

Social Identity and Political Behavior

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What?

- ▶ Effects of social identity on political behavior
 - ▶ **Social identity:** emotionally heightened aspect of a person's sense of self that derives from perceived membership in a social group
 - ▶ **Political behavior:** Turnout, vote choice, politician's effort on behalf of their voters
 - ▶ **Social identities in politics:** Partisanship, race, ethnicity, religious denomination, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, ideology
- ▶ Various pathways how social identity matters:
 - ▶ Hidden biases
 - ▶ Change our preferences
 - ▶ Change how we receive, process, and interpret information
 - ▶ **Change our beliefs about how others should behave and what is expected from oneself**

How?

- ▶ Laboratory experiments that implement interactions between individuals approximating voting decisions and the work politicians do on behalf of their voters – mostly minimal group design
- ▶ Survey experiments that elicit political attitudes while experimentally manipulating content, frame, and order of questions – mostly naturally existing identities

And?

Some results

- ▶ A shared social identity discourages politicians to work hard on behalf of their voters
- ▶ A distinct social identity encourages politicians to compensate voters for a lack of competence with hard work
- ▶ Voters' ability to electorally punish is enough to
 - ▶ make them more prone to choose politicians of their own social group
 - ▶ without actual group-based differences between candidates and/or being driven by voters' prejudice
- ▶ Identity appeals create a coordination effect where voters of one group turn their back on the candidate most of them would prefer on the main policy dimension and flock to another candidate to secure policy benefits distributed at the group-level

Any more?

Current projects

- ▶ Which policies end the kind of discrimination that is rooted in strategic considerations? We manipulate social heterogeneity, the informational environment, and the mechanism by which principals can reward or punish their agents (lab).
- ▶ Are liberals or conservatives more likely to be threatened by mobilized support for the political opponent (survey)?
- ▶ More generally, how do individuals respond when they receive information that threatens their politically-based group identity (survey)?
- ▶ How does the degree of social heterogeneity of our network of peers shape political opinion formation (lab and online).
- ▶ Which societal cleavages are at the heart of political competition and which elites have the most influence on public opinion formation in the Arab world (survey and lab in Egypt and Tunisia).