

Identity in Political Opinion Formation:
How Information Shapes the Influence of
Citizens' Identities on Political Opinions

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PhD Dissertation

Politica

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ISBN: 978-87-7335-240-3

Cover: Svend Siune

Print: Fællestrykkeriet, Aarhus University

Layout: Annette Bruun Andersen

Submitted September 30, 2018

The public defense takes place December 10, 2018

Published December 2018

Forlaget Politica
c/o Department of Political Science
Aarhus BSS, Aarhus University
Bartholins Allé 7
DK-8000 Aarhus C
Denmark

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Acknowledgements

Looking back, I took the first steps towards doing a PhD when Rune Slothuus hired me as a student assistant – at first just to print his curriculum. That job sparked my interest in how people form opinions about politics. Rune was generous with his time, willing to discuss research in opinion formation for hours and invited me into his world of research. Many years later, I have been lucky enough to do my own research project studying how people form political opinions. I am pleased to use these next few pages to appreciate everybody who has supported me in the process of writing a PhD.

First, I would like to thank my two supervisors, Jens Peter Frølund Thomsen and Rune Slothuus. Throughout the PhD, they provided great guidance on the project, papers, and always kept optimistic when I met stumbling blocks. When unexperienced, it is invaluable to have somebody experienced to ask for advice. Jens Peter always kept his door open to me – even when I stopped by to explain an idea for the eighth time. JP has a relentless attention to detail. A trait from which my dissertation has profited greatly. I hope a little of that attention to detail has rubbed off over the years.

I will always be indebted to Rune. As a supervisor, Rune is great, because he is a weirdly wonderful combination of being extremely critical, yet inspirational at the same time. Also, Rune has a remarkable sense of quality, which has always shined through in his advice: “Rather do a few things with high quality than many things mediocrely”. Unquestionably, my dissertation would be better if I had been quicker to understand what he actually meant. Another fine trait about Rune is that he (sometimes) laughs at my jokes. I am unsure whether that says more about Rune or about me.

I have been fortunate to have a lot of good people around me at the Department of Political Science. In particular, Martin Bisgaard deserves my gratitude. During the past years, I have had countless chats with Martin, and he has shown an untiring willingness to discuss ideas, comment on papers or simply listen to frustrations. I have learned a lot from him. So thank you, Martin. Not least for being a dear friend. Many other colleagues need mentioning, especially Lasse Laustsen, Mathias Osmundsen, Kristina Jessen Hansen, Mads Thau, Rasmus Skytte, Jakob Majlund Holm, Thomas Artmann Kristensen, Julian Christensen, Oluf Gøtzsche-Astrup, Frederik Jørgensen, Troels Bøggild, Suthan Krishnarajan, Casper Sakstrup, Sadi Shanaah, and Jonathan Klüser. Everybody contributed to making PhD life a lot more enjoyable and stimulating. I also owe a big thank you to Birgit, Malene, and Helle for helping with various administrative tasks, and to Annette for excellent language editing. And not to forget, from outside the Department, I am grateful to Jakob

Rathlev and Thomas Illum Hansen for giving invaluable advice about doing a PhD, Jeppe Bundsgaard for lending me his office in Copenhagen, and Sofie Bindslev for being a fantastic office-mate in Emdrup.

During the PhD, I have been lucky enough to travel abroad and spend time outside the Department. I greatly benefitted from a stay at London School of Economics and Political Science, where Thomas Leeper kindly hosted me. Thomas is very gifted, but I know of few academics that are as kind as Thomas. A special thanks to Thomas for helping me see perspectives in my research, contributing to ideas and spending so much time on me. At political science conferences, I have met helpful and very bright people. Thanks to Jamie Druckman, Chris Weber, and Sam Klar, who all took time out of their busy schedules to comment on my research findings. At other occasions, I have profited from inspiring talks with Leonie Huddy, Gabe Lenz, Matt Levensky, and Paul Goren.

As a PhD student, I have spent a lot of time learning and thinking about quantitative methods and research designs. Understanding and mastering all the different technical tools is challenging and seemingly a never-ending project! Luckily, I have had inspirational teachers. If I am able to do anything just somewhat cool these days, it is thanks to David Hendry, Allan Würtz, Ulrik Hvidman, and Kim Mannemar Sønderskov.

Doing a PhD has (at least for me) often felt like running a marathon. The encouragement and support from my family to continue pushing through has been unbelievable. I count myself lucky for having an amazing set of parents. Always caring and ready to help with daily life without asking for much in return. They deserve full credit for me getting a degree and teaching me the importance of education (especially when I dreamt more about tennis than academia in high school). My sister, Christina, has kept me smiling, always saying she thought my research was exciting – even when I was struggling to get going with the first paper. And my family in the UK – Cassie, Paul, Peggy, Ted, Bas and Tario – warmly provided me with a home away from home during my research stay in London. I am so very grateful.

Saving the best to last. All these years, Niamh has lovingly been there every single step of the way. She has been there to share my thoughts, concerns, ups and downs, but most importantly, she kept me believing that I could write this dissertation. There is no doubt in my mind that there would be no dissertation without her. Thank you, sweetheart.

Morten Pettersson
Copenhagen, November 2018

Preface

This report summarizes my PhD dissertation “Identity in Political Opinion Formation: How Information Shapes the Influence of Citizens’ Identities on Political Opinions” written at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, Denmark. The purpose of the report is to motivate and present the argument that cuts across the articles in the dissertation, provide an overview of the applied research designs and the results, and finally touch upon how this dissertation contributes to future research avenues in political behavior research. The dissertation consists of this summary report and three papers:

- A. Pettersson, Morten. n.d. How Partisan is Motivated Reasoning? Partisan Identity, Change in Political Office, and Economic Perceptions. *Working Paper*
- B. Pettersson, Morten. n.d. Not Partisan, Latino: When Latino Group Identity Becomes Important to Policy Opinions. *Working Paper*
- C. Pettersson, Morten. n.d. Identity-Based Arguments and Public Opinion: How Persuasive are Arguments Targeting Citizens’ Identities? *Working Paper*

Chapter 1: Introduction

In a democracy, people's opinions and evaluations of policy affect how a society is ordered. In aggregate, people's opinions on issues such as immigration reform, equal access to healthcare, or national economic performance send important signals to elected officials about their priorities, demands for change and ultimately inform their voting decisions (Goren 2001: 159). In short, people's opinions guide the policies and decisions that define the societies we live in – not least the call for substantial political change. This dissertation focuses on one ingredient that can influence people's political opinions: Their core identities based on attachments to groups or roles.

In recent years, a revived interest in citizens' identities based on groups has promoted identities as an important ingredient in political opinion formation (Achen and Bartels 2016; Druckman and Lupia 2016; Huddy 2013). Whether identities are based on party, ethnicity, race, parenthood, nationality, religion or, as in most instances, on multiple attachments (Klar 2013), research on each of these identities now shows that they can powerfully shape citizens' policy opinions (e.g., Druckman and Lupia 2016; Bartels 2002; Sanchez 2006; Transue 2007; Klar 2013; Carey 2002; Bloom et al. 2015). That is, when people identify with a specific group, they are found to either support or oppose policies in order to promote their group's interest. The relevance of citizens' identities for their political opinions is also reflected in recent political realities. Examples of identity politics are not in short supply: Democrats and Republicans in the US now disagree more than ever about political issues (Pew 2017); British nationalists “wanted their country back” and voted for Brexit (Hobolt 2016); African-Americans and Latinos in the US rallied in the ten thousands for respectively “Black Lives Matter” (Sledge and Goyette 2014) and immigration reform (Barreto et al. 2009); and parents and Latinos are now key demographic groups targeted in US election campaigns (Klar 2013; Barreto and Collingwood 2015).

However, while research suggests that citizens' opinions *can* be powerfully shaped by their specific identities, it is not straightforward *when* citizens' identities influence their policy opinions. This is probably best exemplified by how specific identities are found to influence opinions on only some policy issues, and not others. For example, although African-Americans' support for policies such as Food Stamps and Medicare is influenced by their African-American group identity, their support for spending on public schools is not (Tate 1994). Similarly, research suggests that Latinos' group identity made

them favor healthcare reform and oppose the Iraq War, but it did not clearly shape their opinion on standardized tests in schools or federal taxes (Abrajano and Alvarez 2010). These examples stress an important point raised in this dissertation. It is not predetermined that specific identities such as Latino, Social Democrat or as a parent direct individuals' thinking about specific policies.

The dissertation examines *when* citizens' identities matter in opinion formation based on the following research question: Under what conditions do citizens' specific identities influence their policy opinions? The dissertation highlights the need to acknowledge that it is not easy for citizens to use their identities in opinion formation; it is demanding. For a specific identity (e.g., Latino, Social Democrat or parent) to influence people's opinion on policy, they need not only work out their identity is relevant for forming an opinion, they also need to understand how their group's interests link to policy (i.e., how policy support relates to their identity-based interest). Neither is straightforward. Inspired by classic ideas (Converse 1964; Conover 1984), the dissertation argues that political information from the context is key to understanding whether citizens rely on a specific identity when they form opinions. Furthermore, the dissertation suggests what kinds of policy rhetoric that can make citizens' identities politically relevant and thereby specifies the conditions where specific identities should influence opinion.

The main claim advanced in the dissertation is that citizens' specific identities influence their policy opinion when they receive information – from group leader endorsements, political arguments or political events – that clearly connects their group's interest to policy support. Such information makes citizens' identities important in opinion formation because it clarifies that their group's interest is at stake. It clarifies both whether people should view policy from the perspective of a specific identity (e.g., instead of from their values or wallet) *and* whether they should support or oppose policy to promote their group's interest. To illuminate the theoretical claim, the dissertation examines how the identity of parenthood affects policy opinions when parents receive political arguments that stress how a policy benefits (hurts) parental interests. Furthermore, it demonstrates how Latinos' group identity made them more supportive of legalizing undocumented immigrants, when Latino-led rallies clearly connected their group's interest to lenient immigration policy views.

The dissertation adds broadly to our understanding of when identities matter. It also makes an important contribution by widening the focus beyond partisan identities, as most work in political science otherwise focus on, to non-partisan identities, e.g., Latino or parent. This is an important step for

understanding citizens' political opinions, because non-partisan identities figure as the most important group belongings that people mention, when asked. In an ISSP survey (ISSP 2003), 4 % of Americans mentioned their preferred party among their three most important identities, where as 16 % mentioned ethnicity, 32 % religiosity, 77 % family roles and 13 % nationality. The dissertation shows that specific non-partisan identities are powerful predictors of opinions when people receive the messages that makes them politically relevant.

In addition, the dissertation enriches our understanding of where relevant information for citizens' decision-making comes from. Traditionally, work in political communication focuses on political rhetoric in the form of source cues or political arguments (e.g., Mondak 1993; Chong and Druckman 2007; Druckman et al. 2010), but this dissertation also considers how relevant information can come from political events (e.g., large-scale group-led demonstrations, a change in political office). Political events may give people valuable cues about how to use their predispositions in decision-making. The dissertation thus adds to a nuanced understanding of how the political context can supply information that shapes the impact of citizens' predispositions (e.g., their specific identities) in opinion formation.

The summary report demonstrates that information from the political context is vital in making citizens' identities influential to their opinion on specific issues. In the next chapter, I review existing literature about citizens' identities and opinion formation and present the theoretical framework and argument, which clarifies how the three papers are interlinked. Chapter 3 presents the research designs and data used in the papers and emphasizes unique attributes in each research design. Chapter 4 presents the core findings from the three papers, before I discuss the contributions and implications of the findings in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Previous Work and Theoretical Argument

This chapter provides the theoretical background of the dissertation to help us understand under what conditions citizens' identities affect their opinions. Before theorizing about this question, the chapter defines the concept of identity and reviews what we know about the influence of citizens' identities on opinion. The second part of the chapter presents the theoretical framework and argument. Finally, the chapter explains how each paper contributes to the dissertation.

Identity and Its Impact on Opinion Formation

An identity is often viewed as people's psychological attachment to specific groups – such as partisanship (Huddy 2013) – or to specific roles – such as parenthood (Klar 2013). It can be understood as “that part of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1981: 255). The concept of identity serves to distinguish groups or roles to which an individual belongs (e.g., based on membership) that are not central to that person's self-conception from belongings that are a more integral part of the personality (Achen and Bartels 2016: 228). In that sense, the central feature of an identity is that a group or role has become a central part of a person's self-conception: “Who am I?”

The concept of identity explains why people based on a specific identity, e.g., their partisan identity as a Democrat or Republican, would want to support (or oppose) policies based on the group's interest. Identities are assumed to *motivate* people to support a position to promote the group's interest (Conover 1984; Taber and Lodge 2006: 767). The idea is that the group's interest on policy, for example, viewed from the perspective of people's identity as a Democrat, becomes of “personal relevance” and therefore important (Conover 1984: 764). On a deeper psychological level, the motivation to form preferences in line with one's identity group may stem from various psychological motives, for instance because doing so gives them a feeling of status (Tajfel and Turner 1979), approval from others (Kahan 2015) or hedonistic satisfaction from meeting group expectations (Burke and Stets 2009).

Political science has mainly focused on the influence of people's partisan identities – such as Republican and Democrat in the US, or Labour and Conservatives in the UK. (Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Schickler, and Palmquist 2002). Partisan identification is viewed as the “unmoved mover” (Johnston 2006), a core political predisposition, which is at the center of most people's political belief system. Since the idea was formulated that partisan identification acts as a “perceptual screen” (Campbell et al. 1960; also see Lodge and Taber 2013; Leeper and Slothuus 2014), a wealth of work has studied whether citizens view politics and policies in line with whatever is favorable to their partisan orientation (e.g., Bartels 2002; Cohen 2003). In relation to policy opinions, at least in American political science research, the dominant view is that people rely heavily on partisan identities to construct policy preferences (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Jacoby 1988). As stressed by Huddy et al. (2015:1), “No other single variable comes close to accounting so well or consistently for American political behavior”. The large literature on partisan identification also shows that the absence or presence of partisan cues – that is, whether party leaders endorse a policy – plays an important role in whether people's partisan identities influence policy support (e.g., Cohen 2003; Druckman et al. 2013; Klar 2014). For instance, a Democrat or a Republican is likely to support (oppose) a policy proposal when their party sponsors (opposes) the policy. In general, research suggests that partisans are willing to run through various reasons for holding a specific opinion to defend the position that is faithful to their party (Mason 2018; Taber and Lodge 2006; Gaines et al. 2007). Even when supporting a policy based on the party group's interest runs against core ideological ideas (Cohen 2003) or material self-interest (Mullinix 2016), citizens' partisan identity heavily influences their opinion.

More recently, scholars have stressed the importance of non-partisan identities based on attachments to social groups for citizens' policy opinions (e.g., Druckman and Lupia 2016; Klar 2013). Research now indicates that such identities – whether based on nationality (e.g., Carey 2002), race (e.g., Transue 2007), ethnicity (e.g., Sanchez 2006), parenthood (e.g., Klar 2013), gender (e.g., Conover 1984), or religion (Bloom et al. 2015) – can have a powerful impact on opinions. In numerous incidences, research finds that people who identify (strongly) with each of these groups are more likely to take a pro-group policy position than people who do not identify (strongly) with the group. For example, in observational research, people with a strong national identity are found to be more skeptical of European integration (Carey 2002), and strongly identified African-Americans are more likely to support policies such as affirmative action, Food Stamps and Medicare than weakly identified African-Americans (Tate 1994). The causal evidence that citizens' non-parti-

san identities can influence their opinions is further strengthened by experimental studies that manipulate the strength of such identities (e.g., Klar 2013; Transue 2007). These find that people's opinions become more aligned with specific pro-group policy positions when their identities are stronger.

However, while extant research shows that citizens' specific identities – both partisan and non-partisan social identities – *can* powerfully influence whether they support specific policies, our understanding of *when* they become influential remains limited. As mentioned, we do know that citizens' partisan identity matters when their partisan elites endorse a policy, but beyond that, we know little about the specific conditions under which partisan identities influence opinions. Regarding citizens' non-partisan social identities – which, unlike partisans, are not represented by clear-cut group leaders – we know even less about when they become important to policy opinions. Empirical work often shows that citizens' non-partisan identities influence their opinion only on some issues and it is unclear why they matter in some instances. Tate (1994: 41) finds that African-Americans' group identity makes them more supportive of Food Stamps and Medicare, but also that group identity does not influence their support for spending on public schools. Furthermore, Tate's results show that although African-American identity influences opinion on both Food Stamps and Medicare, their opinion on Food Stamps is more strongly moved by their group identity.

What is clear from extant research, however, is that if people have a specific identity – such as African-American, Latino, Democrat or parent – we cannot simply infer that it directs their thinking about politics and specific policy issues. To help us understand under what conditions specific identities become relevant to citizens' opinions, the next section presents the theoretical framework and argument of the dissertation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework aims to improve our understanding of under what conditions citizens' specific identities direct their opinions. How can we better understand *when* people who identify (strongly) with a group are more likely to support (or oppose) a policy than people who do not identify (strongly) with the group? The crux of the theoretical framework is that it is not straightforward for people to apply their specific identities in opinion formation; instead, it is demanding. The framework is inspired by two ideas in framing theory. First, most political issues are complex and multifaceted (Gamson and Modigliani 1987: 143). This suggests that people can think about issues from different angles or, more specifically, from the outlook of different predispositions

(e.g., values, specific identities etc.) (Chong and Druckman 2007a: 105)¹. Second, for a specific predisposition to matter, people need to have a clear evaluative policy belief. They need to understand how the predisposition connects to the policy (Chong and Druckman 2007b: 639). Consequently, when people form an opinion on a policy, they face a double task: they have to work out what predisposition (e.g., a specific identity) to use and how to apply it. Thus, for opinions to be influenced by specific identities, individuals need to be able to answer two questions:

1. Is the identity (e.g., Latino, Democrat, parent) relevant for forming an opinion on this policy?
2. Should I support or oppose the policy to promote my group's interest?

Both questions are difficult for people to answer, and I will in the following explain why.

#1. Answering: "Is the identity (e.g., Latino, Democrat, parent) relevant for forming an opinion on this policy?"

For people to understand from which perspective they should view a policy – a specific identity group or something else – does not necessarily come naturally. As Kinder (1998) stresses, people possess many different ingredients that they can use in opinion formation, for example values (Feldman 1988), material self-interest (Chong et al. 2001), personality traits (Gerber et al. 2010) – and their identities. This means that when people form an opinion, they can potentially view a policy from the outlook of their wallets, values, or from the perspective of a specific identity (e.g., parental, Latino, or partisan perspective). That people do not automatically see one of their identities as relevant for decision-making is best captured by identity priming studies (e.g., Sniderman et al. 2004; Transue 2007; Klar 2013). These suggest that specific identities often need to be emphasized or cued before it is *the* ingredient people find relevant. Klar (2013) highlights that when an identity is emphasized or cued, it “increases an identity’s salience, and subsequently, related concern for *identity-based interests*” (Klar 2013: 1109, italics in original). Consistent with this perspective, Klar (2013) shows in a survey experiment that when Democratic parents’ parental identity is made salient – by a question that primes them to focus on their parental identity – they become more supportive of policies such as spending on anti-terrorism and stricter sex offender sentencing than Democratic parents whose parental identity is not primed

¹ Chong and Druckman (2007a: 105) refer to these as dimensions, but in this context, I call them predispositions.

(also see Klar, Madonia and Schneider 2014; Sniderman et al. 2004; Transue 2007). Thus, it is not straightforward for people to even realize that a specific identity is the relevant ingredient to apply in opinion formation, instead of, for example, their values, material self-interest or another group attachment.

#2. Answering: “Should I support or oppose the policy to promote my group’s interest?”

Even if people think their identity is relevant, we cannot take for granted that they understand how policy support relates or links to their group’s interests (i.e., their identity-based interests) – except in situations where it is very clear or people previously have learned. A group’s interest can relate to various factors. It can relate to whether the policy advances the group materially (e.g., Conover 1985). For example, if an ethnic group suffers from unemployment, it would be in its interest to support higher unemployment benefits. The group’s interest can also relate to the policy’s consequences for norms or core beliefs that exist in one’s identity group (Huddy 2013; Suhay 2008), e.g. for rural identities “a belief in hard work” (Walsh 2012) or for the identity of parenthood “caring about what is best for one’s children” (Burke and Stets 2009: 45). A norm or core belief may give the group a specific interest to pursue, if the policy hurts (promotes) the belief. Finally, the group’s interest can relate to the policy’s consequences for the group’s perceived status, as people are assumed to want their group to be associated with positive attributes (Huddy 2013).

On most issues, the question of whether a policy hurts (or advances) a group’s interest –e.g., material interest, group norms or group status – rarely comes with straightforward answers. The reason is that politics is complicated. There are many different (and new) issues on the political agenda, and it is challenging to understand the details of specific policies. As many have little knowledge about policy details (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), or “hold no definite beliefs at all about the consequences of a given policy until they encounter debate about it” (Jerit, Kuklinski, and Quirk 2009: 103), people who identify with a group are, on most issues, likely to either not know or not have a fixed idea about whether to support (oppose) the policy to promote their group’s interest.

Now we have established that people need to be able to answer these two questions before they can use their specific identities in opinion formation. So what enables people to answer these two questions? What facilitates that people use a specific identity in opinion formation? Political information from the context, I argue. Although it has rarely been empirically tested, classics have alluded to the possibility that people need information about how their group’s interest links to policy and that such information drives the influence

of citizens' identities. For example, while not explicitly related to identities, Converse (1964: 267) suggested that for groups to matter, "the individual must be endowed with some cognitions of the group as an entity and with some interstitial 'linking' information indicating why a given party or policy is relevant to the group". Likewise, Conover has emphasized that citizens' identities should matter on those issues that political rhetoric "connects to the group's interest" (Conover 1984: 765).

Inspired by these ideas, the dissertation's core theoretical argument is that people form opinions based on their specific identities, such as Latino, parent, or Democrat, when they are exposed to information that clearly connects their group's interest to policy support. The reason is that such information is diagnostic to citizens' opinion formation because it clarifies both whether they should view policy from the perspective of a specific identity, and makes it clear whether they should support or oppose a policy to promote their group's interest. Put in another way, when people receive information about how their group's interest – whether it be the group's material interest, group norms or group status – is affected by a policy, it helps them use their identity in opinion formation.

Wherefrom do people receive information that connects their group's interest to policy? If such information drives the impact of citizens' specific identities on opinions, it is important to identify or specify the conditions in which people receive the information. I suggest that three types of policy rhetoric may inform people about how their group's interest connects to policy.

One type is *endorsements* from group leaders. While we know that endorsements from partisan elites can supply relevant information to partisans (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Mondak 1993; Bullock 2011; Druckman et al. 2010), group leader endorsement may also be relevant to people who identify with non-partisan groups. Even though people who identify with a non-partisan group (e.g. Latinos) do not have a natural group leader as partisans do, they may still *perceive* an actor, for instance a prominent spokesperson or an organization, as a group leader. If this actor publicly takes a policy stance, it should provide clear information to people about how their non-partisan group's interest connects to policy. For instance, when the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda – a coalition of Latino advocacy organizations – took a stance against a new Republican healthcare act (NHHA 2017), it may very well have sent a clear signal to Latinos that it was in their group's interest to oppose the policy proposal.

A second type of relevant rhetoric is *political arguments* (see more in paper C). A large literature in political communication shows that political arguments influence citizens' opinions (e.g., Cobb and Kuklinski 1997; Chong and

Druckman 2007b), demonstrates how arguments change opinions (e.g., Nelson et al. 1997; Slothuus 2008) and illuminates the impact of arguments in different contexts (e.g., Chong and Druckman 2007b; Druckman, Fein, and Leeper 2012; Chong and Druckman 2013). Yet, little work has considered if political arguments influence whether citizens' specific identities drive their opinions. I stress that political arguments play an important role in making citizens' specific identities relevant to their opinions, when they point out how the group's interest – e.g., the group's material interest, norms or status – is affected by policy. In policy debates, politicians frequently use arguments that explicitly link how politics relates to a group's interest when they justify their policy positions. They use arguments that connect policy support to parental interests when arguing how gun control is vital for children's safety (Stavrianos 2014) or how national debt threatens future generations (Bowen, Davis, and Kopf 1960). Likewise, they use arguments that focus on policy's negative consequences for the working class' group interest when arguing that tax cuts neglect the working class (Shabad 2017) or interpret environmental policy as “killing our steelworkers” (Trump 2016). When people are exposed to such arguments, I argue, it provides information about the policy's consequences for their identity-based interests and thereby may make their specific identities important to their opinions.

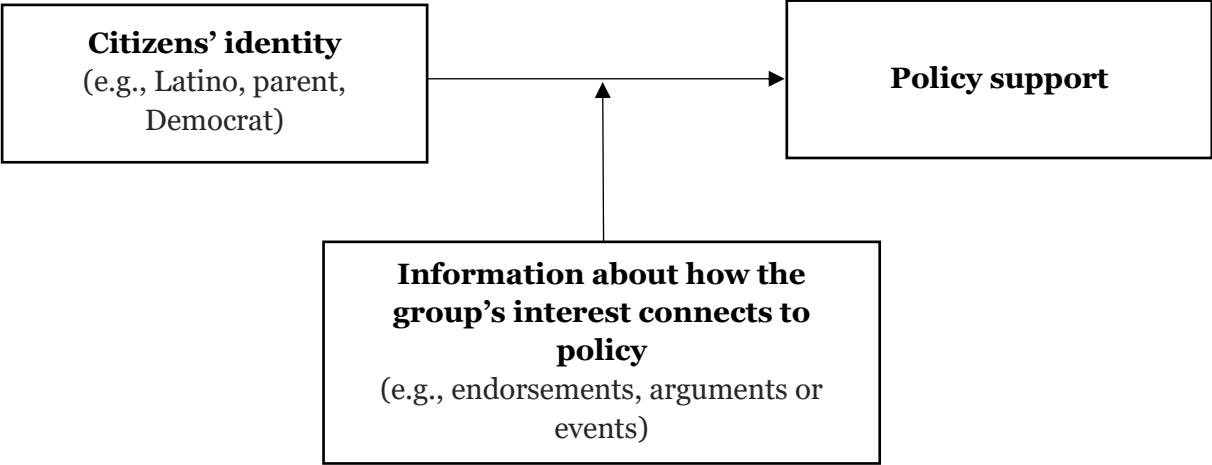
Finally, I stress how people even are exposed to information that connects their group's interest to policy support from *political events*. A burgeoning literature in political behavior examines how seemingly irrelevant events such as shark attacks, random lotteries, and athletic competitions can shape political preferences (e.g., Achen and Bartels 2016; Healy, Malhotra, and Mo 2010; Huber, Hill, and Lenz 2012). I also stress the importance of events, but I specifically suggest that events can play an important role for making citizens' identities important. More specifically, I argue that political events, for example a group-led rally to promote policy change, can act as a cue or signal connecting a group's interest to a policy question (see more in paper B).

To summarize, the theoretical argument advanced in this dissertation is that citizens' specific identities influence their policy opinion when they receive information that clearly connects their group's interest to support for policy – whether it comes from endorsements,² political arguments or political events (see Figure 1). The logic is that people need clarifying information to use their identities in opinion formation. When people are exposed to policy rhetoric that connects their group's interest to policy support, it makes them

² The dissertation does not empirically test the influence of endorsements but only of political arguments and political events. Endorsements are still included theoretically, as they are part of the larger theoretical argument in the dissertation.

understand that their specific identity is relevant and how it should be applied – thereby making it likely that their identity influences opinion on policy.

Figure 1 Theoretical model for the dissertation



This argument leads to an overall empirical expectation in the dissertation. If exposure to information about how the group's interest connects to policy (either positively or negatively) conditions whether citizens' specific identities influence their policy opinion, we should expect to observe the following:

People who identify with a group should become more likely to support (oppose) a policy than people who do not identify with the group when they are exposed to information (from endorsements, political arguments or events) that connects the group's interest positively (negatively) to the policy.

This is the overall expectation tested in the dissertation. In the following, I will explain how each of the three papers contributes to the theoretical argument and the model and thereby help answer the overall research question.

How Each of the Three Papers Contributes to the Dissertation

Paper A: How Partisan is Motivated Reasoning? Partisan Identity, Change in Political Office, and Economic Perceptions

The first paper conducts a hard test of whether citizens' partisan identities influence political opinions. While most scholars, as mentioned, assume that partisanship has a causal impact on political perceptions, most prior evidence is still consistent with alternative explanations. For example, observational

studies find that Democrats and Republicans disagree about how the unemployment rate has changed, which seems to reflect the impact of their partisanship (e.g., Bartels 2002). However, perceptual differences may also reflect other differences because partisan groups might differ in values, economic experiences, or exposure to media stories about the economy (e.g., Gerber and Huber 2010). Even experimental research that studies the impact of partisanship by varying the degree of partisan polarization has difficulties pinpointing the impact of partisan motivation (e.g., Bolsen et al. 2014).

This paper offers a new approach to pinpointing the impact of partisan motivation. It examines whether partisans change their perception of the *same* economic conditions when their preferred conclusion about them changes. One of the rare situations where it is possible to observe how partisans perceive similar real-world conditions, but where their preferred conclusions about them vary, is just before and after a change in office. For instance, when partisans' party is responsible in office, they should *want* to view economic conditions positively to credit their party. In contrast, when the opposition party takes office, they should want to evaluate parallel economic conditions negatively to discredit the governing party.

What happens with partisans' economic perceptions when their party leaves (or takes) office and their preferred conclusion about economic conditions suddenly flips? The paper investigates this question by focusing on a change in political office in May 2010 in the United Kingdom when the Conservatives became the new leading governing party after Labour. The paper taps into the impact of partisan identity on economic perceptions by observing whether Labour (Conservative) partisans became more negative (positive) about the economic situation when their party left (took) office and it suddenly became their preferred conclusion to view economic conditions negatively (positively).

The paper, moreover, can also be understood as a test of the dissertation's theoretical argument, if the change in office is seen as a political event that changes information about how a partisan group's interest connects to evaluating the economic domain. From this perspective, and related to the model in Figure 1, the paper studies how the impact of citizens' partisan identities (X) on their economic perceptions (Y) is conditioned by the change in office (Z) – an event that changes how the partisan group's interest links to the economic domain. Thus, while the paper is intended as a “hard” test of the impact of partisan identities on economic perceptions, it also suggests that the impact of citizens' partisan identities is affected by exposure to contextual information from a political event.

Paper B: Not Partisan, Latino: When Latino Group Identity Becomes Important to Policy Opinions

Paper B contributes to testing the overall theoretical expectation (and the model in Figure 1) by investigating whether US Latinos' ethnic group identity (X) influences their immigration policy opinion (Y) when they are exposed to a group-led rally (Z) that connects their group's interest to the policy. Prior work has found that Latinos' group identity can be politically consequential for their policy opinions and other political opinions (e.g., Sanchez 2006; Barreto and Pedraza 2009; Huddy et al. 2016), but so far few studies have examined under what conditions Latino identity directs policy opinions. The paper suggests that exposure to a Latino-led rally pushing for immigration reform makes Latinos' group identity important for their opinion by providing them with a clear cue that connects their group's interest to support for lenient immigration policy.

The paper focuses on large-scale Latino-led rallies that occurred on a national scale in spring 2006, in response to an anti-immigration bill, H.R. 4437, passed in the US House in December 2005. This bill sought to increase the penalties for illegal immigration and would have categorized undocumented persons and anyone helping them in any way to remain in the US as felons (Mohamed 2013; Barreto et al. 2009). The rallies aimed to protest the bill and push for new immigration policy that included a route to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants (Barreto et al. 2009).

These rallies, the paper argues, provided information that connected the Latinos' group interest to a lenient immigration policy position. Based on this idea, the paper examines whether Latinos' group identity became important to support for lenient immigration policy, when they were exposed to the Latino-led rallies. Specifically, I seek to observe whether exposure to the Latino-led rallies make people who identify (strongly) with the Latino group more supportive of legalizing undocumented immigrants than people who do not identify (strongly) with the Latino group.

To sum up, the paper contributes to the dissertation in two ways. First, it conducts a direct test of the dissertation's theoretical argument using the Latino group in the US context. It tests the idea that Latinos' group identity becomes important to their policy opinion, when they are exposed to information – cued by a Latino-led rally – that connects their group's interest to policy support. Second, by considering demonstrations as a supplier of information about how a group's interest connects to policy, the paper adds to a nuanced understanding of how the political context provides information to

citizens' opinion formation. In this vein, information related to people's "primary ingredients" in political opinion formation does not just come from endorsements or arguments, it also comes from events with political meaning.

Paper C: Identity-Based Arguments and Public Opinion: How Persuasive Are Arguments Targeting Citizens' Identities?

Paper C illuminates the theoretical argument (and the model in Figure 1) by examining if arguments that connect identity-based interests to policy (Z) influence whether citizens' specific identities (X) drive their policy opinion (Y)³. The paper is motivated by the observation that politicians often use arguments that emphasize how policy connects to a group's interests (e.g., parental interests, Latinos' interests, or working-class interests) when they justify their policy positions. More specifically, the paper focuses on what happens with the opinions among people who identify as parents when they receive arguments that connect parental interests (e.g., "caring about what is best for children's future") to policy support. Do such arguments make their parental identity influential to policy support? Focusing on the identity of parenthood in political opinion formation is important. It is often appealed to by politicians (e.g. Thau 2018; Klar 2013), but still understudied (yet see Klar 2013; Klar et al. 2014) although family roles are among the most important identities that people mention (Reid and Deaux 1996; ISSP 2003).

What happens with opinions among people who identify as parents when they receive arguments that stress how policy benefits (hurts) parental interests? If arguments that connect policy to parental interests make people base opinions on their parental identity, one observable would be to see the following: Opinions among people who identify (strongly) as parents should be more persuaded by such arguments than opinions among people who do not identify (strongly) as parents. This is the specific expectation tested in the paper using two randomized survey experiments with parents in Denmark.

Overall, paper C contributes in two important ways to the dissertation. First, it tests the dissertation's theoretical argument – that arguments that connect identity-based interest to a policy make citizens' specific identities influential to their support for policy. Second, the paper draws on randomized survey-experiments to study the causal impact of arguments that connect policy to identity-based interests on opinions. Thereby, it confronts methodological challenges in pinpointing the impact of information that *explicitly links*

³ The paper is written up as testing the impact of arguments on opinion conditional on identity strength. However, the results also speaks to the theoretical model sketched in figure 1.

policy to identity-based interests, which is difficult with observational data (see more in the next chapter).

In a bigger picture, the paper illuminates how politicians might shape the impact of citizens' specific identities in opinion formation. Given the complexity of most policies, politicians may very well have leverage to interpret how policy relates to citizens' identities such as being a parent, Latino or working-class. That is, *whether* policy has positive or negative consequences for their identity-based interests. If so, politicians can shape not only whether people use their specific identities in decision-making by offering them a good identity-based reason to do so. They can also define what they should think about policy based on an identity, because they can strategically emphasize those aspects of policy that make it seem like their identity-based interests are related to either favoring or opposing a policy. In this way, the paper highlights that the directional impact of citizens' specific identities may be highly sensitive to how elites interpret their identity-based interests to fit with a policy.

To conclude on the chapter, the overarching research question of the dissertation is: Under what conditions do citizens' specific identities influence their policy opinions? I have argued that specific identities are likely to influence people's policy opinions when they receive information from the political context – from group leader endorsements, political arguments or political events – that connects their group's interest to policy support. In the next chapter, I will clarify why the dissertation employs specific research designs (i.e., quasi-experimental and experimental designs) to test the dissertation's overall theoretical expectation, and then introduce the research designs and data used.

Chapter 3: Research Designs

This chapter summarizes the research designs and methods used in the three papers in the dissertation. First, the chapter presents relevant considerations for choosing the research designs. Here, I first outline methodological difficulties related to studying the theoretical argument and then stress how different research designs applied in the dissertation can help solve these. Afterwards, the chapter offers an overview of the three papers' methodological features and data sources. In this section, I specifically highlight the research strategies applied to bolster the quasi-experimental and experimental research designs in order to estimate the impact of relevant treatments (i.e., a change in office, group-led demonstrations, and political arguments) on citizens' decision-making.

Considerations about Choice of Research Designs

In the dissertation, I want to examine when citizens' specific identities influence their policy opinion. As previously suggested, in paper B, one could imagine that Latinos' group identity influences their immigration policy views if they are exposed to Latino-led rallies that connect the group's interest to support for lenient immigration policy. How could one examine whether exposure to such "information" drives the impact of Latinos' identity when they form an opinion on the policy issue?

One option is to find one cross-sectional survey collected *after* a Latino-led rally that asked people both whether they had seen the rally and about their immigration policy views. Using such an approach, one could estimate whether the impact of Latinos' group identity on opinion had changed by relying on variation in self-reported exposure to the event; those who said they were exposed compared to those not exposed. In other words, we could just compare whether there was a larger difference in support for lenient immigration policy between Latino and non-Latino identifiers, among those exposed to the rally than among those not exposed. The difference between the two groups provides us with the estimate of the impact of the Latino-led rally.

Such an approach would have obvious flaws. Most likely, there is an abundance of unobserved differences between those who say they were exposed and those not exposed that could explain differences in their opinions. For instance, those who say they heard about the rally might already have had a different view on immigration policy before the rally, or they may differ on

other traits (e.g., gender, age, values), be more activist or had been exposed to other messages as well. Differences that may make it *look* like it was the difference in exposure to the rally that moved opinions, but in reality is a result of those exposed and not exposed being *incomparable* in the first place. Such other differences, beyond treatment status, are also termed selection bias. This simply means that people exposed to the treatment are not similar to people who were not exposed on factors related to the outcome. In addition, using self-reported recall to vary exposure to a message is particularly troublesome, as different people have different capacities to recall things correctly (Zaller 1992) – another source of selection bias. Either way, with this approach, it is very unlikely that differences in the outcome between those exposed and those not exposed are caused by the treatment, as they probably vary on various other characteristics.

One way to limit the selection problem is to use quasi-experimental designs (used in paper A and paper B) that vary exposure to the treatment through non-random assignment (Dunning 2010). One way to induce variation is to exploit that people are exposed to sudden events that happen over time, for example, a Latino-led rally. When people are exposed to a sudden event over time, it creates a pre- and post-treatment period. In the Latino-rally case, this would allow us to observe whether the impact of Latinos' group identity on opinion increases from the pre- to the post-treatment period, i.e., when Latinos suddenly experience the Latino-led rallies.⁴ Exploiting over-time variation in exposure to the treatment has one important advantage compared to the approach of comparing people who said they were exposed and not exposed to the rally: It controls for all (un)observed time-invariant factors by design (Andress et al. 2013). For example, if strong Latino identifiers have become more likely to support lenient immigration policy than weak Latino identifiers after the rally, it cannot be explained by those factors (e.g., traits) that are constant over time. Yet, the main concern with quasi-experimental designs that exploit over-time variation stems from other factors that, in addition to the treatment, may change over time. Researchers who use such designs face the challenge of excluding the impact of other time-varying factors, e.g., other events or exposure to other political messages that could explain over-time changes in the observed outcome. When I describe the specific research designs in the next chapter, I will account for the various strategies used to limit such issues.

An even better way to solve the selection problem is to use randomized survey-experiments. The core feature of the experimental design is that it fully

⁴ This obviously hinges on the assumption that one has access to data collected before and after the Latino-led rally.

controls and randomly assigns subjects to different treatments. Because the treatment is randomly assigned, the experimental groups are on average (and apart from random noise) similar on observable and unobservable characteristics, beyond the treatment (Druckman et al. 2011). This feature is crucial and why experiments are thought to be the strongest research design for causal inference: it solves the selection problem. More specifically, random assignment of the treatment rules out differences between exposed and not exposed. In the example with the Latino rally, one could imagine an experiment where a news story about a Latino-led rally pushing for immigration reform was randomly assigned. With such an experiment, it would be possible to estimate whether being exposed to the rally increased the impact of Latinos' identity on immigration views by comparing exposed and not exposed – without having to worry about those exposed differing on individual-level traits or being exposed to other events or messages than the people who were not exposed.

The survey-experimental design can also solve a measurement problem. The controlled setting allows the researcher to pinpoint the impact of a specific treatment by careful creation of the stimuli material. In my case, I am interested in pinpointing the impact of a message that clearly connects policy support to a group's interest. The controlled setting of an experiment allows the researcher to randomly assign messages that link policy to a group's interest OR to other interests. This makes it possible to tap into the unique impact of a message that *links policy to the group's interests*, because one can compare its impact to an important counterfactual: the impact of a message that links policy to other interests. This would be difficult with observational data, because it is hard to separate the impact of a persuasive message from the impact of its content.

However, while the survey-experimental design is preferable to the quasi-experimental design in terms of internal validity, its higher internal validity does not come without a price. Experiments are often conducted in artificial settings like labs or surveys, which lowers their external validity (Gaines et al. 2007). Furthermore, the external validity often suffers because it is difficult to construct realistic stimuli material in experiments that closely reflects the political messages to which people are exposed in the real world (Kinder and Palfrey 1993: 27). This might especially be true if one wants to study how information that connects a group's interest to policy support – cued by a group-led demonstration – influences decision-making. In other words, with survey-experiments we often cannot be sure whether people would respond differently in real-world settings. This dissertation uses both survey-experimental (in paper C) and quasi-experimental designs (in paper A and paper B) to strengthen the external validity of the overall theoretical claim; i.e., citizens'

specific identities influence their policy opinions when they are exposed to information that connects their group's interest to policy. Despite, it is difficult to study causal questions in real-world settings without random assignment, it is important to learn about public opinion formation not only in controlled survey-experimental settings but also in the sort of real-world settings where people receive and respond to political messages.

Overview of Designs and Data

Table 1 provides an overview of the three papers in the dissertation. It includes the research question in each paper and outlines the research design and data used. As the table shows, the three papers draw on different research designs to examine their research questions, and across the papers, both observational and experimental data is used from a diverse set of national contexts (United Kingdom, United States, and Denmark). In the following, I will describe the data and research design used in each of the three papers.

Table 1. Overview of each paper’s research design and data

Paper	RQ	Identity	Treatment	Context	Research design	Data
A	Does a change in political office move partisan identifiers’ perception of the economic situation?	Party	A change in political office	U.K.	Quasi-experimental design: Treatment: Change in political office in May 2010. Measure impact in a pre-post setup with a narrow event window. Use difference-in-difference design to estimate whether the change in office moved economic perceptions among <i>treated</i> partisans compared to an <i>untreated</i> control group.	The Continuous Monitoring Survey (BES 2008-2010). A rolling cross-sectional study consisting of monthly interviews with a nationally representative sample. Mainly use waves just before (April 2010) and just after (June 2010) the change in office (N = 1557).
B	Do Latino-led rallies make Latinos’ group identity more important to their immigration opinion?	Latino	Group-led demonstration	U.S.	Quasi-experimental design: Treatment: Exposure to Latino-led rallies promoting immigration reform. Measure impact in a pre-post setup with a narrow event window. Estimate whether exposure to Latino-led demonstrations made Latinos with strong Latino identity more supportive of legalizing undocumented immigrants than Latinos with weak Latino identity.	Latino National Survey 2006. A large cross-sectional survey with Latino respondents from 16 U.S. states (N = 8634).
C	Do arguments that connect parental interests to policy move opinion among people who identify (strongly) as parents?	Parental	Political arguments	Denmark	Survey-experiment: Random assignment to arguments that connect policy to either parental interests or other interests. Parental identity strength measured in pre-experimental wave.	Main study: A randomized survey-experiment on two policy issues with a sample of parents in Denmark consisting of a pre-experimental wave and an experimental wave (N = 314). Collected by YouGov. Pre-experimental wave: January 2017; Experimental wave: February-March 2017. Follow-up study: A randomized survey-experiment on two policy issues with a sample of parents in Denmark consisting of a pre-experimental wave and an experimental wave (N = 1013). Collected by Epinion. Pre-experimental wave: July-August 2017; Experimental wave: August-September 2017.

Paper A examines what happens with partisans' economic perceptions when their party leaves (takes) office, and their preferred conclusion about economic conditions suddenly flips. The treatment – a sudden change in political office⁵ – occurred in the United Kingdom in May 2010 when the Conservatives took over from Labour. The event rapidly flipped how respectively Labour and Conservative partisans preferred to perceive economic conditions. To test whether the treatment changed partisans' economic perceptions, the paper relies on a quasi-experimental design using a closely spaced rolling cross-sectional survey from the British Continuous Monitoring Survey. The survey was carried out with monthly and national representative interviews from 2008-2010 (CMS 2010) and asked the same core questions in each survey. This allows us to track partisans' economic perceptions before and after the change in office. I thereby exploit over-time variation in exposure to the change in office to observe whether Labour (Conservative) identifiers become more negative (positive) about past economic performance by comparing their economic perceptions pre and post their party left (took) office.

However, as previously stressed, exploiting over-time variation in exposure to a treatment calls for caution. Many other factors may change between the pre- and post-treatment period in addition to the treatment. For example, in this scenario, how do we know that it is the change in office and not other events that cause a change in partisans' economic perceptions?

The research design applies two strategies to limit the concern that temporal changes in other factors, and not the treatment as postulated, make partisans change economic perceptions. The first is a narrow event window. Specifically, the treatment – the change in political office (May 2010) – happened between two very closely spaced waves (April 2010 and June 2010). This means that I study the impact of the change in office by comparing partisans' economic perceptions *just* before and *just* after the event. The shorter the time interval between observing people's opinions before and after the treatment, all else equal, the more persuasive is the attribution of a causal effect to the event rather than to other things occurring between interviews (Gerber and Huber 2010: 157). Of course, it does not keep other factors perfectly constant. Nevertheless, the narrow event window limits the concern that partisans instead respond to changes in other factors, such as changes in economic *experiences* (e.g., with macro-economic or "local" changes in unemployment) or changes in *media coverage* about economic conditions, as these are unlikely to vary much in this short time interval.

⁵ While there was nothing sudden about the general election in May 2010, the change in office should have been uncertain for most given tight polls before the election (Glover 2010).

Second, the research design applies a difference-in-difference design to add additional control for unobserved factors – that may change along with the treatment (even in a narrow window) – and cause changes in partisans’ opinions. In the difference-in-difference design, the impact of the treatment is estimated by comparing the change in opinion among *the treated* with the change in opinion among a *control group* (Bechtel and Hainmueller 2011; Finkel and Smith 2011; Ladd and Lenz 2009). The idea is that by correcting the change in opinion among the treated with the change in the control group, the difference-in-difference estimator removes the impact of those factors that change along with the treatment and also affects the control group. The study uses a difference-in-difference strategy to examine whether the change in office changed partisans’ perceptions of the economy relative to a specific control group (i.e., Independent voters) whose preferred conclusion about the economy should be unaffected by the change in office. Thus, by taking the difference in these two differences, I control not only for time-invariant factors (because of the pre-post design) but also for the time shocks that are common to the treatment and control group.

Paper B examines whether exposure to Latino-led rallies pushing for immigration reform makes Latinos’ group identity important for their immigration policy views. The paper uses a unique dataset, the Latino National Survey 2006 (LNS 2006), which contains an unusually large number of interviews with Latinos in the U.S. (more than 8000 Latino respondents). Normally, large-scale surveys in the U.S. (e.g., the American National Election Studies) contain small subsamples of Latinos and might not even ask questions about Latinos’ group identity, which makes it difficult to study the impact of Latino identity on policy opinions – and even more so *when* it matters. The LNS 2006 overcomes such challenges.

Based on the LNS 2006, I exploit over-time variation in exposure to the treatment – the Latino-led rallies – to examine if it made Latinos’ group identity influence their support for legalizing undocumented immigrants. The treatment is based on a three-week event period in the spring of 2006 when the demonstrations occurred in cities across the U.S. (Mohamed 2013). Respondents are defined as exposed to the rallies if they were interviewed during this “event period”, and defined as not exposed to the rallies if interviewed before the “event period”. Thereby, it is possible to estimate whether being exposed to the rallies make Latinos’ group identity influential to their immigration policy views, by comparing people interviewed before and during the Latino-led rallies. Specifically, I expect to observe an increased impact of Latino group identity on immigration views, because strong Latino identifiers became more supportive of legalizing undocumented immigrants than weak Latino identifiers did in response to the Latino-led demonstrations. As a

unique feature, the research design utilizes a narrow event window just around the onset of the demonstrations, which reduces the chance of conflating the rallies' impact with other events (Gerber and Huber 2010). I construct the narrow event window by grouping respondents into monthly intervals just around the event, which makes it more likely to identify the impact of exposure to the Latino-led rallies on decision-making.

Paper C sheds light on whether political arguments that connect parental interests to policy make parents apply their parental identity in opinion formation. The paper builds on two intricate survey-experimental studies with samples of parents. The two studies were conducted in Denmark by YouGov (main study) and Epinion (follow-up study). Both studies include experimental tests on two separate policies: The subsidy scheme for home services and house repairs ("Boligjobordningen") and the NOx tax ("NOx-afgiften"), a government-imposed tax on companies' emission of nitrogen oxide. Each policy has received periodic attention from the Danish media and politicians in recent years.

In both studies (main study and follow-up study), subjects are randomly assigned to arguments that connect the policy to parental interests (i.e., "what is best for children's future"). The two studies use a similar experimental protocol with a pre-experimental and experimental wave. In the pre-experimental wave, subjects are asked about how strongly they identify as parents. They answer this question in a separate survey, before the experiment, to measure the parental identity independent of the treatment, and to rule out that the parental identity is primed by the question. In the experimental wave, subjects are re-interviewed and randomly assigned to arguments in a fashion that make it possible to observe the impact of arguments that connect policy to parental interests on policy support and of arguments that connect policy to other interests on policy support.

The experimental design in paper C allows for two important tests. First, it allows us to observe whether opinions among people who identify (strongly) as parents are more influenced by arguments that connect parental interests to policy than opinions among people who do not identify (strongly) as parents. Such a result would indicate that people rely on their parental identity in opinion formation when they receive arguments that link their parental interests to the policy. Second, the experimental design allows us to test whether it is the argument content – the explicit link of policy to parental interests – that makes parents rely on their parental identity in opinion formation. The reason is that we can compare the impact of such arguments to the counterfactual: the impact of arguments that link policy to other interests. If parental identi-

fiers are responding to the arguments *because* they link policy to parental interests, they should not be equally influenced by arguments that link to other interests.

Finally, the experimental design in paper C uses an observed (identity) measure. Using an observed measure in an experiment (as opposed to randomly assigned) is an often understated reason for caution because it limits the experimental design's internal validity (Kam and Trussler 2017). Without random assignment, parent identity strength could be confounded with other variables. Thus, with an observed identity measure, one cannot simply state (at least based on design) that stronger parent identifiers were more affected by arguments that connect policy to parental interests because of their parental identity, without considering other explanations that may correlate with parent identity strength (Kam and Trussler 2017: 795). For instance, women may be more likely than men to identify as parents and they may be more responsive to arguments about parental interests than men, not because of their parental identity, but because of their gender. Failing to control, in this instance, for heterogeneous treatment effects by gender would bias an estimator of heterogeneous treatment effects by identity strength.

To limit issues with confounders, the survey-experiments in paper C take two steps: 1) Both studies measure potential confounders of identity strength in the pre-experimental wave, and 2) all analyses are reported both *without* and *with* statistical control for the option that heterogeneous treatment effects by identity strength are actually caused by other variables. This is done by including additional interactions between controls and the treatment.⁶ Although such efforts do not provide the same strong internal validity as one gets from pure random assignment (i.e., random assignment of both arguments that link to parental interests *and* identity strength) – and therefore have to base the causal claims on the assumption of selection on observables – it does increase the persuasiveness of the causal claim in the paper.

To briefly summarize, the dissertation seeks to test the overall theoretical claim, which is: citizens' specific identities affect policy support when they receive messages that connect policy support to their group's interest. To test this, the dissertation uses both quasi-experimental designs with observational data that exploit over-time variation in exposure to such "messages", and survey-experimental designs that exploit random assignment. Both designs help deal with selection problems that arise when we test the influence of exposure

⁶ Even if the true data-generating process does not include such additional interactions, it does not bias the estimator of the interaction between treatment and identity strength (Kam and Trussler 2017: 806); however, it reduces efficiency.

to a message. Yet, the main advantage of combining these two research designs, instead of simply relying on experiments, is that it strengthens the external validity of the empirical findings in the dissertation. In the following chapter, I report the core findings from the three papers.

Chapter 4: Summary of Findings

In this chapter, I report the results in the dissertation and summarize the core findings from each of the articles. More detailed information, robustness checks and additional analyses can be found in the individual papers, which I refer to in each section.

Partisan Identity Shapes Economic Perceptions

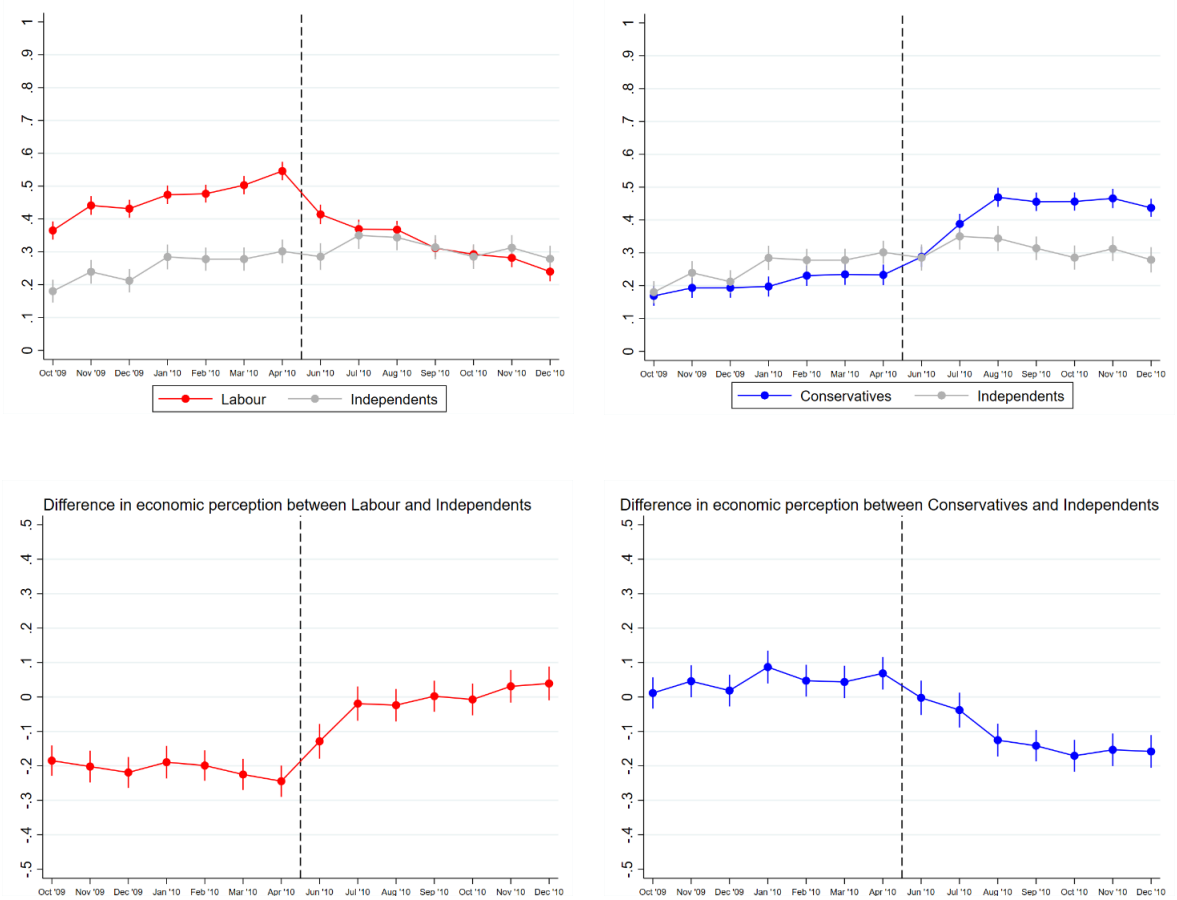
In paper A, I investigate whether citizens' partisan identities influence how they perceive the economic situation. The paper tests this expectation by observing whether partisans change their perception of economic conditions when their preferred conclusion about the national economy suddenly flips in response to a change in political office. As argued in paper A, how partisans prefer to perceive the economic situation is assumed to depend on whether their party is in office (e.g., Bartels 2002): When partisans' own party (out party) is responsible in office, they should want to view economic conditions positively (negatively) to credit their party. Thus, the paper seeks to pinpoint the impact of partisan identity on economic perceptions by observing whether partisans become more negative (positive) about basically the *same* economic situation, when comparing their economic perceptions just before and after their party leaves (takes) office.

The paper focuses on the change in political office in the United Kingdom, in May of 2010, when the Conservatives replaced Labour in office. I use the monthly rolling cross-sectional data from the British Election Study (see chapter 3) to examine whether Labour (Conservative) partisans became more negative (positive) about the economic situation when their party left (takes) office. To test whether the treatment (the change in office) changed partisans' economic perception, I apply a difference-in-difference strategy; that is, I compare how economic perceptions changed in each partisan group with the change in a control group (i.e., Independents), whose preferred conclusion about the economy should be unaffected by the treatment. This provides the difference-in-difference estimate of the impact of the change in office on partisans' economic perceptions.

Perceptions of the economic situation is based on the question: "How do you think the general economic situation in this country has changed over the last 12 months?" Responses were provided on a five-point scale: "got a lot better," "got better," "stayed around the same," "got worse," and "got a lot worse".

The scale was rescaled to a 0-1 scale (1 = got a lot better), and respondents answering “don’t know” (less than 2 %) were left out.

Figure 2. Economic Perceptions Conditional on Month



Note: Upper panels show unadjusted means conditional on month with 95 % confidence intervals. Lower panels show the mean differences between partisans and Independents (i.e., Independents minus partisans) with 95 % confidence intervals. The dotted vertical line marks the change in political office.

Did Labour (Conservative) partisans adjust their economic perceptions when they suddenly preferred to view the economy negatively (positively) in response to the change in office? The evidence in figure 2 suggests that they did. In the upper left panel, treated Labour partisans become dramatically more negative about the economic situation immediately after Conservatives took office, while economic perceptions in the control group, in comparison, are largely unchanged. When comparing answers given one month before and after the change in office, the difference-in-difference estimate suggests that the change in office led to an 11.6 percentage point decline in Labour partisans’ perception of past economic performance ($p < .001$). Correspondingly, in the right panel, we see that Conservatives became more positive about past economic conditions straight after the change in office. Based on the difference-

in-difference analysis in the paper, the change in office improved their perception of past economic performance by 7.1 percentage points ($p < .05$). These results clearly suggest that partisan identification directs people's economic perceptions. In the paper, I present additional analyses to rule out alternative explanations such as selection into the study and that partisans changed economic perceptions because their preferred newspaper with partisan slant altered its coverage of the economic situation simultaneously with the change in office.

Yet, the strongest part of the study is not the additional robustness tests provided in the paper. It is the empirical design. Not only does the research design use closely spaced waves and a difference-in-difference design to keep other factors as good-as-constant, e.g., changes in economic experiences and media coverage about the economy. The study also explicitly focuses on partisans' economic perceptions of *past* economic performance to reduce the concern that partisans simply change their perceptions because of changed expectations, e.g., about the governing party's economic policies, or changed expectations based on the governing party's economic competence.

In sum, the results in paper A suggest that partisanship directly influenced citizens' political opinion: Partisans reinterpreted the *same* economic conditions when their preferred conclusion suddenly pointed toward a different perception of reality to credit their party. These results, I think, offer a particularly powerful case of political perceptions being driven by partisan motivation, as they, in contrast to much prior research on partisan bias, are hard to square with alternative accounts.

Do Latino-led Demonstrations Make Latino Group Identity Important to Immigration Opinion?

Paper B focuses more precisely on the question of *when* citizens' specific identities influence their policy opinions. I investigate whether Latinos' group identity become important for their immigration policy opinion when they are exposed to group-led rallies that connect their group's interest to lenient immigration policy views. The paper looks at the unique event of large-scale Latino-led rallies that occurred on a national scale in the spring of 2006 in response to an anti-immigration bill, H.R. 4437 passed in the U.S. House in December 2005. The main objective of the rallies were to protest H.R. 4437 and to push for immigration reform (Barreto et al. 2009). The idea is that exposure to the Latino-led rallies makes Latinos' group identity influential in opinion

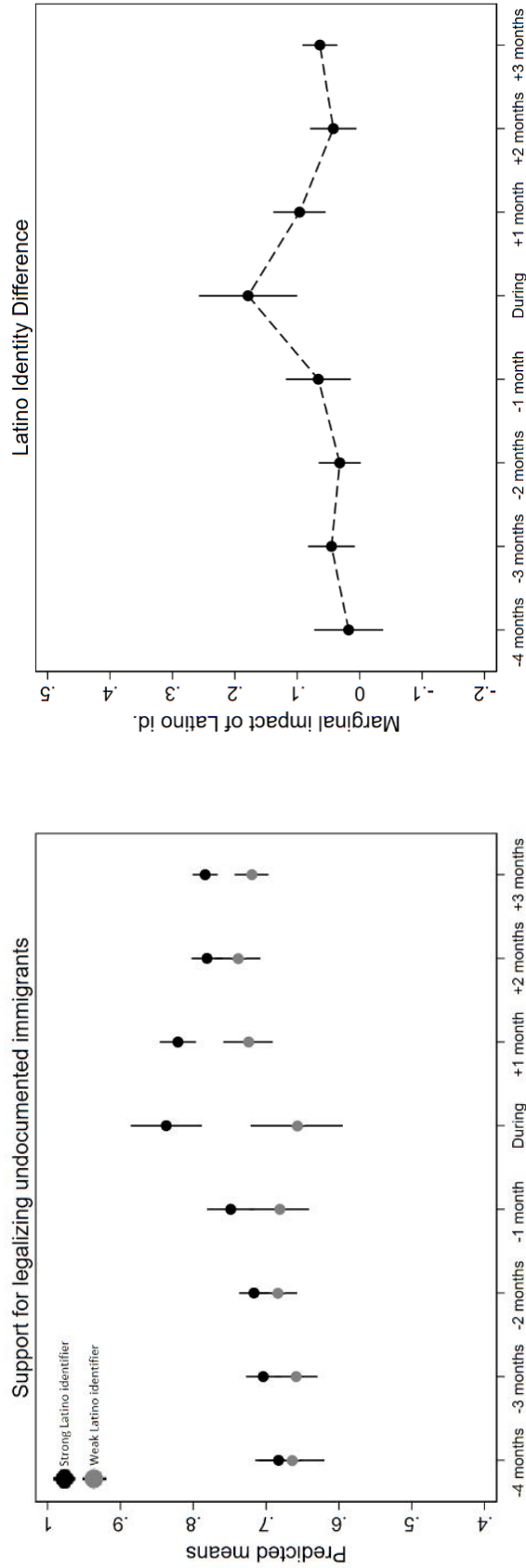
formation, because they receive a cue about how their group's interest connects to immigration policy. The expectation tested in the paper is whether the impact of Latinos' group identity on immigration policy views increases when Latinos are exposed to the Latino-led rallies pushing for immigration reform. Specifically, I expect to observe an increased impact of Latino identity on immigration views because strong Latino identifiers became more supportive of legalizing undocumented immigrants than weak Latino identifiers did in response to the rallies.

As explained in the previous chapter, I study this expectation using the Latino National Survey 2006. Exposure to the Latino-led rallies is operationalized based on a three-week event period – April 10 to May 1 – when the demonstrations occurred in cities across the U.S. and gained extensive media coverage (Mohamed 2013; Barreto et al. 2009). Respondents who were interviewed during the event period are defined as exposed to the rallies, and respondents who were interviewed before the event period are defined as not exposed to the rallies. Furthermore, to narrow the event window, I group the respondents into monthly intervals just around the event with interviews conducted “4 months before” (n = 512), “3 months before” (n = 1042), “2 months before” (n = 1328), “1 month before” (n = 544), “during” (n = 238), “1 month after” (n = 863), “2 months after” (n = 1166), or “3 months after” (n = 1985).

Respondents' opinions about immigration policy was measured with the following question: “What is your preferred policy on undocumented or illegal immigration?” “1. Immediate legalization of current undocumented immigrants,” “2. A guest worker program leading to legalization eventually,” “3. A guest worker program that permits immigrants to be in the country, but only temporarily,” “4. An effort to seal or close off the border to stop illegal immigration,” “5. None of these.” In the results, presented below, the variable is rescaled to a dummy variable with the values 0 and 1, where 1 covers “support for legalizing undocumented immigrants” (option 1 and option 2) and 0 indicates “no support for legalizing undocumented immigrants” (the other policy options grouped) (M = .74, SD = .44) .

Did the Latino-led rallies affect whether Latinos' group identity influenced their support for legalizing undocumented immigrants? Figure 3 shows the main result.

Figure 3. Latinos' support for legalizing undocumented immigrants



Note: The left panel shows predicted mean support for legalizing undocumented immigrants conditional on whether Latinos identify (strongly) with their group or do not identify (strongly) with the group. The right panel shows the mean differences in opinion between Latinos who identify (strongly) with the group and Latinos who do not identify (strongly) with the group. Vertical lines represent 83.4 % confidence intervals (allow for upfront comparison of which estimates are different from each other at the 0.05-level). Dependent variable is coded 0 and 1; 1 = “support legalizing immigrants” and 0 = “no support for legalizing immigrants”.

The left panel in figure 3 shows that both Latinos who identify strongly with the group and the Latinos who do not identify strongly with the group held quite constant opinions in the months preceding the Latino-led rallies. However, when the Latino group started rallying for immigration reform (marked by “During” in the figure), the Latinos who identified (strongly) with the group became substantially more supportive of legalizing undocumented immigrants. Latinos who did not identify (strongly) with the group did not change opinion “during” the Latino-rallies. In sum, and as indicated by the right panel, the impact of Latinos’ group identity on opinion towards immigration policy increased considerably when the Latino rallies occurred.

Did the Latino-led rallies make Latinos’ group identity important to their policy opinion because it provided a clear cue about how their group’s interest connected to immigration policy, or simply because it primed – that is, increased their awareness of (i.e., salience) – their ethnic group identity? If the rallies worked to prime the Latino identity, one should furthermore expect the impact of Latinos’ group identity to increase on opinions toward other issues associated with the Latino group (e.g., health care, income support etc.). However, additional analyses show that the rallies did not move Latino identifiers’ opinion on Latino group-related issues (or Latino-unrelated policy issues for that matter). It only moved their views on immigration policy. This strengthens the notion that the rallies made Latinos’ group identity influential because it provided them with a cue connecting their group’s interest to immigration policy and not simply because their Latino identity in general became more salient.

Furthermore, one may wonder whether the evidence *in fact* shows that Latinos’ *group identity* became more important to their immigration policy views in response to the Latino-led demonstrations. Could other traits (e.g., national origin, education, income) instead have become more essential for Latinos’ immigration policy views? As strong and weak Latino identifiers are likely also to differ on many of these traits, it could be these traits rather than Latinos’ group identity that became influential. Additional analyses limit this concern as they show that results remain unchanged after control for the time-varying impact of other relevant characteristics – such as national origin, party identification and other variables. This further supports the notion that it was Latinos’ *group identity* that became more important to immigration policy views in response to the rallies.

Overall, the evidence from paper B shows that Latinos’ group identity became important for their views on immigration policy when they were exposed to Latino-led rallies that connected their group’s interest to support for lenient immigration policy. In other words, the Latino-led rallies made people who

identify (strongly) as Latinos substantially more supportive of legalizing undocumented immigrants. This is an important result, because it suggests that people – in this instance Latinos – use their specific identities in opinion formation when they receive clarifying information from the context that links their identity to policy support.

How Arguments about Parental Interests Make Parents Rely on Their Parental Identity When They Form Opinions

Paper C moves the focus to the identity of parenthood and examines how arguments from policy debates influence whether citizens' parental identity drives their policy opinions. While prior work emphasizes how political elites often appeal to citizens' identities based on parenthood, religion or ethnicity (e.g., Dickson and Scheve 2006; Klar 2013; Albertson 2015; Barreto and Collingwood 2015), most work has neglected that politicians frequently use arguments that emphasize how policy connects to a group's interests when they justify policy positions.

In paper C, I specifically examine what happens with policy opinions among people who identify as parents when they are exposed to arguments that connect parental interests (e.g., “caring about what is best for children's future”) to support for different policies. The paper presents results from two experimental studies in Denmark with samples of parents. Here, I report the core findings from the “Main Study” (see description in chapter 3, table 1) and focus on the results on one policy proposal: Abolishing the NO_x emission tax on companies (“NO_x tax”), a tax imposed by the Danish government on businesses in relation to their nitrogen oxide emissions (i.e., NO_x).

If exposure to arguments that connect policy to parental interests makes people rely on their parental identity when they form an opinion about the NO_x tax, I suggest we should observe two things. First, we should expect to see the opinions among people who identify (strongly) as parents to be more persuaded by arguments that connect policy to parental interests than opinions among people who do not identify (strongly) as parents. This would indicate that the arguments make parents form opinions based on their parental identity. Furthermore, if the arguments make parents use their parental identity in opinion formation because they *connect to parental interests*, we should *not* see the same result when arguments *connect policy to other interests*.

To examine these two expectations, the survey-experimental design (i.e., in the “Main Study”) has three core attributes. First, to measure the impact of

arguments that connect parental interests to the policy, the design varied the direction of the arguments connecting policy to parental interests (pro vs. con). Second, to measure whether arguments that connect parental interests to policy in particular influence opinion among parents who identify (strongly) as parents, the design measured their parental identity strength in a pre-experimental wave. Third, the design varied the content of the arguments (link to parental interests OR link to other or “general” interests). This allows me to identify whether it is arguments that explicitly connect policy to parental interests that move opinions among people who identify as parents. An overview of the arguments used for the policy issue “The NOx tax” is presented in table 2.

Table 2. Overview of Arguments Used for the Policy Proposal: Abolish the NOx Tax

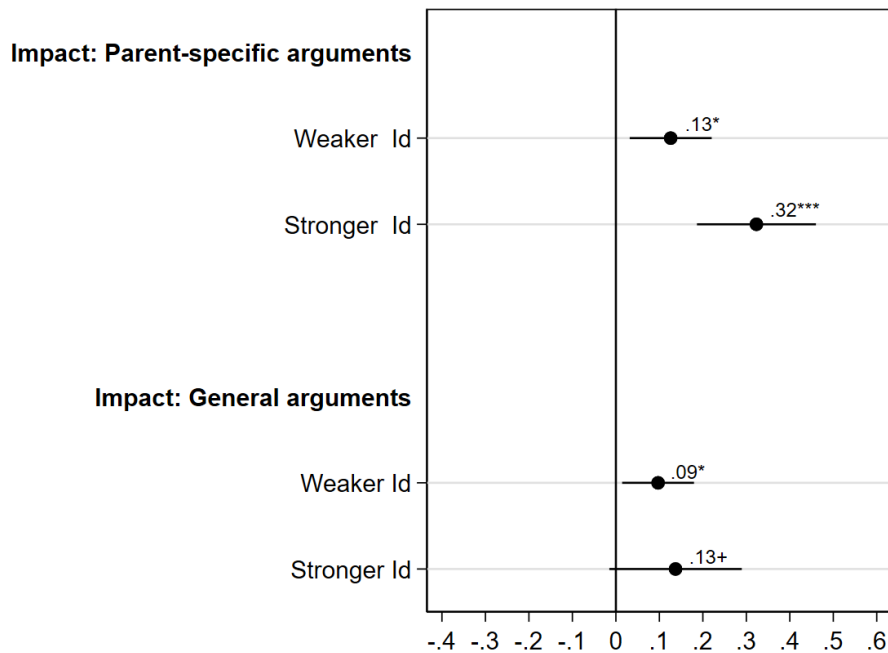
	Con	Pro
Parental interests	“Protect planet for kids’ future”	“Fund children’s welfare”
General interests	“Export of green tech”	“Keep Danish jobs”

Note: Full wording of arguments, see appendix 2 in Paper C.

Opinion about the NOx tax was measured with the question: “There has recently been debate about energy taxes on businesses in Denmark. It has been suggested that the NOx Emissions tax should be abolished. The tax is paid by businesses that consume energy from natural gas and biomass. What do you think? Do you think that the NOx tax should be abolished or kept?” Responses were measured on a 7-point scale from “definitely abolish” to “definitely keep,” and the item was rescaled from 0–1, higher values signaling stronger support for abolishing ($M = .56$, $SD = .30$).

The main result is presented in Figure 4, which shows the impact of arguments that connect parental interest to policy support (i.e., the difference in opinion between receiving pro and con arguments) and the impact of arguments that connect policy to other interests conditional on parent identity strength. At the top, we see that the parent-specific arguments predominantly moved opinion about the NOx tax among people who identify strongly as parents. The parent-specific arguments moved opinion about the NOx tax by 32 percentage points among people who identify strongly as parents ($M_{\text{pro}} = .68$ vs. $M_{\text{con}} = .35$, $p < .001$) and by 13 percentage points among people who do not identify (strongly) as parents ($M_{\text{pro}} = .63$ vs. $M_{\text{con}} = .51$, $p < .05$). Conversely, the impact of arguments that connect policy to other interests (“general arguments”) is nearly constant across parent identity strength.

Figure 4. Impact of arguments on opinion (NOx tax), by parent identity strength



Note: Lines represent 95 % confidence intervals. All significance tests are one-tailed. + $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. N = 314.

These results clearly suggest that people rely on their parental identity in opinion formation when they receive arguments that connect their parental interest to policy. We see that exposure to such arguments predominantly causes people who identify strongly as parents to adjust their opinion accordingly, while we see less change among people who do not identify strongly as parents. Furthermore, the evidence indicates that people who identify strongly as parents respond *because* the arguments *connect* policy to parental interests. This is supported by the result that respondents, across parent identity strength, react similarly to arguments that connect policy to other interests.

The evidence presented here is strengthened in two additional ways. First, in the paper, I present results from four experimental tests – all examining whether arguments that connect parental interest to policy support make people rely on their parental identity in opinion formation. I replicate the same pattern of results, as presented here, in three out of four experimental tests. Furthermore, the findings appear robust to different manipulations of the argument content (i.e., whether arguments connect to parental or other interests). These additional features bolster the empirical evidence for the notion that arguments connecting parental interests to policy influence whether citizens’ parental identity drives their policy opinions.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This dissertation contributes with a theoretical argument and empirical results that advance our understanding of the research question raised in the introduction: Under what conditions do citizens' specific identities influence their policy opinions? The argument and results also have implications for future research. In this chapter, I highlight the contributions and the implications. In the first section, I discuss the contribution of the theoretical argument and point to new questions for future research. I then stress how the dissertation contributes methodologically by using events from real-world settings to study the impact of messages from the political context on opinion formation. Finally, I conclude with some closing remarks on the dissertation's general contribution.

Theoretical Contribution: Adding Information from the Political Context

The overall contribution is to add information from the political context to help us understand the relationship between citizens' specific identities and their policy opinions. Most work has focused on the direct impact of citizens' identities on their political opinions (e.g., Campbell et al., 1960; Sniderman et al. 2004; Transue 2007) or on whether individual-level traits such as identity strength (Huddy 2013), ambivalence (Lavine et al. 2012), or economic status (Chong and Kim 2006) condition the impact of a specific identity on opinion. Little work investigates whether information from the political context affects the impact of people's identities on opinions. This is so even though people often form opinions on policy in the presence of various pieces of information from the political context, e.g., news reports about policy and its immediate consequences, or arguments from central political elites in policy debates.

The dissertation argues that the influence of citizens' identities on political opinions is highly driven by messages from the political context. And not just any messages about policies or about ones identity group. I have specifically stressed that messages from the political context that connect the group's interest to policy support is key. Such messages are important because they clarify that people should view policy from the perspective of a specific identity (instead of their wallet, values etc.), and they inform them how their group's interest relates to policy support. From this point of view, people's identities such as Latino, Democrat or parent may influence policy support, but they are

especially likely to dictate policy support when people receive messages that connect their group's interest to politics. Classics (Converse 1964; Conover 1984) were aware of this possibility – i.e., that identities should matter when people receive information that link their group's interest to policy – and the dissertation has picked up this idea and pushed it forward both theoretically and with empirical tests.

A particular novel feature of the theoretical argument is that it specifies the types of policy rhetoric that connect policy support to a group's interest. The dissertation emphasizes, as others have in relation to political parties, an important role of group leader endorsements (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Jacoby 1988). However, it stresses, in new ways, how political arguments and events such as group-led rallies can drive the specific identities people rely on when they form opinions. I have suggested that political arguments make citizens' specific identities influential when they explain how the policy benefits (hurts) the group's – be it parents, working class, Latino – interests. Moreover, I have proposed that a political event such as a group-led demonstration pushing for policy change can cue people about their group's interest on policy. All three types of “policy rhetoric” have one thing in common: They clearly connect an identity group to policy support – thereby making citizens' identities important to their opinions.

The results demonstrate that information from the political context – provided by events such as group-led demonstrations or political arguments – strongly influence whether citizens' specific identities are important to their policy opinions. The result in paper B highlighted how Latinos' group identity dictated their immigration policy views once they were exposed to Latino-led rallies pushing for immigration reform. When Latinos who identified with the group experienced their group rallying and coherently demanding a change in policy, they became more supportive of legalizing undocumented immigrants. Paper C revealed how political arguments that connect policy support to parental interests influence whether people's parental identity drives their policy opinions. If arguments emphasize how policy benefits (hurts) parental interests, it makes, in particular, people with a strong parental identity adjust their support for policy.

However, one part of the theoretical argument remains to be tested, namely whether people's specific identities influence policy opinion when they receive an endorsement from a group leader. This opens up for an interesting avenue of future research related to citizens' non-partisan identities: Does the presence of perceived group leader endorsements influence whether citizens' non-partisan identities affect policy support? While the presence or absence of party leader endorsements matter for the impact of partisan identities (e.g.

Cohen 2003; Druckman et al. 2013), there is, to my understanding⁷, virtually no work that has examined this for non-partisan identities. This might be key to better understanding when citizens' non-partisan identities become politically consequential. If people who identify with a non-partisan social group *perceive* a spokesperson or organization as a group leader, an endorsement from this actor should also shape the political impact of their non-partisan identity. For instance, if people who identify as working-class in Denmark hear that the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions ("LO"), a trade union recognized as representing workers, endorses a policy, this message should connect the working-class' interest to the policy and push working-class identifiers towards policy support. One could test such a prediction by examining if a non-partisan identity (e.g., working-class, or Latino) influences policy support when people receive an endorsement from a perceived group leader compared to one from a non-perceived group leader. An obstacle would be to capture variation in whether people perceive a source to (not) represent the group, as it is unclear *who* people in a non-partisan group recognize as group leaders. To overcome this barrier, a researcher could use one of two approaches. One way to capture this variation would be to pick two different sources – one source perceived as a group leader and one source not perceived as a group leader – based on a pretest with relevant participants (e.g., Druckman 2001). Yet, with this approach, sources are also likely to vary on other characteristics (expertise, likeability, etc.) than just on their perceived "group leader-ness". A better approach would be to experimentally manipulate whether a specific source is perceived to represent a group. For instance, one could randomly assign people to stories that only manipulate whether the source previously had fought politically for the group. Either way, examining the role of group leader endorsements for the impact of people's non-partisan identities is an area ripe for future research.

On a broader level, there is an important question the dissertation cannot answer: To what extent is exposure to messages that connect their group's interest to policy a necessary condition for whether citizens' identities influence policy support? Or put simply, are there situations where citizens' identities influence policy support, even when they have not previously received group leader endorsements or arguments that connect their group's interest to policy? It would be surprising if there was not, and I think it might depend on the

⁷ Some work has examined how organizations or interest group sources affect citizens' opinions (see Groenendyk and Valentino 2002; Grant and Rudolph 2003; Hartman and Weber 2009; Nicholson 2011; Weber, Dunaway, and Johnson 2012), but I do not know of empirical studies of their influence on whether people rely on their non-partisan identities in opinion formation.

policy content. In some instances, a policy's attributes may provide cues that allow people to infer whether the policy benefits (hurts) their group's interest. For instance, simply asking about "increasing the retirement age" might be sufficient for the working-class to reason that the policy hurts their group's material interest, because the group members, in general, perform strenuous, manual jobs. Similarly, a proposal to "restrict the knife-carrying law" may be enough to make people who identify as parents perceive the proposal as benefiting parental interest (e.g., because it helps protect children). Based on this logic, receiving messages from the political context may have less influence on whether citizens' identities influence their opinion when (and if) specific policy attributes allow people to connect their group's interest to policy. Thus, as a counterweight to this dissertation's argument, it is highly relevant to explore whether specific issue-traits limit the need for (and influence of) messages from the political context to make citizens' specific identities politically influential.

Furthermore, although the empirical evidence suggests that messages from the political context powerfully shape whether citizens' identities influence their opinions, it does not follow that individuals are equally receptive. As stressed in the theory section, people have other ingredients to use in opinion formation, such as their wallets or values, and these may already push them towards support for a policy. Thus, if people receive a message that stresses how the same policy hurts their group's interest, it clearly contradicts the conclusion that their other predisposition(s) inclines them to favor. Would people still, despite such cross-pressure between their predispositions, follow the message and favor a policy position to promote their group's interest? I expect that they, on average, would be less likely to, but it requires empirical investigation.

As explained above, the dissertation cannot speak to exactly *how important* political contextual information is for whether citizens' identities influence their opinions, or the scope conditions. This was not the motivation. The dissertation contributes by pointing towards *one* important condition that helps us understand when citizens' identities are likely to influence opinion: When they are exposed to messages from the political context that connects their group's interest to policy. Its contribution is to argue and demonstrate that citizens' specific identities affect policy support when they are exposed to policy rhetoric such as political arguments and political events that link their group's interest to policy support. These insights call for further research on the subject in relation to the specific role of group leader endorsements for non-partisan identities and in relation to the scope conditions. That is, to examine if messages from the political context with equal force shape whether

citizens' identities affect opinion across issue- and individual-level characteristics.

Methodological Contribution: Using Real-World Events to Study the Impact of Messages

Another key contribution of the dissertation is that it promotes a different way of studying the influence of messages from the political context than simply using survey-experiments. Specifically, it has sought to obtain observations from events in real-world settings that provide sharp variation in exposure to political messages (e.g., group-led rallies, a change in office) to study the impact of political messages on decision-making. Such designs, I think, can help advance our knowledge in political communication research about the effect of messages from the political context compared to the current state of the art.

Most of what we know about the impact of messages from the political context in political communication research comes from experimental studies. These typically find a large direct impact of political messages on citizens' opinions, both from party endorsements (e.g., Boudreau and MacKenzie, 2014; Cohen 2003; Slothuus and de Vreese, 2010) and political arguments (e.g., Cobb and Kuklinski 1997; Chong and Druckman 2007b). This work is enlightening because the experimental design, given random assignment, provides a clean test of the impact of respectively party endorsements and political arguments on citizens' opinion formation. However, experiments are often not very realistic; they are conducted in artificial environments isolated from the unique traits of the real world. When people receive political messages in the real world, they typically also receive other messages, e.g., competing arguments (Chong and Druckman 2007b) and media coverage. In addition, people might not be *that* attentive to messages in real-world settings, where private life often gets in the way (Kinder 2007: 157). Thus, a major issue with the present work is that experiments may exaggerate the impact of messages from the political context on citizens' opinions.

To obtain more precise knowledge about how messages from the political context affect citizens' opinions, I advocate for an adjustment in approach. We should move beyond the experimental setting and into the real world – but still with a strong emphasis on causal inference. This requires two important steps. First, researchers should try to identify and use events that provide sharp exogenous variation in messages from the political context, as attempted in the dissertation (in paper A and paper B). After all, many real-world events offer variation in people's exposure to political messages that is relevant for scholars in political communication. For instance, one may use an unexpected policy endorsement (or change in policy position) by a party or an

ethnic organization to measure its impact on citizens' opinions. One might also use an event that induces variation in whether people receive specific political arguments. An example is the recent event during the Brexit campaign when the UK government sent leaflets with economic arguments promoting "Remain" to English households (Dominiczak 2016).

Second, researchers should combine the exogenous variation in political messages from real-world events with strong identification strategies, i.e., the strategy used to provide a counterfactual estimate of what would have happened in the absence of the treatment (Angrist and Pischke 2015). Without random assignment to the treatment, in order to aim for causal inference, researchers need a credible counterfactual to estimate the impact of the treatment. The dissertation has used two strategies to obtain this: the narrow event window and the difference-in-difference design. The difference-in-difference design, I believe, is a highly relevant research design for scholars who are interested in the impact of messages from the political context, because it provides a compelling and (often) applicable way to deal with the counterfactual. If we have longitudinal data, and an event induces variation in exposure to a political message – creating a treated group and an untreated control group – the untreated controls can provide a credible counterfactual estimate *if* the groups were likely to have followed common trends. If this assumption is valid, the design is applicable when an event introduces variation in whether people receive a specific message confined by space (e.g., through a magazine, TV channel, geography, and so on) or time (e.g., some people receive the message before others) – thereby clearly allocating people in a treatment and control group. Furthermore, path-breaking advances in causal inference facilitate additional promising strategies to obtain causal estimates of treatments occurring in the real world, e.g., the regression discontinuity design (Imbens and Lemieux 2008; Angrist and Pischke 2014).

There has been a few notable attempts to study the impact of political messages on citizens' opinion using exogenous variation from real-world events AND combining it with compelling strategies for causal inference. For instance, Ladd and Lenz (2009) and Bisgaard and Slothuus (2018) exploited exogenous variation in respectively newspaper and party endorsements to study its impact on citizens' opinions using the difference-in-difference design. In addition, Huber and Arceneaux (2007) studied the effect of presidential campaign messages on vote choice exploiting that a subset of voters in non-battle-ground states "accidentally" were treated with high levels of (one-sided) presidential advertising. These studies are a major step forward because they offer strong evidence of how some notable political communication efforts can affect citizens' opinions in the real world. However, the small number of studies clearly highlights how little solid evidence we have from natural settings about

how and to what extent citizens' opinions and perceptions about politics actually are shaped by political messages. This gap does not become smaller when one considers the many various types of political rhetoric, such as different source cues (e.g., party endorsements, ethnic group endorsements), political arguments, and political events (e.g., group-led rallies) to which citizens are often exposed and might affect their political views. Based on these thoughts, I suggest that it is an important avenue for future political communication research to produce stronger empirical evidence, from naturalistic settings, about how various types of political rhetoric affect citizens' political views.

In sum, the dissertation contributes methodologically by studying the influence of messages from the political context with observations from events in real-world settings – not only with survey-experiments. Furthermore, it points towards an important agenda for future research in political communication. Specifically, it suggests that political communication research would benefit from using research designs that to a larger extent obtain observations from events in the real world and combine these with compelling strategies for causal inference, such as the difference-in-difference design, to provide stronger causal evidence of the influence of political messages on citizens' opinions.

Closing Statement

A key characteristic of a democracy is that the government responds to the citizens' preferences (Dahl 1971: 1). Thus, the question of why people have the preferences they do is relevant to anybody interested in the core functioning of democracy. One key ingredient that is often found to influence citizens' opinions is their specific identities, e.g., as a Latino, Democrat or parent. As stressed by Huddy: "Group identities are central to politics, an inescapable conclusion drawn from decades of political behavior research" (Huddy 2013: 1). This dissertation has wrestled with the question of *when* citizens' identities dictate their policy views by exploring the role of information from the political context. I believe I have added to a better understanding of how citizens' opinions become shaped by their identities by stressing the importance of information from the political context, specifically endorsements, arguments and political events, in making citizens' identities politically relevant.

In the bigger picture, the dissertation provides new insights into the significance of messages from the political context to understand citizens' political opinions in a democracy. It thereby calls for future research to seek a better understanding of how powerful messages are in shaping the impact of citizens' identities across different types of policy issues and individual-level charac-

teristics. It also stresses that researchers interested in political communication, in general, should focus much more on studying the impact of messages on political opinions in those real-world settings where people actually receive them. This would give public opinion scholars a much better sense of how vital messages from the political context actually are in shaping citizens' political views. Moving forward along these two paths, I think, will provide key insights into how people's opinions are shaped by information, why they sometimes change, and the dynamics of democracy.

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English Summary

Classic literature in public opinion stresses that citizens' identities are central to understanding why they support policy issues. The idea is that citizens' specific identities (such as identifying as a Social Democrat, Latino in the US, or as a parent) affect their views on policy, because they are motivated to promote their group's interests. In accordance, a large empirical literature supports that citizens' identities can have a direct impact on their policy opinion. However, at the same time, research also shows that specific identities only affect citizens' views on some issues. For instance, African-Americans' group identity are found to influence their support for Medicare, but not their support for public spending on schools. Similarly, research indicates that group identity made US Latinos oppose the Iraq War, while it did not shape their opinion on federal taxes or standardized tests in schools. This raises the question: Why do identities only affect citizens' opinions in some instances?

Through a series of three papers, this dissertation examines *under what conditions citizens' specific identities influence their policy opinions*. The main argument advanced is that citizens' specific identities matter to their opinion when they receive information – either from group leader endorsements, arguments or political events – that connects policy to their group's interest. The crux of the argument is that citizens' identities become relevant for support on a policy, when information from the political context clarifies that their group's interest is at stake.

The first contribution of the dissertation is to emphasize that specific identities affect citizens' views on policy, when *political events* link the group's interest to support or opposition. For example, in a quasi-experimental design, I show that group identity becomes highly influential to US Latinos' opinion on immigration policy, when they are exposed to a significant political event: Latino-led rallies pushing for immigration reform. As Latinos, who identified with their ethnic group, experienced their group rallying for immigration reform, they turned more supportive of legalizing undocumented immigrants. Moreover, the dissertation uncovers how another potent political event – a change in political office – affects the relationship between citizens' partisan identity and their perception of the national economy. In a quasi-experimental study in the UK, I find that partisans perceive the national economy performing much better (worse), when their party takes over (leaves) political office, and it suddenly becomes in the group's favour to see economic conditions in a different light.

The second contribution is to stress how *arguments* from policy debates influence whether citizens' specific identities drive their policy views. In policy

debates, the arguments presented often highlight how policy benefits or hurts a specific group – be it Latino, working class, or parental interests. According to the theoretical argument in the dissertation, such policy arguments should render citizens' specific identities consequential to policy support. In line with this expectation, two survey-experiments in Denmark show that citizens, who identify as parents, in particular support policy when they receive arguments emphasizing the policy's benefits for children's future. This result indicates that arguments from policy debates are highly important to understand whether citizens' identities influence their position on political issues.

Together, these findings cast new light on how information from the political context – both from political events and arguments – plays a key role in shaping whether citizens' identities affect their support for policy. When information from the political context connects policy to their group's interest, citizens' specific identities become highly influential for their opinion. The dissertation consists of this summary report and three research papers.

Dansk Resumé

Klassiske værker i politisk holdningsdannelse fremhæver, at borgeres identiteter er centrale i forståelsen af, hvorfor de støtter politiske forslag. Ideen er, at specifikke identiteter (fx det at identificere sig som socialdemokrat, latino i USA, eller forælder) påvirker borgeres standpunkter, fordi de motiveres til at fremme gruppens interesse. Den empiriske litteratur understøtter, at identiteter kan præge borgeres holdning til politiske emner. Imidlertid viser forskningen også, at identiteter ofte kun dikterer borgernes standpunkter på enkelte emner. Et eksempel herpå er, at afroamerikaneres gruppeidentitet påvirker deres støtte til "Medicare" men ikke deres tilslutning til et øget forbrug på skolevæsenet. Ligeledes antyder forskning, at gruppeidentitet fik amerikanske latinoer til at opponere mod Irak-krigen, men at gruppeidentitet ingen indflydelse havde på deres holdning til skatteniveau eller standardiserede skoletests. Det rejser spørgsmålet: Hvorfor påvirker identiteter kun borgeres standpunkter i nogle tilfælde og ikke i andre?

Gennem en række af tre artikler undersøger denne ph.d.-afhandling *under hvilke betingelser borgernes specifikke identiteter påvirker deres holdninger til politiske emner*. Hovedargumentet i afhandlingen er, at borgeres specifikke identiteter får betydning, når de modtager information – enten fra gruppelederes anbefalinger, argumenter eller politiske events – der kobler deres gruppes interesse til et politisk emne. Kernen i argumentet er, at borgernes identiteter bliver relevante for deres standpunkt på et specifikt politisk emne, når information fra den politiske kontekst tydeliggør, at deres gruppes interesser er på spil.

Det første centrale bidrag i afhandlingen er at betone, at specifikke identiteter får betydning for borgernes holdning til et politisk emne, når *politiske events* kobler gruppens interesse til opbakning eller modstand. Eksempelvis viser jeg i et kvasi-eksperimentelt studie, at gruppeidentitet fik stor indflydelse på amerikanske latinoers holdning til immigrationspolitik, da de blev eksponeret for en markant politisk begivenhed: Latino-ledet demonstrationer i USA for at opnå en immigrationsreform. Da latinoer, der identificerede sig med gruppen, oplevede, at tusindvis af andre latinoer protesterede for at fremme en immigrationsreform, blev de mere positive over for opholdstilladelser til illegale immigranter. Herudover afdækker afhandlingen også, at en anden potent politisk begivenhed – et regeringsskifte – påvirker sammenhængen mellem borgeres partiidentitet og deres opfattelse af nationaløkonomien. I et kvasi-eksperimentelt studie fra Storbritannien, viser jeg, at partitilhængere opfatter nationaløkonomien i markant bedre (værre) form, når deres parti

overtager (overgiver) regeringsmagten, og det pludseligt bliver til gruppens fordel at se økonomien i et andet lys.

For det andet bidrager afhandlingen med at fremhæve, hvordan *argumenter* fra den politiske debat kan påvirke, om borgeres identitet driver deres politiske standpunkter. I politiske debatter fremsættes ofte argumenter, der målrettet fremhæver, om politiske forslag gavner eller skader specifikke gruppers interesser – hvad end det fx er latinoers, arbejderklassens eller forældres interesser. I forlængelse af afhandlingens hovedargument bør sådanne argumenter påvirke, om borgeres specifikke identiteter får politisk betydning. I tråd hermed viser jeg i to survey-eksperimenter fra Danmark, at borgere, der identificerer sig som forældre, i særlig grad støtter et politisk forslag, når de præsenteres for argumenter, der fremhæver forslaget positive konsekvenser for børns fremtid. Dette indikerer, at argumenter fra politiske debatter har stor betydning for, hvorvidt borgernes identiteter præger deres politiske standpunkter.

Med disse fund kaster afhandlingen nyt lys på, hvordan information fra den politiske kontekst – både fra politiske begivenheder og argumenter – spiller en helt central rolle for om borgeres identiteter påvirker deres holdning til politiske emner. Afhandlingen viser, at borgeres specifikke identiteter får stor betydning for deres opbakning til et politisk emne, når information fra den politiske kontekst kobler deres gruppes interesse til emnet. Afhandlingen består af denne sammenfatning og tre forskningsartikler.