Abstract

UNITED IN POLITICAL SOLIDARITY: HOW MULTICULTURAL ENDORSEMENT AND GROUP IDENTITY INSPIRE INTERGROUP POLITICAL SOLIDARITY AMONG MEMBERS OF LOWER STATUS GROUPS

By

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This dissertation proposes and tests a new theoretical model that describes the conditions under which low status group members will work with members of higher status groups for social change, known as intergroup political solidarity.

Political solidarity between low and high status groups can be an important route to positive social change. Research on intergroup political solidarity has focused on either the high status group’s orientation toward solidarity or when members of separate groups work together on behalf of a common low status group. There is a lack of research regarding when members of low status groups will work for social change with members of a higher status group. Drawing on social science disciplines and intergroup relations research, this dissertation proposes that recognition of group differences by the high status group influences intergroup political solidarity. Specifically, it was expected that endorsement of multiculturalism, which recognizes group differences, compared to colorblindness, an ideology that minimizes group differences, increases intergroup political solidarity. It was also expected that trust in the high status group and greater perceptions of common values with the high status group would explain the relation between multiculturalism and intergroup political solidarity, compared to colorblindness.
Additionally, it was predicted that greater strength of group identification with the low status group would be associated with greater intergroup political solidarity, and also moderate the direct relation between multiculturalism and intergroup political solidarity, such that multiculturalism would increase solidarity under lower levels of group identification, compared to colorblindness.

Three experimental studies were conducted with two distinct lower status groups, Latinos (Experiments 1 and 3) and people who are LGBTQ (Experiment 2), using two different methodological approaches, surveys (Experiments 1 and 2) and an in-person laboratory analogue experiment (Experiment 3). In all three experiments, participants read a press release statement that lead them to believe that a relevant higher status group endorsed either multiculturalism or colorblindness. Four dimensions of intergroup political solidarity were assessed (Experiments 1-3): willingness to work with the high status group to develop programs that promote social change, willingness to engage in collective action with the high status group, attitudes toward joint action between low and high status groups, and personal willingness to work with the high status group without any specific action in mind. Experiment 3 also assessed willingness to work with a member of the high status group in an anticipated interaction. Experiments 2 and 3 added trust and common values as mediators.

Three major findings emerged. First, endorsement of multiculturalism, compared to endorsement of colorblindness by the high status group, increased one of the four dimensions of intergroup political solidarity: willingness to work with the high status group to develop programs that promote social change (Experiments 1 and 2). Second, greater strength of identification with one’s low status group was related to greater intergroup political solidarity across several of the dimensions: willingness to work on programs (Experiments 1 and 2),
willingness to engage in collective actions (Experiment 3), willingness to work with the high status group without any specific action in mind (Experiment 3), and willingness to work with a member of the high status group (Experiment 3). Third, there was partial evidence that level of group identification moderates the role of endorsement of multiculturalism (Experiment 2). This finding occurred again with only one of four dimensions intergroup political solidarity: willingness to work on programs.

Multiculturalism may inspire only certain types of intergroup political solidarity, specifically, top-down efforts for institutional reform through programs and policies. Group identification may strengthen one’s orientation toward intergroup political solidarity across multiple types of actions in solidarity. Neither trust nor common values are useful variables to explain intergroup political solidarity. The results can be applied to future research investigating intergroup political solidarity among members of lower status groups, and also used by intergroup activist coalitions to encourage intergroup political solidarity among the activists in their group.