Social identity and Political Behavior

Definitions
- **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

Questions
- My primary research interest is on how salient social identity, like race or ethnicity, influences political behavior. More specifically, I clarify how psychological and strategic implications of heightened group concerns interact to affect electoral accountability and the formation of political preferences.

Electoral accountability:
- How do politicians respond to the propensity of voters to elect candidates from their own social group?
- When do voters attribute responsibility for political outcomes favorably to incumbents with whom they share a salient social trait?

Formation of political preferences:
- When do campaign appeals to voters’ social identity lead to bandwagoning of members of one social group behind one candidate and when do candidates alienate potential supporters by priming their group membership?
- How are political preferences shaped by voters’ perception of the boundaries and characteristics of social groups they are affiliated with?

Research design
- Laboratory experiments that implement interactions between subjects that approximate voting decisions and the work office holders do on behalf of their voters. I simulate shared membership in social groups by showing subjects pairs of paintings from two painters and assemble those with similar preferences over painters in the same group (minimal group design).

- Survey experiments that elicit political attitudes while experimentally manipulating content, frame, and order of questions.

Results

**Social identity and electoral accountability**
- 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

**How does politicians’ effort in office change with competence and group identity?**

Social identity and electoral coalition formation
- Campaign appeals to group identities make voters shift the focus of their vote choice from a self-centered perspective to one that accounts for the actions and expectations of fellow group members and of other social groups
- Identity appeals create a bandwagoning 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

**How do identity appeals help groups coordinate to support the same candidate?**

**Social identity and political behavior**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A: ID appeals</th>
<th>B: Income appeals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Effort</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rich</td>
<td>Effort</td>
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Average treatment effect of identity and income appeals – change in vote share of the redistribution candidate for poor and rich in first (Round 1-20) and second half (Round 21-40) of the experiment. The rich lose money on the income dimension by voting for the same candidate in strong numbers.

Current projects
- Which policies end the kind of discrimination that is rooted in strategic considerations rather than prejudice or actual differences between groups? A laboratory experiment that manipulates social heterogeneity, the informational environment, and the mechanism by which principals can reward or punish their agents (with Dimitri Landa, NYU).
- Are liberals or conservatives more likely to be threatened by mobilized support for the political opponent? Survey experiment with Eric Dickson, Emily Balcetis, and Yaël Granot (all NYU)
- More generally, how do individuals respond when they receive information that threatens their politically-based group identity? Survey experiment with Catherine de Vries (Oxford University)

Treatments that challenge a Republicans perception of who belongs to her social group of co-partisans

- Control
- Treatment

Publications