EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE ON EXPRESSIVE IDENTITY VOTING

ROBERT BÖHM (ERFURT), BETTINA ROCKENBACH & ARNE WEISS (COLOGNE)
"Issues are important, but they are not as important as the fact that this is an opportunity to vote for one of your own."

Tony Sanchez, who (unsuccessfully) tried to become, as a Hispanic, governor of Texas in 2002

(NY Times, Sep 5, 2001; first found in Dickson&Scheve, 2003)
Social identity (e.g. based on ethnicity) is a strong predictor of voting behavior in many countries (Huber, 2010).

Lots of attention devoted to „elections as censuses“ (Horowitz, 1985) in developing countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Yet, causal effect of social identity on voting behavior difficult to establish.
Possible explanations for ingroup-voting

1. Expressive identity voting
   - Voting for one of yours
   - Explanation linked to Horowitz (‘85), who applies social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner) to „groups in conflict“

2. Instrumental
   - Rational expectations: voters benefit from voting for candidates or parties with whom they share social identity
   - Perceptual: voters believe that their interests are served best by members of their own (salient) group

„Paradox of voting“ has fueled long-standing debate (already noted by Downs, 1957) on „expressive“ vs „instrumental“
In search for „clean“ evidence

- Political-economy literature offers many potential reasons why voters may (believe to) benefit from voting for their own (salient) social group

- Studies generally have to rely on questionnaires and, crucially, can therefore not control well for voters‘ policy preferences
  - Ferree (2006) finds little evidence for expressive identity voting in South-Africa‘s election, but calls for better (e.g. experimental) data

- No „clean“ evidence on ingroup-voting yet
  - Closest: Field exp. by Wantchekon (2003), who finds ethnic card to pay off in electoral campaigns in Benin
Research question: Does identity itself matter in voting decisions?

- Two complementary definitions of identity voting:
  - Weak identity voting: Ingroup-voting in the absence of strategic incentives
  - Strong identity voting: Ingroup-voting against strategic incentives

- Strategic incentives are derived from policy preferences
  - Obvious catch: what do voters want?
Existence of expressive identity voting may have profound implications

- Democratisation may not justify our hopes in better accountability, and may even lead to worse
  - Horowitz predicts „census-style“ elections to lead to conflict
  - Creation of „national identity“ may have to precede democratisation (Collier, 2009)

- Rational choice models on voting behaviour may have to be rewritten if voting indeed has a (significant) expressive component
Experimental approach

- Test of whether social identity can explain ingroup-voting when all other explanations (instrumental and perceptual) are ruled out

- Experimental goals:
  - completely control for voters' policy preferences
  - completely control for voters' perception of (their and other) social groups
Experimental design

- „Society“ consists of 6-players: 4 citizens, 2 candidates for president
- Split into two groups: blue and yellow
- One citizen becomes voter who decides which of the 2 candidates becomes president
- Each candidate proposes policy: a distribution of a fixed amount of money among the citizens
- Policies may distribute uniformly or differentiate between citizens
4 possible policies

Example based on voter belonging to the yellow group
Example of voting choice by a yellow voter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal of candidate from blue group</th>
<th>Payoff for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>You</strong></td>
<td><strong>Other voter from your group</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal of candidate from yellow group</th>
<th>Payoff for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>You</strong></td>
<td><strong>Other voter from your group</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **vote for blue candidate**
- **vote for yellow candidate**
Computer determines the policies proposed by the candidates

Each citizen decides for the case of becoming voter before computer draws voter and policy proposals

- All face same 7 potential voting decisions, which each have same probability of being decisive
- Allows to completely control for citizens' policy preferences
Candidates tasks and earnings

- President has to implement policy she proposed
- President makes one important decision: choosing recipient of actual donation
- Both candidates earn 150 points regardless of election
- Citizens earn points based on implemented policy
1. Estimation task, after which „society“ is median-split into „high“ and „low estimators“, which are then called „blue“ and „yellow“

2. Real-effort inter-group competition
   - Counting letters
   - additional group-price for performing better than other group
   - purpose: creation of „common fate“ and putting subjects into inter-group competition mode
Procedure

- Conduced in Erfurt according to standards of experimental economics
- 72 participants (48 citizens)
- Total earnings about 10€ (1 point = 0.08€)
- Programmed in ztree (Fischbacher, 2007)
Hypotheses

- **Policy-based voting:**
  - 50% share of ingroup-votes
    - irrespective of whether citizens care about self, group or others

- **Weak identity voting:**
  - Voters prefer ingroup candidate when candidates propose identical policies

- **Strong identity voting:**
  - Share of ingroup-votes higher than share of outgroup-votes also when candidates‘ propose different policies
Results

- Strong evidence for weak identity voting:
  - 85.4% ingroup-votes when policies do not differ

- Evidence for strong identity voting:
  - 58.3% ingroup-votes when policies differ \((p=0.0005, \text{ 2-sided, Wilcoxon signed rank test for equality of each citizen's number of ingroup- and outgroup-votes})\)

- Overall, sign. more ingroup- than outgroup-votes:
  - 62.2% vs. 37.8% \((p<0.0001)\)
Only group-membership has explanatory power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>vote (1 for yellow, 0 for blue candidate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>voter’s income gain</td>
<td>0.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.242)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voter’s ingroup-member’s income gain</td>
<td>0.0299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.102)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>citizen belongs to yellow group</td>
<td>1.006***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.191)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.490***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.119)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors (clustered at subject-level) in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
The economist wonders …

Is identity voting an experimental artefact?
No, identity seems to matter

separate logit regressions for subsamples of highly and lowly identified voters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>subsample strong identification voting for yellow</th>
<th>subsample weak identification voting for yellow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>-0.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.632)</td>
<td>(0.636)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voter’s income gain</td>
<td>-0.173</td>
<td>0.0695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.284)</td>
<td>(0.222)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voter’s ingroup member’s income gain</td>
<td>2.179**</td>
<td>0.515***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.871)</td>
<td>(0.135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voter belongs to yellow group</td>
<td>-1.804**</td>
<td>-0.220*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.868)</td>
<td>(0.132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Identity-voting stronger for highly identified citizens (p=0.059)

Separate logit regressions for subsamples of highly and lowly identified voters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>subsample strong identification voting for yellow</th>
<th>subsample weak identification voting for yellow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>voter’s income gain</td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>-0.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.632)</td>
<td>(0.636)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voter’s ingroup member's income gain</td>
<td>-0.173</td>
<td>0.0695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.284)</td>
<td>(0.222)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voter belongs to yellow group</td>
<td>2.179**</td>
<td>0.515***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.871)</td>
<td>(0.135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.804**</td>
<td>-0.220*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.868)</td>
<td>(0.132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Summary and conclusion

- Successful search for clean evidence for weak and strong identity voting
  - Exp design completely controls for voters’ (unobservable) policy preferences and possible perceptual biases
  - Ingroup-voting stronger for highly identified subjects

- Surprising:
  - Only social identity sig. predicts voting behaviour

- Lab-effects may be lower bound for „real-world“-effects
  - Identity voting should thus, if robustly found, be accounted for.