

NEURO-POLITICS

PARTISANSHIP AS A SOCIAL IDENTITY

Politics impacts our everyday lives. But does a person's political party identification -partisanship- affect their everyday life? How ingrained in their neurological structures is partisanship, is it similar to other strong social identities, such as race or ethnicity? If partisanship is so strongly felt, then at what point does their partisanship change?

To begin to answer these questions, we have to look towards bridging political science and neuroscience in a multidisciplinary effort study the underlying neural correlates behind party affiliation.

“Although party identification is generally believed to represent affective attachment to a party, an individual’s party identification is also a function of social identity with the party.”
(Greene 1999, 400)

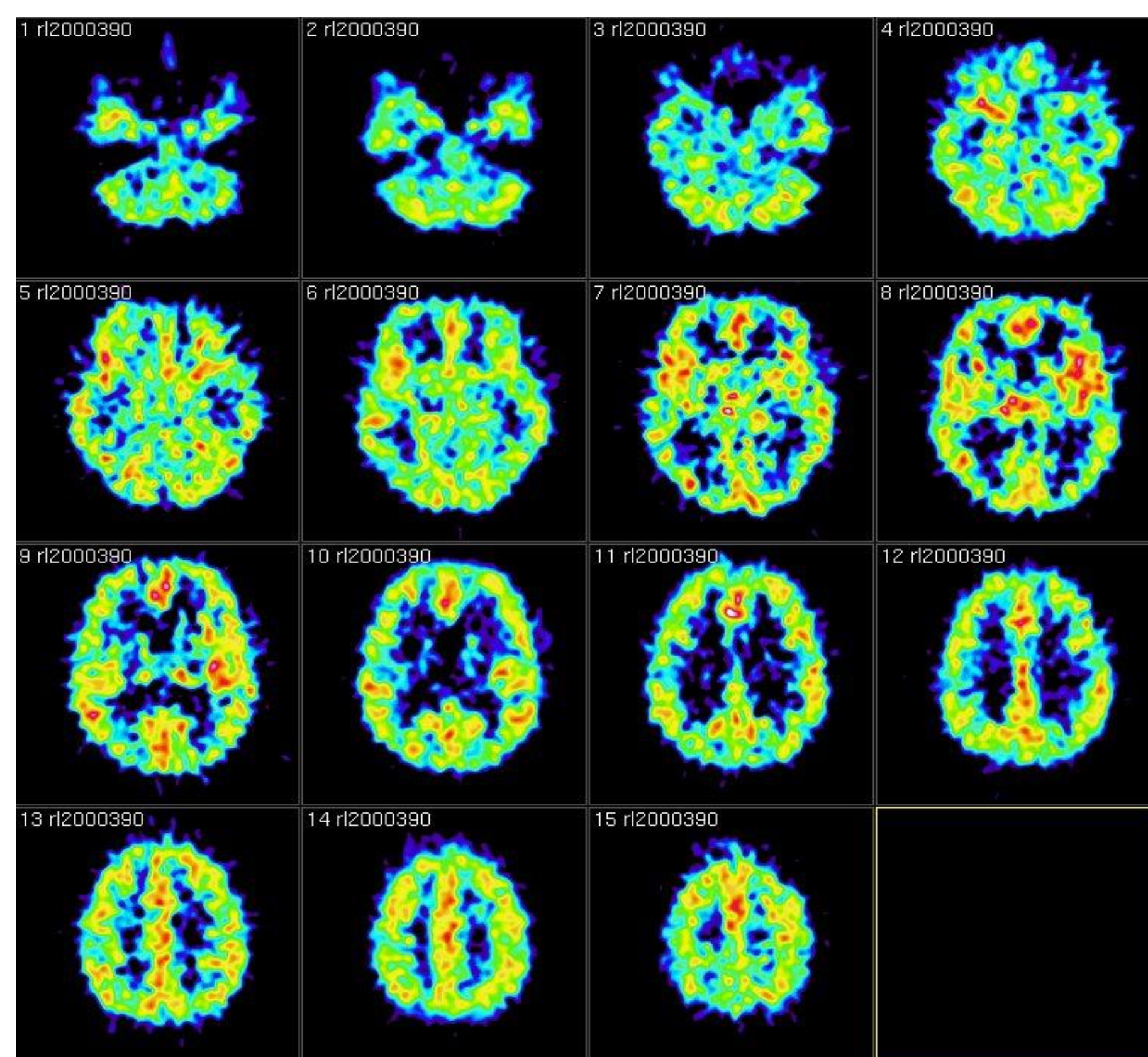
METHOD AND HYPOTHESIS

One way to look at the neural correlates behind partisanship is with fMRI scans. On the most basic level, to answer the question of the similarity between partisanship and other social identities, we have to understand the neuroscience behind social identities by looking at which brain regions are activated when a subject is presented with social identity stimuli during an fMRI. Then, we have to understand which brain regions are activated during the political party stimuli tasks and see whether they are the same.

we know that the amygdala plays a key role for various social identities, thus we expect that the mobilization of partisanship would indeed solicit a similar neurological response compared with other social identities.

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

In this design, we compare subjects with strong partisanship and strong social identities. Based on findings from previous neuro-politics studies



LeBlanc (2005)

POLICY FEEDBACK

BENEFITS ↔ PERCEPTION OF GOVERNMENT

How do people's experience with government affect their perceptions of and participation with politics, and how in turn does that affect policy-making? Does policy shape public opinion, or does public opinion shape policy?

Canada's hybrid welfare regime makes it an interesting place to study policy feedback. How do Canadians' experiences with different types of welfare benefits, universal or means-tested, evoke distinct responses?

*“The separation between benefits that are regarded as ‘**deserved**’ because of their contributory nature, and ‘handouts’ to the poor, who are conceived as largely ‘**undeserving**’, is particularly rigid”
(Ellison 2006, 84-85)*



METHOD AND HYPOTHESIS

This study is based off a two-wave survey conducted in Ontario which asked people about their experience with public benefits, their level of civic engagement and the first three words that came to mind when they thought about government. Previous studies based in the US have shown that the more means-tested benefits people receive, the less likely they are to participate in politics, and the worse their opinion of government.

One hypothesis for our project is that we will find similar results to the American case; people who are under the threat of government taking revoking their benefits and having to prove their worthiness are likely to be unsatisfied with government and less likely to participate. However, because of Canada's distinct political culture, perhaps the experience of receiving

means-tested benefits will still lower people's opinions of government, but it won't decrease civic engagement.

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

POPULISM

THE DEMOCRATIC CONSEQUENCES

The word “**populism**” is often thrown around in discussions about politics and leaders, but how exactly do we define populism and classify populist leaders? Although there may never be an exact consensus, these are still important questions to answer as the consequences of populism can greatly affect the quality of a democracy.

This project, using surveys, will try to understand the consequences of left-wing and right-wing populism. But in order to do so, we must first look at the elements of populism and its support group: who supports populists and why, and how do we measure this support?

“Insofar as all populisms can be dangerous this lies in the degree to which they oppose the existing norms of liberalism and seek to undermine its moderating institutions.”
(Molyneux and Osborne 2017, 1)

THE QUESTIONS

What is populism?

The ideology that society is split into two homogenous groups: the people and the elite. The people are considered to be virtuous while the elite (other) is considered immoral and thus unworthy of leading the people. Populism tends to be anti-liberal as it questions established institutions and thus gives reason to act on executive power alone. However, right wing populism is more nativist and anti-immigrants than anti-elite. As Katsambekis (2017) puts it, right-wing populism is generally exclusive and identitarian, while left-wing populism is inclusive and pluralist. This can be seen today with anti-EU parties, such as UKIP.

What predicts populist support

The most commonly found predictors thus far include: political knowledge, distrust in liberal institutions, education, and class. However, researchers have begun looking into psychological predictors of populist support and perceptions of vulnerabilities.

What are the consequences of populists in power

Although populist regimes are not anti-democratic at heart, they have been known to lead to undemocratic outcomes, such as Chavez's regime in Venezuela. The fear is that populists' anti-liberal sentiments will cause the decay of the liberal institutions that carry out the checks and balances along with the deliberative processes necessary to a healthy democracy.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Professor Stolle and Gidengil for the opportunity to work with them and be included in their research endeavors. I would also like to thank the Maldoff family for their kind donations to the ARIA program; without their generosity I would not have been able to pursue this research.

