Capstone 2020/21 Political Science: Ethnic Politics and Identity

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This research theme provides students with an opportunity to develop a project that seeks to investigate the relationship between various kinds of social identities and important political processes/outcomes. Students will have an opportunity to delve into questions related to three kinds of social identities:

1. **Ethnicity:** perhaps the social identity that has received the most attention from the scholarly literature on identity politics. Potential research questions (or variations of) related to ethnicity can include:
   1. Are salient ethnic identities compatible with a civic, national identity?
   2. Ethnic conflict, both violent and not, is common throughout the world. Why do some episodes of ethnic conflict turn violent while others do not?
   3. Does ethnic diversity impede economic performance and development?
2. **Gender:** research on gender and politics typically focuses on electoral/party dynamics, the causes/consequences of women’s presence in politics, and the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation. In that vein, potential research questions related to gender can include:
   1. Are political factors (i.e., political institutions, elite recruitment) or social factors (i.e., gender equality, stereotypes) more responsible for the under-representation of women in politics?
   2. How (if at all) does the descriptive representation of women in politics affect substantive representation?
   3. What kinds of electoral institutions and practices increase/decrease women’s representation?
3. **European Identity:** much of the literature on European identification addresses its determinants and the relationship between national and European identities. Potential research questions related to European identity can include:
   1. Does national identification foster or hinder European identification?
   2. Are economic considerations or identity issues more powerful in explaining support for /opposition to European integration?
   3. How important are elite cues/messaging in terms of shaping mass attitudes toward the EU?

Ultimately, the student will be free to develop their own research question/project in consultation with the theme instructor. However, the research questions above are intended to serve as guidance with respect to crafting an effective question/project. Students will employ an appropriate methodological approach of their choosing, again in consultation with the instructor. In that vein, during our meetings we will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of various methodological approaches as relevant to the study of ethnic politics and identity. Finally, in consultation with the instructor, the student will be free to decide whether to conduct cross-national analyses or focus on specific case studies (or combine the two approaches) in answering their research question. In the end, which approach the student selects will in part depend on what is appropriate for the question at hand.