Translating Group Identities Into Partisanship: The Role of Party Signaling

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Background:

How do people become partisans? Instrumental models of partisanship stress the importance of economic and/or ideological considerations (e.g. Fiorina 1981). In contrast, expressive models view partisanship as grounded in social group identities (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960; Green et al. 2002). Past research has found strong support for the expressive view of partisanship with group identity a strong predictor of political outcomes (see Huddy et al. 2018).

Questions remain, however, over how exactly social group identities are translated into partisan identities. I look at the role of party signaling in influencing party attachments. Relying on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1981), I predict that signals from the Party that they are looking out to protect/advance the status of one's social group in society will aid in the development of strong partisan attachments.

Research Questions:

Do signals from the Democratic Party suggesting that they are looking out for the **status** of African Americans strengthen Democratic Partisanship among Black Americans?

Are these **status** appeals more effective than instrumental appeals (**economic** and **values**) appeals?

Study Design:

I conducted an **online survey experiment** with a Prolific sample of 220 American citizens who self-identified as Black. Participants answered a short set of questions before being **randomized into one of four treatment groups**. The control condition did not receive any treatment. The other three groups were told we were interested in the use of social media in campaigns. They were told they would see one recent Twitter exchange before being asked some follow up questions. Post-treatment, they were asked a number of questions about the Democratic Party.

Experimental Treatments:

Control Condition:

No Tweets

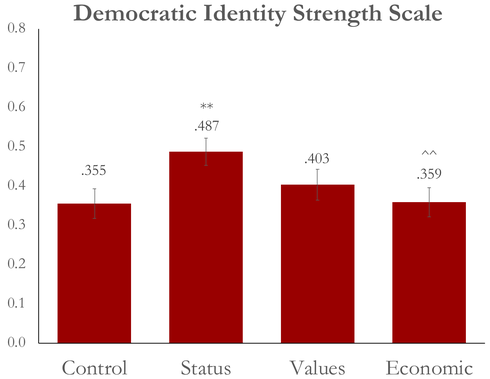
Status Condition:

Values Condition:

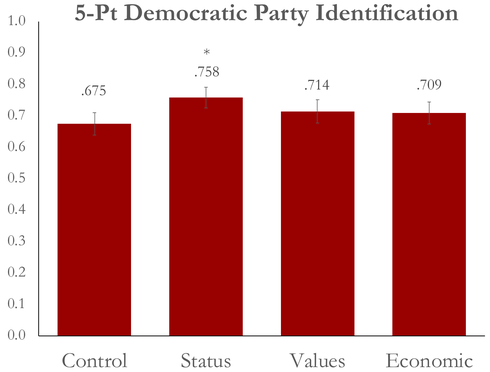
Econ Condition:

Results:

Democratic Identity Strength Scale



5-Pt Democratic Party Identification



KEY:

** = significantly different from Control Condition (p<.05)

* = significantly different from Control Condition (p<.1)

^^ = significantly different from Status Condition (p<.05)

N's:

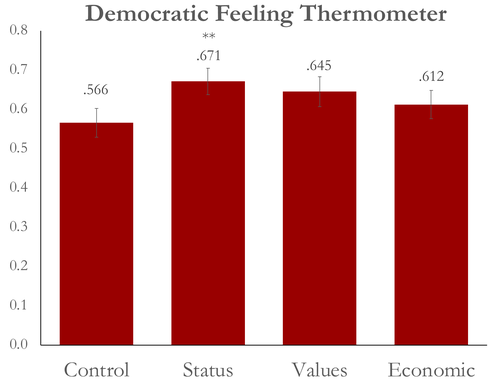
Control = 53

Status = 63

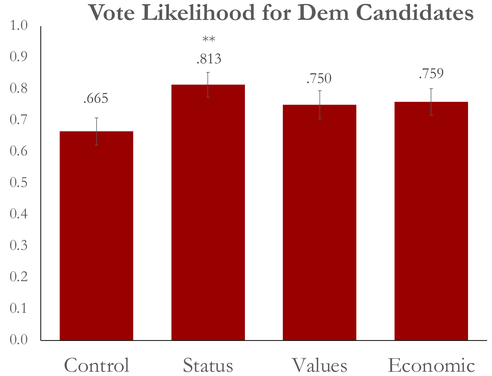
Values = 49

Economic = 55

Democratic Feeling Thermometer



Vote Likelihood for Dem Candidates



Sample Characteristics:

Sample Size	220	7-pt Liberal Ideology (Mean)	4.97
Black (%)	100	5-pt Political Interest (Mean)	3.4
Age (Mean)	32.3	Democrat (%)	62.56
Female (%)	65	Independent (%)	31.96
Attend Church (%)	46.8	Republican (%)	5.48
Attend College (%)	85.5	Racial Linked Fate (%)	80.94
<$40,000 HH Income (%)	42.5	Black Identity Importance (0-1) (Mean)	0.72

Dependent Measures:

1. Democratic Party Identity Strength Scale
   - 5-item social identity strength scale (see Bankert et al. 2018)
2. Democratic Party Feeling Thermometer
3. Party Identification (5-pt Strong Rep-Strong Dem)
4. Likelihood of Voting for Democratic Party Congressional Candidates if Election was Today

Conclusion:

Compared to control, status appeals led to significantly higher evaluations of the Democratic Party for all DVs.

Status appeal condition had highest scores on all DVs but differences between status and instrumental appeals not significant.

References:

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