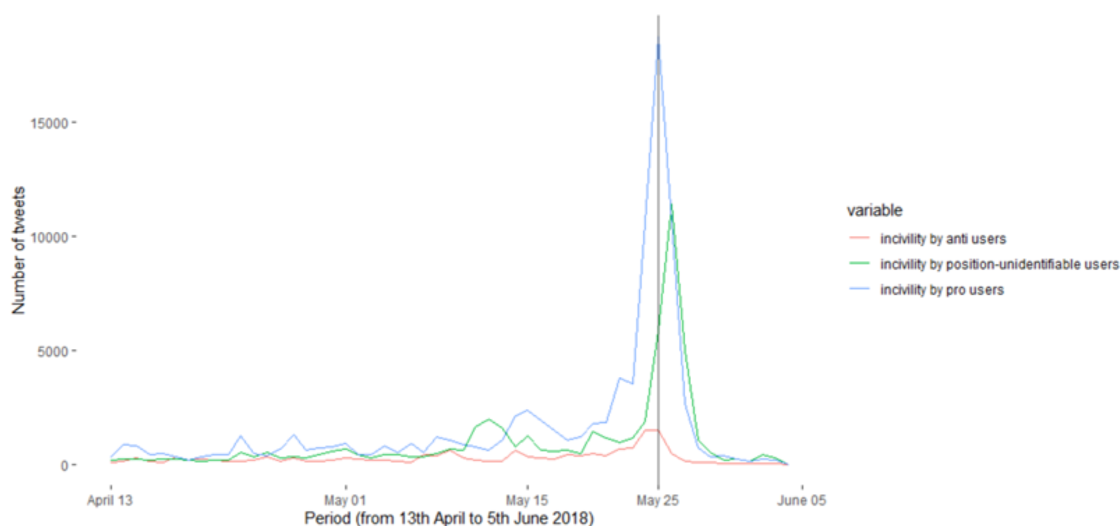
(a) The number of total tweets, incivility, and intolerance



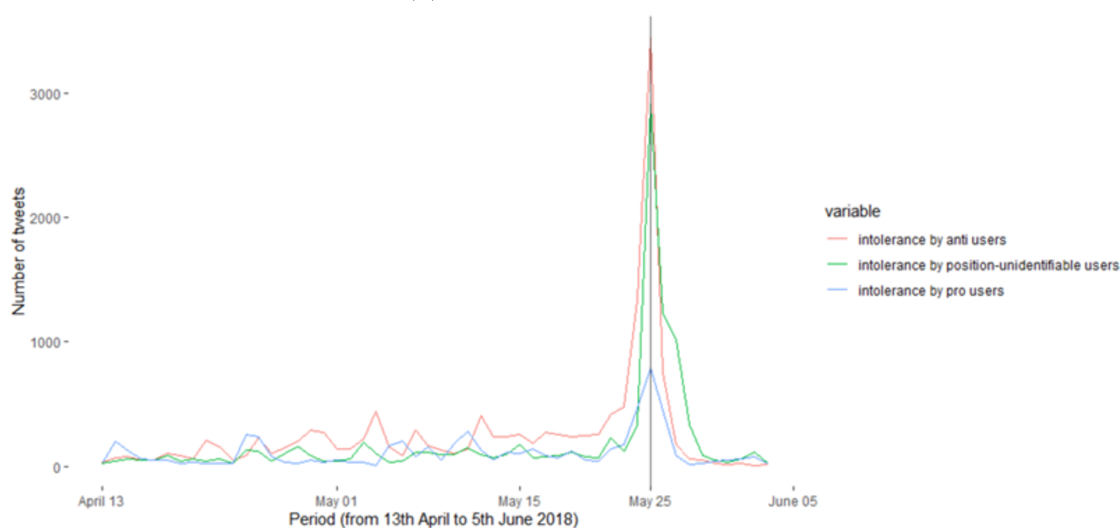
(b) The number of incivility and intolerance

Figure 6.1: The distribution of total tweets, incivility, and intolerance between 13th April and 4th June 2018 in the Irish Twitter data

amount of incivility and intolerance (Figure 6.3a) – although it was the case in the Irish dataset (Figure 6.1a). In the U.S. dataset, not every high-profile political or



(a) The number of incivility

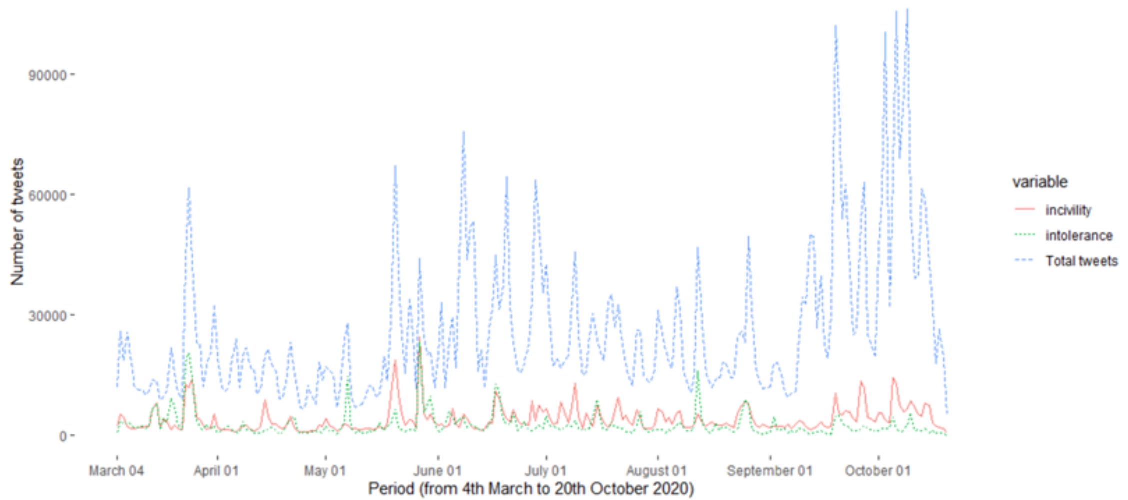


(b) The number of intolerance

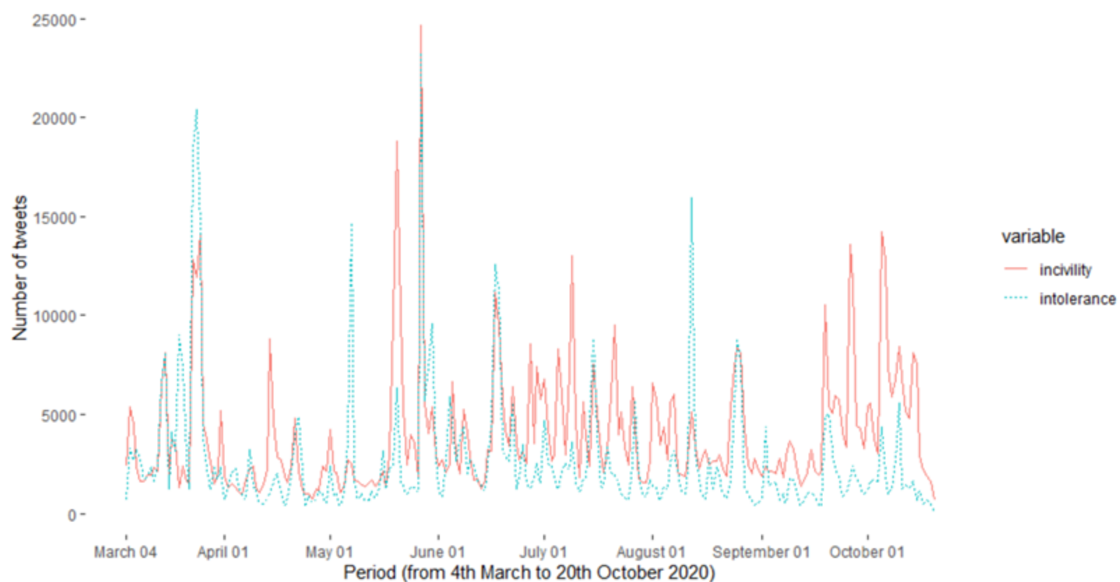
Figure 6.2: The distribution of incivility and intolerance tweeted by pro-abortion, anti-abortion, and position-unidentifiable users between 13th April and 4th June 2018 in the Irish Twitter data

media event and news story caused the amount of incivility and intolerance to skyrocket to the same extent or in the same manner. The overall tweet participations had their peaks during September and October, probably due to the upcoming presidential election in November (Figure 6.3a). Meanwhile, incivility and intolerance occurred more frequently in March and May than in September and October (Figure 6.3b). This suggests that external political and media events could mobilise the public's general political actions such as tweeting one's opinion, but only specific types of events could engender mass incivility and intolerance from the U.S. public.

To make them read clearer, I have clustered these peaks into three major moments in the U.S. abortion discourse: late March (the coronavirus relief bill and



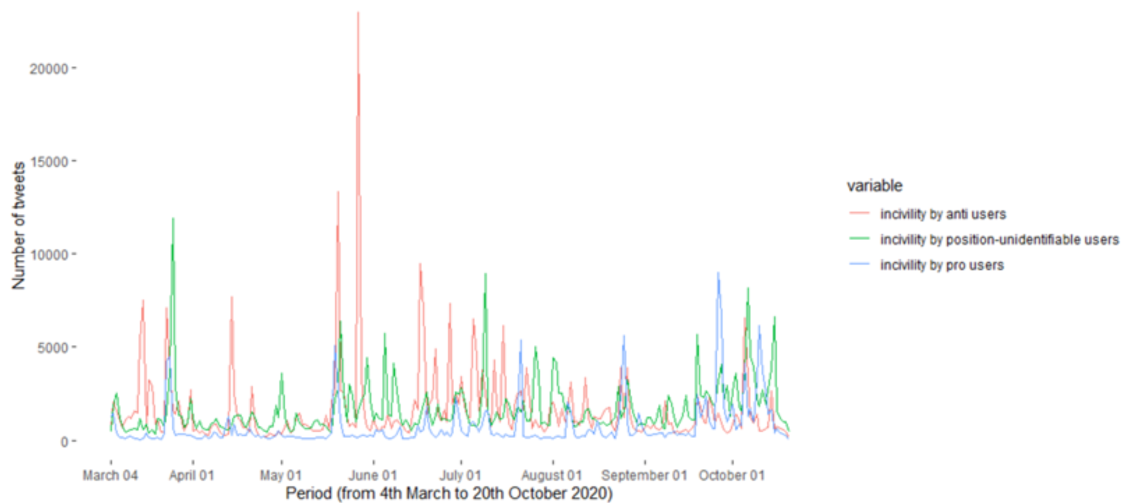
(a) The number of total tweets, incivility, and intolerance



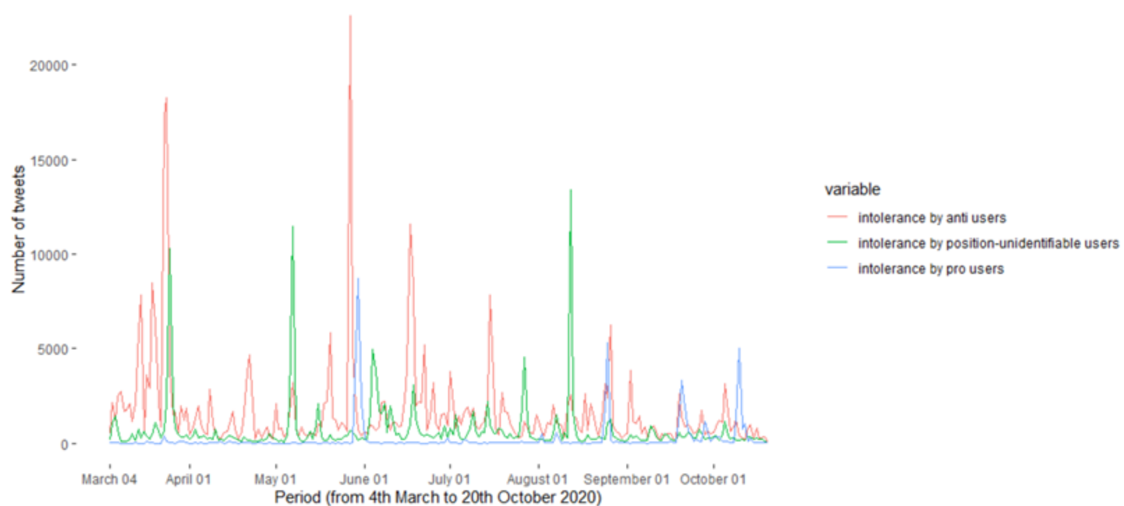
(b) The number of incivility and intolerancee

Figure 6.3: The distribution of total tweets, incivility, and intolerance between 4th March and 20th October 2020 in the U.S. Twitter data

abortion ban), late May to June (Planned Parenthood foetal part scandal, Black Lives Matter movements), and late September to October (a new Supreme Court Justice nomination after the death of Justice RBG) (Figures 6.3a and 6.3b). Let us look at the first sharp peak in March 2020. Spring 2020 in the U.S. is a turbulent month for abortion discourse. Late March showed sharp increases in incivility and intolerance from anti-abortion and position-unidentifiable users (Figures 6.4a and 6.4b). This incivility and intolerance were largely motivated by two political issues: an allegation regarding the coronavirus relief bill, and covid-related abortion bans in several states including Texas.



(a) The number of incivility



(b) The number of intolerance

Figure 6.4: The distribution of incivility and intolerance tweeted by pro-abortion, anti-abortion, and position-unidentifiable users between 4th March and 20th October 2020 in the U.S. Twitter data

The coronavirus relief bill: The U.S. House was debating a bill to provide financial aids to individuals and businesses affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. GOP wanted to include language from the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits the use of federal funds for abortion, into the covid relief bill, but Democrats rejected the demand. Conservative critics and anti-abortion websites like Life News accused House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that she got 'caught trying to sneak in abortion funding' into the coronavirus response stimulus package (News Week, 2020). Politifact, a fact-check institute partnered with Facebook, wrote that this claim is false and unsubstantiated (PolitiFact, 2020a), but the story was widely circulated on social

media platforms including Twitter. This story engendered strong incivility and intolerance not only from anti-abortion users but users who were neutral or ambiguous towards abortion. Anti-abortion users were indignant that Democrats were using this opportunity for their pro-abortion agenda, and users who were neutral or ambiguous to abortion were angry that the politicians were playing a political game with the pandemic emergency and with U.S. citizens' lives.

Another huge political event in March was abortion ban attempts at multiple states including Texas. State abortion bans resulted in a lot of heated opinion expressions, incivility, and intolerance – mostly from anti-abortion users. On 18th March, the federal Centres for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) recommended states and healthcare providers suspend non-essential medical, surgical, and dental procedures during the Covid-19 pandemic. Five days later, Texas interpreted this CMS order to ban abortion, characterising it as 'non-essential.' The ban forced abortion providers across Texas to immediately cancel almost all appointments for abortion. On 26th and 27th March, other states such as Ohio, Iowa, Alabama, Oklahoma joined the abortion ban attempts (Planned Parenthood, 2020). Pro-abortion organisations such as Planned Parenthood Federation of America, the Centre for Reproductive Rights, the ACLU, the Lawyering Project, and local lawyers filed suit against the abortion bans in several states (Planned Parenthood, 2020). The late March was full of legal ping-pongs between pro-abortion alliances and anti-abortion states. This 'banning non-essential abortion during the medical crisis' issue engendered a lot of passionate engagements from both pro- and anti-abortion users. U.S. anti-abortion users were infuriated that the abortion providers refused to temporarily stop 'killing babies' at least for a few weeks. Pro-abortion users were indignant that the states treated abortion as 'non-essential', when, in reality, it is a necessity for women in crisis pregnancy every day. But size-wise, the legal battles over the abortion ban generated stronger responses from anti-abortion users than pro-abortion users (Figure 6.4a and 6.4b).

Late May was another highly engaging month in the U.S. abortion discourse, with a lot of incivility and intolerance, especially from anti-abortion users (Figures 6.3b, 6.4a, 6.4b). On 27th May, Lila Rose, the founder of Live Action (an anti-abortion news and commentary organisation), tweeted breaking news that Planned Parenthood officials admitted under oath to selling aborted baby parts for profit (Live Action, 2020). The news story also used an 'undercover investigative video' filmed in 2015 by David Daleiden, anti-abortion activist for the Centre for Medical Progress (CMP), as evidence to substantiate their allegation. Planned Parenthood

made a long counterargument on their official website, explaining how the 'under-cover' video was heavily edited and the companies behind the video were known anti-abortion extremists (Planned Parenthood, 2015). The governmental organisation, House Committee on Oversight and Reform (2015), also published YouTube videos and web reports, rebutting this anti-abortion claim as fiction. Regardless of the truth, this so-called Planned Parenthood foetal part scandal engendered heated incivility and intolerance from a number of anti-abortion users on Twitter.

Late May was a politically active month for the national Black Lives Matter movements, fighting against systemic and institutional anti-black racism. This civil rights movements language was adopted into the 2020 U.S. abortion discourse, especially by the anti-abortion side. Anti-abortion users used slogans such as 'Black baby lives matter' and argued that Planned Parenthood and the abortion industry deliberately target Black communities. Many tweets argued that Planned Parenthood committed 'Black genocide' through abortions and Margaret Sanger – the founder of PP – was a racist eugenicist who 'wanted to exterminate the Negro population' (Life News, 2020). This accusation of black genocide through Planned Parenthood abortion services has been used constantly in the U.S. abortion discourse for a long time, although PolitiFact has flagged this as false information multiple times (e.g., PolitiFact, 2015a).

Lastly, another cluster of high peaks of incivility and intolerance occurred in late September and October. These months were a distinctive period when pro-abortion incivility and intolerance outnumbered anti-abortion incivility and intolerance (Figures 6.4a and 6.4b). On 18th September 2020, Supreme Court Justice RBG passed away, and it opened controversies over the nomination and confirmation of her successor, about six weeks before the presidential election. On the 26th, President Trump nominated Judge Amy Coney Barrett to fill the vacancy (ABC News, 2020). Following the nomination, Barrett's judicial philosophies, speeches, political views were scrutinised and questioned by the Judiciary Committee hearing, mainstream media, and the public (ABC News, 2020). Pro-abortion users especially problematised her strong anti-abortion records, claiming that she was, for this reason, unfit for the role of Supreme Court Justice. In 2006, Barrett signed an anti-abortion advertisement by St. Joseph County Right to Life (The Hill, 2020b). In 2013, Barrett signed another ad against *Roe v. Wade* in Notre Dame's student newspaper and described the Roe decision as having 'killed 55 million unborn children.' In the same year, she also spoke at two anti-abortion events at Norte Dame University where she worked as a law professor at the time (Huffington Post, 2020). During her nom-

ination acceptance speech, Barrett said, ‘A judge must apply the law as written. Judges are not policymakers, and they must be resolute in setting aside any policy views they might hold’ – meaning that her personal belief will not interfere with her legal decisions (Bloomberg Law, 2020a). Regardless of Barrett’s words, a number of pro-abortion users on Twitter expressed their anger, frustration, and concerns over the future of the Supreme Court with the 6-3 conservative majority court, and the future of *Roe v. Wade* getting overturned. The pro-abortion public’s anger and concern seems to have influenced their language to be especially uncivil and intolerant at this point in the data collection period. Overall, findings show that incivility and intolerance in the U.S. abortion discourse on Twitter were affected by external political and media events (H3 accepted), like with the Irish case (H2 accepted).

6.2.2 H4 partially accepted: issue position, incivility, and intolerance

Table 6.2 summarises the results of general linear models of the Irish and U.S. data. Log odds are transformed to odds ratios to facilitate interpretation, and 95 per cent confidence intervals are reported in addition to p-values. CI is especially important in big data studies to complement the error-prone nature of p-values (Lin et al., 2013). In the Irish dataset, anti-abortion tweets are less uncivil but more intolerant, whereas pro-abortion tweets are more uncivil but less intolerant. In contrast, in the U.S. dataset, anti-abortion tweets are more uncivil and more intolerant than pro-abortion tweets. Abortion issue positions have different impacts on incivility and intolerance between Ireland and the U.S. Hence, H4 is fully accepted in the U.S. dataset but partially accepted only for intolerance in the Irish dataset.

6.2.3 H5 accepted: Issue partisanship, incivility, and intolerance

For this analysis, I compute the Gini coefficients for inequality in the distribution of tweets by users (Barberá & Rivero, 2015; Theocharis et al., 2020). Gini coefficient is used to capture coordination dynamics on Twitter, namely whether a small set of users are leading the uncivil and intolerant online communications (Steinert-Threlkeld, 2017; Theocharis et al., 2020). A Gini index close to 1 means that all incivility or intolerance is tweeted by one user and everyone else in the data never tweets any incivility or intolerance. In contrast, a Gini index close to 0 means the opposite that all users are equally responsible for uncivil and intolerant tweets

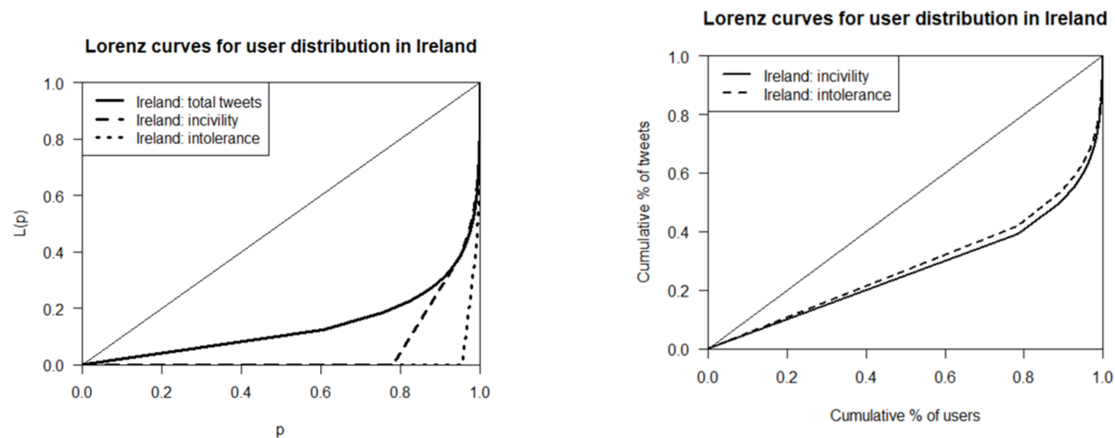
	Ireland				U.S.			
Independent variables	Incivility		Intolerance		Incivility		Intolerance	
	OR ($e\beta$)	CI [2.5%, 97.5%]	OR ($e\beta$)	CI [2.5%, 97.5%]	OR ($e\beta$)	CI [2.5%, 97.5%]	OR ($e\beta$)	CI [2.5%, 97.5%]
(Intercept)	0.07***	[0.07, 0.07]	0.01***	[0.01, 0.01]	0.15***	[0.15, 0.15]	0.01***	[0.01, 0.01]
Gender-unidentifiable	1.09***	[1.08, 1.1]	1.33***	[1.29, 1.37]	1.06***	[1.05, 1.07]	1.04***	[1.03, 1.04]
Male	1.10***	[1.008, 1.11]	1.39***	[1.34, 1.43]	1.04***	[1.03, 1.05]	1.09***	[1.08, 1.1]
Anti-abortion	0.63***	[0.61, 0.64]	4.19***	[4.07, 4.32]	1.22***	[1.21, 1.22]	3.62***	[3.6, 3.64]
Pro-abortion	0.83***	[0.82, 0.84]	0.31***	[0.3, 0.33]	0.74***	[0.73, 0.74]	0.49***	[0.49, 0.5]
Quote	2.15***	[2.1, 2.2]	1.97***	[1.86, 2.08]	1.65***	[1.63, 1.66]	1.58***	[1.55, 1.61]
Reply	1.77***	[1.71, 1.83]	1.26***	[1.16, 1.36]	1.25***	[1.24, 1.27]	1.33***	[1.31, 1.36]
Retweet	1.44***	[1.41, 1.47]	1.47***	[1.4, 1.55]	0.83***	[0.82, 0.84]	2.72***	[2.68, 2.77]
Incivility			4.51***	[4.39, 4.64]			4.08***	[4.05, 4.1]
Intolerance	4.5***	[4.38, 4.62]			4.11***	[4.08, 4.13]		

Signif. Codes: 0 ‘***’ 0.001 ‘**’ 0.01 ‘*’ 0.05 ‘.’

Table 6.2: Odds ratio and 95% CI of incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. Twitter data

(Theocharis et al., 2020).

The Irish dataset contains 348,141 unique users. The Gini coefficient for the entire distribution of users-tweets is 0.73. The top 1 per cent (10%) most active users in the Irish dataset are responsible for 41.5 per cent (71.8%) of total tweets. Among 348,141 users who have tweeted at least once during the Irish data collection, 22.9 per cent users (n = 76,295) tweet incivility at least once, and 4.5 per cent users (n = 15,728) send intolerance at least once. The Gini coefficients are 0.88 for incivility and 0.97 for intolerance. The top 1 per cent (5%) users who actively express incivility tweet 41 per cent (100%) of total incivility. The inequality of distribution is even larger for intolerance that almost all intolerance in the Irish dataset is tweeted by the top 1 per cent users. Figure 6.5a visualises the distribution of users in the Irish dataset who have tweeted abortion-related tweets at least once, using Lorenz curves.



(a) Amongst users who tweeted at least once

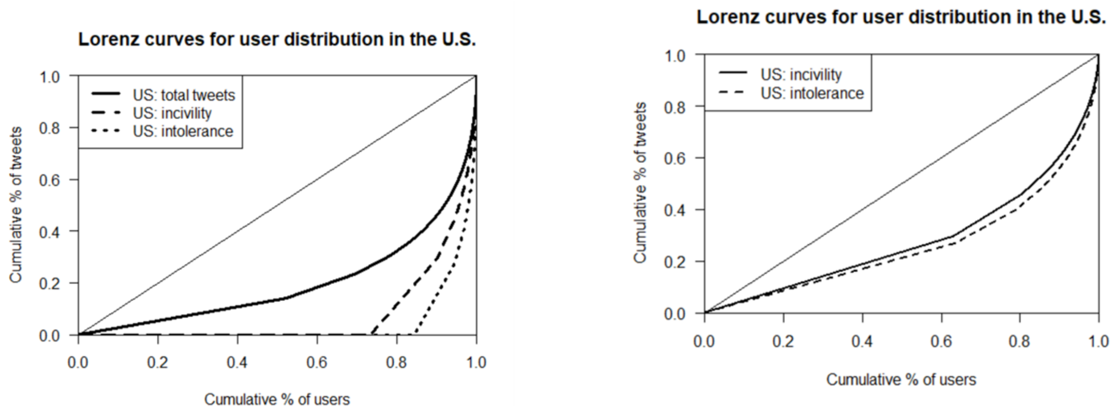
(b) Amongst users who tweeted incivility or intolerance at least once

Figure 6.5: Lorenz curves for user coordination dynamics in the Irish data

I also compute the Gini coefficients for the Irish dataset amongst the users who tweet incivility or intolerance at least once. Among the 76,295 users have tweeted incivility at least once, the Gini coefficient for incivility is 0.46. The top 1 per cent (10%) of users who express incivility is responsible for 23.7 per cent (50.2%) of the entire incivilities. Among the intolerance-expressing users (n = 15,728, 4.5% of the entire users in the Irish data), the Gini coefficient for intolerance is 0.43. The top 1 per cent (10%) of users who express intolerance is responsible for 21.2 per cent (46.3%) of the entire intolerances. That means, even among Twitter users who express incivility and intolerance, the top 10 per cent most active users account for the half or almost half of entire incivility and intolerance sent on Twitter during the abortion referendum discussions. Figure 6.5b visualises the distribution of incivility

and intolerance amongst users who have tweeted at least one incivility or intolerance in the Irish dataset, using Lorenz curves.

In the U.S. dataset, the Gini coefficients are slightly smaller than in the Irish data. The U.S. dataset contains 1,630,989 unique users. The Gini coefficient for the entire tweet distribution is 0.6. The top 1 per cent (10%) users in the U.S. dataset tweet 20.2 per cent (55.8%) of the total tweets. Among the users who tweet at least once in the U.S. abortion discourse, 435,309 users (26.7%) send incivility at least once, and 256,267 users (15.7%) express intolerance at least once. The Gini coefficient for the U.S. incivility is 0.85, and for intolerance is 0.92. The top 1 per cent (5%, 10%) of users are responsible for 27.1 per cent (54.1%, 100%) of incivility and for 39.5 per cent (73.1%, 100%) of intolerance. The Gini coefficients for the distribution of incivility and intolerance are larger than for the entire tweet, indicating that a smaller number of users are actively partaking in the communication of incivility or intolerance in the U.S. abortion discourse on Twitter. Figure 6.6a visualises the Lorenz curves for the distribution of total tweets, incivility, and intolerance in the U.S. dataset.



(a) Amongst users who tweeted at least once

(b) Amongst users who tweeted incivility or intolerance at least once

Figure 6.6: Lorenz curves for user coordination dynamics in the U.S. data

I also compute the Gini coefficients amongst the users in the U.S. dataset who at least once expressed incivility and intolerance. Among those users who express incivility at least once, the Gini coefficient is 0.43. The top 1 per cent (10%) of users who tweet incivility account for 12.2 per cent (44%) of the entire incivility in the U.S. abortion discourse. Among the users who tweet intolerance at least once, the Gini coefficient is 0.48. The top 1 per cent (10%) of users who tweet intolerance are responsible for 14.3 per cent (44.8%) of the entire intolerance in the dataset. It can

be inferred that even among users who express incivility and intolerance, it is the top 10 per cent of the most highly active users who tweeted more than 44 per cent of the entire incivility and intolerance. Figure 6.6b visualises the Lorenz curves for the distribution of incivility and intolerance among users who have expressed incivility and intolerance at least once in the U.S. dataset.

Overall, this suggests that only a small number of 'superparticipants' and 'superposters' (Graham & Wright, 2014) are responsible for most incivility and intolerance in both Irish and U.S. Twittersphere (H5 accepted). Compared to the 'general' public who do not tweet much about abortion policies, expressions of incivility and intolerance are distinctive behaviours of a small set of issue partisans. However, when it is compared among the issue partisans who tweet at least one incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse, the level of coordination gets more significant – meaning that expressing incivility and intolerance is, to some extent, a common behaviour among the issue partisans.

6.2.4 H6 partially accepted: gender, incivility, and intolerance

The odds ratios and CIs indicate that gender does not have a meaningful impact on Twitter users' incivility and intolerance (Table 2). The odds ratios show that male users in the Irish dataset are 1.1 times and 1.39 times more likely to express incivility and intolerance than female users. And male users in the U.S. dataset are 1.04 and 1.09 times more likely to express incivility and intolerance than female users. Despite the small p-values, the effect sizes are relatively small and insignificant compared to other stronger predictors such as anti-abortion issue position and Twitter affordances (6.2). The only exception is the effect size of male gender on intolerant tweets in the Irish dataset: Irish users with male names are 1.39 times more likely to express intolerance than Irish female users. Therefore, to summarise, gender only has a statistically significant relationship with incivility and intolerance in both Irish and U.S. datasets with little empirical significance (H6 partially accepted).

6.2.5 H7 rejected: anonymity, incivility, and intolerance

Gender-unidentifiable pseudonyms and anonymity seem not to have a strong effect on Twitter users' incivility and intolerance (Table 2), contrasting with the previous findings (Fox et al., 2015; Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Rowe, 2015; Santana, 2014). Anonymous users in the Irish and U.S. dataset express more incivility and intolerance

than users with female names, but less than users with male names. Incivility in the U.S. dataset is the only exception where anonymous users express more incivility than users with male names, but even for the incivility in the U.S. datasets, the effect sizes are extremely small.

6.2.6 H8 and H10 accepted, H9 rejected: Tweet context, incivility, and intolerance

My regression analysis also reveals that Twitter affordances and discussion environments are relevant predictors of incivility and intolerance (Table 2). Replies are more uncivil and more intolerant than Original tweets in both Irish and U.S. Twittersphere (H8 accepted). This suggests that incivility on Twitter is often dialogical and responsive. This finding substantiates previous works in which incivility is found to be a sign of active inter-user engagements in digital public spheres (Masullo Chen et al., 2019; Rossini, 2020). This uncivil dialogue and communication between Twitter users may not be rational-critical in a strictly Habermasian ideal, but it is a form of inter-group engagement that can open the door to further deliberation and persuasion between different civil societies (Mansbridge et al., 2012; Parkinson, 2012; Rossini, 2019; I. M. Young, 2002).

However, incivility is more popularly expressed in a homogeneous and agreeing discussion environment (measured through Quotes) than in a heterogeneous and disagreeing environment (measured through Replies) (H9 rejected). This may suggest that in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse, incivility occurs more frequently in an agreeing, homogeneous discussion environment to express partisan enthusiasm and endorsement of like-minded views, instead of heated criticisms and arguments across different views. This result challenges previous finding such as Rossini's (2020) study of Brazilian Facebook and news website comments. Rossini (2020) finds that incivility occurs in a context of heated disagreements, indicating meaningful discursive engagements. The difference might be due to how my big data study operationalises homogeneous and heterogeneous discussion environments, simply based on Twitter affordances (Garimella et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2019; Villa-Cox et al., 2020). Future research could include an investigation into this matter for more evidence. Intolerance also seems to occur more frequently in the context of Retweets and Quotes than in Replies (H10 accepted). This substantiates the notion that intolerance occurs more frequently in a closed circle of like-minded people who are endorsing and propagating views that they already agree with. This finding may also indicate that user networks built through the Quotes function can be used to collect rich data

about uncivil and intolerant behaviours on Twitter, as Quotes seem to contain a larger amount of incivility and intolerance than Replies.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide and discuss answers to RQ1 and ten hypotheses that allow us to understand demographic and contextual factors that can influence Twitter users' expression of incivility and intolerance:

RQ1. What are the dynamics and intensity of political incivility and intolerance in abortion policy discussions in the Irish and U.S. Twittersphere?

H1. The U.S. dataset will contain significantly more incivility and intolerance than in the Irish dataset (accepted).

H2. In the Irish dataset, the volume of total tweets posted per day, incivility, and intolerance will significantly increase as the voting day approaches, compared to the earlier days during the referendum (accepted).

H3. In the U.S. dataset, the volume of total tweets posted per day, incivility, and intolerance will increase around high-profile abortion-related events (e.g., state/federal court decisions regarding abortion ban, news stories regarding abortion) compared to uneventful periods (accepted).

H4. In both Ireland and the U.S., anti-abortion tweets are significantly more likely to express incivility and intolerance than pro-abortion tweets (partially accepted).

H5. A large portion of incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse on Twitter are conducted by a small number of highly active users with strong issue partisanship (accepted).

H6. In both Ireland and the U.S., Twitter users with male names are more likely to express incivility and intolerance than users with female names (partially accepted).

H7. In both Ireland and the U.S., Twitter users with gender-unidentifiable pseudonyms are significantly more likely to express incivility and intolerance than users with gender-identifiable first names (rejected).

H8. Twitter users in Ireland and the U.S. will be more likely to express incivility when they are replying to other users directly than when they are the original poster of a tweet (accepted).

H9 Twitter users in Ireland and the U.S. will be more likely to express intolerance when they are retweeting and quoting other tweets than when they are replying to

other tweets (rejected).

H10. Twitter users in Ireland and the U.S. will be more likely to express incivility when they are replying to other tweets than retweeting and quoting other tweets (accepted).

6.3.1 Discussion and conclusion

The general linear model shows that uncivil and intolerant tweet behaviours are motivated by diverse demographic and communicative contexts. The odds ratio and 95 per cent Confidence Intervals for the regression model are plotted in Figure 6.7 for visualisation of the distinct effects associated with incivility and intolerance. In short, the strong predictors of incivility and intolerance are high-profile political events and policy issues, abortion issue position, issue partisanship, and Twitter communication context. Male gender might be related to more intolerance in the Irish dataset, but the same meaningful impact of the male gender is not found in uncivil tweets in the Irish dataset and uncivil and intolerant tweets in the U.S. dataset. Also, in contrast to previous research findings, in this big data study, anonymity does not have any empirically significant relationship with incivility and intolerance. Lastly, although I have taken a sympathetic, critical approach to the potential of incivility in deliberative politics, I discuss the concerning relationship between incivility and intolerance, becoming each other's strongest predictor in abortion discourse.

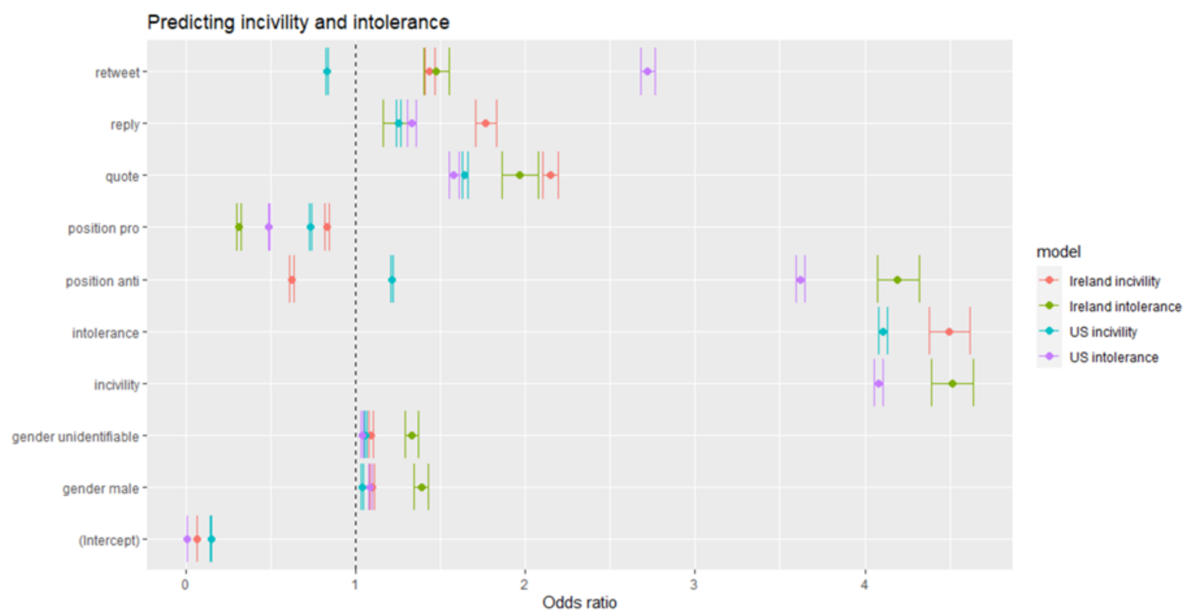


Figure 6.7: Visualisation of odds ratio and 95% CI of incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. datasets

The U.S. dataset contains a larger amount of incivility and intolerance than the Irish data

The findings of the statistical analysis in this chapter show that incivility and intolerance are more prevalent in the U.S. abortion discourse on Twitter than in the Irish one. However, this does not mean that the personalities of the users in the U.S. Twittersphere is necessarily more uncivil and intolerant than those of the Irish Twittersphere. It is important to recall that incivility and intolerance are defined as language practices, actualised in citizens' thinking and arguing processes. Some citizens choose to express incivility and intolerance for various reasons: because of discussion context, political situations, available rhetorical resources and repertoires, or because of the presence of like-minded people who will support one's incivility and intolerance. Hence, I would summarise political situations in the U.S. which might have led the U.S. citizens to use incivility and intolerance more frequently on Twitter than the Irish public.

First, the turbulent political situations in 2020 U.S. might have influenced Twitter users to express incivility and intolerance more heavily than in the 2018 Irish abortion referendum discussions. Both countries had high-profile political events such as the 2018 abortion referendum in Ireland and the 2020 presidential election in the U.S. However, on top of the presidential election, the U.S. had a multitude of different high-profile political events dispersed throughout the data collection, such as abortion bans during the Covid-19, coronavirus relief bills, the Black Lives Matter movements, Supreme Court Justice nomination, and so forth. U.S. pro-, anti-abortion and neutral/ambiguous users expressed heightened incivility and intolerance over different events as they perceived those events to be a threat to their core beliefs and values. Because of the political complexities of the 2020 U.S., there were so many peaks of incivility and intolerance in the U.S. dataset, whereas there was only one giant peak of incivility and intolerance in the Irish dataset. Incivility and intolerance drastically rose in the Irish Twittersphere when the referendum voting date was around the corner.

Second, the U.S. dataset has a larger portion of anti-abortion tweets than the Irish dataset, which are more likely to contain intolerance than pro-abortion tweets. My regression analysis finds that the anti-abortion issue position is one of the strongest predictors of incivility and intolerance in both Irish and U.S. abortion discourse. This does not mean that the U.S. at a national level is more anti-abortion than Ireland. The national consensus in both countries has a pro-abortion majority (Field, 2018; Pew Research Centre, 2021b). Rather, it seems that the U.S.

Twittersphere seems to have attracted a number of engagements from a reactionary anti-abortion force who are a minority in number at a national level, gathering on Twitter and super-posting their anti-abortion views with strongly uncivil and intolerant language.

High-profile events and issues affect users' political participation, but only specific events engender mass incivility and intolerance

Earlier research works on online incivility such as Coe et al. (2014)'s find that certain topics like political and economic issues generate more uncivil comments than other less-controversial topics. Theocharis et al. (2020) similarly find that high-profile political events and specific policy issues incite more incivility than others. The findings in the U.S. dataset complement these earlier findings by providing evidence that the impact of political events and contentious topics on incivility and intolerance vary depending on the nature of the political issue and the issue positions of users. In other words, different events have different impacts on pro-, anti-abortion, and neutral/ambiguous users and their expression of incivility and intolerance.

In the U.S. dataset, the communication of incivility and intolerance rises following specific political and media events that appeal to specific partisan concerns of pro-, anti-abortion users, and users who are neutral or ambiguous to abortion. Pro-abortion users in the U.S. abortion discourse are more likely to express incivility or intolerance regarding the nomination and confirmation of a new Supreme Court Justice to success Justice RBG, due to the perceived threat of a conservative majority Supreme Court which can attempt to overturn the *Roe* decision in the future. In contrast, anti-abortion users are motivated to express incivility and intolerance by perceived corruption and immorality of Planned Parenthood. Also, anti-abortion users express a significant amount of incivility and intolerance, adopting the language from the BLM that Planned Parenthood is a white supremacist organisation deliberately exterminating the black race. Users who are neutral or ambiguous toward abortion are more likely to express incivility or intolerance over the government measures to the impact of coronavirus including the coronavirus relief bills.

Incivility and intolerance are largely right-wing phenomena, but left-wing politics is not free from them

My finding shows that intolerance seems to be a distinctively conservative phenomenon in both Ireland and the U.S. abortion discourse. This substantiates exist-

ing scholarly discussions about bad civil society, making explicit the inherent connection between incivility, intolerance, and reactionary right-wing populism (Krzyżanowski et al., 2021; Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017; Ruzza, 2009). My finding also shows that the pro-abortion, liberal-progressive discourse is not free from the concern of incivility. This finding reminds Berry and Sobieraj's (2013) findings in their study of outrage speech[2] from the U.S. left and right-wing contents. The authors found that the U.S. liberal political contents are 'quite nasty in character,' but conservatives are 'even nastier' (p.56). My finding from this regression analysis is another evidence showing that the left-wing discourse from the West is not free from the concern of uncivil politics. Incivility can be a left-wing problem as much as a right-wing problem. More research is needed to reveal the volume and nature of left-wing incivility and intolerance.

A small set of 'superposters' dominates uncivil and intolerant discourse

H5 results suggest that only a few 'superparticipants' and 'superposters' (Graham & Wright, 2014) are responsible for most incivility and intolerance in both Irish and U.S. datasets. So, although incivility is a common behaviour for angry citizens on Twitter across diverse political and policy issues (Theocharis et al., 2020), when it is a specific issue public with political polarisation and issue partisanship, only a small subset of users are responsible for many of the uncivil and intolerant exchanges. In both Ireland and the U.S. Twittersphere, the portion of users who tweet most of incivility and/or intolerance in abortion policy discourse is less than 5-10 per cent, and less than 1 per cent (in the case of intolerance in the Irish dataset) of all users who have tweeted at least once during the 2018 Irish referendum or 2020 U.S. abortion policy discussions. In other words, for every 100 people on Twitter, there are less than 10 people, or even only one person, who is actively and repeatedly expressing incivility and intolerance in the digital public deliberation. Even among users who have tweeted at least one incivility or intolerance in the Irish and U.S. dataset, the top 10 per cent of such users are responsible for half or almost half of the entire incivility and intolerance in the datasets. So, even amongst users who have partisanship, superposters quantitatively dominate the uncivil and intolerant communications.

[2] Berry and Sobieraj's (2013) model of outrage speech overlaps with my definition of incivility and intolerance to some extent. Berry and Sobieraj define that outrage is a subset of incivility: 'In a sense, outrage is incivility writ large [...] not every incivility is outrage' (p.17). The authors identify outrage speech as a genre with distinctive speech characteristics such as insulting language, name-calling, emotional language, hyperbolic exaggeration, etc.

The fact that the small number of superposters are dominating the exchanges of uncivil, and intolerant communications is potentially harmful to public deliberation, given that it increases participatory inequalities amongst citizens and subsequent inequalities in policy outcomes (Klein, 2018). Users with strong issue partisanship differ from other members of the public in terms of communicative style (incivility) and extremity of attitudes and actions (intolerance). If partisan voices are strongly represented in the Twitter issue public, their loud voices are likely to be heard more by politicians, policymakers, news media, and other citizens, whereas the voices of the citizens with moderate views are rather unnoticed. This distorts the public and elite perception of what the actual public opinion on abortion is. Subsequently, to please their hyper-partisan electoral base, populist politicians might reproduce the uncivil and intolerant speech and advocate for more radical abortion policies, pushing abortion discourse to be more polarised than it needs to be.

However, the detection of a small number of superposters can also be a positive finding, relieving the common concern over the health and democratic quality of digital public spheres such as Twitter. The Gini coefficients and Lorenz curves indicate that incivility and intolerance are indeed uncommon activities among the digital public even in the discussion of emotional, sensitive, and polarised topics like abortion. Even when citizens post a tweet with incivility and intolerance, most of these users do not repeatedly engage in such uncivil and intolerant communications. Only a handful of users are responsible for most incivility and intolerance in abortion policy discussions on Twitter. Apart from the uncivil and intolerant superposters, political communications among the general public on Twitter mostly manifest characteristics of civil and tolerant communication.

Gender has little impact on user expressions of political incivility and intolerance

In both Irish and U.S. datasets, users with male names are only slightly more likely to express incivility and intolerance than users with female names. Irish users with male and female names express incivility to almost the same extent, and U.S. users with female and male names also express similar amounts of incivility and intolerance. Intolerance in the Irish dataset is slightly more closely associated with users with male names, but the effect size is relatively small. The effect sizes of gender are insignificant compared to other major predictors of incivility and intolerance such as anti-abortion positions, tweet affordances and contexts with much bigger odds ratios. This indicates that on Twitter, women and men on the Internet do not

significantly differ in terms of their language in political deliberation. Whereas previous surveys find that uncivil and intolerant discourse (e.g., racism, reactionary authoritarian populism) is dominated by male voices (Berry & Sobieraj, 2013; Norris & Inglehart, 2019), such differences seem to be discourse-dependent. Both women and men on Twitter, in Ireland and the U.S. abortion discourse, employ incivility and intolerance to a similar extent. Possibly, the very nature of abortion – often framed as a women's rights and feminist issue – motivates women on Twitter to engage with others with uncivil and intolerant language. Gendered rhetoric and dynamics of incivility and intolerance might require further research.

Incivility and intolerance in political discussions is not affected by anonymity

In this dataset, anonymity does not have a strong effect on a user's tendency to express incivility and intolerance neither in Ireland nor in the U.S. Twittersphere. This challenges previous findings observed in several papers, in which anonymity is said to lead social media users to behave worse towards each other (Clean up the Internet, 2020; Fox et al., 2015; Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Rowe, 2015; Santana, 2014). Clean up the Internet, an independent U.K. organisation, suggests that restricting misuse of anonymity is crucial for dealing with online harm. This would include: giving users an option to verify their identity, seeing who is verified or not, and blocking interaction with unverified, anonymous users (Clean up the Internet, 2020).

However, tackling incivility and intolerance might require more than restricting anonymity, since anonymity might not be a strong predictor of uncivil and intolerant behaviours in political debates and discussions like abortion discourse. Restricting anonymity and user verification can be effective for certain types of antisocial and offensive activities such as cyberbullying and online harassment. But, when it comes to public debates over polarised political issues like abortion, incivility and intolerance might not be motivated primarily by anonymity and disinhibition. Incivility and intolerance in political spheres have special natures, different from everyday inter-personal rudeness. To some extent, Twitter users might have posted hostile, uncivil, and intolerant things to one another in abortion discourse because they perceive their incivility and intolerance as a 'righteous' and 'just' thing to say, and not because they are typically disinhibited to say or do antisocial things that they would have never said or done in real life. Therefore, political incivility and intolerance needs to be tackled in our political and communicative culture, on top of platform-based measures like restricting the misuse of anonymity and censoring and banning

anti-democratic accounts and contents. I will discuss possible suggestions in more depth in Chapter 9.

Intolerance prevails in a homogeneous discussion environment, but incivility is frequently exchanged in both homogeneous and heterogeneous environments

This thesis has emphasised that incivility and intolerance are understood as communicative behaviours. The empirical findings in this chapter show that incivility and intolerance in both Irish and U.S. datasets are influenced by Twitter affordances and discussion environment. Twitter users express more incivility and intolerance in dialogical and responsive contexts. The contextual difference between incivility and intolerance is that incivility rises from both homogeneous and heterogeneous discussion environments whereas intolerance is exchanged more in a homogeneous environment. This corroborates previous research (Masullo Chen et al., 2019; Rossini, 2020) that incivility can serve the needs of public deliberation by prompting inter-group engagements. Masullo Chen & Lu (2017) also find that online incivility about abortion issues incites aggressive feelings, which in turn increases users' intention to participate in the abortion issue. Rossini (2020) also finds that online incivility is associated with meaningful deliberative features such as justified opinion expression, and hence serves as more than just empty offensive shouting. If one theorises that an engaged and passionate electorate is desirable, this might show that incivility has some role in provoking political actions.

However, some would disagree, arguing that the electorate who are politically activated on behalf of emotional volatility and hostility is normatively bad for democracy (Mason, 2018). It may sound like a good thing, on one hand, that uncivil and anger-driven communications drive more citizens to talk more about politics. But then, on the other hand, the question is what kinds of participation and what quality of engagements can be generated from emotion and incivility charged communications. This thesis has argued that the very role of public spheres is to encourage inter-group engagements to mobilise diverse issues, information, and perspectives that are essential to generate a well-informed and well-considered public opinion in society (Habermas, 1996, 2006a). Then it points to a concern that uncivil and intolerant types of communications within an exclusionary, homogeneous environment do not contribute to public deliberation in a system-enhancing way (Mansbridge et al., 2012; Parkinson, 2012). Uncivil tactics can only be beneficial to deliberative politics when they are accompanied with the inter-group, heterogeneous engagements that

aim to communicate with and persuade the other side (I. M. Young, 2002).

This point requires a serious inquiry as this thesis has found a strong predictive relationship between incivility and intolerance (Table 2 and Figure 6.7; will be discussed in the next section). What rhetorical tasks do incivility and intolerance in abortion discourse perform? Is incivility more commonly used to appeal to a sense of justice to a wider populace with heterogeneous opinions and to persuade them, or is it used more in a homogeneous partisan circle, like intolerance, to antagonise political 'Others' and refuse inter-group engagements? The next chapters 7 and 8 will examine rhetorical patterns and types of incivility and intolerance respectively in order to investigate nuances that cannot be captured in statistics.

Incivility and intolerance predict each other

Although incivility and intolerance are conceptually separate (Rossini, 2019; Tromble, 2018, also Chapter 3 in this thesis), the modelling in this thesis finds that incivility and intolerance are strong predictors of each other. There can be two different interpretations of this relationship. First, it may indicate that incivility and intolerance are expressed together, especially in a homogeneous discussion. The homogeneous communication with expressions of both incivility and intolerance can create a toxic atmosphere, indirectly making potential opposing arguments silenced and withdrawn from the same online space. Empirical studies find that the perception of a homogeneous environment provokes 'the spiral of silence' (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) where some people hold back their opinions, fearing potential attacks from other users (Gearhart & Zhang, 2014; Matthes et al., 2010). This withdrawal due to fear might be especially prominent for people with marginalised identities such as women, people of colour, LGBTQ+, and ethnic-religious minorities whose identity itself can be an easy target for insult, mockery, harassment and abuse. Like Labour MP Jess Phillips writes on her Twitter, 'People who don't like this feral side of the Internet are just going to walk away' (Huffington Post, 2016).

Secondly, the predictive relationship between incivility and intolerance can also mean that they result in each other in turn. Previous studies have already discussed that uncivil comments elicit counter-attacks and further incivility rather than substantive engagement (Jamieson & Hardy, 2012; Masullo Chen & Lu, 2017), but the predictive relationship might suggest that incivility also elicits the intolerant attitudes and values against the out-group: so not simply being rude or uncivil in style, but the substance of one's belief turns intolerant. Although we are sympathetic to the uncivil, unruly, disruptive rhetoric and tactics of the oppositional movements

and protests for the socially marginalised communities, the predictive relationship between incivility and intolerance might suggest that uncivil rhetoric is nonetheless not the most effective tool for social justice. Uncivil rhetoric from the feminists or other disadvantaged identities (e.g., people of colour, religious and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+) might backfire, flaming the uncivil and intolerant reactions from the conservatives and majorities who are hitherto indifferent to the issue. Nussbaum (2016) argues that progress is impeded by anger because anger increases the other party's defensiveness and anxious self-protection. The same logic may apply to incivility and intolerance: incivility increases the other party's sense of defensiveness, their own victimhood, and anger in response. Forward-looking political pragmatism is 'a question of getting the other party to do what you want' (Nussbaum, 2016, p.230) where the other party's hostility and social intolerance need to be curtailed. This is never to blame the progressive movements for the advancement of political and cultural backlash from the far- and radical right. However, it might be worth scholarly investigations to see if incivility in one movement results in an immediate and long-lasting increase in incivility and intolerance from the other party across diverse sociopolitical topics. Cultural issues such as LGBTQ+ rights, feminism, abortion rights, immigration and multiculturalism can be especially relevant topics as these are often the centre of the cultural backlash and culture war globally (Hunter et al., 2006; Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

In summary, the strong predictors of incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discussions on Twitter are:

- High-profile political events and policy issues that appeal to partisan concerns
- Anti-abortion issue position
- A small set of superposters with strong issue partisanship
- Homogeneous discussion environments provoke both incivility and intolerance amongst a closed circle of issue partisans
- Heterogeneous discussion environments provoke incivility potentially as heated disagreements and inter-group engagements

6.3.2 Limitations and extensions

There are several limitations of the quantitative big data analysis and general linear model which could be further investigated and extended in future works. First, the cross-country findings in my Irish and U.S. abortion discussion datasets might not

be directly comparable. The Irish dataset centres around the constitutional referendum that is specifically designed to ask the Irish public about their opinions on abortion whereas the U.S. dataset encompasses diverse political events that are not directly about abortion policies such as presidential election, Covid-19, Black Lives Matter movements, and so on. Future research can directly compare two presidential election discussions or two referendum discussions on Twitter and analyse the systemic differences between the deliberative qualities of international civic political discourse.

Second, the impact of anonymity on incivility and intolerance needs further investigation. This future task is especially important because my finding contradicts previous research findings emphasising the role of anonymity in online incivility and digital harm (Clean up the Internet, 2020; Fox et al., 2015; Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Rowe, 2015; Santana, 2014). This chapter finds that anonymity has little impact on incivility and intolerance, but this finding is affected by the specific operationalisation of anonymity in this thesis that is based on a user's first name on their Twitter profile. Name-to-gender inference inherently contains flaws and biases: for example, popular pseudonymous names like Jane Doe or John Doe would not be properly considered anonymous. If there are more up-to-date algorithms to infer a degree of anonymity from user profile data such as full name, profile picture, and biography customisation (cf. how Munger, 2020 records user anonymity scores), such future research can re-test the relation between anonymity, incivility, and intolerance. Furthermore, it should be noted that the Gender package Mullen (2021) employed in this thesis is developed based on the U.S. census data. This limitation does not invalidate the findings of this thesis, but such limitations should be acknowledged for a careful interpretation of the findings.

Third, the work here is built on the binary classifier developed through manual labelling of uncivil and intolerant words and phrases (the dictionary building steps are explained in Chapter 5). Therefore, each tweet is simply classified as civil or uncivil, or tolerant or intolerant. Such a binary classifier would miss some of the complexity of incivility and intolerance, such as different categories and forms of incivility and intolerance: e.g., Coe et al. (2014) analyse sub-categories of incivility as name-calling, aspersion, lying, pejorative for speech. Rossini (2019) divides intolerance into sub-categories such as racism, sexism, etc. If future works can develop a more complex machine learning classifier to categorise big data into specific forms and types of incivility and intolerance, such a model can explore the complexity of user behaviours.

Chapter 7

Rhetorical patterns and types of incivility

The goal of this chapter is to investigate in-depth the rhetorical patterns and types of political incivility in abortion discourse on the Irish and U.S. Twittersphere. This chapter addresses the second research questions in this thesis:

RQ2. What are the rhetorical patterns and types of incivility expressed in the Irish and U.S. abortion discussions on Twitter?

I mainly identify two rhetorical patterns of incivility in the Irish and U.S. samples. The cross-country comparison between Ireland and the U.S. shows that incivility is a widely shared rhetorical device used (1) to Contrast Us with Them, by attributing good traits to the in-group and negative traits to the out-groups. Another rhetorical pattern of incivility is (2) Ambiguities. It is not always clear to discern what is civil and uncivil and what is acceptable and not in online political deliberation. Uncivil rhetoric can be inoffensive linguistic intensifiers, heated criticism, witticism and satire, and it can also contain some forms of civility at the same time. In the conclusion to this chapter, I highlight both the universal and culture-particular nature of incivility in political discourse. Also, I connect these empirical findings to the normative-critical model of deliberative democracy, asking what the normative implications of the findings in this chapter are.

7.1 Contrasting Us with Them

7.1.1 'It is Them who are uncivil!': Contrasting Our civility with Their incivility

One of the recurring themes of incivility in both Irish and U.S. samples is to point out the uncivil comments and behaviours made by one's opponents. Since civility and mutual respect are generally understood as desirable, the public often portrays the out-group Them as uncivil and unjustified, whereas We, the in-group, are the civil ones (the rhetoric of othering in (Riggins, 1997)). For instance, pro-abortion rights users criticise the 'despicable' and 'disgusting' behaviours of anti-abortion protesters ('scumbag,' 'fuckers') who display graphic images of aborted foetuses in front of a maternity hospital in Ireland:

'Misleading and abhorrent behaviour from the NO campaign. Those people disgust me, not an ounce of compassion. #PhotoBlurred #Repeal8th @Together4yes @anonymised @repeal_shield' (Ireland)

'Absolutely despicable. What an absolute scumbag. #RepealThe8th' (Ireland)

'So, those fuckers in ICBR turned up outside Bellissimos in Limerick today too. The staff went out and covered their posters. #8thref' (Ireland)

Anti-abortion users in both Ireland and the U.S. also depict their opponents as uncivil by calling them 'baby killers who bully' anti-abortion people trying to make things better for babies:

'@anonymised @anonymised @realDonaldTrump until Trump became pro-life, the hatred for Pro-Life people is constant attack. Shame on those baby killers who bully people trying to get along and make things better for babies. Trump 2020' (U.S.)

In such language, the opponent's incivility is frequently contrasted with the civility of the in-group Us: They are baby killers and bullies, but We are trying to make things better for babies; We are civil, but They are uncivil. One anti-abortion tweet states:

'I never see pro-life stopping anti-lifers have their say or put up their banners etc. What would one expect, seems to be their nature: blocking and extinguishing others' lives and rights #savethe8th #ForcesOfLight #repealthe8th #CultofDeath' (Ireland)

7.1.2 'They lie but We don't': Criticising the mendacity of the opponent

A number of tweets from both the Irish and U.S. samples, and from both pro- and anti-abortion right sides, attack the mendacity of their opponents by accusing them of lying, spreading mis- and disinformation, and being liars. These accusations imply that the accused knows the truth but intentionally gives deceitful information to the public. This rhetorical incivility can be an effective tool to discredit the opponent, portraying them as disingenuous, deceitful, untrustworthy in contrast to the integrity of Us. The targets of this form of incivility vary from characterising opposing arguments as lies and fake news to describing opponents as liars. The tweets below are illustrative of these points:

'No actually, I can't bring myself to watch #CBLive. It's too depressing seeing all the No side lies being given time on national tv #together4yes' (Ireland)

'We need you to help us fight back against the onslaught of fake news on social media ads from the No side. #ItsTime #Repealthe8th #Together4Yes' (Ireland)

Other tweets accuse politicians and activists with opposing views of lying and being deceitful:

'#8thref #LoveBothVoteNO #CBlive the confidential enquiry states no woman has died because of the 8th. Dr Peter Boylan needs to stop lying, politicians need to stop lying to the public. #lifematters #voteno 8th save 1000000 lives already. Is killing babies ok? No!' (Ireland)

'@anonymised @CatoInstitute @anonymised @espn @anonymised @anonymised Planned parenthood pays for safe sex, HIV testing and female health. The propaganda patrol is lying to you! You think it's all about killing babies! Oh, you are precious!' (U.S.)

Furthermore, at times, the attack on the mendacity of the opponents goes beyond accusing the opponent of lying and amounts to a charge against a person's character as a liar, which is a more serious charge but harder to prove, as illustrated in these tweets:

'Stunning double-teaming @anonymised and Dr John Monaghan with the medical facts against the shameless pro-abortion liar @drboylan #8thref #Savethe8th #LoveBothVoteNo' (Ireland)

'I swore alone at Ronal Mullen on TV - Ireland does not agree with you. The country does not believe you! YOU ARE A LYING LIAR WHO LIES! and other expletives. #ivotedyes #repealthe8th #MnaNahEireann #WomensRights' (Ireland)

'She's a liar and an asshole. An indirect way to close abortion providers is not

different from an outright abortion ban. If Kavanaugh had gotten his way today, Roe v. Wade would have been overturned in Louisiana.' (U.S.)

7.1.3 'They are morons, We are intelligent': Belittling, demeaning, and ridiculing the opponent

Another recurring type of incivility in both the Irish and U.S. samples is to belittle the opponent, depicting them as brainwashed, gullible, unintelligent, and who do not know any better. This rhetoric insinuates that, in contrast to the absurdity of their views, ours are reasonable and grounded. The rhetoric conveys that the opponents and their opposing views are not equipped with rationality, logic, arguments worth listening to and debating, but rather a ridiculous joke to laugh at and move on from. The targets of this belittling incivility vary from other citizens, journalists, activists, to politicians.

'I'm simply not a fan of killing babies. It's stupid that there's another side to this argument.' (Ireland)

'The absolute state of this, "abortion is not healthcare" how can you be so utterly stupid it hurts my head' (Ireland)

Other tweets belittle other fellow citizens by replying directly to each other's tweets, calling them 'dumb cuck,' 'moronic,' 'tube,' 'easily conned,' etc., as illustrated in the following Irish and U.S. tweets:

'@anonymised it's about a miscarriage you dumb cuck' (Ireland)

'Thank goodness that match of the day is on BBC tonight so none had to watch that bigoted @Johnwaters shitting his moronic views upon the world. I've had enough laughs already tonight! #sundaytv3 #Repealthe8th #Together4Yes' (Ireland)

'@anonymised @anonymised @anonymised @Cernovich Pro-life? Your porn star IMPOTUS is not pro-life. Republicans had all three branches of government and didn't even defund PP until after they got their asses kicked in 2018. You're such a tube, so easily conned' (U.S.)

'@anonymised @anonymised @anonymised @anonymised Are you moronic by choice, or is this just your natural state? FFS' (U.S.)

Some tweets do not directly target fellow Twitter users (using @ function), but they target a general group of people that are not present in the ongoing discussion thread.

'The gullible, brainwashed Yes voters will not vote in the next elections. They will be furious that these idiot politicians hoodwinked them into the most liberal abortion laws in the world. And there will be many spineless cowards who will lose their seats

and cushy careers' (Ireland)

'@anonymised A lot of loyal lobotomized Democrats are simply like: "We have to defeat Trump or he will replace RBG and overthrow Roe v Wade, which is why we all need people who support overthrowing Roe v Wade with us" and don't understand how crazy that is' (U.S.)

This rhetorical incivility seems to be a strategic tool to remind the in-group Us that We are superior to Them when it comes to logic and arguments. But it also reminds the in-group members that We must campaign hard to guarantee the win in the referendum/presidential election. In the Irish sample, a pro-abortion tweet encourages other pro-abortion users:

'The No campaigns may be imploding, but, if we have learned anything from Trump and Brexit experiences, it's that obvious dishonesty, dysfunction, and stupidity do not guarantee a loss. Let's continue pushing and #Repealthe8th' (Ireland)

7.1.4 'They benefit from the rigged establishment, We are the victim of the establishment': Perceived victimisation by mainstream & social media

In both the Irish and U.S. samples, there are tweets directly or indirectly lamenting the perceived bias and unprofessionalism in mainstream media, journalists, and social media platforms. This type of incivility seems to be encouraged by perceived victimisation by mainstream media and other media platforms. When users feel that the media are disrespectful or unfair to their in-group members (e.g., not getting enough television airtime compared to the opponent), some users label mainstream and social media as rigged, biased, pushing 'dangerous' 'socialist' or 'communist' agenda to the nation, or even calling mainstream media 'the enemy of the people.' Below are some illustrative examples from the Irish and U.S. Twitter spheres:

'#CBLive was an obvious stitch-up and hatchet job. It reminds us that RTE is certainly not liberal media, it continues to rim the Church and give reach to the Establishment. Forget about them and keep fighting. #Together4Yes #Repealthe8th #WhoNeedsYourYes' (Ireland)

'CNN COMMUNISTS NEWS NETWORK. BAD FOR BABY.' (U.S.)

'NBC is fake news. NBC Ignores Chuck Schumer's Threats Against Justices Gorsuch and Kavanaugh Over Pro-Life Supreme Court Case'(U.S.)

'@anonymised Agree! I have a small number of followers but trying to do my part by replying to MSM, FDA, influential accounts with truth, links, redirection when

those accounts publish lies about HCQ, masks, covid, planned parenthood, and such. #PatriotsFight #MSMIsTheEnemyOfThePeople #QuestionTheNarrative' (U.S.)

Social media platforms like Google, Facebook, and Twitter are attacked for similar reasons. For instance, in May 2018, Google decided to suspend all advertisements related to the Irish abortion referendum amidst concerns about election integrity and Facebook banned foreign-based individuals and organisations from purchasing referendum-related advertisements (Field, 2018; Reuters, 2018). Such platform decisions hamstrung the Irish No campaign in particular, since they relied heavily on online advertising more than street canvassing (Field, 2018). Many anti-abortion tweets express outrage that these 'biased' social media companies try to unfairly silence the anti-abortion voice and rig the referendum for the 'twisted socialist liberal agenda.' Two examples are quoted below:

'RIGGED REFERENDUM? Joint press conference happening now with #Savethe8th, The Iona Institute, and Pro-Life Campaign Ireland on #Google's decision today to silence debate in Ireland ahead of the historic abortion referendum! #8thref' (Ireland)

'@anonymised @anonymised Censorship by pro-abortion liberal platforms, they are no longer neutral but push their twisted socialist liberal agenda. Just look at the recent Alfie Evans case, whereby thousands were talking about him, yet Twitter had him hardly trending at all. Culture of death promoted.' (Ireland)

7.1.5 'They are un-American socialists, We are patriots': Red scare in the U.S. sample

A red scare is a promotion of widespread fear and hysteria against a potential rise of communism, anarchism, or other leftist ideologies by a society (Levin, 1971). The Red Scare is closely connected to the history of the U.S. after World War I (fear and anxiety that the Bolshevik revolution in the U.S. will destroy the U.S. way of life) and World War II (the McCarthyite political hysteria of communism and socialism infiltrating the U.S. government) (Levin, 1971). This anti-communist fear conveys a collective hysteria about protecting 'real Americans' from 'un-' or 'anti-Americans' – which is almost a catch-all word to usually signify communists, anarchists, political radicals, labour union movements, and so forth (Levin, 1971). Incivility in my 2020 U.S. sample shows that the red scare is still a prominent talking point in U.S. right-wing politics, separating 'dangerous, traitorous, un-Americans' from 'real Americans', as illustrated in the following tweets:

'DEFUND PUBLIC EDUCATION and UNIVERSITIES. DEFUND the UN,

WHO, and the PA. DEFUND PBS and PLANNED PARENTHOOD. DEFUND EVERYONE and EVERYTHING that is ANTI-AMERICAN and ANTI-AMERICAN VALUES. But ESPECIALLY, DEFUND OUR SCHOOLS until they STOP TEACHING OUR OWN CHILDREN TO HATE US!!' (U.S.)

Even without using the overt word 'anti-American,' calling one's opponent 'socialist,' 'Marxist,' and 'communist' successfully signals that those mentioned people are un/anti-American.

'Democrats want their planned Parenthood money included!! Those socialist bastards don't care about the people!!!' (U.S.)

'@anonymised @anonymised @anonymised BLM supports Planned Parenthood who have murdered thousands of potential black lives. BLM is a Marxist group that aims to get Trump out so that they can force a strict Communist program on us all. That is why BLM appears in every 4 years around an election' (U.S.)

Red scare politics has a history in Ireland as well, but it is closely related to the Church authority than the government. The Irish state took a neutral statement in international relations during WWII and Cold War, but the Church took a more open and strong anti-communist position (Delaney, 2011). Throughout the 1930s, inspired by the papal encyclical, Irish Catholic Action groups engaged in an anti-communist crusade, including mob attacks on suspected communist groupings (Delaney, 2011, p.884). In the post-WWII years, Irish Catholic priests and anti-communist Catholic groups propagandised anti-communist messages with strong anti-Semitism in Irish Catholic culture, arguing that the U.S. film industry was the medium by which the Jewish nation and their agent communists infiltrated society (Delaney, 2011, p.886). Unlike the U.S., the ideological dimensions of the red scare in Ireland were not perceived to be so threatening as to dominate public life (Delaney, 2011, p.903). In my Irish sample, the word 'socialism' or 'Marxism' was rather used in a positive context signalling solidarity between feminism and socialism, as illustrated in this tweet:

'CDSA's Socialist Feminists stand in solidarity with everyone in Ireland voting today to #RepealThe8th. Here's to everyone who travelled #HomeToVote so no one would ever again have to travel to another country to receive healthcare. Here's to free, safe, and legal! #Together4Yes' (Ireland)

The Irish sample includes several official Twitter accounts by socialist organisations, expressing international socialist camaraderie for the repeal of the 8th amendment in Ireland:

'Thank you to all my comrades and friends across the world for all your support

throughout the campaign, especially those from @YESocialists @RainbowRose_PES and @PES_Women who came and knocked on doors with us last weekend @labour @labouryouth @labourwomen #Together4Yes' (Ireland)

'Campaigning in Ireland to #RepealThe8th with @RainbowRose_PES @YESocialists @PES_Women @labouryouth' (Ireland)

Exceptionally, there is one tweet from the Irish sample that uses socialist with a negative connotation ('Censorship by pro-abortion liberal platforms, they are no longer neutral but push their twisted socialist liberal agenda'). In general, the U.S. sample has a distinctive talking point to use words like socialist, Marxist, communist, as a red scare tactic which immediately signals that those accused are not true patriotic U.S. citizens cherishing U.S. values. In contrast, even when the word socialist appeared in a negative meaning in the Irish sample, it does not necessarily invoke public fear and anxiety with respect to anti- or un-Irishness. This shows that incivility is a universal rhetorical device, but its vocabulary unfolds in a culture-specific way depending on the political history of a country.

7.2 Ambiguous rhetorical functions of incivility

While analysing the tweets, I have found that it is not easy to draw a sharp distinction between what is civility or incivility and what is acceptable or not acceptable in online political discussions. In the following sections, I provide examples of such rhetorical ambiguities of incivility where it is unclear whether incivility is used in a truly offensive and anti-deliberative way.

7.2.1 Fuck, shit, bitch: Swear words for intensifier, exclamation, informality

In both the Irish and U.S. samples, profanity and swearwords seem to be embedded in many users' everyday speech habits – not necessarily to offend or verbally abuse other users but to add informality and intimacy (Adams, 2016; Fägersten, 2017). Twitter users utter incivility as everyday intensifiers and exclamations. Some tweets use profanity like fuck, shit, to express their emotions in an informal way:

'Holy shit #repealthe8th' (Ireland)

'You can't be pro-life and support the chief fascist in command. For fuck's sake what is so hard about that to understand?' (U.S.)

Other users use profanity to emphasise the point they are trying to make:

'GET OUT TA FUCK AND VOTE! #repealthe8th #together4yes #hometovote #FUCKYES' (Ireland)

'Abortions will happen regardless of whether the 8th is repealed or not, what you are voting for is the safety, respect, dignity and most importantly the fundafucking-mental human right to safely control your own body – couldn't have said it better @anonymised #8thref #repealthe8th' (Ireland)

'I'm pro-choice as fuck. You do what's right for you sis. Fuck everything and everybody else.' (U.S.)

Whether using swear and taboo words can be viewed as incivility can be contestable. Regardless, when we live in an 'age of online incivility' (Hmielowski et al., 2014), this aspect must be considered before regulating incivility or imagining what our future public spheres and public communication ought to be in a realistic sense. Amongst users who frequently partake in online political discussions, it is perceived to be acceptable to some extent to express incivility (e.g., swearing, flaming) on the Internet (Hmielowski et al., 2014; Kwon & Cho, 2017). The Internet expects and rewards humour that transgresses the existing societal norm of what is acceptable (W. Phillips & Milner, 2018) and online incivility can often be fused with humour, satire, and pro-social swearing to reclaim old pejoratives and slurs.

7.2.2 'N****s on Twitter don't think': Context-dependent use of racial slurs

In the U.S. Twitter, some tweets include racial slurs for black people such as the n-word, sambo, and coon. The n-word has been in use as a racist insult against black people since the 19th century (Rahman, 2012). The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary describes the term as 'almost certainly the most offensive and inflammatory racial slur in English' (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The word has not yet disappeared from people's vocabularies in the 2020s. However, now the word is used as an acceptable, non-derogatory term amongst black communities themselves (Rahman, 2012). Various writings show that using the n-word to address and refer to one another is a means of showing survival identity with a shared history of slavery (Rahman, 2012). The n-word is also used as a term of solidarity and endearment: for example, when two black men greet each other with the n-word (Rahman, 2012). However, the n-word can also connote opprobrious meanings even when it is uttered by black people. Rahman (2012) analyses that one of the core social meanings of the n-word is an attitude of disapproval and censure, noting that another black person behaves in a way that does not conform with the norms and expectations of the African or

Black American communities.

In my U.S. sample, the n-word and other racial slurs for black people are used with opprobrious meaning. These racial slurs appearing in my sample are seemingly written by black Twitter users (based on their profile pictures; although it should be noted that profile pictures do not guarantee the true identity of any user online) to refer to fellow black citizens or sometimes to refer to themselves. Hence, the use of racial slurs in my sample is not intended to convey blunt anti-black discrimination or hatred. However, the slurs are still used in ways that are similar to how racial slurs towards black people were used originally: with a negative connotation, disapproval and censure. For example, an anti-abortion tweet in the U.S. sample states:

'So if I support Obama even though he supported aborting our black children and transitioning our youth, I'm a Queen. But if I support Trump while he defunded planned parenthood, preserved black life, freed blacks from prison and permanently funded HBCU I'm a Coon and a House Nigga' (U.S.)

U.S. pro-abortion rights users also use racial slurs with negative connotations to refer to anti-abortion users and the U.S. government, as illustrated in the following two tweets.

'For thousands of years women have had abortions, hella white countries like Ireland have had women demand access to abortion, but somehow niggas on Twitter insist abortion and Planned Parenthood is a plot to exterminate the black race. Embarrassing. Y'all don't know how to think.' (U.S.)

'These government niggas claim to be pro-life but want us all to catch a virus that killed a million people' (U.S.)

This illustrates an example of contextual challenges an algorithmic content regulation faces. The use of the n-word and racial slurs convey different meanings and harm when it is spoken by a black person compared to a non-black person. This will raise an ethical question of whether a platform should collect data and infer about a speaker's and recipient's identities to assess the level of incivility and intolerance.

7.2.3 'Shut the fuck up you dickhead': Heated criticism or unreasonable incivility

Another complexity of incivility is that the distinction between heated criticism and unreasonable personal attack can be contestable. Incivility is often expressed in a context of passionate and heated criticism of perceived injustice and wrongdoings. But sometimes the demonstration of such passion can be (seen as) overstepping the line and turning into an unwarranted ad hominem attack, or so-called 'unreason-

able' incivility. Whether face-threatening, ad hominem attacks and incivility are a true deliberative dialogue in the Habermasian sense is dubious as civility and mutual respect are prerequisites of constructive deliberation in Habermas' theories (Habermas, 1991, 1996). However, feminist scholars and radical theorists point to limitations of Habermasian understandings of rational-critical debates and argue for more nuanced appraisals of the role of emotional, uncivil, unruly and disruptive tactics in agonistic deliberation and emotional turn in public spheres - especially for movements of the hitherto marginalised and disenfranchised (Alexander et al., 2018; Mouffe, 2000; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019; I. M. Young, 2002; Zerilli, 2014). I. M. Young (2002) argues that 'reasonableness' does not reside in a limited notion of rationality, but resides in the public's willingness to communicate and persuade one another. As I. M. Young (2002) insists, 'what are the appropriate limits to democracy and protest is surely contestable, but in a deep democratic society the presumption should be in favour of the protesters that their purpose is to persuade' (p.48).

By incorporating feminist critiques and expanding the boundary of 'reasonable' deliberation beyond Habermas' earlier theorising, we can recalibrate the Habermasian normative ideals to acknowledge the lived experience of 'actually existing democracy' (Fraser, 1992; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). This helps to resolve the tension between 'uncivil and counterproductive' behaviours and 'uncivil but yet pro-deliberative' behaviours. 'Unreasonable' incivility can mean when an utterance lacks any reasonable motivation to justify one's own opinion and persuade one another through arguments – as when exchanges of incivility are simply an exchange of anger and hostility without any meaningful communicative engagements to deal with their disagreements or conflicts. My point here is not to draw a clear normative line between what is acceptable and what is not in a definite sense. I believe such a normative task is hard to achieve since the norm of civility and acceptability is always fluid and context-dependent: it is not only about what is said, but by whom and to whom (Tracy, 2008). Rather, this analysis aims to describe and discuss some examples where incivility can sit on ambiguous lines between what is an acceptable, justified form of criticism versus an unacceptable, 'unreasonable' ad hominem attack. This theme of incivility is often directed at politicians, as exemplified in these three tweets:

'Shove it up your arse, @VP @BetsyDeVos @ScottPruittOK and the rest of the evangelical right, here and abroad. We will not back down! #HomeToVote' (Ireland)

'@realDonaldTrump HEY MORON45, you are a CONNIVING PSYCHOPATHIC LIAR WHO HAS CONTINUOUSLY DUPED your evangelical voter base! Michael

Cohen said, "I KNOW FOR A FACT trump IS PRO-CHOICE!"' (U.S.)

'@TomCottonAR Senator if you don't want women to have reproductive health-care you can go fuck yourself. Who the hell are you to pass judgement? After Trump Floats Tom Cotton For SCOTUS, Cotton Says "It's Time For Roe V. Wade To Go" #SmartNews' (U.S.)

Sending vulgar invectives (e.g., shove it up your arse, you are a conniving psychopathic liar, go fuck yourself) directly to a person or a group of people is often offensive behaviour. However, is it harmful and anti-democratic to the deliberative system as a whole, when it is uttered by citizens who are angry at politicians with power and influence? Answering this normative question is difficult in this case. Incivility can damage the process of deliberation since 'raw' blurt-outs of invectives and insults usually do not add any rational-critical substance or new information to the Twitter issue public (Coe et al., 2014; Gervais, 2015). But sometimes the invectives and insults themselves can be an important symbolic substance expressing the collective anger and determination of citizens. The insults and invectives in the tweets above can convey important symbolic meanings in themselves by showing to the political elites and other citizens on Twitter that We are angry, We are not afraid of you political elites, and We will not back down.

Another common target of this type of incivility is journalists. For example, one pro-abortion tweet in the Irish sample sends a direct insult to an anti-abortion 'journalist' (or a far-right vlogger according to Hope not Hate (2017)) Peter Sweden. Peter Sweden tweets first:

'Abortion is evil. Abortion is evil. Abortion is evil. Abortion is evil. Abortion is evil. Abortion is evil. #SaveThe8th' (Ireland)

In response, one Irish Twitter user says:

'You fucking gobshite need to grow up. Abortion is the reason I don't have an unloved child in care. I was poor, alienated from my family, had terrible mental health issues. Sorry for the crude example but abortion is not a choice. It's a grim necessity for women in a shit situation' (Ireland)

Name-calling someone 'fucking gobshite' might not be the most laudable language. But again, making a normative judgment about 'is this tweet harmful to the overall deliberative system?' is not an easy task. Expressions of incivility, even when they take the form of person-directed insults, can entail some forms of rational-critical or symbolic messages. Despite the rude language, the responding tweet above has some argumentative structures in terms of rebutting Peter Sweden's claim that 'abortion is evil' and providing her personal story as a ground to back

up her counterclaim: 'abortion is not evil, it is a necessity for women in a hard situation.' In this case, even when other users are name-called in harsh ways, this exchange can be more than just personal harassment or abuse. It might be seen as an instance of heated opinion exchange.

I am not arguing that any form of incivility or personal attack should be taken as justifiable or acceptable in online political debates and discussions. I only suggest that, as long as one can offer some rational-critical or symbolic substances to the wider public alongside one's use of incivility, it might be too hasty to condemn such a tweet as completely unacceptable or anti-democratic in public deliberation. Incivility can beget more incivility, disrupting the overall health of deliberation, but the process is far from simple or automatic. On one hand, emotional and uncivil tweets beget emotional and uncivil responses. Some Twitter users respond to the fucking-gobshite tweet above by saying:

'Shut the fuck up ffs'

'How about you keep legs closed or instead of buying drugs you're going to snort spend money on contraceptives. You liberal millennial moron.'

'You should have been aborted. I am guessing that you are willing to get abortion again and again. Don't you see it yet? You are the problem.'

Those insults and invectives are expressions of pure hostility and antagonism, easily turning into personal harassment and shaming to the original poster. But on the other hand, incivility can also provoke emotional but reciprocal conversations, inviting bystanders (non-target readers of uncivil comments) to intervene in the conversation. One thread of replies goes:

'Person A: How about abstinence or using protection? If you deliberately had unprotected sex then you reap what you sow. Both you and your partner have a choice.'

'Person B: How about we do not force pregnancy and childbirth as punishments for having whatever kind of sex.'

'A: Nope I didn't say pregnancy or childbirth is a punishment. It's a consequence, all actions have consequences, some are good some aren't. Take responsibility.'

'Person C: If I work with a cancer-causing agent, am I obligated to "take responsibility" and suffer resultant cancer rather than being a burden to the national health service because it was my choice to work with carcinogenic substances? What do you mean by "not taking responsibility" in terminating unsentient life before it becomes a sentient child capable of suffering, born to unloving parents?'

Here is one more example of how incivility provokes engagements, for better and

for worse, at the same time:

'Person D: So you were alienated from a family, had mental health problems, but still HAD to get the dick'

'Person E: you know that unstable people in desperate situations are the most vulnerable when it comes to the danger of being taken advantage of. Those people can make hasty and impulsive decisions. You haven't thought of that right.'

'Person F: Women have sex. Get over it.'

Name-calling and invectives are also communicated between users. One pro-abortion user writes:

'@anonymised You don't have to agree with abortions. You just have to understand there is a wider picture and women deserve a safe way to do what they want with THEIR bodies. Just because you're a bigoted cunt doesn't mean thousands of women should suffer #repealthe8th' (Ireland)

The language of this tweet also contains rational-critical argumentative elements, despite the harsh name 'bigoted cunt.' So, it might be the case that what is problematic in our digital public sphere is not necessarily incivility or name-calling or personal attacks in themselves, but rather that some tweets lack argumentative structures, or any constructive efforts to provide more than just a pure blurt out of hostility and anger. Anger can have instrumental roles in public spheres in recognising societal wrongs, motivating civic solidarity and participation, etc., but such instrumental roles can only be achieved when anger is transitioned into a willingness to communicate, and incivility is combined with rational-critical arguments or symbolic substances enriching the ongoing issue public (Nussbaum, 2016). The public on the Internet is already aware of this, as Coe and colleagues' (2014) study show that Internet users often express incivility alongside their use of evidence, statistics, and rational-critical arguments. Uncivil comments in online news websites are not linked to limited use of evidence or irrationality and they actually cite more statistics and evidence than civil comments (Coe et al., 2014). Rossini (2020) finds that incivility is associated with meaningful discursive engagement such as justified opinion expression and engagement with disagreement. Hence, it can be said that incivility is sometimes a disorganised burst out of pure anger and hostility that is not leading our deliberation anywhere, but it is also sometimes an expression of political passion combined with rational-critical arguments or symbolic substances. This latter form of incivility might be able to invite further emotional, passionate, but enriching conversations about contested political topics.

A scholarly call for the democratic standards of internet deliberation should fo-

cus on encouraging users to construct tweets or comments while considering the use of a basic argumentative structure even when they are angry, wanting to insult and name-call the opponent. How to construct a claim, add grounds, connect the argument to the evidence, limit how universal the claim might be and be prepared for counterarguments (Herbst, 2010), are important democratic deliberative strategies. But this may require changing common expectations about communication on social media platforms, especially on Twitter. As discussed in section 1.1.3, there is something unique about Twitter in that people perceive and respond to incivility on Twitter differently from incivility on other media channels and social media platforms (Coe et al., 2014; Oz et al., 2018; Sydnor, 2018). Restoring and maintaining productive deliberations and proper feedback between different civil societies would require changing the expectations of Twitter not only as a space for short bursts of incivility and anger but also as a space for 'rational anger' (Transition-Anger in Nussbaum (2016)) to transform raw anger and political passion into constructive deliberation.

7.2.4 Warmth, empathy, and engagement with others: Civility coexists with incivility

Another complexity of incivility is that civility and incivility can co-exist in one tweet. This theme implies that it might be wrong to distinguish civil and uncivil practices in a strictly separate sense as if they are two exclusively distinctive types of human behaviours: as if one behaviour can only be either civil or uncivil. For the purpose of the quantitative content analysis in this thesis, I simply identify uncivil tweets by examining if a tweet contains any form of incivility. But in reality, civility and incivility can be intertwined in one tweet, and such a tweet might not be easy to call straight away as either completely civil or uncivil. Let us look once again at an example tweet mentioned above. This is an uncivil tweet responding to the far-right vlogger Peter Sweden's tweet *'abortion is evil. [...] #savethe8th'*:

'You fucking gobshite need to grow up. Abortion is the reason I don't have an unloved child in care. I was poor, alienated from my family, had terrible mental health issues. Sorry for the crude example but abortion is not a choice. It's a grim necessity for women in a shit situation' (Ireland)

Here, besides the uncivil language 'fucking gobshite,' this user makes multiple polite and sympathetic apologies to different groups of users:

'I would like to make it clear that my apology for using a crude example was for those who may have preferred a content notice or trigger warning. It was not for

Peter Sweden whose opinions on abortion I could not give a single fuck about'

'While writing the tweet amid extreme anger, I excluded trans and non-binary people. I'm sorry. Abortion and reproductive healthcare rights are a trans issue too.'

Similarly, a pro-abortion tweet in the U.S. sample employs civility and incivility at the same time:

'Do you Bernie-supporting fuckers not realize Trump will ban abortion? He'll separate more families? Some people don't have the luxury of a butt-hurt protest vote and if you let those people down, you're no less entitled and self-serving than the top 1% you claim to hate.' (U.S.)

Calling a group of Bernie supporters 'fuckers' or disparaging their protest vote as 'butt-hurt' is uncivil and disrespectful. But this tweet also shows the virtue of civility, empathy, and solidarity towards the socially disadvantaged and marginalised identities, those for whom the re-election of Trump and abortion ban will have significant negative impacts. The tweet, despite its uncivil language, encourages Bernie supporters to think about the less fortunate people in the U.S. and use their votes sympathetically. This shows that the expression of incivility is not solely about anger, antagonism, zeal for violence or retribution, like Martha Nussbaum (2016) is concerned about. On the contrary, incivility can co-exist with civility, civic solidarity, warmth, empathy, etc. Moreover, a person's civic solidarity and empathy is sometimes the very motivation why the person expresses incivility towards fellow citizens. In the Irish tweet above, the user's personal abortion experience and solidarity with people in crisis pregnancy motivate her uncivil response to Peter Sweden's intolerant tweet. In the U.S. tweet, it is their solidarity with the marginalised community which motivates one's uncivil language. This resonates with Susan Herbst's (2010) evaluation of 2008 U.S. Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin's language, her strategic employment of civility and incivility. Beyond Palin's strategic use of incivility (e.g., calling Obama socialist, accusing him of palling around with terrorists), Palin reflected the characteristics of civility as well by engaging with her audience with warmth, empathy, and gratitude (Herbst, 2010, p.67).

7.2.5 Incivility as witticism, satire, and in-group laughter

Sometimes incivility is used as a form of witticism and satire to banter with in-group members and elicit in-group laughter. In the Irish sample, one tweet is posted on 25th May 2018, on the referendum vote day, getting thousands of likes and retweets:

'Just took 93-year-old mam to vote, she's registered blind. In a very loud voice,

she said, "Which box for #repealthe8th?" A cheer went up from waiting voters' (Ireland)

This viral tweet quickly becomes the meme of the day, and a number of other pro-abortion users parody the tweet. Some of the parodied versions of this tweet make fun of anti-abortion public figures like Ronan Mullen (leader of an anti-abortion political party, the Human Dignity Alliance), John Waters (anti-abortion columnist), and so forth, as in these examples:

'Just took my 93-year old granny to vote; she's registered blind. She asked, "Which box do I tick to have Ronan Mullen chemically castrated?" A cheer went up from waiting voters. #Together4Yes' (Ireland)

'Just took my 93-year old mum to vote; she's registered blind. She asked, "Which box do I tick to get John Waters to fuck off to Torremolinos?" A cheer went up from waiting voters. #together4yes' (Ireland)

The joke about John Waters refers to Waters' own words. He said earlier that he will leave Ireland if the repeal referendum passed and that he had bought a house in Spain (The Times, 2020). Another pro-abortion tweet makes fun of Waters' promise to leave the country:

'Can we crowdfund an iceberg to ship John Waters off? #Togeher4Yes #repealthe8th' (Ireland)

In the U.S. sample, many users retweet YouTuber Logan Paul's tweet where he draws tiny penises on the photos of the 25 male senators who voted to ban abortion in Alabama (Figure 7.1). This tweet reads like a satirical cartoon telling the audience that these politicians are 'dickheads.'

Supreme Court Justice nominee Amy Coney Barrett (ACB) is also a popular target for uncivil sarcasm and mockery because of her religious-conservative view on abortion and her attendance and speeches at several anti-abortion events. A satire website, The Babylon Bee for instance, posts a fictional article about Barrett with the headline 'ABC racing to get dinner ready for husband so he'll let her out to overturn *Roe v Wade.*' The article contains a photoshopped image of Barrett cooking in the kitchen, smiling at the camera (Figure 7.2). The tweet derides Barrett's conservative anti-abortion views by imagining her private life through the stereotypes of conservative sex roles (e.g., being submissive, serving her husband, needing his permission to leave the house). Political satire and sarcasm can be essentially negative, rude by nature by exposing, denouncing, and deriding the folly of the target being mocked. Political jokes and satires often sit on the ambiguous line between being negative, critical, and transgressional.

Figure 7.1: YouTuber Logan Paul's tweet on 17th May 2019 where he drew dicks on the photos of 25 male senators who voted to ban abortion in Alabama. Paul wrote: 'I took the liberty of drawing tiny dicks on the 25 male senators who voted to ban abortion in Alabama.' This tweet was posted before my data collection period but one of its many retweets were made during the data collection.

Figure 7.2: Satire website The Babylon Bee's tweet (28th September 2020), sharing their satire article 'ACB racing to get dinner ready for husband so he'll let her out to overturn Roe v Wade.' The article contains a photoshopped image in which Barett is cooking in the kitchen, smiling.

7.3 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to answer RQ2 for a qualitative cross-country comparative analysis:

RQ2. What are the rhetorical patterns and types of incivility expressed in the Irish and U.S. abortion discussions on Twitter?

I have mainly identified two rhetorical patterns of incivility in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse, with several sub-themes:

1. Contrasting Us (positive) with Them (negative attributes)
    - To point out incivility of the opponent by calling them despicable, scumbags, bullies
    - To accuse the opponent of lying, being liars, deceiving, conniving, spreading mis/disinformation and propaganda
    - To belittle, demean, and ridicule the opponent and their political claims as gullible, brainwashed, morons, and something to be laughed at
    - To blame bias and unprofessionalism of other institutions (e.g., mass media and social media platforms) for one's political unsuccess
    - To portray the opponent as un- and anti-American traitors, especially using red scare talking points like anti-communism as true U.S. identities
2. Ambiguous rhetorical functions of incivility
    - Which make drawing a line between civility and incivility and what is acceptable and not in digital public spheres complicated and contestable:
    - Casual use of swearwords and profanity for linguistic intensifier, exclamation
    - Context-dependent use of racial slurs
    - A blurry line between heated political criticism and unreasonable personal attack (e.g., strong name-calling and insults at politicians and journalists)
    - Simultaneous use of civility and incivility in one communicative practice
    - Incivility as a form of witticism, satirical humour, banter for in-group laughter

7.3.1 Discussion and conclusion

Incivility is cross-cultural but culture-specific

The list of rhetorical patterns and types of incivility found in the Irish and U.S. samples show that political incivility is a cross-cultural rhetorical device sharing many similar rhetorical patterns and themes. In both the Irish and the U.S. Twittersphere, political incivility follows the political othering of the in-group and out-group by attacking the out-group's incivility, mendacity, unintelligence, abuse and corruption in contrast to the in-group's civility, integrity, intelligence, innocence, and victim status. Incivility in both Irish and U.S. datasets contain ambiguous characteristics such as involving both civility and incivility, sitting ambiguously on the line between what is acceptable and not, and what is a reasonable criticism and satire and unreasonable personal attack.

However, my analysis also finds that the specific vocabulary of incivility varies depending on the culture and history of abortion discourse. In U.S. Twittersphere, words like Marxist and socialist almost automatically connote negative meanings, implying that the accused is un/anti-American and unpatriotic due to the political history of the red scare in the U.S. In contrast, when such words appear in the Irish Twittersphere, those words are not necessarily used in a negative context. Rather, some Twitter users in the Irish sample use the words in a positive context, expressing solidarity between Marxism, socialism, and feminism. The racial slurs for black people (e.g., the n-word) is also particular to the vocabulary of incivility in the U.S. sample. This might be due to the different racial make-ups of the U.S. and Irish populations. Black and/or African people account for 13.4 per cent of the U.S. population in the 2019 census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019) whereas the Black Irish or Black African people made up only 1.4 per cent of the Irish population in the 2016 census (Ireland Central Statistics Office, 2016).

Can uncivil tweets still contribute to public deliberation?

Incivility is ultimately a rhetorical tool for giving harsh negative criticism to one's out-group. Calling others by harsh names and referring to opposing policy ideas with negative judgment and blame ultimately serves to provoke the in-group members' anger at the out-group, and their pride and enthusiasm for the success of the in-group. This thereby affects solidarity and motivation for political actions. Many rhetorical patterns of incivility explained in this chapter demonstrate that expressions of incivility are not always inherently anti-democratic or damaging to ongoing

public deliberation. Uncivil tweets can still provide new perspectives, claims, and grounds that can persuade and appeal to bystanders (especially those who are yet undecided) on the same Twittersphere. Uncivil tweets tend to attract further heated conversations and engagements from users.

However, such benefits of incivility can be only achieved when the expressed incivility is accompanied by some forms of rational-critical or symbolic messages. To function productively, incivility has to be more than just an outburst of anger and hostility. For a productive sublimation or transition of one's anger, one has to communicate a sense of wrongfulness and a vision for a better future to wider audiences. Otherwise, as discussed in this chapter, incivility might serve as no more than personal harassment and abuse, or it might serve to flame more incivility and hostility between subsequent groups. The unsublimated type of incivility cannot contribute any meaningful input to the ongoing deliberation and influence the formation of a 'considered public opinion', which then ultimately influences the state's policymaking decision.

Hence, although I have taken a rather sympathetic stance towards uncivil and unruly rhetoric in political struggles, especially for those who are socially disadvantaged and marginalised, I do not argue that uncivil communications or emotionally volatile electorate themselves are desirable for deliberative politics. I instead suggest that productive uncivil communications can utilise the attention-grabbing and engaging nature of incivility for persuading opponents and audiences. Then the task for restoring the health of our public deliberation is not necessarily to reduce the volume of incivility, but to help users constructively channel their desire to express incivility through persuasive arguments. However, the very structure of Twitter often drives our public engagements to be short, quick, responsive, and emotion-driven, making this transition difficult for some users (Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017).

Chapter 8

Rhetorical patterns and types of intolerance

This chapter investigates the themes of intolerance in abortion discourse on the Irish and U.S. Twittersphere, addressing the following research question:

RQ3. What are the rhetorical patterns and types of intolerance expressed in the Irish and U.S. abortion discussions on Twitter?

In this chapter, I outline and discuss four main rhetorical patterns and types of intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse samples. The first three patterns of intolerance appear in both the Ireland and U.S. Twitterspheres, which I name as (a) Vilification, (b) Exclusion, Ostracism and Excommunication, (c) Reactionary perception of 'the threats' and victimhood, and (d) violence. Religious intolerance and violence are observed particularly in the U.S. sample. In the concluding remarks, I highlight both the cross-cultural and culture-particular nature of intolerance in online political discourse. Also, I shortly summarise the normative implications of the findings in this chapter: how intolerance can result in irreconcilable antagonism among cultural, religious, and ideological groups, and how to understand intolerance.

8.1 Demonisation

In both the Irish and U.S. Twittersphere, one of the prominent themes in the language of intolerance by both pro- and anti-abortion users is to demonise one's political opponents. Just like how Twitter users played with the conception of civility and incivility and portrayed themselves as civil and their opponent as uncivil, Twitter users often framed their in-group as tolerant in contrast to the out-group as intolerant and intolerable. This framing justifies one's own intolerance of the other because

it is morally justified not to tolerate the intolerable (Forst, 2003, 2008, 2017). I have discussed Habermas and Forst's conception of toleration as reciprocity and generality in Chapter 2, which suggests that one who denies the norm of tolerance should not expect tolerance from others.

8.1.1 Evil, demon, bloodthirsty: Demonisation and a dualistic worldview

Demonisation involves a simple dualistic worldview where abortion discussion is a battle between good and evil, between darkness and light, between demise and deliverance. It follows a very simple and clear demarcation between good/virtuous Us versus evil Them. Othering constructs a sharp boundary between Us (and people like us) and Them, assigning inferior status to Them and superior status to Us (Nyhagen, 2019; Pickering, 2001; Riggins, 1997).

In moralised politics, political struggles are constructed as a moral tug of war where only one side can win, and only one side is defensible (Nolan et al., 1996). In doing so, inter-group conversations or compromises in abortion discourse become undesirable or even nearly impossible. We do not expect devils to change their evil minds after a rational conversation. Devils are an enemy to be destroyed (Mouffe, 2000). Twitter analysis in this thesis finds that abortion discourse is portrayed as a part of a continuing culture war where only one side is legitimate and the other is an enemy and threat to be destroyed (Dillon, 1996a; Hunter, 1991; Mouw & Sobel, 2001).

In my Irish and U.S. datasets, some anti-abortion tweets frame women with abortion experiences, the public in favour of abortion rights, and medical staff performing abortion as murderous, bloodthirsty devils. According to this demonising logic, being pro-abortion has nothing to do with women's rights or concern for women's reproductive health. Instead, the pro-abortion stance is an outcome of people being devils, morally bankrupt, who kill babies and exploit their human rights for money or any other selfish reasons: namely, the idea that there is no goodness in pro-abortion views. The dualistic worldview and demonising rhetoric among Irish Twitter users are illustrated in the following two quotes:

'Sad and scary to see so many murderous people support the killing unborn babies, God will judge you for your slaughter of babies, dark times #hometovote' (Ireland)

'Pro-abortionists dance with the Devil while #Ireland decides whether to accept infanticide. Social media censorship will play a significant role #irelandreferendum #8thAmendment #ProLife #abortionreferendum #AbortionIsMurder' (Ireland)

In the U.S. abortion discourse, the Planned Parenthood foetal part scandal (Live Action, 2020; Planned Parenthood, 2015) is frequently mentioned to demonise Planned Parenthood, abortion doctors, and politicians supporting abortion rights that pro-abortionists murder babies and sell their organs for profit. Anti-abortion tweets from the U.S. sample for instance write:

'@JoeBiden Biden the Butcher killed more than 60 million babies because he supports abortion and Planned Parenthood since 1972. God creates, Biden Kills. Joe is a Monster. Spread this to your friends. Lord have mercy' (U.S.)

'@JoeBiden's bloodthirstiness for innocent blood makes my decision in November a very easy one' (U.S.)

'@amyklobuchar @TODAYshow @DNC @RNC Get real, Hypocritical Amy. You are a BABY MURDERER who supports PLANNED Parenthood.' (U.S.)

'Planned parenthood = illegally selling foetal parts. PP is a Sick KILLING machine that will do ANYTHING to continue to SLAUGHTER OUR KIDS!' (U.S.)

'@anonymised @anonymised Planned Parenthood is the evilest, most sinister, corrupt institution killing U.S. babies for over the past 75 years' (U.S.)

Demonisation rhetoric is also used by pro-abortion Twitter users. According to this rhetoric, being anti-abortion is nothing to do with defending babies' right to life, but it is simply because these people are misogynistic or religious fundamentalist bigots hoping all women will suffer and die: namely, there is nothing good or respectable in anti-abortion views. The demonising rhetoric among Irish and U.S. Twitter users is illustrated in the following three quotes:

'Behold the faces of those people who are happy to let women die or travel abroad for healthcare or be forced to carry a dying foetus for months or remain pregnant with a rapist's child. Remember their faces at our next election' (Ireland)

'Pro-life people celebrating RGB's death because of the potential overturn of Roe shows that they don't actually care about anyone's life. They just care about controlling women. Just say you hate women and go!!' (U.S.)

'Protecting fetuses but let people die when it comes to the coronavirus. He says it is about freedom, but freedom for whom? Certainly not for women. It is really about trying to bring back total control of women – no vote, no property ownership – they want women as a property of husband' (U.S.)

8.1.2 Hitler, Nazi, KKK, Islamic terrorist organisations: Demonisation via political extremist analogy

Another prominent technique of demonisation is using extremist analogy to compare one's opponent to political extremist individuals, organisations and ideologies that are generally agreed as intolerant and intolerable such as Nazism, Hitler, Islamic fundamentalist terrorist organisations, White supremacy, KKK, and so forth. A political extremist analogy is used to justify their own intolerance against the opposing group. When unwarranted and unjustified, this extremist comparison can be used to forward inappropriate hyperbolic comparisons and argumentative fallacies. Without detailed information and justification about the accusation, Nazi and other extremist analogy is often a tool to shun differences, derail and shut down any ongoing discussion by driving a moralised politics that transforms political adversaries into evil enemies (Craig, 2018). In Ireland, anti-abortion users criticise women with abortion experiences as being as bad as Hitler and Nazi, or comparing abortion to the holocaust, as illustrated in these two quotes:

'I object to repealing the 8th amendment in #Ireland and starting an #abortion holocaust! #SaveThe8th @YouthDefence @Savethe8thInfo' (Ireland)

'#8thref #LoveBothVoteNO Hitler killed people, are we following women who want to murder their babies for reasons outside of health risk? No way! No killing and no to us paying for deaths' (Ireland)

In the U.S. sample, Hitler and Nazi analogies, as well as comparisons to white supremacy and KKK, are made by anti-abortion users to demonise pro-abortion actors and abortion service providers like Planned Parenthood. The KKK analogy might have been popular during the period of my data collection because the anti-abortion language adopts a lot of racial talking points from the Black Lives Matter movements which coincide in the same year after the murder of an African American man George Floyd. Anti-abortion tweets borrow the anti-racism talking points like black genocide, systemic racism, etc. and argue that Planned Parenthood is a white supremacist organisation deliberately committing black genocide, as exemplified in the following tweets:

'German NAZIS murdered Jews in ovens and American LEFTIST Nazi-like Planned Parenthood kills BLACK BABIES then butchers and sells their BABY PARTS for profit! If BLM cares about black Americans, why don't they PROTEST the largest killer of blacks in this nation: PLANNED PARENTHOOD?' (U.S.)

'Planned Parenthood has killed more black babies than the KKK could have ever dreamed of.' (U.S.)

'@anonymised Sanger and the Klan created Planned Parenthood to control the black population and influence. Dems created the welfare state to incentivize single-parent black families without male role models. There is a reason why abortion and welfare are core Democrat issues. It's the true systemic racism. Tell them.' (U.S.)

Both the Nazi and KKK analogies of abortion highly simplify the abortion policy landscape. On the one hand, women are foregrounded as the very perpetrators, who are responsible for the murder and the holocaust of babies. This intolerant view rarely considers that women are encouraged or discouraged to procreate by the state, depending on their memberships to different class, racial, and ethnic collectivities (Yuval-Davis, 1993). In Nazi Germany, forced sterilisation and abortion for a 'racial emergency situation' applied differently between German and non-German (especially Jewish) women (David et al., 1988). In the U.S., state-funded sterilisations were abused to force poor women of colour not to procreate whereas white and middle-class women were rather encouraged by the same state to childbearing (Davis, 1983).

On the other hand, women are backgrounded and erased in the demonising logic in anti-abortion discourse. Namely, women are rarely mentioned. Without a reference to women in crisis pregnancy, the abortion issue is portrayed as a battle between the evil state and those who fight for the 'future of the nation.' Here, unborn babies are discussed as 'national stock' and abortion as a threat to 'the nation' (Yuval-Davis, 1993). Look at the following tweet for example:

'The unborn children are in danger. We must protect our Nation's children, our future generations, our daughters, our sons, our grandchildren. Don't kill a Nation in the womb. #AbortionNever #LoveBothVoteNo #Savethe8th' (Ireland)

While talking about saving the babies from the evil force of the pro-abortion state, the focus of this pronatalist discourse rarely goes to the mothers. For instance, U.S. anti-abortion tweets argue that Planned Parenthood is a white supremacist organisation and must therefore be abolished, but in doing so they rarely advocate for justice for pregnant black women. Black activist and scholar Angela Davis (1983) in this regard argues for reproductive rights as socioeconomic rights, not the liberalist notion of 'choice' (Roberts et al., 2005). Lacking any vision for progressing justice for women in crisis pregnancies, intolerant anti-abortion tweets merely hijack anti-racist talking points for a mere pretext to object to women's termination of crisis pregnancy.

However, demonising the opponent is not confined to anti-abortion reactions. Among pro-abortion users in the Irish sample, the analogy to Islamic fundamen-

talism and terrorist organisations is somewhat popular as a discursive technique to demonise political opponents, as illustrated below:

'Unelected @DaithiDoolan LOVES the Muslim Brotherhoods and Hamas's Irish plant Fatin Al Tamimi also head of the Nazi @ipsc48 He shouts #8thref & equality for #LGBT but associates and promotes those who slaughter #LGBT and send babies to their deaths.' (Ireland)

Again, the demonising language often loses the nuances and complexities of politics. The tweet above condemns Sinn Féin politician Daithi Doolan for his support for the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC). The tweet also demonises the head of IPSC Fatin Al Tamimi by calling her 'head of the Nazi IPSC.' However, supporting Palestine is not equivalent to supporting Islamic fundamentalist organisations slaughtering LGBTQ+ people and their babies. Moreover, a pro-Palestine campaign does not amount to anti-Semitism or Nazism. Such vilification serves as an easy automatic reaction to shut down any difference in our online political discourse. Another pro-abortion tweet uses the Taliban analogy to condemn the anti-abortion party in Northern Ireland:

'Never forget that the glue that holds Theresa May's government together is the #DUP, which, like the Taliban, believes that women do not deserve equality or dominion over their lives and bodies' (Ireland)

This pro-abortion tweet condemns the Democratic Unionist Party in Northern Ireland (DUP) by saying that it 'believes like the Taliban.' The analogy to the Taliban, an Islamic militant organisation in Afghanistan back in 2018, and now an actual governing power in 2021, emphasises how misogynistic the DUP is. The Taliban has been notorious for their Islamic fundamentalism, misogyny, and violence against women. Taliban social policies toward women include systemic gender apartheid, eliminating women from the public space, depriving them of their right to appear in public, right to work, education, healthcare, etc. (Goodson, 2001). When we equate a political party in our own country to the Taliban, we are expecting this as a moral justification of our intolerance of our enemy: it is justified to be intolerant of the DUP because They are like the Taliban who must not be tolerated. However, without detailed evidence and explanations about the analogy, we cannot assess if such a comparison is reasonable or hyperbolic. Intolerance without grounds is not only anti-deliberative but also anti-pluralist, pushing our politics into moralised antagonism where one side is clearly an immoral enemy of society.

Another concern about the Islamic fundamentalist analogy from the left-wing users is that it perpetuates the stereotype of Islamic beliefs and organisations as a

symbol of oppression, bigotry, and misogyny. The Islamic fundamentalist analogy is not new in Ireland's abortion discourse. In County Kerry in 1984, Joanne Hayes was arrested for the murder of two babies. During the tribunal, Hayes' moral character and her sex life were questioned (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019). Regarding the Hayes' case, journalist Nell McCafferty wrote that Ireland needed reminding that this was 'Tralee (a town in Count Kerry), not Iran,' indicating that Ireland was 'an outlier in terms of Western European values' (Earner-Byrne & Urquhart, 2019, pp.80-1). Such an analogy can perpetuate the negative stigma and prejudices attached to Muslim communities in European countries (e.g., illiberal, different from, or even incompatible with European values). Furthermore, such language ignores the autogenous grassroots movements in Iran, Palestine, and other Islamic countries fighting for equality, justice, and social changes (Fleischmann, 2000; Moghadam, 2020; Tohidi, 2016). Such othering reinforces the Islamophobic prejudice and hampers transnational solidarity between the West and Middle East for progressive reproductive justice.

8.2 Exclusion, ostracism, and excommunication

8.2.1 Gendered othering and exclusion: Men have no say in abortion discourse

Men's roles and involvements in the abortion issue have been complex. Among the recent Irish and U.S. publics, the abortion issue is not deeply divided by gender. Both Irish women and men vote in favour of legal abortion (Field, 2018) and majorities of U.S. adult women and men support legal abortion in all or most cases (Pew Research Centre, 2021b). But there are some conflicting norms and expectations about men's role in abortion decisions. Several attitudinal studies have found that men and women have different expectations about men's role in abortion decision-making processes (Nelson et al., 1997; Rosenwasser et al., 1987). Women tend to think abortion decision is a women's choice whereas men endorse a higher level of men's right to be involved in an abortion-decision making process (Nelson et al., 1997; Rosenwasser et al., 1987). However, the same study also finds that many men nonetheless remain passive in the decision-making process (Nelson et al., 1997). Men are also more likely to have no opinion on the abortion issue than women (The Irish Times, 2018a). This complexity between male gender and abortion attitudes gives challenges to abortion campaign organisations in terms of how they deal with male

citizens.

Hunt & Friesen (2021) explore how Irish pro- and anti-abortion campaigns during the referendum appeal to men in their Twitter messages. In their samples, anti-abortion campaign messages often portray men's role as 'impacted parties' and 'family protectors' who are personally hurt by abortion (Hunt & Friesen, 2021). The authors point out that men in anti-abortion campaigns speak as survivors of abortion or emerge as pleading fathers who want to have a say to protect their own child from their pregnant partners who want an abortion (Hunt & Friesen, 2021; Manninen, 2007). On the contrary, Irish pro-abortion campaign messages emphasise men's role as 'supporters' rather than 'protectors' (Hunt & Friesen, 2021). Hunt & Friesen (2021) find that male athletes and celebrity role models are featured in many Irish pro-abortion campaigns by juxtaposing hegemonic masculinity (physical strength, occupational achievement) and feminist messages like 'real men support women's bodily autonomy.' This implicit appeal to a certain view of male gender role is similar to the discussion of 'real men' in anti-sex trafficking and anti-sex work campaigns (i.e., 'real men do not buy girls') (Hunt & Friesen, 2021; Steele & Shores, 2015).

However, some pro-abortion messages attempt to solve the complexities of men's roles in abortion by delegitimising men's participation per se from abortion discourse, arguing that abortion is strictly a women's issue where men have no say in it. Below are two examples, one from Ireland and one from the U.S.:

'It still bugs me that men have the right to vote for what women should do with their bodies but anyway, get it over and done. #Repealthe8th #VoteYes #irelandreferendum' (Ireland)

'@anonymised @anonymised You have no uterus, no womb and no vagina. Why should I care about your opinion on Planned Parenthood?' (U.S.)

In doing so, some pro-abortion tweets frame abortion as a deeply gendered issue, where men are the oppressors and women are the oppressed. They also argue for clear contrast between being male and female, indicating the gender itself is self-explanatory to tell which side is right. The following examples demonstrate the clear boundary between oppressed women and oppressive men:

'Over the past 30 years, I have attended many large political gatherings, most of which were predominantly male and stale. I've never seen anything as fresh and female as this campaign. @anonymized #TogetherForYes #RepealedTheEighth' (Ireland)

'The Yes campaign is run by women. The No campaign is run by men. I'll just

leave that there. #RepealThe8th #Together4Yes' (Ireland)

Namely, intolerance of male opinions takes a rather monolithic view on women and men's involvement in pregnancy and abortion. This monolithic view also makes some pro-abortion users intolerant of women with conservative, anti-abortion views – who would be seen as not conforming with the norm and expectations of legitimate women's stance on the abortion issue. One pro-abortion tweet in the U.S. sample criticises anti-abortion women as 'literally letting men decide for you':

'[quoting another tweet] HOW ARE YOU A FEMALE AND NOT A FEMINIST NOR PRO-CHOICE? MAKE IT MAKE SENSE. YOU ARE LITERALLY LETTING MEN DECIDE FOR YOU' (U.S.)

The intolerance of the male voice in abortion discourse can be largely counterproductive to deliberative politics as this rhetoric distorts the public perception of political polarisation between women and men. It essentialises differences between genders, even though, in reality, gender is not a strong dividing factor in abortion discourse (Field, 2018; Pew Research Centre, 2021b). The big data analysis in Chapter 6 also demonstrates that women and men do not differ much in their uncivil and intolerant language use. Gender-based intolerance can drive abortion policy discussions into an unnecessary gender war. The same critique can be applied to the anti-abortion demarcation where women are simply the abuser of the foetal human rights and men are the protector of the babies against the 'murderous' mothers. An earlier study finds that women and men share similar views on men's role in abortion decision making (Nelson et al., 1997). Other scholarly works discuss that while men cannot have the right to veto a woman's abortion decision, yet there may be times where a woman would consider a man's paternal right (Manninen, 2007). Intolerant perception of the other group (either men or women) hampers the public from acknowledging many agreements they share and any policy consensus that they can actually achieve by engaging with one another's voice.

8.2.2 Religious exclusion: 'Excommunicate those fake Christians!'

Intolerance is not only used to demonise the out-group Them but it is also used to increase the unity of the in-group Us by deporting and excommunicating some in-group members when there are internal conflicts or disagreements due to 'deviant,' 'disloyal,' 'heretic' members (Castano et al., 2002; Kahn, 1980). This form of intolerance comes largely from U.S. Christian communities that wish to shun pro-abortion Christians and excommunicate them from their religious communities. Among my

datasets, this type of intolerance is more popular in the U.S. than in Ireland, possibly because of the rise of Christian Right movements and the recent Trump administration in the U.S., which successfully appealed to the reactionary-right ideas of social conservatives (Ferree et al., 2002; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; A. L. Whitehead & Perry, 2020). The religious charge in the reactionary right-wing movements in the U.S. politics might have led U.S. anti-abortion users to be more prone to express heated intolerance against dissents within their own religious community who are perceived to get in the way of 'taking America back for God' (A. L. Whitehead & Perry, 2020). The tweets below illustrate such religious-charged intolerance from the U.S. context:

'@anonymised You cannot be Catholic and have the "leftist" belief that pro-choice is ok. The killing of babies is not acceptable to God. So don't give me your leftist bullshit that it's ok, and don't call yourself Catholic. Excommunication is the answer for you.' (U.S.)

'@anonymised @anonymised I wonder what he thinks of Pelosi being a "prayerful" Catholic who uses every opportunity to fund Planned Parenthood? Maybe the Catholic Church should excommunicate her' (U.S.)

'A political leader who calls himself a Catholic cannot take an anti-life stand and receive communion. Period. It is a mortal sin to scandalize the masses with a viewpoint against the Church teachings. The Church cares about souls, not votes' (U.S.)

'Catholic @JoeBiden admitted on the stage that he supports Roe v. Wade. How can this man still receive communion?' (U.S.)

These intolerant tweets in the U.S. dataset show that the conservative Christian forces in the U.S. are more than religious renewal; they are a political power (A. L. Whitehead & Perry, 2020). A. L. Whitehead & Perry (2020) observe that those who enthusiastically emphasise U.S. Christian nationalism put political power over religion. The Christianity invoked by the reactionary populists is 'a civilisational and identitarian' Christianism – a matter of belonging, rather than believing (A. L. Whitehead & Perry, 2020, Ch. 2, para 103). To belong in the Christian community, not only one's religious identity but also other social identities should be homogeneously sorted across racial, ideological, partisan positions (Mason, 2018). For instance, among the intolerant tweets in the U.S. anti-abortion discourse, being a true Christian is equated to holding certain political and partisan positions such as voting for Republicans and holding anti-abortion views. One U.S. tweet demonstrates the social identity sorting in the U.S. anti-abortion discourse:

'You are not Catholic if you're not pro-life and that is the truth. Catholics must vote Republican.' (U.S.)

This does not mean, however, that most U.S. Christians are supporters of Christian nationalism or anti-abortion policies and legislation. In fact, a Pew report (2021b) shows that majorities of U.S. adults across different Christian affiliations support legal abortion in all or most cases. 64 per cent of Black Protestants, 63 per cent of White Protestants who are not evangelical, and 55 per cent of Catholics answered abortion should be legal in all or most cases. White evangelical Protestants are the only religious affiliation that is anti-abortion majority (77%) (Pew Research Centre, 2021a). Furthermore, other studies show that those who advocate for national policies based on Christianism are stronger among unchurched voters than those who are associated with traditional religious organisations and regular churchgoers (Stroope et al., 2021). This might give us an insight into the reactionary right-wing intolerance that is coming from the unconventional periphery of Christian conservatives and these people use Christian narratives in everyday life to construct and defend their political agenda. But at the same time, when we are experiencing unconventional populist leaders like Donald Trump who have constantly appealed to and made policies based on such reactionary demands, this religious-political discourse should not be downplayed as an insignificant fringe discourse. A. L. Whitehead & Perry (2020) criticise such dangerous potential of Christian nationalism and their intolerance:

'Christian nationalism is, [. . .] ultimately about privilege. It co-opts Christian language and iconography in order to cloak particular political or social ends in moral and religious symbolism. This serves to legitimate the demands, wants, and desires of those embracing Christian nationalism in the transcendent. If God says the United States should take a particular stance, or pass a specific law, who are we to argue? Christian nationalism is used to defend against shifts in the culture toward equality for groups that have historically lacked access to the levers of power—women, sexual, racial, ethnic, and religious minorities.' (Conclusion, para 10).

8.3 Reactionary perceptions of 'the threats' and victimhood: 'They are destroying the nation and We are defending it against Them'

Politics of victimhood are observed in many themes of intolerance discussed in the previous sections: demonisation and exclusion involve constructing We (or the group We are protecting, e.g., foetuses) as the wronged and oppressed victim and the other Them as the wrongdoer and oppressor. Arguably, the position of a victim has become among the most pivotal identity positions in European and North American politics (Horwitz, 2018). Horwitz (2018) insists that everyone now establishes their status as a victim before advancing a political claim: the politics of victimhood embodies the idea that We suffer wrongs that must be requited. The politics of victimhood has often been deplored by conservative critiques as a left-wing characteristic in many civil rights movements, women's rights movements, but Horwitz (2018) points that the conservatives exercise and claim the victim status even when they disavow doing so (p.558). For instance, Christian nationalism entails a sense of resentment and victimhood (A. L. Whitehead & Perry, 2020). The problem of victim politics is that the perception and construction of victimhood can easily be a reaction and backlash to the minority rights and women's revolution (Horwitz, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Such reactionary victimhood is reflected in both the Irish and U.S. Twitter samples. Reactionary intolerance often comes from right-wing anti-abortion Twitter users, but a few reactionary tweets are coming from the left of the political spectrum as well. Reactionary right-wing intolerance tweets express fear, anxiety, and disgust against progressive social changes and movements in general. One anti-abortion user in the Irish sample writes:

'If you think these communist scumbag feminist goblins will be finally satisfied by the repeal of the 8th amendment and go back to whatever they were doing before this, you are gravely mistaken. Fight back #voteno.' (Ireland)

Several anti-abortion Twitter users in my samples connect their anti-abortion view to their refusal of other liberal changes, especially for LGBTQ+ friendly policies, such as in the examples below:

'One look at the #SexEdBill shows you the true intent of the leftists who wrote it. Promoting abortion to our children, peddling the myth that there are more than two genders, explaining how two men have sex and they want eight-year-olds taught this! #leaveourkidsalone #Savethe8th.' (Ireland)

'The obvious dangers and evils of abortions (pro-abortion = literally pro-death) show that black people should specifically take a stand against the promotion and overexposure of homosexuality and transsexualism to our children #AngelaStantonKingforCongress' (U.S.)

But such reactionary intolerance does not solely come from the anti-abortion sides. A pro-abortion user in the U.S. sample expresses their hostility and intolerance of transgender-friendly policies, calling them a 'trans cult.'

'@anonymised @anonymised @anonymised @anonymised @Twitter I've always been pro-abortion. But Biden seriously scares me. He will hand over womanhood directly to the trans cult. I considered voting for one of the alternatives but that just feels like not voting. Honestly, I don't know what to do.' (U.S.)

In summary, we see that reactionary intolerance towards abortion policies does not exist in isolation. The reactionary anti-abortion campaign is more than an isolated campaign for the foetal right to life; instead, such intolerance is part of broader reactionary campaigns against many socio-cultural changes that have occurred in the past decades in Ireland and the U.S. Reactionary intolerance from the right-wing sphere seemingly comes from deep anxiety and resentment towards the rise of progressive social changes in general – including women's rights to abortion, and LGBTQ+ friendly education and policies (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). This reactionary intolerance seeks to undo the liberal policy changes that occurred in the last few decades, or actively disrupt progressive changes happening now. Reactionary intolerance from the political left manifests in a more or less different way. The common type of intolerance in pro-abortion discourse seemingly stems from their fear that other right-based movements for another marginalised identity can override their own movements, e.g., trans movements are perceived to override and erase women's movements and womanhood (Phipps, 2021). The perceived threat to one's own movement and identity politics might be the reason why some types of pro-abortion intolerance tend to draw a line between women and non-women (men, trans and gender non-conforming people without a uterus) and fixate on a narrower sense of womanhood.

8.4 Violence: 'Who wants to have a bonfire?'

Chapter 4 has summarised the history of U.S. abortion discourse and anti-abortion violence throughout the 20th century. Even in the 21st century, numerous murders, arson, bombings, and property crimes have been committed at multiple Planned

Parenthood facilities: a firebomb explosion at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Grand Chute, Wisconsin in April 2012 (The Washington Post, 2012); an arson at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Pullman, Washington in September 2015 (The Spokesman Review, 2015); a murder of two civilians and a police officer at a Planned Parenthood facility in Colorado Springs, Colorado in November 2015 (CNN, 2015), and so forth. In my U.S. sample, I have found several tweets calling for or making reference to anti-abortion violence:

'@anonymised @PPact I'd be okay with targeted drone missile strikes on all Planned Parenthood sites. This is war, it's time to start acting like war. You just have to eradicate them. Otherwise, like rats and roaches, they will just reproduce and regenerate. @PPact must be wiped from the face of the earth.' (U.S.)

'Can we destroy planned parenthood since the founder was a white supremacist who wanted to eradicate black ppl (aka weeds). Who wants to have a bonfire?' (U.S.)

'@anonymised @anonymised Has any Planned Parenthood been vandalized yet?' (U.S.)

'@anonymised @anonymised When will they set Planned Parenthood on fire?' (U.S.)

The history of anti-abortion violence in the U.S. shows that political rhetoric of intolerance and demonisation in the U.S. abortion discourse does not stop at a verbal level but can easily escalate into actual physical violence and harm onto abortion clinics, medical staff, and citizens. Therefore, tweets inciting or glamorising anti-abortion violence read dangerously even when they are just 'words online.' If verbal intolerance can be easily transformed into actual physical harm and antagonism in one country, such a possibility must be considered when trying to balance moderation and regulation of public communication on the one hand and free speech on the other. The existing harm principle allows the government to limit individual liberties as necessary to prevent harm to others (Brown, 2015). Arguably, free speech rights might be no exception to this principle. For John Stuart Mill, the protection of speech is a means to protect thought, and opinions lose their immunity if they cross over from thoughts into actions (Brown, 2015; Mill, 1859/1892). Social media platforms can be especially a 'free highway,' low-cost, high-speed dissemination mechanism for the spread of hate speech and violence (Cohen-Almagor, 2015). Hence, many social media platforms have their own guidelines and policies to regulate and ban hateful and violent users from the platform. Even indictment and prosecution for social media posts can be appropriate in limited circumstances (Guiora & Park, 2017). If social media platforms unflag or leave violence-inciting

contents, then this might result in a build-up of anti-abortion violence or violence-prone public sentiments. It might, however, be a different story in the Irish case where the public has not experienced anti-abortion violence and crime, unlike the U.S.

However, more interventions from government authorities and social media platforms may not result in a fundamental resolution to tackle the cycle of intolerance, in which politics has become a war between enemies. I have discussed that some intolerance can stem from reactionary thinking patterns and a sense of victimhood and resentment that the society has treated Us badly. 'The society' can be a blank, floating signifier that can be anything depending on one's own sense of victimhood – it can be multiculturalism, a flow of non-White immigration, feminism, LGBTQ+ friendly policies – it can be anything. Giving more power to governmental authorities or platforms to regulate what can or cannot be said online, could exacerbate this feeling of victimhood. One of the common themes of incivility (discussed in chapter 7) is to blame and feel resentful towards mainstream media and social media platforms that are perceived to be systemically biased against the victim Us, and always side with the evil victimiser Them. Even if we manage to eradicate all hateful and intolerant expressions from one social media platform, it will not mean that hate and intolerance will be gone for good; they will just move elsewhere, to another platform, to another website that might be even harder to find and tackle (W. Phillips & Milner, 2018).

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to answer RQ3 for a qualitative content analysis of rhetorical patterns and types of intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse:

RQ3. What are the rhetorical patterns and types of intolerance expressed in the Irish and U.S. abortion discussions on Twitter?

This chapter has identified four main themes of intolerance, with sub-themes under each main theme:

1. Demonisation

    - By calling the opponent evil, devil, demon, monster, abomination
    - By comparing the opponent to political extremist ideologies and groups such as Nazi, Hitler, the KKK, and Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups

2. Exclusion, Ostracism, and excommunication
    - Gender essentialism to delegitimise non-women's (which can involve both men and trans, gender nonconforming communities without a uterus) voice and participation in abortion debates and discussions
    - Excommunication to shut down intra-group disagreements
3. Reactionary perceptions of 'the threat'
    - Reactionary fear and anxiety over the liberal socio-cultural changes in the last few decades (e.g., LGBTQ+ friendly education bill, bills for trans rights, threats of the left-wing 'totalitarianism' against the western civilisation)
4. Violence
    - Calling for anti-abortion violence at abortion service facilities (e.g., arson, property damage)

8.5.1 Discussion and conclusion

Intolerance is cross-cultural but also culture-particular

The list of patterns and types of intolerance identified in this chapter shows that, like incivility, intolerance is a cross-cultural but also culture-particular concept. In both Ireland and the U.S., intolerance is channelled through demonisation, exclusion, and reactionary perceptions of 'the threat' coming from out-groups or the socially disadvantaged and marginalised. But some specific ideas and vocabulary of intolerance vary depending on the political culture and abortion history in the two countries. When demonising their out-group opponents, the Irish Twitter users commonly compare their out-groups to Hitler, Nazis, and Islamic terrorist organisations. In the U.S., however, the tropes of the KKK, white supremacy, and anti-black racism are more popular options to demonise pro-abortion advocates. This is largely because the U.S. anti-abortion discourse in 2020 has adopted the language of the Black Lives Matter movement taking place in the same year. Also, race, poverty, and population policies are historically intertwined and discussed in connection often in the U.S. (Davis, 1983).

Furthermore, calling for anti-abortion violence and for excommunicating pro-abortion Christians appear only in the U.S. sample. The U.S. abortion discourse has historically experienced hyperpolarised, antagonistic activism, especially from

the anti-abortion side. Murder, kidnapping, arson, bombing and other violent and militant tactics have occurred at diverse abortion service facilities and medical practitioners. Hence, calling for anti-abortion violence in the 21st century might be a more familiar talking point for anti-abortion users in the U.S. than in Ireland. Intolerant tweets calling for excommunication of pro-abortion Christians are observed in the U.S. sample, perhaps because of the rise of Christian nationalism movements since the 1970s (Ferree et al., 2002; A. L. Whitehead & Perry, 2020). People express such intolerance because they know their message will resonate with other wide audiences on Twitter. In Chapter 6 I find that intolerance occurs frequently when people are communicating with already liked-minded people in a homogeneous environment (see also Rossini (2020)).

The sample size for this qualitative analysis is not large enough that one can generalise these tweets to represent the overall abortion discourse in the two countries at a national level. But the observed cross-country differences in Twitter discourses on abortion can certainly point to the idea that the specific vocabulary of intolerance is decided upon by the history of abortion discourse, as well as rhetorical resources and repertoires available at the time of political conflicts and ruptures (e.g., hijacking BLM movement talking points, making use of the rise of Christian nationalist movements).

Intolerance and antagonism: Political tribalism, resentment, victimhood

For a final remark, I want to link the empirical findings in this chapter back to the normative-critical discussions of intolerance discussed in Chapter 2: intolerance as a violation of norms of reciprocity and generality for the healthy maintenance of pluralist society (Forst, 2003, 2008, 2017; Habermas, 2003, 2004, 2006b). The examples of intolerance in this chapter illustrates how intolerance results in hyperpolarised, moralised politics between enemies.

One of the noticeable patterns of intolerant communications in my samples is that intolerance is driven more by a sense of political tribalism – a sense of belongingness to a political or religious group Us and the othering of Them – than by actual differences in citizens' abortion policy preferences. I observe that many anti-abortion tweets express moral outrage and intolerance against pro-abortion people by arguing that pro-abortion people are devils and Nazis supporting the legalisation of 'unlimited' abortion up to birth or even post-birth. Some pro-abortion tweets express intolerance against the anti-abortion stance, arguing that anti-abortion people are devils and Nazis advocating for the complete ban of abortion, even when moth-

ers' lives or health are at imminent risk or even pregnancy from rape. This might be far from the actual social reality and the actual public understanding of abortion, in both Ireland and the U.S. Empirical studies find that the U.S. citizens across party and ideological lines actually share a lot of agreements when it comes to specifics of abortion policy, such as when and why abortion should be legal (Mason, 2018). There can be electorates with extreme and intolerant views on abortion, but they might not dominate the national abortion discourse unlike it is assumed by some Twitter users in my samples.

If the public relies on prejudiced perceptions of threats and social polarisation, actual opportunities for reasonable policy consensus or compromise may go unnoticed (Mason, 2018). Mason (2018) finds that having a strong pro- or anti-abortion identity is the biggest motivator for political engagement for U.S. citizens. So, people who hold more or less similar understanding and expectations of legal abortion develop a sense of Us versus Them tribalism and express strong intolerance against the opposing political identity. Political tribalism pushes politics into an inter-tribal war where only one tribe wins over the other, without consideration for a possibility that finding an inter-group consensus can be possible. Namely, the core side-effect of moralised politics and identity-driven intolerance is that it can propel our political actions for 'wrong reasons' (Mason, 2018) – driven by threat perception (whether the threat is real or imaginative) and political tribalism (Us versus Them) instead of how much we truly agree and disagree on specific issues and policies.

Furthermore, communications of intolerance in my Twitter samples tend to rely on the logic of perceived victimhood. Horwitz (2018) notes that the victim position has become the most important identity position in U.S. politics. Many narratives of the expressed intolerance in my samples follow a structure where there is clear othering between a victim Us and a victimiser Them (Riggins, 1997). Conservatives develop a sense of victimhood that they are victimised and silenced by the progressives (Horwitz, 2018). Reactionary right-wing movements are a movement of victimhood and resentment, arguing that progressive socio-cultural changes, feminism, multiculturalism, immigration, and such are oppressing them (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). The left-wing political sphere is not immune from the internal logic of victimhood as well: reactionary feminism blames 'transgenderism' or 'gender ideology' for threatening women's safety and womanhood that are pivotal to women's movements (Phipps, 2021). The victimhood narratives justify intolerance within one's own community – arguing that We are defending an important value against a social evil Them: defending free speech, Christian heritage and values, women's

rights, for example. Such narratives are subsequently used to blame the other as the threat who are destroying the important values away from our nation: progressives are destroying free speech rights, multiculturalism is destroying Christian traditions that are fundamental to the European and North American culture, and trans ideologies are threatening women's sex-based rights (Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Phipps, 2021; Wynn, N., 2021). The problem of social intolerance driven by victim politics is that victim politics can easily transform into a call for authoritarian policies and restrictions, asking the state and society to punish 'unconventional' lifestyles and resulting in the hampering of the other's liberation (e.g., material resources to access reproductive healthcare) (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

In summary, this shows that the rhetorical patterns of intolerance contain an immanent contradiction between what tolerance means in theory, and how people make use of the concept in their political messages. The rules of tolerant behaviours must be generally and reciprocally acceptable for all sides, and all those involved take the perspectives of the others (Forst, 2008; Habermas, 2003). However, the narratives of intolerance in my samples reveal that the concept of tolerance is something called upon unilaterally. It is always Them who should be tolerant of Our beliefs and values, and it is Them who have intolerant attitudes and behaviours that should be condemned and destroyed. In contrast, it seldom directs at the in-group's own intolerance. The main implications of this chapter would be that, in order to address intolerant politics, we need to deal with political othering, identitarian tribalism, and victimhood politics.

Chapter 9

Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis aims to contribute to the scholarship of online civic culture, providing new insights about online incivility and intolerance in public deliberation. The objectives of this thesis are threefold:

(1) To explore in what contexts incivility and intolerance arise more frequently (RQ1).

(2) To explore how people use incivility and intolerance in their political rhetoric (RQ2 and 3).

(3) To discuss possible implications of my findings for the health of deliberative politics (RQ4).

In this chapter, I discuss and synthesise the theoretical discussions and empirical findings of the thesis and consider future work and extensions, addressing the final research question of this thesis:

RQ4. Are there implications of my findings for the health of deliberative politics and the academic debate with regards to the rise of incivility and intolerance in public deliberation?

In the first section of this chapter, I recapitulate my core theoretical arguments of deliberative democracy, public spheres, incivility, and intolerance. Then, in the rest of this chapter, I summarise empirical evidence and key findings regarding how far the theoretical discussion can be supported or challenged. In the second section of this chapter, I summarise the findings relating to the three research questions and ten hypotheses. In the third section of this chapter, I articulate five noteworthy insights that are relevant to advance on previous scholarship in this area: (1) a strong relationship between incivility and intolerance; (2) Twitter structures that hinder the productive sublimation of anger into persuasive arguments; (3) the small set of superposters (Graham & Wright, 2014) of incivility and intolerance in online

abortion discourse; (4) rethinking the role of anonymity in online political incivility and intolerance; and finally (5) the link between uncivil and intolerant Twitter communications, authoritarian populism, and reactionary backlash.

In the fourth section of this chapter, I consider the transferability of this thesis beyond Twitter research, abortion discourse, and the country-specific contexts of Ireland and the U.S. In the fifth section, I discuss the practical implications of this thesis for lasting social impacts, recommending both top-down and bottom-up approaches. In the sixth section, I discuss the limitations of this thesis and future extensions to the research. Overall, I argue that the overarching research aim and objectives of the thesis have been realised.

9.1 The theoretical argument

My account starts with the normative theories of deliberative and pluralist democracy by Jürgen Habermas and other deliberative and critical theorists such as Nancy Fraser, Irish Marion Young, Jane Masnbrdige, John Parkinson, and Rainer Forst. Habermas' theory of deliberative democracy is 'epistemic proceduralism', where legitimacy of democratic power and validity of political decision-making emerge from the fair and just operation of public communication processes (Bohman & Rehg, 2014; Habermas, 1996). Habermas' model of deliberative politics consists of multiple political arenas, ranging from the dispersed communication of citizens at the periphery of the public sphere (or counter-publics) to the centre of the official political bodies (Fraser, 1992; Habermas, 1996). Habermas (1996) envisages that the role of the public sphere is mainly to identify new social problems from the periphery of the public sphere or counter-publics, and mobilise relevant perspectives and information so that the issue is taken to and discussed by mass media and the institutionalised deliberation of lawmakers (Habermas, 1996, 2006a). Civility and mutual respect are the norm of an ideal speech situation where an argument wins over other claims by the power of better arguments, without threat, coercion, or deception (Habermas, 1991). But Habermas acknowledges in exceptional cases the legitimacy of non-deliberative and illegal activism such as civil disobedience (Habermas, 1985). To him, the important aspect of non-deliberative but legitimate political actions is that they are a non-violent, symbolic, public expression with the intention of appealing to the sense of justice of the wider populace and thereby reopening further deliberation and persuasion (Habermas, 1985; Smith, 2008).

Other deliberative theorists such as Irish Marion Young (2002) expands Haber-

mas' theories to incorporate more agonistic, disruptive, and unruly forms of political actions as reasonable political actions in deliberative politics (c.f. Mouffe, 2000). More agonistic understanding of deliberative politics sees that narrower images of civil and rational deliberation tend to discriminate certain forms of political struggles of the socially disadvantaged and marginalized as violent and illegitimate (I. M. Young, 2002; Zerilli, 2014). Young (2000) argues in this regard: 'What are the appropriate limits to democracy and protest is surely contestable, but in a deep democratic society the presumption should be in favour of the protesters that their purpose is to persuade' (p.48).

Deliberative system theorists like Jane Mansbridge and John Parkinson propose a systemic study of deliberation, echoing Habermas' multilevel understanding of public and political spheres (Mansbridge et al., 2012; Parkinson, 2012). Deliberative politics has multi-level hierarchies and not every level of deliberative arenas and every instance of deliberation must meet the full normative criteria to be productive to the deliberative political decision-making as a whole (Mansbridge et al., 2012; Parkinson, 2012). Hence, uncivil political communications among citizens can be beneficial to the deliberative system insofar as it contributes to the main purpose of the public sphere; namely to identify new social problems and mobilise diverse perspectives and narratives to create a well-considered public opinion (c.f. Habermas, 1996, 2006a). This sympathetic understanding of uncivil political rhetoric by citizens and civil societies acknowledges incivility's expressive and mobilizing functions (Herbst, 2010; Jamieson et al., 2017; Rossini, 2019). The critical evaluation of incivility in deliberative politics therefore requires a nuanced and detailed assessment of the possible pluses and minuses regarding the implications of such uncivil rhetoric to the deliberative system and issue publics over time (Mansbridge et al., 2012). The assessment requires more than simply what was said, but also who said it to whom, relative power differences between political actors, in what socio-political context and discursive settings, and what results and implications such incivility can lead to (Tracy, 2008).

Whereas the normative and empirical implications of uncivil political communication can be ambiguous and nuanced, the real threat to deliberative and pluralist democracy can be intolerance (Rossini, 2019). In modern democracies with increased religious, ethical, and cultural pluralism, the norm of tolerance arises in specific contexts of social and political conflicts and implementation of justice. Tolerance as a pluralist norm is required so that different groups including religious minorities, women, LGBTQ+, and others can stand as moral-political equals to the cultural

and ethical majorities (or the more powerful) in both legal and social spheres (Forst, 2003, 2008, 2017). Since different ethical groups are morally and politically equal in society, it is not a liberal state's territory to have a particular conception of 'the good life,' favouring one particular ethical worldview into laws and policies over other ethical communities without legitimate grounds (Forst, 2017; Habermas, 2003, 2004, 2006b; Rawls, 1973).

Hence, in pluralist democracy, tolerance is discussed in connection with the neutrality principle of a liberal state in particular contexts of social and political conflicts: the idea that 'all enforceable political decisions *must be formulated* in a language that is equally accessible to all citizens, and it *must be possible to justify them* in this language as well' (Habermas, 2006b, p.12, emphasis in original; Forst, 2017). The basis of tolerant law in pluralist democracy should then be reciprocally and generally acceptable to different ethical communities involved in a political issue public and public deliberation (Forst, 2003, 2008, 2017). Citizens are tolerant if they accept the boundary of tolerance set by the criteria of reciprocity and generality, understanding that justification for one's particular ethical beliefs and justification for generally binding laws are different (Forst, 2003). Intolerant law and citizens violate the norm of reciprocity and generality, unfairly arguing that their particular version of 'a good life' should be transformed into a generally binding law and general norm for others. This explains why intolerance has a contingent relationship with authoritarian conservatism, such as advocating that unconventional behaviours which are seen 'unethical' or 'immoral' to the in-group Us (e.g., abortion, same-sex marriage, transgenders in the military) should be restricted or prohibited by the state and society (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Norris & Inglehart (2019) regard that the combination of authoritarianism and populism as potentially the most dangerous for undermining liberal democracy by galvanising intolerance and resentment (p.248).

9.2 Evidence and key findings

To sum, the normative theory-inspired conceptions of incivility and intolerance in this thesis argue that incivility can have ambivalent rhetorical purposes for serving the needs of civil societies and public spheres. Intolerance in contrast is incompatible with the cardinal principle of pluralist democracy, denying the moral-political respect among different ethical groups and neutrality of a modern constitutional state. Many parts of this theory are supported by evidence and key findings throughout

this thesis. In the methodology chapter, I establish RQ1 and the ten hypotheses to explore in what demographic and discursive contexts political incivility and intolerance arise more frequently. The RQ2 and RQ3 are established to explore how people construct and express incivility and intolerance. The summary of the outcomes for each hypothesis and research question is as follow:

RQ1. What are the dynamics and intensity of political incivility and intolerance in abortion policy discussions in the Irish and U.S. Twittersphere?

H1: The U.S. dataset will contain significantly more incivility and intolerance than in the Irish dataset (accepted). I find that the U.S. dataset contains a larger portion of incivility and intolerance than the Irish dataset. However, this does not mean that Twitter users captured in the U.S. Twittersphere are inherently more uncivil and intolerant people. Rather, there have been some political and communicative contexts strongly influencing the users' uncivil and intolerant behaviours captured in the U.S. data. In the following nine hypotheses, I examine diverse variables that might have affected the bigger volume of incivility and intolerance in the U.S. dataset than in the Irish one.

H2: In the Irish dataset, the volume of total tweets posted per day, incivility, and intolerance will significantly increase as the voting day approaches than the earlier days during the referendum (accepted).

H3: In the U.S. dataset, the volume of total tweets posted per day, incivility, and intolerance will increase around high-profile abortion-related events (e.g., state/federal court decisions regarding abortion ban, news stories regarding abortion) than during uneventful periods (accepted). The acceptance of both H2 and H3 substantiates the claim that incivility and intolerance are communicative practices influenced by socio-political contexts. The timeline analysis shows that pro- and anti-abortion incivility and intolerance drastically increase when there are political events affecting their partisan concerns and values. For instance, when the Planned Parenthood foetal part scandal breaks out, anti-abortion tweets express a huge volume of incivility and intolerance at the pro-abortion public, politicians, and abortion facilities. Some events generate a similar volume of incivility and intolerance across issue positions, but some events only provoke partisan incivility and intolerance from one side of the abortion discourse. For example, the foetal part scandal during late May results in a disproportionately larger amount of intolerance from the anti-abortion side, but it does not provoke a similar amount of outrage and intolerance from the pro-abortion side in response. These findings require further investigations to see under what conditions one political event or issue influences

one political group's partisan incivility and intolerance but not the other conflicting side, or when they affect both pro- and anti-abortion partisan incivility and intolerance. The timeline analysis partly explains that the U.S. dataset may contain larger incivility and intolerance due to having multiple political events and issues during the data collection period.

H4: In both Ireland and the U.S., anti-abortion tweets are significantly more likely to express incivility and intolerance than pro-abortion tweets and tweets that are neutral or ambiguous to abortion (partially accepted). H4 is fully accepted in the U.S. dataset and partially accepted in the Irish case. In the U.S. Twittersphere, anti-abortion users were both slightly more uncivil and strongly more intolerant than their pro-abortion counterparts. However, in the Irish dataset, anti-abortion users were significantly more intolerant but less uncivil than pro-abortion users. This justifies the scholarly attention largely paid to the uncivil and intolerant discourse in right-wing political mobilisation (especially the radical and far-right sphere, as discussed in Askanius (2021); Krzyżanowski & Ledin (2017); Nilsson (2021); Norris & Inglehart (2019)). In abortion discourse at a big data scale, my Twitter analysis demonstrates that right-wing political discourse is significantly more likely to contain incivility and intolerance than left-wing political discourse, although left-wing politics is not completely free from concerns, as discussed by Berry & Sobieraj (2013). H4 partly explains why the U.S. data contain more incivility and intolerance than the Irish dataset as the U.S. dataset consists of a larger volume of anti-abortion tweets than the Irish dataset (see Table 6.1).

H5: A large portion of incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse on Twitter are conducted by a small number of highly active users (accepted). This hypothesis proves a relationship between deep issue partisanship and incivility and intolerance. Twitter can be seen as a form of 'issue publics' (Habermas, 2006a) amongst a smaller self-selecting company of interested actors (Bruns & Highfield, 2015). Twitter as an issue public attracts a cluster of citizens who are interested in abortion policy discussions, and hence the issue public is dominated by a smaller number of active users. In both Ireland and the U.S. Twittersphere, users who repeatedly engage in uncivil and intolerant behaviours in abortion discourse amount to less than 10 per cent, or even less than 1 per cent (in the case of intolerance in the Irish dataset), of all accounts. In other words, for every 100 people on Twitter, there are less than 10 people, or even only one person, who are actively expressing incivility and intolerance in the digital public environment when it comes to abortion discourse. Even among users who have tweeted at least one

incivility or intolerance in the Irish and U.S. dataset, the top 10 per cent of such users are responsible for half or almost half of the entire incivility and intolerance in the datasets. This finding notably differs from previous research findings such as those by Theocharis et al. (2020), who find that incivility is less a matter of a serial transgression amongst a small set of users, and more of general public behaviour. But in Theocharis and colleagues' research, they are looking at political tweets across a diverse range of political events and policy issues including immigration, gun control, and so forth. Hence, the difference between Theocharis et al.'s (2020) findings and mine indicate that incivility is a common behaviour for angry citizens on Twitter, but when we are looking at a specific issue public over a hyper-polarised, emotional issue like abortion, then political incivility and intolerance in the narrower issue public are dominated by hyperpartisan superposters.

This result can be a positive finding, on one hand, reassuring that the majority of Twitter users communicate with one another in a civil and tolerant manner. Hence, Twitter can serve the pro-democratic potential as digital public spheres (Papacharissi, 2004). But on the other hand, the hyperactive engagement of uncivil and intolerant superposters in the abortion issue public also cautions us of participatory inequalities in online deliberation and subsequent inequalities in policy outcomes (Klein, 2018). As Klein (2018) argues, political polarisation is a source of participatory inequality, where the extreme, hyper-partisan citizens' voices are likely to be represented and heard more strongly by the wider public and policymakers, whereas those with moderate views are rather quiescent. The overrepresentation of extreme partisan voices may give force to reactionary populist parties and political leaders (like Trump) to set repressive policies, arguably as true representatives of 'the people.' And by 'ordinary people,' right-wing populist discourse typically emphasises nativism, xenophobic nationalism, and cultural conservativism against immigration, LGBTQ+ rights, abortion rights (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Gibson's historical analysis of repressive policies during the McCarthyism and the Vietnam Wars (Gibson, 1988, 1989, 1992) argue that mass political intolerance affects the choices of policymakers by setting limits to acceptable and popular policies.

H6: In both Ireland and the U.S., Twitter users with male names are significantly more likely to express incivility and intolerance than users with female names (partially accepted). In both Ireland and the U.S., users with male names are more likely to express incivility and intolerance than users with female names, but the effect size is very little. Users with female and male names express incivility to a very similar extent in the Irish dataset and both incivility and intolerance in the U.S. dataset.

The only noticeable effect of the male gender is an increase in intolerance in the Irish dataset. Users with male names in the Irish dataset are 1.39 times more likely to express intolerance than users with female names, but the effect size is much smaller compared to other more significant predictors of intolerance such as anti-abortion issue position and Twitter affordances like Quotes. This suggests that incivility and intolerance in abortion discourse might not be strongly gendered or dominated by male voices compared to other forms of reactionary political discourse, such as those relating to anti-immigration and racism (Berry & Sobieraj, 2013; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). The demands for reactionary backlash and uncivil and intolerant politics are not confined to the grievances and frustration of men, although they constitute a big part of the support base for authoritarian populism (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). The other identities relevant for the support of reactionary populism (e.g., working-class, lower education degrees, religious, rural-residing) influence non-male and non-white citizens' engagement in reactionary anti-abortion movements (e.g., anti-feminist women's movements, Taranto (2017)). The gendered dynamics of uncivil and intolerant politics need further research.

H7: In both Ireland and the U.S., Twitter users with gender-unidentifiable pseudonyms are significantly more likely to express incivility and intolerance than users with gender-identifiable first names (rejected). There were no practically significant differences between incivility and intolerance written by users with gender-identifiable first names and gender-unidentifiable pseudonyms. Although several studies argue that platform anonymity can influence users' tendency to more easily behave in rude and uncivil ways (Clean up the Internet, 2020; Rowe, 2015), the finding of this thesis suggests that the practical effect of anonymity on political incivility and intolerance might not be as significant as it is argued in law and policy discussions (Clean up the Internet, 2020; Levmore & Nussbaum, 2012). This point will be discussed further in section 9.2.4.

H8: Twitter users in Ireland and the U.S. will be more likely to express incivility and intolerance when they are replying to other users directly than when they are the original poster of a tweet (accepted). This finding substantiates my conception of incivility and intolerance as communicative performances and rhetorical practices arising from the process of interpersonal arguing.

H9: Twitter users in Ireland and the U.S. will be more likely to express incivility when they are replying to other tweets than retweeting and quoting other tweets (rejected). In contrast to the expectation that incivility arises from the heterogeneous/disagreeing discussion environment (operationalised as Reply function on

Twitter), incivility is expressed more frequently in an agreeing/homogeneous environment (operationalised as Quotes and Retweets). This challenges (Rossini, 2020)'s and other computational works (Garimella et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2019; Villa-Cox et al., 2020) that incivility occurs more freuqnelty in a disagreeing discussion environment and in Replies.

H10: Twitter users in Ireland and the U.S. will be more likely to express intolerance when they are retweeting and quoting other tweets than when they are replying to other tweets (accepted). As expected, intolerance is more frequently stimulated in an agreeing/homogeneous discussion environment where a user's intolerance is supported and strengthened by other like-minded users (operationalised as Retweets and Quotes on Twitter) than in a heterogeneous/disagreeing environment (operationalised as Replies). H9 and H10 show that there is something unique about Quote function, attracting both incivility and intolerance. For future research, this means Quotes are useful to collect rich data about uncivil and intolerant user behaviours.

Besides RQ1 and the ten hypotheses, RQ2 and RQ3 are explored to analyse rhetorical patterns and types of political incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse on Twitter:

RQ2. What are the rhetorical patterns and types of incivility expressed in the Irish and U.S. abortion discussions on Twitter?

My analysis identifies two main patterns relating to RQ2: An 'Us versus them' pattern, and a pattern of 'Ambiguous functions of incivility as rhetoric'.

1. Contrasting Us (positive) with Them (negative attributes)

    - To point out incivility of the opponent by calling them despicable, scumbags, bullies
    - To accuse the opponent of lying, being liars, deceiving, conniving, spreading mis/disinformation and propaganda
    - To belittle, demean, and ridicule the opponent and their political claims as gullible, brainwashed, morons, and something to be laughed at
    - To blame bias and unprofessionalism of other institutions (e.g., mass media and social media platforms) for one's political unsuccess
    - To portray the opponent as un- and anti-American traitors, especially using red scare talking points like anti-communism

2. Ambiguous rhetorical functions of incivility

- Types of incivility which make drawing a line between civility and incivility and what is acceptable and not in digital public spheres complicated and contestable. These themes indicate that incivility has some rhetorical functions in deliberation:
- Casual use of swearwords and profanity for linguistic intensifier, exclamation
- Contextual use of racial slurs
- A blurry line between heated political criticism and unreasonable personal attack (e.g., strong name-calling and insults at politicians and journalists)
- Simultaneous use of civility and incivility in one communicative practice
- Incivility as a form of witticism, satirical humour, banter for in-group laughter

RQ3. What are the rhetorical patterns and types of intolerance expressed in the Irish and U.S. abortion discussions on Twitter?

In relation to RQ3, my analysis identifies four main patterns, including 'Demonisation', 'Exclusion, Ostracism and Ex-communication', 'Reactionary Perceptions of "the Threat"' and 'Violence.'

1. Demonisation
   - By calling the opponent evil, devil, demon, monster, abomination
   - By comparing the opponent to political extremist ideologies and groups such as Nazi, Hitler, the KKK, and Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups
2. Exclusion, Ostracism, and excommunication
   - Gender essentialism to delegitimise non-women's (which can involve both men and trans, gender nonconforming communities without a uterus) voice and participation in abortion debates and discussions
   - Excommunication to shut down intra-group disagreements
3. Reactionary perceptions of 'the threat'
   - Reactionary fear and anxiety over the liberal socio-cultural changes in the last few decades (e.g., LGBTQ+ friendly education bill, bills for trans rights, threats of the left-wing 'totalitarianism' against the western civilisation)

4. Violence

    - Calling for anti-abortion violence at abortion service facilities (e.g., arson, property damage)

9.3 Discussions

9.3.1 Incivility and intolerance are strong predictors of each other

One of the main findings in this thesis is a predictive relationship between incivility and intolerance. The quantitative analysis at a big data scale shows that the overall user communications in the Irish and U.S. datasets are mostly civil and tolerant, but when the small number of tweets express incivility, and intolerance, they are closely associated with the expression of another. In other words, it seems that Twitter users who say something uncivil will also say something intolerant in the same tweet, and vice versa. This finding invites us to revisit the theoretical and empirical discussions of public spheres, deliberation, and the norm of civility.

The critical discussions still stand that incivility and intolerance are separate concepts. Being rude or aggressive to someone is not identical to advocating for reactionary, exclusionary policies depriving a group of people of their rights. On the one hand, we have a political discourse with an uncivil tone, but with a pro-democratic aim to achieve social justice and equality for the hitherto socially disadvantaged (I. M. Young, 2002; Zerilli, 2014). Many critical discussions of deliberation and public spheres accept some limited roles of uncivil rhetoric and unruly practices in political struggles and activism (Alexander et al., 2018; I. M. Young, 2002; Zerilli, 2014). A systemic model of public deliberation incorporates uncivil and nondeliberative instances as a part of deliberative politics, so long as they enhance the overall pool of different perspectives to be taken into consideration by the wider public and by official political bodies like the legislature (Mansbridge et al., 2012; Parkinson, 2012). Empirical studies also show that incivility in online political discourse can be an important rhetorical tool, and therefore eradicating incivility from the Internet is not the ultimate solution (Masullo Chen et al., 2019; Milner & Phillips, 2018; Rossini, 2019). On the other hand, there is a political discourse that is civil and pseudo-intellectual in tone, but it promotes anti-liberal and exclusionary ideas (Askanius, 2021; Krzyżanowski et al., 2021). Rossini (2019) argues that the core problem of online deliberation is intolerance, not incivility. Using incivility alone

as a yardstick to discern harmful or dangerous content can be counterproductive to public deliberation and can result in unintended consequences such as silencing the voice of dissents (Jamieson et al., 2017; Masullo Chen et al., 2019; Zerilli, 2014).

However, the big data analysis in this thesis demonstrates that there are nonetheless some links between political incivility and intolerance, which make them co-occur frequently. The statistical model also finds that homogeneous discussion environments are related to more incivility and intolerance. Although speculative at this stage, this might indicate that the practices of incivility in a homogeneous discussion provoke intolerance within a closed circle of liked-minded issue partisans. Intolerance in a homogeneous circle will also lead issue partisans to be more readily uncivil and hostile when they are talking about people from the other side as their intolerance is not challenged by other users (Rossini, 2020).

The qualitative analysis of rhetorical patterns of incivility and intolerance shows that both political incivility and intolerance are built on the 'othering' (Riggins, 1997) of the other. The vocabulary of incivility assigns inferior traits to the out-group (e.g., morons, lying, scumbag). The vocabulary of intolerance contains the extreme level of othering and stereotyping language where it involves dehumanisation and demonisation of the other group (e.g., evil, demon, Hitler, rat and roaches). On one hand, it is imaginable that intolerance provokes uncivil practices from citizens: people with intolerant viewpoints can get easily agitated by the perceived threat from the opposing identity Them and turn to utter uncivil remarks and vitriols directed at Them. On the other hand, it might also be the case that repeated exposure to, or expressions of incivility develops intolerance. Repeated exposure to incivility and hostility might escalate interpersonal rudeness into dehumanising hostility, where the othering dichotomy between non-antagonistic Us-Them becomes an antagonistic friend-enemy dichotomy. This is a contestable, but also testable, hypothesis. Exposures to incivility often elicit a 'hostility triad' of emotions (Rozin et al., 1999) from the audience, namely anger, disgust, and contempt (Hwang et al., 2018; Masullo et al., 2020; T. Phillips & Smith, 2004). Disgust is a major source of indignity that blocks equal political respect (Nussbaum, 2013; Tileagă, 2019). Mediated by the 'hostility triad,' incivility may indirectly motivate people to partake in reactionary, illiberal, intolerant political actions such as seeking segregation, subordination, and such.

This finding also suggests an important point for oppositional movements and progressive protests that their uncivil rhetoric might be prone to backfire with reactionary incivility and even the rise of reactionary intolerance. I. M. Young (2002)

argues that in a deep democracy, the presumption should be in favour of the uncivil protesters that their uncivil rhetoric is to persuade and to appeal to justice of the populace. The implications of this thesis show that without such a civic culture of empathy for unruly practices, uncivil oppositional movements might provoke mass incivility and intolerance in an undesired way as we have witnessed in the rise of reactionary cultural backlash worldwide (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). We need further studies to investigate under what conditions incivility and intolerance co-occur and provoke one another.

9.3.2 Redesigning platforms for productive incivility: Sublimating anger into constructive-persuasive arguments

Another main finding pays attention to how the current Twitter structures might affect uncivil and intolerant user communications. I am concerned that Twitter structures encourage unproductive types of incivility where one's anger is not transitioned into constructive-persuasive arguments. The critical-normative discussions in Chapter 2 and the qualitative analysis of incivility in Chapter 7 argue that incivility itself is not the problem in our deliberative politics per se. The problem is rather the failure in sublimating one's anger into constructive and persuasive arguments for public communications. Many scholarly works argue that incivility can be a form of 'reasonable hostility' in politics (Tracy, 2008), as a means of public criticism of authorities, politicians, their incompetence, misconduct, and social injustice and inequalities (Rossini, 2019; Theocharis et al., 2020). Some uncivil tweets in my Irish and U.S. datasets critique perceived injustice and inequalities, even when they attack other users with names and profanity. These uncivil tweets are accompanied by some argumentative elements such as what societal wrong a person is angry at, and why it is wrong and needs to be changed. It reminds us that in everyday public deliberation, emotion and 'reasonable hostility' (Tracy, 2008) can serve the needs of civil society, so long as it is transitioned into a form of rational communication. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2016) calls this rational emotion 'Transition-Anger'.

However, some uncivil tweets in my datasets only contain vitriol and invectives without any rational-persuasive arguments or justified opinion expressions. For instance, some tweets simply tell other users or public figures to 'shut the fuck up' or 'go fuck yourself.' These types of incivility seem to be a mere outburst of anger and hostility while lacking rational elements to progress reciprocal persuasive processes towards a creation of a 'considered public opinion' (Habermas, 2006a). This incivility lacks opinion, justification, or constructive attempts to move the conversation

forward (Friess & Eilders, 2015; Oz et al., 2018; Rossini, 2020; Rowe, 2015). This unreasonable type of incivility can be especially counterproductive and dangerous to deliberative politics when it is practised on a socially disadvantaged group of people to silence their voice in the public sphere. Empirical findings show that not only strong forms of verbal abuse and but also subtle forms of incivility, trolling, sexist 'humorous' comments, tacit shaming, etc. can impact women's political participation (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Jane, 2014; Megarry, 2014; Southern & Harmer, 2021). Incivility directed at women reinscribes the Internet as a place where women do not belong and hence silence women's voices from the Internet (Fox et al., 2015; Jane, 2014; Southern & Harmer, 2021). There can be many different interpretations of the problem of unproductive incivility on Twitter, but one speculation I suggest is that the very structures of Twitter discourage healthy sublimation of anger and hostility into constructive and persuasive arguments (Transition-Anger, Nussbaum (2016)).

The structures and logic of Twitter (simplicity, emotionality, ephemerality) (see section 1.1.3) make it especially easy for users to quickly jump into uncivil communications (Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017). The character limitation of Twitter encourages simple communication, rather than lengthy and sophisticated deliberative communications (Ott, 2017). Twitter constructs an 'affective public' (Papacharissi, 2015) where negative, aggressive, and emotional communications are rewarded with a larger number of engagements such as likes and retweets (Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017). Furthermore, the fast, ever-flowing stream of new tweets and new trending topics on Twitter requires users to invest little time and effort in writing a tweet (Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017). Twitter structure pushes user communications to be impulsive and ephemeral (Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017). It might be difficult or even unrealistic to expect Twitter users to spend hours doing research, seeking different perspectives, and carefully assessing what other arguments have been laid out before they add to the endless stream of new tweets every second and minute. A strong emotional and outrage-provoking tone in many online media contents exacerbate this spiral of quick, short, and emotion-driven communications on Twitter (e.g., exposure to outrage media in Berry & Sobieraj (2013); uncivil and in-your-face politics, in Mutz (2015); information disorder (mis-, dis-, and malinformation) in Wardle & Derakhshan (2017)). In Appendix B, I briefly discuss the links between incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse, outrage media, and information disorder. The relationship between platform structures and uncivil communications encourages future works to explore possible ways to redesign our social media plat-

forms to facilitate heated but constructive deliberation, healthy sublimation of anger into arguments, instead of quick and simple reflex actions propelled by raw anger and hostility. Herbst (2010) for instance suggests an important role of discussion moderators with some training in argumentation, who can transform a disorganised string of comments into a coherent discussion, demanding clarification, evidence, and logic from users. Herbst (2010) expects that if it is done well, users would start demanding clarification and evidence from each other. Herbst's (2010) suggestion relates to news websites like CNN.com and blog forums like Daily Kos. This deep level of content moderation is not directly applicable to Twitter moderators, but it can certainly provide some ideas for redesigning Twitter for Transition-anger and productive incivility.

9.3.3 Understanding the small set of partisan superposters in online political discourse

The big data analysis in this thesis identifies a smaller number of Twitter users who are responsible for a disproportionately large amount of total tweet participation, incivility and intolerance. In the Irish dataset, the top 1 per cent of the most active users are responsible for 40 per cent of the incivility detected and most intolerance expressed during the data collection among more than 1.8+ million tweets. In the U.S. Twittersphere, 10 per cent of the most active users are responsible for the entire prevalence of incivility and intolerance expressed among the 6+ million tweets collected. That means, out of 100 Twitter users, it is often one user in the Irish dataset and ten users in the U.S. Twittersphere who repeatedly engage in uncivil and intolerant behaviours in abortion discourse.

This both complements and challenges previous incivility research. Theocharis and colleagues (2020) found that Twitter incivility directed towards U.S. politicians is a common behaviour for many frustrated and angry citizens. Theocharis et al. (2020) do not find that a set of serial transgressors are responsible for the majority of incivility and abuse. However, my thesis challenges Theocharis et al.'s (2020) argument by demonstrating that most incivility and intolerance among the abortion issue public is expressed by a small fraction of users with strong issue partisanship. Overall, this suggests that incivility and intolerance might be becoming a common practice for many angry citizens on Twitter like Theocharis and colleagues observe (2020), but when we are specifically looking at an issue public (e.g., abortion issue public) that attracts and involves around a strong collective identity and issue partisanship, we can identify 'superposters' (Graham & Wright, 2014) who are

dominating the uncivil and intolerant turn in a Twitter deliberation.

This relationship between partisan superposters, incivility, and intolerance gives us mixed implications for the health of online deliberative politics. On one hand, it can be interpreted as a positive finding that the majority of Twitter users and engagements are civil and tolerant. It is only a handful of partisan users who express most of the hostile, uncivil, and intolerant messages in relation to abortion discourse on Twitter. But on the other hand, this can be alarming because a small group of loud users can steer the direction of abortion public discourse towards a situation in which moderate views are muted. When the small number of superposters with hyper-partisanship dominate the exchanges of ideas and opinions, this increases participatory inequalities (the partisan views are overrepresented in the online public sphere) and subsequent inequalities in policy outcomes where the partisan views are heard and recognised more by mass media and subsequently more by policymakers (Kleiner, 2018). This partisanship and political polarisation are especially threatening, given the current rise of authoritarian populism in the European and North American countries (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). When affective polarisation is the norm, populist elites commonly employ uncivil and intolerant rhetoric, rousing partisan combatants and appealing to their support for reactionary or radical policies (Gervais, 2015; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). As our political discourse becomes more polarised and dominated by uncivil and intolerant voices of the more extreme views, other civic voices with politically moderate views are underrepresented and unheard in the policymaking processes. To deal with online incivility and intolerance, we need to better understand the attitude and behaviour of such polarised superposters.

9.3.4 Rethinking anonymity and the online harm of political incivility and intolerance

The big data analysis in this thesis questions the relationship between anonymity and online harm. Previous research argues that the anonymity of cyberspace makes it easier for individuals to feel more deindividuated, disinhibited, and act in a rude and uncivil way (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Papacharissi, 2004; Rowe, 2015; Santana, 2014). For this reason, reducing or restricting anonymity is often considered by scholars and platform developers as a means of mitigating the problems of online harm including incivility, abuse, harassment, bullying, hate speech, and such. On Facebook, for instance, users are expected to register with their real-life identities, with features that are expected to reflect their real identities such as their names,

profile pictures, work and education history, and network of friends. Facebook has a platform policy to report a fake Facebook account stating that 'Your account should represent you' and 'We also encourage you to let us know about accounts that represent fake or fictional people, pets, celebrities or organisations' (Facebook, 2021). Several studies have found that uncivil and sexist content is created and shared more on anonymous platforms and by anonymous accounts (Fox et al., 2015; Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Rowe, 2015). The Clean up the Internet report (2020) recommends that social media companies give users the option to verify their identity, the option to block interaction with unverified users, as well as making it easiers for every user to see whether other users are verified or not. Law scholars suggest that internet anonymity is reformed so that defamed individuals can successfully sue those who bully and threaten them (Levmore & Nussbaum, 2012).

However, the finding in this thesis challenges the anonymity restriction approach. This thesis finds that anonymity does not have a significant impact on political incivility or intolerance in abortion discourse. Anonymous Twitter users in my datasets are even slightly less likely to write intolerant tweets than are users with male names[1]. In the same vein, Rossini (2020) has also found that there are no significant differences in the volume of incivility between real identity-based Facebook users and an anonymous news website. Furthermore, Rossini (2020) finds that intolerance is actually more likely to be expressed on Facebook than on an anonymous news website. Why anonymity does not have a significant impact on uncivil and intolerant behaviour might be due to the nature of abortion discourse. Abortion issues create strong social identities around issue advocacy that are distinctive from advocates of other socio-political issues such as tax or healthcare reform (Mason, 2018, p.51). Abortion issues involve a strong sense of moral emotions such as anger and outrage at the perceived breach of morality, justice, and human rights. In the U.S., historically, numerous violent anti-abortion acts have been committed, such as killing doctors and civilians at abortion clinics and damaging abortion clinic facilities (Ferree et al., 2002). These violent and intolerant acts were perhaps motivated under the self-righteous cause of serving justice for babies and defending babies' human rights. For instance, in 2015, Robert Lewis Dear killed two civilians and a police officer at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs, Colorado. After his arrest, Dear made a comment about 'no more baby parts' as he believed that Planned Parenthood sold aborted foetal parts on the black market for profit (CNN,

[1]This finding should be read with caution because gender and anonymity are operationalised in a very specific way in this thesis (see section 5.2.4 and section 9.6).

2015). Dear might believe he did the 'right' thing.

Intolerant anti-abortion Twitter users who call pro-abortion people demons, Satan, Nazi, Hitler, rats and roaches probably have a similar understanding of their attitudes and behaviours that they are neither uncivil nor intolerant, but they are doing something morally right. When one's own acts of incivility and intolerance are self-perceived as righteous against injustice, i.e., something other than cruelty or infliction of harm, these strong partisans may not need to rely on online anonymity and its deindividuation or disinhibition effects to say something uncivil and intolerant to the out-group. In short, political incivility and intolerance might not be motivated by anonymity, deindividuation, and disinhibition because Twitter users espousing such attitudes would not necessarily think they are doing something shameful or anti-social. The impact of online anonymity on disinhibition and deindividuation might be strong only when users expect that they are subject to negative consequences, damage of social reputation, legal or even criminal sanctions for their online behaviours such as in the cases of cyberbullying (Lowry et al., 2016) or hate speech (Mondal et al., 2017). Under my operationalisation, political incivility and intolerance in abortion discourse do not necessarily amount to criminal offences. In other political discourse where certain intolerant speech can be flagged as criminal offences, anonymity can grant users the disinhibition to make uncivil and intolerant remarks. Future studies should investigate the impact of anonymity in expressions of political incivility and intolerance relating to other political topics, such as anti-immigration, anti-LGBTQ+, misogyny, and Islamophobia.

9.3.5 The link between intolerance, conservative reactionary backlash, and populism

Many scholars have studied intolerant political discourse in connection with conservative reactionary backlash and authoritarian populism such as racism, ethno-nationalism, anti-immigration, Brexit and EU scepticism, the electoral success of authoritarian populist parties and politicians in the U.S., Europe, etc. (Krzyżanowski et al., 2021; Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Ruzza, 2009). The findings in this thesis substantiate the link between intolerance and reactionary populism. Like previous studies have found, such connection is more strongly observed in socially conservative anti-abortion tweets, but this thesis finds that left-wing sphere is not free from the concern of authoritarianism and reactionary politics: some pro-abortion tweets exhibit the authoritarian and reactionary attitudes.

First, the qualitative analysis in this thesis shows that intolerant tweets from

both pro- and anti-abortion sides are appealing to a strong sense of group conformity. Both pro- and anti-abortion intolerance tweets employ the Us-versus-Them dichotomy, which is a defining feature of an authoritarian orientation to endorse loyal obedience toward the in-group values and social intolerance of deviance and out-groups (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Although authoritarianism is largely studied in connection with right-wing discourse such as anti-immigration, anti-feminism, anti-LGBTQ+, and so forth, authoritarian predispositions can be observed in both pro- and anti-abortion tweets such as holding dogmatic attitudes, intolerance of dissent, and enforcing conformity to a specific vision of justice (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). In my Irish and U.S. datasets, both pro- and anti-abortion intolerance tweets demonise the out-group as evil, demons, Nazi, Hitler, rats and roaches. Both data sets condemn and ostracise in-group members with different views as heresy, traitors, enemies (e.g., demanding the excommunication of pro-abortion Catholics). However, size-wise, anti-abortion tweets are disproportionately more likely to contain intolerance than pro-abortion tweets in both Ireland and the U.S. Twittersphere. Like many previous studies have rightly argued, the findings of this thesis show that dealing with the problems of intolerant politics is connected to tackling the support for reactionary populism (Mason, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Second, rhetorical patterns and types of intolerance observed in both the Irish and U.S. datasets are related to a reactionary backlash against progressive social changes including not only legal abortion but also LGBTQ+ friendly education and policies (see Chapter 8). Most of the intolerant anti-LGBTQ+ tweets in my samples come from the anti-abortion side, suggesting that LGBTQ+ friendly and pro-abortion sex education is dangerously indoctrinating our children. But one anti-trans tweet is written by a U.S. pro-abortion user. The pro-abortion tweet makes a reactionary remark that if elected, Biden's Democratic government will hand over womanhood to the 'trans cult,' implying that trans rights would override and threaten women's rights (Phipps, 2021).

Finally, qualitative analysis of the Irish and U.S. datasets shows that rhetorical patterns of intolerance deliver a sense of victimhood, which is often a part of populist rhetoric (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Horwitz (2018) even argues that the victim has become the most important identity position in U.S. politics. Whereas actually being a victim is undesirable, constructing a victim position in political struggles has many benefits: e.g., victims are often seen as morally superior (Campbell & Manning, 2018), and victims are seen as deserving of social deference that non-victims do not deserve (Armaly & Enders, 2021). For this reason, some people

tend to construct their in-group as the victim. Trump supporters are more likely to perceive Christians, whites, and men as victims of the U.S. society than Clinton supporters who are likelier to see people of colour, LGBTQ+, and women as victims (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Many anti-abortion tweets in my Irish and U.S. datasets claim the victim status for their in-group, arguing that We – e.g., anti-abortion conservatives – are victimised by the corrupt and biased pro-abortion establishment. There is conservative fear and anxiety that the left-wing agenda is going to push Ireland and the U.S. into communism, totalitarianism, and the collapse of Western values. Populist parties and politicians feed on the public's anxiety and victimhood to garner electoral supports and votes. During the 2016 presidential election, for instance, Donald Trump appealed to social conservatives, addressing them as victims of globalisation, immigration, and affirmative action (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Dealing with intolerance requires dealing with this public anxiety and victimhood. Norris & Inglehart (2019) argue: 'The disorientation and anxiety that these people experience is genuine, and dismissing their feelings as irrational bigotry does not solve the problem. In the long run, doing so can lead to levels of cultural backlash that endanger civility and democracy itself' (p.451).

All of these points suggest that dealing with online intolerance is more than simply a matter of policing or regulating user communications that violate platform guidelines. It takes understanding and dealing with the rise of social and political polarisation, authoritarian tendencies, populism, and reactionary backlash from the public who might think of themselves as the victims of past social changes and policies. In the future, politics of populism, resentment, and victimhood should be considered in the study of incivility and intolerance.

9.4 Transferability of the thesis findings

The quantitative and qualitative findings in this thesis can be transferable to explain political incivility and intolerance on other social media platforms beyond Twitter, in other socio-political contexts beyond abortion discourse, and beyond Ireland and the U.S. Repeatedly in this thesis, I have discussed the particularities of Twitter. The logic and structures of Twitter encourage quick, short, simple, emotional, and uncivil exchanges among users (Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017). I have discussed in the Introduction chapter that Twitter studies cannot be representative of the offline population, and even for social media platform studies, Twitter research results might not be fully generalisable to other platforms with different structures and

affordances, attracting different types of behaviours. One user can use different platforms to build and perform different aspects of their identities (Van Dijck, 2013). Hence, user expectations of behavioural norms for Twitter can be different from norms for Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, or any other online communities. Oz et al. (2018) find that Twitter attracts more incivility and less deliberation than Facebook. Facebook accounts are often linked to the real identities of people, and therefore Facebook users might be less disinhibited from engaging in socially criticisable things such as expressing incivility or intolerance in front of the network of one's family, friends, colleagues, etc. In contrast, niche and marginal platforms like 4chan, Gab, or a few subreddits on Reddit (e.g., r/fatpeoplehate and r/CoonTown) harbour a huge amount of hate, abuse, and toxic discourse (Chandrasekharan et al., 2017; Vidgen et al., 2019).

However, Twitter also shares many common concerns with other social media platforms. The crisis of incivility, intolerance and online harm is not specific to Twitter alone; it is a commonly shared problem for many mainstream and niche social media platforms (Vidgen et al., 2019). The emotional structure is a general tenet of many social media platforms including not only Twitter but also Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and so on (Waterloo et al., 2018). The expressions of negative emotions such as anger, sadness, worry and disappointment are deemed acceptable for many platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter (Waterloo et al., 2018). For these reasons, despite platform differences, the quantitative results of hypotheses testing in this thesis can be transferable to some extent to predict uncivil and intolerant political communications on other social media platforms (e.g., relations between gender, anonymity, issue position, issue partisanship, discussion environment, incivility, and intolerance). Future research could test the transferability of the findings and discussions in this thesis across different social media platforms. This will help to overcome the limitations of a single platform case study.

Furthermore, the quantitative and qualitative findings of the rhetorical patterns and types of incivility and intolerance in abortion discourse in Ireland and the U.S. can be applied to other socio-political issue publics. The strong relationship between right-wing politics and incivility and intolerance observed at a big data scale in this thesis has been found in other studies of far- and radical-right topics, e.g., right-wing populism, racism, anti-multiculturalism, and so on in many European, North American, and Asian countries (Jun, 2019; Krzyżanowski et al., 2021; Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Ruzza, 2009). Uncivil and intolerant language

in both abortion discourse and other political discourse across cultures and continents rely on the tactics of othering by assigning inferior status to an out-group Them or dehumanising and demonising Them: e.g., racial stereotyping (Pickering, 2001), stereotyping of immigrants in relation to illegality, crimes, and social problems (Jun, 2019), and reciprocal stereotyping and othering between religious non-feminist women and secular feminist women (Nyhagen, 2019). The findings of this thesis largely contribute to the international study of populism, incivility, and intolerance.

9.5 Intervention and education: Can we fix online incivility and intolerance?

Intervention and education-related discussions in this section will be largely speculative, as social interventionist strategies require detailed empirical investigation in their own right. This section curates several potential approaches to deal with the problem of online incivility and intolerance in political discourse, using empirical findings and normative discussions in this thesis as well as previous discussions from diverse disciplines including social psychology. Potential interventions that are discussed in the sub-sections below include both top-down and bottom-up approaches: (1) cross-cutting exposure and contact to reduce inter-group conflicts, (2) platform-level efforts to regulate, censor, and redirect incivility and intolerance, (3) self-affirmation techniques, (4) civic education of online ethics, and so on. In the end, none of these solutions may be effective or likely. Some approaches can have unintended negative effects. However, each may provide some insights into the nature of dealing with the harm of online incivility and intolerance in public deliberation.

9.5.1 Cross-cutting exposure and contact: Reducing inter-group hostility and conflicts

The big data analysis in this thesis has found that incivility and intolerance occur more frequently in a homogeneous discussion environment. It is argued that participation in ideologically homogeneous groups exacerbates one's political bias and prejudice, or even extremism (Wojcieszak, 2010). Hence, certain types of cross-cutting exposure and social contact are discussed as an approach to reduce prejudice between groups (Allport, 1954; Mason, 2018). Other studies argue that indirect contacts such as simply having a friend of a friend in the opposing group or contact through media

can reduce intergroup prejudice and polarisation (Duckitt, 1992; Mason, 2018). In an ideal sense, cross-cutting contact and exposure can give the public a chance to reconsider the perceived intergroup distinctions, inequities, negative stereotypes, and prejudices they have held. This social exposure and contact approach is especially relevant to the online space as social media platforms have often been criticised for constituting 'echo chambers' (Sunstein, 2001) and 'filter bubbles' (Pariser, 2011), where users are connected to and communicate with like-minded users and become distanced from information and perspectives from out-groups. So, the volume and intensity of online incivility and intolerance might be reduced through diverse forms of platform-level algorithmic curating efforts to increase cross-cutting exposure and contact between different political groups. Web developers have recognised the importance of exposure to diverse opinions on the Internet and tried to design online spaces for diversity (Garrett, 2017; Negroponte, 1996).

However, the effects of cross-cutting exposure and contact have generated mixed results. For instance, Brewer & Kramer (1985) find that the prejudice-reducing effect of cross-cutting exposure does not last if one thinks that the out-group member is atypical of the opposing group. Some empirical studies even caution against interventions such as promoting cross-cutting exposures or redirecting methods (e.g., hacking the white supremacist website and redirecting its traffic to anti-racist websites) because such actions may backfire (Wojcieszak, 2010). Experimental studies suggest that exposure to dissimilar out-group perspectives and information can encourage biased cognitive processing, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs and prejudice (Bail, 2021; Lazarsfeld et al., 1968; Lord et al., 1979; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). When people are exposed to corrective information that contradicts their previous belief, this corrective information ironically reinforces one's biased thinking – so the exposed person develops an even more biased and polarised view than those who do not get to contact the corrective information in the first place (Bail, 2021; Lazarsfeld et al., 1968; Lord et al., 1979; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). Bail (2021) strongly argues that breaking our echo chamber is the wrong place to start. However, other political science research finds little evidence of the backfire effect of cross-cutting exposures (Guess & Coppock, 2020; Wood & Porter, 2019).

This gives us mixed impressions that designing platforms for cross-cutting exposure can reduce intergroup hostility and conflicts between clashing political and social identities, or it backfires in an undesirable way, which can be even worse than pre-intervention. Future research should investigate under what conditions cross-cutting exposure can reduce intergroup conflicts and hostility and under what

conditions such an effort can backfire in an undesired way.

9.5.2 Platform efforts: Regulation, censorship, and redirection

The backfire effect discussed in the previous section is also crucial in debates as to whether platform-level interventions such as content regulation, censorship, and redirection are effective to deal with the problems of online political incivility and intolerance. On one hand, regulating uncivil and intolerant contents and accounts are important to protect other users from harm. Furthermore, banning hateful contents and users can deter further uncivil and intolerant behaviours on the platform. For instance, in 2015, Reddit closed several hateful subreddits such as r/fatpeoplehate and r/CoonTown following their anti-harassment policies (Chandrasekharan et al., 2017). Chandrasekharan et al. (2017) find that 'the bans worked for Reddit,' making the problematic users leave the platform or change their behaviours (p.31:3).

On the other hand, platform interventions might be prone to backfire. For instance, when politicians are accused of or even prosecuted for online hate speech, this legal and criminal sanction triggers the supporters' anger and increases prejudiced support for their parties (Van Spanje & De Vreese, 2015). My datasets show a similar pattern where both pro- and anti-abortion users display a sense of victimhood suggesting that the establishment – mass media and tech companies – are always unfairly silencing and victimising Our voice but unfairly favouring Their voice. This type of victimhood is more often observed in conservative anti-abortion tweets, but a couple of pro-abortion tweets develop the same type of victimhood that the media serves for the establishment (Chapters 7 and 8). So even if platform-level interventions successfully remove politically uncivil and intolerant behaviours from the platform, this might be done at the expense of further fuelling the sense of victimhood and resentment that the biased and corrupt media establishment is doing it yet again to Us. This in turn can exacerbate the problems of reactionary populism where threatened people seek strong authoritarian political leaders to protect them from the alleged broken system and corrupt establishment (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Moreover, banning alone does not ameliorate the problem at its root: uncivil and intolerant behaviours can easily move into an underground platform which is harder for authorities to find and deal with (Milner & Phillips, 2018).

9.5.3 Self-affirmation: Dealing with grievances and resentment

If interventions might not be the best approach to deal with online incivility and intolerance, another approach might be to help individuals who are more prone than others to fall for uncivil and intolerant politics. The link between populism, incivility, and intolerance is especially prominent among less educated, working-class, religious, rural-residing, white men in the U.S. and European countries (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). These once-dominant social groups have become feeling estranged from their home country with lots of grievances, frustration, and resentment, because of the multicultural and liberal societal changes in the last few decades as well as the global economic crisis, and lack of economic security and job opportunities (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). These groups of people can be especially vulnerable to the appeal of authoritarian populism and reactionary ideas. Social psychological theories explain that during times of political crises, those with damaged self-esteem seek to enhance their self-image by developing strong socio-political group identities and being allegiant to them (Cohen et al., 2007; Mason, 2018). When the importance of being faithful to one's group identity is highly salient, accepting or being open to inter-group compromise or consensus poses a threat to one's identity integrity (Cohen et al., 2007). An economic upturn or change in the economic status of such vulnerable people could reduce the intensification of radical political identity and out-group loathing (Mason, 2018), but this structural change might take a long time.

In the meantime, social-psychological experiments suggest that those people vulnerable to the appeal of political extremism can be helped by teaching them to increase their self-worth (Cohen et al., 2007; Mason, 2018). Cohen and colleagues (2007) find that a technique of 'self-affirmation,' reminding a person of their own self-worth that is independent of their political identity, such as their relationships with friends, and positive feedback on a valued skill, can substantially reduce extremism, ideological closed-mindedness, and inflexibility. In one experiment, self-affirmation techniques increase the willingness of pro-abortion participants to make pragmatically necessary concessions with the out-group and make them more trusting of the other (Cohen et al., 2007). Self-affirmation also helps parties involved in conflicts to engage in politics in an outcome-oriented, productive way, reducing their identity-based motivation to win over the other party (Cohen et al., 2007; Mason, 2018).

9.5.4 Education about online ethics: Towards the building of self-critical online communities

Incivility and intolerance are affected by communicative factors such as the structures of social media platforms (Bail, 2021; Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017), outrage-selling media and journalism (Berry & Sobieraj, 2013; Herbst, 2010) and uncivil and reactionary politicians appealing to the partisan voters (Mutz, 2015; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Bail (2021) argues that social media is a 'prism' that refracts our identities – 'leaving us with a distorted understanding of each other, and ourselves' (p.10). If the public can learn about how such media-communication factors may influence our behaviour to be more easily uncivil and intolerant, such problematic behaviours can to some extent be lessened. Education about online ethics could guide users to be reflective of the things they choose to do and say and to be responsible for them (Milner & Phillips, 2018). It could help users to see how social media platforms distort our political landscape, polarising us from one another, and then we can learn how to break the distorted prism by changing our online behaviours (Bail, 2021). Ryan M Milner and Whitney Phillips (2018) argue in the title of their article – The Internet doesn't need civility, it needs ethics.

There are multiple key elements to be learned in the civic education of online ethics. The first step is for the public to become aware of how the structure of the Internet may influence us against making more ethical choices (Milner & Phillips, 2018). Twitter for instance encourages quick, short, responsive, and emotional communications that can easily turn uncivil and intolerant (Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017). The typical thread of tweets on Twitter or a thread of comments on online news websites are simply presented in timestamp order. This might be too disorganised to facilitate a coherent discussion amongst users, and therefore users can jump into conversations mid-thread without knowing what the issues are or what other things have been discussed and debated by other users already (Herbst, 2010; Milner & Phillips, 2018). Being aware of the structural challenges of social media communication might help users to have an emotional and cognitive bumper before they jump into quick, responsive communications online.

Then the second step is for users to try to pre-empt unethical outcomes by questioning what we do and do not know about the content we are sharing or the conversation we are engaging in (Milner & Phillips, 2018): e.g., how and where was something sourced? What, exactly, has happened to the people involved in this story or to the users @mentioned in this tweet thread? Could it be a case where the accused is unfairly targeted or victimised? Could it be a case where a tiny disagree-

ment has unnecessarily escalated into harm and abuse? (Milner & Phillips, 2018; Schulman, 2016). This reflective thinking is important because the internet can easily escalate small disagreements to disputes and conflicts (Friedman & Currall, 2003; Schulman, 2016). Digital communications often lack ordinary social interactive structures such as normal turn-taking, constant feedback between participants as well as social cues like each other's facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, etc. which are all necessary to enhance understanding and agreements in conversation (Friedman & Currall, 2003). Because of this lack of social-interactive cues, digital communications can easily lead to misunderstanding and overstatement of aggression and mal-intent in each other's statements and quickly escalate a disagreement into conflicts, threats, and abuse (Friedman & Currall, 2003). If the public can be aware of the problematic psychological cycle of conflict escalation within their own behaviours and within their own political communities, they might be able to change their behaviour in a calmer and less emotionally volatile way.

Finally, building self-critical online communities will be important to tackle the escalation of conflicts on the Internet. Schulman (2016) argues for the importance of a 'healthy, fair, self-critical group' to interrupt escalation of disagreements and conflicts before it produces any tragedy (Ch. 5, para 27). This self-critical group of users may have the ability to see how a small disagreement has been escalated to abuse and conflicts in any given situation, and potentially this group has enough love and empathy for others to be willing to intervene and help the anxious calm down and see their own mistakes and the role they play in escalating the situation (Schulman, 2016, Ch. 5, para 27). In the case of political incivility and intolerance, this will be a group of users who can take the initiative to interrupt and intervene when their in-group members are unfairly insulting, demonising, or victimising the out-group members. Munger's (2020) experiment shows that in-group persuasion is more effective in reducing uncivil behaviours on Twitter. The importance of in-group user intervention may apply to reducing intolerant behaviours as well.

9.6 Thesis limitations and future research

This thesis has aimed to mix computational social science methods onto big datasets and conventional social sciences methods onto smaller random samples. While the mixed-methods approach adopted in this thesis is both rigorous and robust, some limitations exist which require further consideration. Notably, the findings of my computational analysis must be read with caution that they are based on the specific

operationalisation of many social concepts, and here I want to raise some issues that require a cautionary reading.

(1) The gender of Twitter users is classified based on their first names in their Twitter user profiles by using R Gender package (Mullen, 2021). Such an automatic gender recognition method has been criticised for reinforcing the state-imposed gender binary (Hamidi et al., 2018; Mihaljević et al., 2019; Mullen, 2021). (2) Anonymity in this thesis is classified based on gender-unidentifiable names using the same Gender package (Mullen, 2021). This operationalisation can result in false classification: e.g., John Doe or Jane Doe will be considered as non-anonymous whereas, in reality, they are commonly used pseudonyms for hiding users' real identities. Also, there are possibilities that since the R Gender package is trained with U.S. census data (Mullen, 2021), some rare forms of Irish-Gaelic names are misclassified. These limitations do not invalidate the method, but some caution is necessary when interpreting the thesis results. (3) Discussion environments (e.g., homogeneous versus heterogeneous) are automatically classified based on different Twitter affordances: simply, Retweets and Quotes are used as a proxy for an agreeing/homogeneous environment and Replies are used as a proxy for a disagreeing/heterogeneous environment (Garimella et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2019; Villa-Cox et al., 2020). These operationalisations have affected the regression model in this thesis. Future studies can employ different operationalisations of social concepts such as gender, anonymity, discussion environments, etc. and test whether the results of this thesis are transferable in different research designs.

Furthermore, the regression model of incivility and intolerance in the empirical chapters are built on the lexicon-based classification of political incivility and intolerance. This approach can be distinguished from other techniques such as supervised machine learning (e.g., Jigsaw (2021); Theocharis et al. (2020)). Several computer science papers find that machine learning classifiers such as SVM and Naïve Bayes perform higher accuracy, precision, and recall than lexicon-based dictionary classifiers (Mukhtar et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2014). Yet, lexicon-based dictionaries can still achieve reliable performances in a time- and resource-efficient manner (Mukhtar et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2014). For efficiency and theory-driven qualitative coding, this thesis has employed a lexicon-based approach, but future research can take a machine learning approach to develop incivility and intolerance classifiers for even greater performances and apply them to the Irish abortion dataset that is publicly available (Littman, 2018).

Finally, findings and discussions made in this thesis can be complemented with

future multidisciplinary research including digital media, political communication, and social policy studies. This thesis for instance finds that political incivility can be counterproductive to deliberative politics unless it is transitioned into productive anger and persuasive arguments. But social media structures can interrupt the sublimation of anger to persuasive arguments due to its fast, simple, emotional logic (Bouvier, 2020; Ott, 2017). Future social psychology research can explore further the link between digital technologies, incivility, and intolerance. Further social policy studies can also investigate the effects of intervention and education suggestions discussed in this chapter. Moreover, future studies can adopt a similar research design to this thesis but different social media platforms, or different political issue publics, or different countries, to test the transferability and differences between different case studies of online political incivility and intolerance.

9.7 Conclusion

This thesis makes a timely and original contribution to ongoing scholarly and social impact discussions through a case study of political incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse on Twitter. Throughout this concluding chapter, I have sought to systematise and synthesise the key findings from the thesis, which has brought together and extended scholarship from overlapping research areas: deliberative politics, social media, populism, and incivility and intolerance. I have made three main contributions. The first contribution is critical-normative: I have discussed incivility and intolerance in terms of deliberative politics and critical theories. When assessing the harms and dangers of political incivility and intolerance, what should be taken into account is not only what is said, but also what it does to the ongoing deliberation and our deliberative system. The end goal of healthy civil societies, public spheres, and deliberation is ultimately to create a considered public opinion and public will-formation through public justification (Habermas, 1996, 2006a). The standard criteria of just procedures of democracy require civility and tolerance as reciprocity and generality for open and equal public deliberation (Forst, 2003, 2008, 2017; Habermas, 1996, 2003). However, non-deliberative means such as some forms of incivility and 'reasonable hostility' (Tracy, 2008) can be necessary and beneficial in exceptional situations to increase the pool of perspectives available in an ongoing deliberative public, especially the voices of the socially disadvantaged, for instance (I. M. Young, 2002; Zerilli, 2014). The norm of productive incivility and 'reasonable hostility' is contestable over time and across different deliberative

settings, but it is nonetheless an important critical understanding to deepen our democracy and deliberative politics beyond a tone-policing of the uncivil and unruly voice of diverse citizens and activists. Intolerance, in contrast, is incompatible with fundamental principles of deliberative and pluralist democracy.

The second contribution is empirical and descriptive. I have explored the Irish and U.S. Twitter abortion discourse both quantitatively and qualitatively, both with big data analysis and with in-depth analysis on smaller samples. While doing so, this thesis has made several substantiative findings such as the predictive relationships between incivility, intolerance, and other demographic, political, and communicative contexts (e.g., high-profile political events and stories, issue position, issue partisanship, discussion environments), as well as analysis of rhetorical patterns and types of political incivility and intolerance in the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse. Furthermore, this thesis illuminates the importance of studying a domain-specific study of political incivility and intolerance: e.g., specific dynamics, patterns, and types of incivility and intolerance in abortion discourse. The thesis findings also demonstrate the link between abortion discourse and populist discourse, asking for further investigation of the anti-feminist discourse in populist communications. This finding is especially important since abortion discourse has been relatively neglected in populism studies although anti-feminism (e.g., against legal abortion, gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights) is a big part of right-wing populist demands (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Thirdly, I contribute to the scholarship by discussing implications of my theoretical and empirical findings for the health of deliberative politics and for the academic debates around how we should understand and address the current uncivil and intolerant politics to mitigate online harm. The nuanced analysis of political incivility and intolerance show that dealing with the online harm of incivility and intolerance is not straightforward, as simply detecting and censoring uncivil and intolerant content cannot solve the root of the problem. Incivility can be productive to deliberation if it is a form of passionate opinion expression or an attempt for a persuasive argument. Intolerance is anti-deliberative, but stopping the cycle of intolerant attitudes and behaviours require a more complicated and nuanced approach to deal with sentiments of victimhood, resentment at the root of one group's collective intolerance of out-groups and dissent, than simply censoring their intolerant voices off the platform. The discussions in this chapter summarise five main loci for starting points for future research, platform design and policymaking: (1) how political incivility and intolerance provoke one another; (2) how to redesign

social media platforms to facilitate transition-Anger (Nussbaum, 2016) and persuasive deliberation; (3) further studies to enhance our understanding of hyper-partisan superposters in diverse online political issue publics; (4) rethinking the relationship between online anonymity and political incivility and intolerance; and (5) more studies to research uncivil and intolerant politics in connection with authoritarian populist and reactionary movements.

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Appendix A

Quantitative content analysis coding scheme

General instructions

All tweets are to be analysed and coded according to the following instructions.

All tweets that are related to the Irish and U.S. abortion policy discussions must be coded. This includes tweets not only talking directly about the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse but also talking about abortion movements and policy issues in other countries (e.g., the U.K., Northern Ireland, etc) in connection with the Irish and U.S. abortion issues.

If tweets include hyperlinks (e.g., articles, images, videos, other tweets), please look at the link and take the linked content into consideration when coding. If the link provided is not available anymore, code only what is present in the tweet.

Spam and irrelevant tweets should be coded 'Irrelevant' in V3. Irrelevant tweets mean tweets that are using the abortion-related hashtags or keywords but to talk about some other abortion-irrelevant issues: e.g., #voteyes to talk about the Scottish Independence referendum.

Incivility and intolerance are **not mutually exclusive** – they are two distinctive concepts. Some can be civil but intolerant; others can be uncivil but tolerant. Some tweets can be uncivil and intolerant simultaneously.

This codebook operates with two units of analysis: **users** and **tweets**.

1. Identification variables

V1 User ID: Please provide a Twitter user's username on the screen.

V2 Date of a tweet: Please provide a date of a tweet in the Year-Month-Day order

V3 Relevance to the abortion issue public:

- **0 No irrelevant**: If a tweet is a spam message, or if it talks about other political issues that are irrelevant to the abortion policy discussions in Ireland and the U.S., please code a tweet as 'Irrelevant.'
- **1 Yes relevant**: A tweet could directly relate to the Irish and U.S. abortion policy discussions, or relate to abortion rights movements and abortion policies in other countries in connection with the Irish and U.S. abortion discourse (e.g., abortion discourse in the U.K., Northern Ireland, etc.). In these cases, please code a tweet as '1 = Relevant.'

If a tweet is classified as **0 Irrelevant**, leave the rest of the following variables blank.

2. User variables

V4 Gender of a user

- 1 Female
- 2 Male
- 3 Unidentifiable: when a user's first name is a gender-unidentifiable pseudonyms (e.g., 'Old Glory')

V5 Abortion issue position

Please code the abortion issue position of a tweet based on hashtags or keywords mentioned in the tweet and its overall tone.

- **1 Pro-abortion**: When a tweet discusses the abortion issues from a pro-abortion stance
- 2 **Anti-abortion**: When a tweet discusses the abortion issues from an anti-abortion stance
- 3 **Unidentifiable**: When it is not clear from which stance a tweet is discussing the abortion issue, or when a tweet is simply stating statistical facts, sharing news articles and government reports without advocating a certain stance.

3. Tweet variables

V6 Incivility This variable is to code a presence of incivility in a tweet. Civility is largely conceptualised in connection with the social norms of relationship, politeness, and courtesy. It is to respect and save face of other participants in a debate and not to threaten their face and damage their reputation negatively (Papacharissi, 2004). Hence, incivility can be operationalised as speech that has a face-threatening **tone** and **features** 'that convey an unnecessarily disrespectful tone towards the discussion forum, its participants, or its topics' (Coe et al., 2014, p.660).

- **0 Not incivility**: Tweets do not feature any expression of incivility
- **1 Incivility**: A tweet features some forms of incivility. Incivility can be reasonable criticism, or unreasonable abuse, harassment, and threat, depending not only on what was said and how, but also by whom, to whom, in which context. Examples of different forms of incivility include:
  - Personal attack, name-calling, ad hominem attacks, disparaging remarks at a person or group of people (e.g., 'You are a moron.')
  - Accusing someone lying or spreading disinformation (e.g., 'This government is lying and deceiving the people,' 'Stop lying!')
  - Aspersion, disparaging remarks directed at political ideas, policies (e.g., 'Texting while driving is stupid.' 'Congress is a circus,' 'Social programme is a scam.')
  - Vulgarity, using profanity and cuss words (e.g., 'What the fuck,' 'Holy shit')
  - Sarcasm, irony to mock and convey contempt (e.g., 'Logic isn't your strength, is it?')

V7 Intolerance Intolerance is operationalised in this study as a set of speech that is threatening the democratic norm of tolerance and refusing the norm of pluralism, reciprocity, and generality (Forst, 2003, 2008, 2017; Habermas, 2003, 2004; Rossini, 2019). A set of behaviours that are threatening to pluralism - such as prejudice, segregation, hateful and violent speech, the use of negative stereotyping in order to deny others of their rights, equal status, and freedom (Rossini, 2019). Intolerance also involves moral disrespect towards groups of people.

Intolerance is different from a heated disagreement or incivility. Disagreements are about individual value preferences, but intolerance has moral disrespect against people and groups of people, their opinions, lifestyles, etc. For instance, saying 'supporting pro-choice is stupid' is incivility, but saying 'supporting abortion is

morally evil' is intolerance. By saying the latter, one is saying that their opponent is not just someone with a different viewpoint, but a dangerous threat and enemy to society who must be destroyed. And in doing so, persuasion is impossible, and deliberation/conversation/persuasion is undesirable.

- **0 Not intolerance**: Tweets do not feature any expression of intolerance
- **1 Intolerance**
  - Threats to individual rights and liberty (e.g., saying that a certain group of people shouldn't have a say or vote in a social issue)
  - Intolerance of political differences
  - Racial, social-economic, sexual, religious intolerance and offensive stereotyping
  - Violent threats

Appendix B

Incivility, intolerance, and digital media ecologies

In Chapters 7 and 8, I illuminated that some forms of incivility and intolerance are flamed by outrage media and populist politicians. This appendix explores media ecologies that can flame and influence Internet users' incivility and intolerance on Twitter. Habermas (2006a) argues use and consumption of electronic media affect the public's political attitudes and behaviours:

'Several findings in the United States support the "videomalaise" hypothesis according to which people who more extensively use the electronic media, and consider them an important source of information, have a lower level of trust in politics and are more likely to take a cynical attitude toward politics as a consequence [...] If, however, reliance on radio and television fosters feelings of powerlessness, apathy, and indifference, we should not seek the explanation in the paralyzed state of civil society but in the content and formats of a degenerating kind of political communication itself. The data I have mentioned suggest that the very mode of mediated communication contributes independently to a diffuse alienation of citizens from politics' (p.422).

Through short writings in this appendix, this section discusses how media ecologies at large affect the volume and intensity of the uncivil and intolerant crisis of public deliberation.

B.1 Mis- and disinformation provokes anti-abortion intolerance

In my U.S. sample, I find that a large portion of anti-abortion intolerance cited or referred to the same mis- and disinformation, fuelling their intolerance more and more. One of the most prominent mis/disinformation shared amongst the U.S. anti-abortion users was the so-called Planned Parenthood foetal part scandal. The theory insists that the organisation commits infanticide in order to get intact foetal parts so that they can sell them illegally for profit (CMP, 2021; Reuters, 2018). Such outraging story could fuel public intolerance of abortion which can go unhinged and produce tragedy. After the circulation and media coverage of the Planned Parenthood foetal part scandal filmed by Daleiden and CMP, in the same year, Robert Lewis Dear killed two civilians and a police officer at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs, Colorado. After his arrest, Dear made a comment about 'no more baby parts' (CNN, 2015). Furthermore, several Planned Parenthood buildings were vandalised after the release of the video (CNN, 2015).

This foetal part scandal was flagged as mis/disinformation by several groups and authorities multiple times. Planned Parenthood itself rebutted Daleiden's video, stating that they donate foetal tissues for important medical research at the request of a patient, but such foetal tissues are never sold (Planned Parenthood, 2015). U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform (2015), the main investigative committee in the US House of Representatives, also commented that Daleiden and CMP's claims are false. The committee concluded that the anti-abortion 'investigative' videos about the Planned Parenthood foetal parts scandal were 'heavily edited' and 'deceptively manipulated' (U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform, 2015). Different Congressional committees and state officials (e.g., Pennsylvania, Missouri) investigated the case and did not find any evidence of Planned Parenthood clinics breaking state laws concerning the collection of foetal tissues (Politics PA, 2015; The New York Times, 2015).

However, despite the ample counterevidence and claims that the authorities did not find evidence to prove Daleiden and CMP's claim, the Planned Parenthood foetal part scandal never ceased to circulate further and further across the Internet. Naturally, these stories provoked strong intolerance of abortion from anti-abortion citizens, feeling outraged and calling Planned Parenthood 'satanic,' 'abomination,' 'vile killing establishment,' 'Nazi-like,' 'butchers,' and so such:

'Planned Parenthood sells baby parts on the black market. This is satanic.' (U.S.)

'@anonymised @anonymised Elitists, satanic, perverts buy children. They are an abomination to God so is planned Parenthood selling fetal body parts to labs and pharmaceutical companies! Sanctioned by Dems!' (U.S.)

'VILE KILLING ESTABLISHMENT! Multiple Planned Parenthood officials have admitted under oath to selling baby parts and organs they slaughtered. These are criminal acts. Where are the arrests? @TheJusticeDept @FBIWFO @DHS_Wolf @pnjaban' (U.S.)

'German NAZIS murdered Jews in ovens and American LEFTIST Nazi-like Planned Parenthood kills BLACK BABIES then butchers and sells their BABY PARTS for profit! If BLM cares about black Americans, why don't they PROTEST the largest killer of blacks in this nation: PLANNED PARENTHOOD?' (U.S.)

B.2 Distrust in mainstream media and big social media companies

The problem of mis/disinformation and its impact on intolerance can be exacerbated when it is intertwined with the problem of deep public distrust in mainstream media and big social media companies. Diachronic research shows that the partisan polarisation in the use and trust of media and journalism has widened in the U.S. between 2014 and 2020 (Pew Research Centre, 2020). Republican and Republican-leaning adults have lost more and more trust in mainstream news media in the past five years whereas Democrats' confidence in media remained stable or somewhat strengthened (Pew Research Centre, 2020). One in two Republicans (56%) answered that news organisations 'hurt democracy'; and Republican supporters were more likely to expect their news to be inaccurate and more likely to guess that mistakes in news stories occur deliberately by journalists' desire to mislead audiences and their lack of ethical standards (Pew Research Centre, 2020). U.S. citizens' trust in media is polarised in terms of political-ideological positions; Republicans rely heavily on Fox News as almost the only information source they trust whereas Democrats use a wide range of sources with a reasonable amount of trust (e.g., CNN, NBC, ABC, CBS) and this, in turn, leads to heavily one-sided audiences for many news outlets (Pew Research Centre, 2020). Ireland is facing the same issue of profound public distrust in government and media according to the 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer (Institute of Advertising Practitioners in Ireland, 2020). Joe Carmody, Managing Director of Edelman Ireland commented that this trust seems to be independent of economic situations:

'At a time of high employment and economic growth, trust in government, business, media and NGOs should be surfing high on the wave of prosperity. That is not the case and it would appear that trust has decoupled from national economic prosperity – with none of our institutions in Ireland trusted by the general public. We find ourselves living in a type of trust paradox with high economic performance on the one hand and issues of belief in our institutions on the other' (Institute of Advertising Practitioners in Ireland, 2020, online).

Public distrust in media makes people prone to discredit and reject any reliability of information and narratives from media companies in general. Many tweets in my samples discredited legacy news media as fake news. Fake news used to specifically refer to inaccurate or misleading information presented as factual news, which is often published by alternative media lacking reliability or credibility. However, the lay definition and usage of the concept have evolved and the term is now commonly used by the right-wing figures and public to critique liberal mainstream media (Farkas & Schou, 2018). When the term 'fake news' is used by Republicans and Trump supporters to refer to legacy media, the term signifies that mainstream media are biased and deliberately attempting to promote left-wing political agendas while silencing and ignoring the real voice of 'the people' (Farkas & Schou, 2018). Several tweets in the U.S. sample expressed their distrust or even hostility against mainstream media:

'NBC is fake news. NBC Ignores Chuck Schumer's Threats Against Justices Gorsuch and Kavanaugh Over Pro-Life Supreme Court Case' (U.S.)

'@anonymised Agree! I have a small number of followers but trying to do my part by replying to MSM, FDA, influential accounts with truth, links, redirection when those accounts publish lies about HCQ, masks, covid, planned parenthood, and such. #PatriotsFight #MSMIsTheEnemyOfThePeople #QuestionTheNarrative' (U.S.)

'CNN COMMUNISTS NEWS NETWORK. BAD FOR BABY. ASK PLANNED PARENTHOOD IF THIS THE PROFITS OF ORGAN HARVESTING!' (U.S.)

This distrust of liberal mainstream media expands to distrust in big social media companies like Twitter and Facebook that are often seen as left-leaning by U.S. conservatives. Regarding the Planned Parenthood foetal part scandal, social media companies like Facebook – in their efforts to tackle the spread of fake news on their platform – worked with several fact-checking sites and labelled the foetal part scandal stories as fake news on multiple occasions (PolitiFact, 2015b, 2020b). Some anti-abortion Twitter users' responses to this fact-checking effort were not to accept the expert contribution and accept the new knowledge but rather to dismiss this

fact-check result as fake fact-check.

'BREAKING @Facebook has issued a new FAKE fact-check of pro-life content marking this FACT as FALSE: "@KamalaHarris Tried To Put Pro-Lifers In Jail Who Exposed Planned Parenthood Selling Baby Parts" And they're "significantly reducing" reach of pro-lifers sharing the truth RT!' (U.S.)

Public distrust of legacy media and big social media companies makes it extra difficult to cut the link between the spread of mis/disinformation and expressions of intolerance. As far as I can observe in the sample, distrust in authorities generate outrage and resentment simultaneously. Distrust in media, thinking that journalists are biased and make mistakes on purpose to manipulate the public, leads to the vilification of news media and journalists as 'enemies of the people.' Outrage encourages people to engage in political actions, whether it is to harass and abuse journalists online. But at the same time, distrust of institutions creates populist frustration and resentment that 'the establishment' and 'the system' is corrupt beyond repair or reform through conventional ways of democratic processes. Many populism studies link the authoritarian populist parties and leaders with the politics of resentment and alienation (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p.48).

B.3 Outrage media and politicians provoke outrage and intolerance

Outrage-provoking rhetoric and misrepresentation in journalism and politics can influence and provoke Twitter users' moral outrage and thereby affect their expressions of unreasonable incivility and intolerance. In my Irish and U.S. samples, I observe that the subtle misrepresentation in news headlines – losing or changing important nuances or details of an incident – can affect the public's anger, fear, and moral outrage about the story. In the Irish sample, a news article from Independent.ie. for instance resulted in a lot of pro-abortion public outrage and their intolerance against anti-abortion people. The headline of the Independent.ie article said '"Make rape victims keep babies and help them" - says midwife' (Figure B.1), published on 15th May 2018 (Independent.ie, 2018). This headline naturally provoked deep anger and incivility from outraged pro-abortion users. For instance, one pro-abortion tweet in the Irish sample writes:

'This is the level of scum you're dealing with. They're not pro 'life', they're pro forced labour. This is about controlling women's bodies; not about women's mental health, not about adoption, not about better childcare services. They've had more

Figure B.1: independent.ie news headline change from from '"Make rape victims keep babies and help them" – says midwife' (15th May 2018) (image on the left) to '"Rape victims should be helped keep their babies" – says midwife' (18th September 2021) (image on the right)

than 35 years. This is so wrong. #repeal' (Ireland)

The news headline has now (at the time of writing this chapter in 2021) been changed to '"Rape victims should be helped keep their babies" - says midwife.' There are some linguistic differences when someone suggests 'make rape victims keep babies' or 'rape victims should be helped keep babies.' I could not find the full audio clip or the full transcript of Midwife Barry's speech at a Save the 8th event in Dublin where she made that exact remark. I could only read part of the speech that is cited in several news articles (Evoke, 2018; Independent.ie, 2018). Barry said in the event:

'Apparently, the only thing worse than rape for the women is death. So by encouraging a woman to abort her unborn baby, you are introducing the concept of death.'

'I say love her, make her feel cherished, make her feel "yes, I can do this." Should she consider adoption, support her. If not, make her keep her little baby and help her.'

What Midwife Barry seemed to advocate for is not necessarily 'forcing the rape victims to carry a pregnancy against their will.' In her words, the approach is about 'love her, make her feel cherished, make her feel "I can do this."' Anyone can disagree and reject her suggestion on a rational ground: e.g., arguing that this idea is unrealistic, naïve, insensitive to rape victims, etc. without sliding in misrepresentation in the headline to make her words sound worse than they could have been interpreted otherwise.

Another case of misrepresentation in online journalism in my sample happens

when the Bishop of Ossory, Dr Dermot Farrell commented on pregnancy from rape and abortion. Newstalk headline says 'Bishop of Ossory suggests "abortion can be far worse than rape"' (News Talk, 2018). Newstalk shares this article on their Twitter profile, saying 'the Bishop of Ossory Dermot Farrell claimed "abortion can be far worse than rape"' (Figure B.2). This tweet and article engender a lot of anger from pro-abortion users, expressing incivility at the Bishop and Catholic Church and intolerance of religious people having a voice in a public policymaking process.

Figure B.2: NewstalkFM's official account's tweet: 'The Bishop of Ossory Dermot Farrell has claimed "abortion can be far worse than rape"'

In May 2018, Bishop Farrell had an interview with the Pat Kenny Show on Newstalk FM, in which he called for a No vote in the upcoming referendum. On the issue of abortion in cases of rape, Bishop Farrell said:

'First of all, rape is a violent act and it is a violent crime against a woman - a terrible crime'

'And sometimes, what I understand from women who have been raped, is that the abortion that followed sometimes after rape was far worse than the rape itself.'

NewsTalk's headline might not be the most honest and empathetic paraphrase of Bishop Farrell's words. Bishop did not claim that abortion is worse than rape, but he said he understands from women who have been raped that abortion was far worse than the rape for them. By omitting that part from the headline, it generated public outrage and subsequent incivility and intolerance, which could have been avoided. Such journalistic misrepresenting might be due to the very mode of profit models of online journalism. Online journalism makes a profit off the number of views and user engagements such as likes, shares, and comments. Outraging or sensational headlines

which can incite strong negative emotions might be a successful business model for media companies to garner user engagements: 'Conflict sells and excites in ways that calm political dialogue never will' (Herbst, 2010, p.133). Technology journalist Sam Biddle said: 'Twitter disasters are the quickest source of outrage, and outrage is traffic.' (Gawker, 2014). Outraging headlines and narratives might be appealing for online journalism now more than ever because, in the age of public distrust, media have to appeal to the attention of a specific pool of users who have already decided opinions over controversial issues like abortion (Pew Research Centre, 2020). But such profit might be made at the expense of heightened antagonism between the public, and unreasonable incivility and intolerance.

I also observe that in the U.S. sample, several candidates for the 2020 election attempted to garner votes through outrage-provoking rhetoric, making use of the hyperpolarised nature of the abortion issue. For example, Mindy Robinson, a Republican candidate in Nevada made a discrediting tweet on Democrat candidate Susie Lee that Lee is sponsored by a bunch of baby killers (referring to Planned Parenthood).

'My opponent is holding a "fireside chat" sponsored by a bunch of baby killers. Does anyone else have a problem with Planned Parenthood taking our tax money so they can give it to Dems so they in turn get more money? Sounds like money laundering to me. #Vote4Mindy #NV03 #DefundPP' (U.S.)

Jason Lewis, a Republican candidate in Minnesota, attacked Democratic candidate Tina Smith that 'she is for post-birth abortion' – which is not true:

'It isn't just that my opponent @TinaSmithMN is pro-choice, she is for post-birth abortion & made a career profiting off abortion as a Planned Parenthood exec. I'm proud to be #ProLife & will always stand for the most vulnerable among us! It's an honor to be endorsed by @SBAList' (U.S.)

Lewis' tweet, when it called that Smith is 'for post-birth abortion,' seems to refer to the fact that Smith voted Nay to Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act introduced in January 2019. Senate motion to proceed is rejected, 56-41-3 (60 required) (On the Issues, 2020). The opposing argument of the bill insists:

'These bills are worded very intentionally, with the aim to further the false narrative that abortions regularly occur immediately before or, according to the president, at the time of birth. While it should be apparent, it is still necessary to point out that any intentional action to end the life of an infant is already illegal. This is covered by federal and state infanticide laws, including the 2002 legislation. These bills do nothing but vilify physicians who provide reproductive health care.' (Rewire News

Group, 2019)

In other words, Senators and politicians including Smith vote Nay to the bill, not because they are pro-infanticide or pro-post-birth abortion, but because they saw that this bill will do nothing significant but only unfairly vilify abortion doctors and procedures. Any misrepresentation to provoke public outrage (e.g., ‘my opponent is pro-infanticide’) might guarantee more partisan attention and votes but that partisan support is only achieved at the serious expense of provoking unnecessary outrage and intolerance amongst the public. Such intolerance-provoking rhetoric from politicians eventually weakens our public democracy, hampering inter-group deliberation, negotiation, and cooperation. These findings suggest we might need a big change in regulations of online journalism and politicians’ campaign rhetoric that deliberately provoke unnecessary outrage and vilification.