Research Statement

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I am an applied microeconomist with a strong research interest in empirical political economy. My research uses quasi-experimental methods to study how representative democracy works. I study how voters form beliefs and participate in the electoral process, how voter preferences are aggregated by electoral competition, and how electoral institutions ensure democratic accountability of elected politicians. Ultimately, my work contributes to a deeper understanding of how democratic processes shape public policy and economic outcomes. My current and future research evolves along three key agendas, which I outline below.

I. Electoral Incentives, Strategic Policy Making, and Polarization

In representative democracies, electoral competition shapes public policy in two complementary, yet distinct ways: First, the *selection* mechanism generates electoral turnover, which alters the composition of representative government and, hence, public policy. Second, the threat of turnover creates *electoral incentives* for incumbent politicians to choose policies strategically in anticipation of future reelection bids. A key tenet of theoretical political economy is that electoral competition determines equilibrium policy as candidates strategically adapt their positions to voter preferences and to each other. Yet, there is a surprising lack of empirical evidence that supports these predictions.

In my job market paper **"Out of Office, Out of Step? Electoral Incentives and Strategic Moderation in the U.S. House of Representatives,"** I propose a novel identification strategy to separate electoral incentive effects from selection effects on incumbent politicians' policy positions. Exploiting the unique institutional setup of lame-duck sessions in the U.S. Congress, where lame-duck incumbents who lost reelection vote on the same issues as their reelected colleagues, I use a close election regression discontinuity design to leverage quasi-random assignment of reelection-seeking representatives to lame-duck status, which is orthogonal to voter preferences and incumbents' type. Comparing within-incumbent changes in roll call voting of barely unseated lame ducks to narrowly re-elected co-partisans serving the same congressional term, I find that lame ducks revert to more extreme positions with lame-duck Democrats (Republicans) voting more liberally (conservatively). Consistent with lame ducks' loss of re-election incentives driving the result, the effect of lame-duck status on roll call extremism is more pronounced among electorally vulnerable incumbents, representatives of districts with a large proportion of swing voters, and retirement-aged lame ducks who are less likely to rerun in the future. I also consider but ultimately dismiss several other mechanisms including emotional backlash, logrolling motives, party control, and selective abstention. Although quantitatively dominated by selection effects, electoral incentives to moderate positions are large enough to reduce polarization by 21–26% and to flip high-stakes legislative outcomes under plausible counterfactual scenarios. My analysis establishes an important existence result: electoral incentives to moderate policy positions are operative and powerful. This contrasts with theoretical accounts that politicians are unable to commit to policy positions other than their most preferred and contradicts a large observational literature that portrays U.S. legislators as ideologically rigid and irresponsive to electoral pressure. My findings also have important implications for the design of electoral institutions that shape the democratic accountability of politicians.

While my job market paper identifies incentives for policy moderation to please pivotal voters (taking challenger positions as given), my companion paper (**"Strategic Policy Responsiveness to Challenger Platforms: Evidence From U.S. House Incumbents,"** ***submitted***) studies incumbents' strategic responsiveness to challenger positions (keeping voter preferences fixed). Estimating non-incumbent candidates' policy positions using pre-primary transaction-level campaign finance data, I classify as extremist the more liberal (conservative) of the top two candidates in Democratic (Republican)

challenger primaries. To overcome the difficulty that candidates' strategically chosen policy platforms are interdependent and jointly determined by unobserved voter preferences, I leverage a regression discontinuity design to exploit the quasi-random assignment of House incumbents to moderate or extremist challengers by close primary elections of the incumbent's opponent party. I find that incumbents alter their roll call voting record depending on their opponent's position, committing to a more moderate policy position when running against an extremist instead of a moderate challenger. Consistent with strategic responsiveness to electoral incentives, policy adjustment to challengers is confined to reelection-seeking incumbents and to incumbents defending a seat in a competitive district. I further provide suggestive evidence that incumbents' reaction to challengers is conditioned by the presence of third candidates, and reflects a trade-off between persuading swing voters at the center and mobilizing core supporters. Importantly, incumbents' adjustment is not driven by a valence advantage of moderate over extremist challengers but by incumbents' reaction to opponents' policy positions, suggesting strategic complementarity of policy platforms. These results shed new light on the important but hitherto understudied role of opposition party candidates' political stances in determining implemented public policy. Moreover, my finding that candidates' policy positions move in the same direction, assuages frequently expressed concerns that polarization is self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating with extremism on one side of the political spectrum breeding extremism on the other.

In future research, I intend to build on the methodology developed in previous work to investigate under what conditions primary elections induce incentives for strategic extremism. Results will offer a new perspective on the longstanding debate on whether and how the primary system contributes to the polarization in the U.S. Congress.

II. Voter Turnout, Election Closeness, and Social Pressure

A second strand of my research investigates the determinants of voter turnout, and how unequal turnout shapes representation and public policy. Why people turn out to vote notwithstanding their tiny chance to influence electoral outcomes has been a puzzle to economists and social scientists. Another important question is why some people turn out while others abstain. Unequal participation raises concerns about the legitimacy of representative democracy and public policy.

In joint work with Leonardo Bursztyn, Davide Cantoni, Patricia Funk, and Noam Yuchtman (**"Identifying the Effect of Election Closeness on Voter Turnout: Evidence from Swiss Referenda"**, ***Journal of the European Economic Association,*** **2024**) we provide the first causal evidence for one of the most widely-studied drivers of turnout: Voters' response to anticipated election closeness. We exploit the precise *day-level* timing of the release of Swiss national poll results for high-stakes federal referenda, and a novel dataset on *daily* mail-in voting for the canton of Geneva. Using an event study design, we find that the release of a closer poll causes voter turnout to sharply rise immediately after poll release, with no differential pre-release turnout levels or trends. We provide evidence that polls affect turnout by providing information shaping beliefs about closeness. The effects of close polls are the largest where newspapers report on them most; and, the introduction of polls had significantly larger effects in politically unrepresentative municipalities, where locally available signals of closeness are less correlated with national closeness. We then provide evidence that the effect of close polls is heterogeneous, with an asymmetric effect leading to a higher vote share for the underdog. The effect sizes we estimate are large enough to flip high-stakes election outcomes under plausible counterfactual scenarios.

In joint work in progress with Alda Marchese (**"Regressive Gender Norms and Social Pressure NOT to Vote: Evidence from Switzerland"**), we assembled a novel dataset that matches historical post-electoral survey data in Switzerland with a fine-grained and direct measure for regressive gender norms of political participation: municipality-level "no" vote shares in the 1971 referendum, where Swiss men granted voting rights to Swiss women. We document a significant gender gap in turnout, which is larger in municipalities with more regressive gender norms but closes over time. To disentangle the effect of external social pressure from internalized social norms, we exploit the staggered introduction of postal voting in Swiss cantons as a natural experiment, which provides for the possibility to participate in elections while keeping the act of voting unobserved and thus escaping social sanctions. Using a triple-difference design that compares male and female voters in gender-progressive and gender-regressive municipalities before and after the introduction of postal voting, we isolate the impact of external social pressure on women to abstain from voting. Our results speak to an emergent literature on the causes and consequences of unequal participation, providing the first empirical test if social pressure can *decrease*

voter turnout among politically marginalized groups.

III. Unconventional Participation and the Reallocation of Economic Resources

In a larger ongoing project joint with Patricia Funk and Noam Yuchtman, we study the long-term disruptive potential of protests on the economy. Specifically, we examine the persistent and systemic effects on gender norms of the Swiss Women's Strike of 1991, the largest protest for gender equality in Swiss history in which an estimated half a million women (i.e., 15% of the Swiss female population) took the streets to advocate for equal labor rights, wages and representation in government. We compile an original dataset covering the near-universe of local protest events associated with the strike, as well as comprehensive media coverage from Swiss newspapers, and combine it with rich administrative and survey data on education, occupations, wages, and family structures. Leveraging variation in direct exposure to local protest events and incidental news coverage of the strike, we analyze how this exposure influenced young women's educational choices, career trajectories (both political and non-political), and long-term outcomes such as marriage, fertility, and intergenerational transmission of values.

In a smaller project, I prospectively return to the U.S. context to study the systemic effects of firms' campaign finance contributions on aggregate-level economic outcomes. Exploiting the staggered removal of corporate donation bans for state-level elections over the post-war period, I use a difference-in-differences strategy to estimate the effects of corporate donations on state-level labor market policies (e.g., minimum wages, right-to-work laws), corporate taxation, regulatory density, and real outcomes such as wage inequality or firm value in regulated industries.