

Social Identity and Dissent

Abstract

When do individuals challenge group norms? This study examines how the identity mechanism of outgroup differentiation shapes ingroup norm violations, and how groups reinforce it through actual and perceived social sanctions. Using experiments with Israeli left- and right-leaning participants, I show that strong identifiers are more willing to deviate from ingroup norms when such deviations oppose outgroup norms, particularly on charged issues with potential ingroup sanctions. Outgroup-aligned deviations elicit higher actual sanctions, especially from strong identifiers, and higher perceived sanctions, which vary little with identification. Both actual and perceived sanctions intensify with greater deviation from ingroup norms and greater outgroup alignment. These patterns intensify on issues seen as important, contentious, or well-known: identification more strongly shapes deviation direction, and sanctions respond more sharply to both deviation direction and identification. These findings suggest that identity not only reinforces persistence but can also enable and direct change, with implications for polarization.