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2018 U.S. Midterm Facebook Images Dataset Notes

The first major question that arises in our research regarding how Democratic politicians communicate with racial and ethnic, sexual, and gender minority constituents via social media is what it means to appeal to a minority subgroup. What do these efforts by politicians look like? Answering these questions enables us to use computer vision and other technologies to document politicians' attempts to communicate with minority constituents. In order to provide a thoughtful answer to this question, I observe a random sample of two thousand images shared by politicians during the 2018 U.S. midterm elections.

1. Appeal to racial and ethnic minority groups:



Fig. 1

Top: David Ige, HI governor (left); Elizabeth Warren, MA senator (right); Bottom: Antonio Delgado, NY-19 (left); Ammar Campa-Najjar (right) CA-50

I. Individuals included in images:

Perhaps the most common appeal to racial and ethnic minority constituents by a Democratic politician is in the form of their physical presence in a campaign image. The top row of the above figure showcases this form of appeal to presumably native Hawaiian (left) and black (right) constituents. The difficulty in assessing this form of representative appeal, however, is in regard to the race of the politician themselves. By nature of running a campaign, the politician will often appear photographed alongside constituents. For instance, neither photograph in the bottom row of Figure 1 has an apparent appeal to racial or ethnic minority constituents, but may mistakenly be categorized as so due to the politicians themselves.



Fig. 2

Top: Darren Soto, FL-09 (left); Jacky Rosen, NV senator (right); Bottom: Tom Suozzi, NY-03 (left), Jason Crow CO-06 (right)

II. Racial and ethnic symbolism:

Besides minority constituents themselves that appear in images, there exists a variety of symbolism belonging to these ethnic and racial minority groups that appear in the visual media shared by Democratic politicians. While we have not yet performed an analysis of the effectiveness of specific messages, it is obvious that by sharing these symbols, politicians are seeking to connect with a subset of minority voters. In Figure 2, politicians and constituents are shown holding the flags of countries and territories as well as dressed in cultural garments. These, however, are not the only forms of symbolism pertaining racial and ethnic minority groups (ex. organizational logos: NAACP, UnidosUS, etc.) [3]

2. Appeal to sexual and gender minority groups:



Fig 3.

Gil Cisneros, Jr., CA-39 (left), Seth Moulton, MA-06 (right)

I. LGBTQ+ symbolism:

Provided LGBTQ+ appeal cannot be reasonably inferred solely from the presence of constituents in an image, we rely on symbolism. As illustrated by Figure 3, the most common imagery associated with LGBTQ+ social movements is the rainbow, often pictured on a flag. While this flag is representative of the entire community, we must also consider symbolism pertaining to specific subgroups (ex. the transgender flag) [2]. Furthermore, similar to that mentioned with regard to racial and ethnic minority groups, Democratic politicians commonly receive the endorsement of LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations, such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) [3]. The symbols of these organizations are commonly presented to LGBTQ+ constituents (the HRC logo is pictured in the figure above) to serve as messages of support.



Fig 4.

Stacey Abrams, GA governor candidate (left); Sylvia Garcia, TX-29 (right)

3. Other considerations and challenges:

- In addition to physical characteristics, studies have determined that behavior is a key part of one's ethnic identity [1]. Accordingly, it is likely that the reduction of minority groups to a combination of (1) appearance and (2) symbolism fails to capture the full complexity of these individuals. Therefore, politicians may engage in particular traditions or practices pertaining to certain groups that we cannot capture using computer vision.
- Much of the visual media shared by Democratic politicians on Facebook contains textual messages. In the two examples included in Figure 4, the respective politicians are appealing to Hispanic constituents, an ethnic group that constitutes a

sizable proportion of the Democratic base. Because these messages are considered an edge case (they integrate both visual and textual elements), we must consider whether to include them in our analysis.

4. **Variables:**

- **Minority group-specific appeal variables:** measure an image's appeal to a given racial, ethnic, sexual, or gender minority group using the above considerations regarding how Democratic politicians communicate with these constituents. These variables would be continuous quantitative, measured on a 0 (no appeal) to 1 (high appeal) support, and include:
 - 'black_appeal'
 - 'asian_appeal'
 - 'hispanic_appeal'
 - 'LGBTQ+_appeal'
 - 'general_minority_group_appeal' (an overall measure of appeal to the included minority groups)

Note: Although there are other racial and ethnic minority categories that could be considered, such as Indigenous Americans or Pacific Islanders, these groups may likely not be as greatly represented. Similarly, while LGBTQ+ could be separated into various sexual and gender minority classifications, each subset would likely only pertain to very few images.

Sources:

- [1] Erik H. Cohen. 2004. Components and Symbols of Ethnic Identity: A Case Study in Informal Education and Identity Formation in Diaspora. *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 53, 1 (2004), 87-112.
- [2] Old Dominion University Office of Intercultural Relations (n.d.). *LGBTQA Symbols*. Retrieved from <https://www.odu.edu/life/diversity/resources/lgbtqa/symbols>.
- [3] University of California, Los Angeles Civil Rights Project (n.d.). *Civil Rights Organizations*. Retrieved from <https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/civil-rights-organizations>.

