Comparative Politics Projects: Policy Feedback, Populism, and Neuro-Politics

NEURO-POLITICS

One way to look at the neural correlates behind partisanship is with fMRI scans. On the most basic level, to answer the question of the similarity between partisanship and other social identities, we have to understand the neuroscience behind social identities by looking at which brain regions are activated during the political party stimuli and see whether they are the same. In this design, we compare subjects with strong partisanship and strong social identities. Based on findings from previous neuro-politics studies we know that the amygdala plays a key role for various social identities, thus we expect that the mobilization of partisanship would indeed solicit a similar neurological response compared with other social identities.

I examined related studies to understand how best to compare physiological reactions to various social identities, including party identification. We researched potential manipulations, such as texts or images that will be flashed across a screen while subjects are scanned. These stimuli will represent different types of social identities, allowing us to measure the neural reactions to each in order to know which brain regions are activated during the political party stimuli.

POTENTIAL HYPOTHESIS

This study is based off a two-wave survey conducted in Ontario which asked people about their experience with public benefits, their level of civic engagement and their views on politicians. It measured their opinion of government. One hypothesis for our project is that we will find similar results to the American case; people who are under the threat of government taking revoking their benefits and having their worthiness are likely to be unsatisfied with government and less likely to participate. However, because of Canada’s distinct political culture, perhaps the experience of receiving means-tested benefits will still lower people’s opinions of government, but it won’t decrease civic engagement.

We have not yet analyzed all of the three-word responses, but our initial findings show an overall less than positive view of government. The word cloud above is an example of the responses. The larger the word, the more frequently it appeared in the data. To proceed with this project we will have to classify each of the respondents as receivers of means-tested benefits or not, and from there compare the different groups of engagement and opinions of government. Another prediction is that the group which received the least benefits and paid the most taxes would more frequently rate the word “wasteful” as coming to mind.

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METHOD AND HYPOTHESIS

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