

SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION AND POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY  
*Respect as a Club Good in Karachi, Pakistan*

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**ABSTRACT.** Mobilized ethnic groups often continue to vote for corrupt parties that perform incredibly poorly over long periods of time. Why do individuals vote for co-ethnic politicians, even when those politicians have failed to deliver good governance in the past? To tackle this question, this paper first presents an inductive theory of ethnic voting based on extensive qualitative fieldwork in Karachi, Pakistan – a diverse megacity where ethnicity is a central organizer of social and political life. In particular, it argues that along with demanding material goods (such as roads and clinics), voters also value social identity goods (such as respect and group status). Individuals form political preferences over ethnic representation as a function of how much they care about each of these two types of goods. Importantly, the more weight individuals place on social identity goods, the higher the acceptable threshold for poor governance by the ethnic party or candidate. To test this theory, the paper provides evidence from a survey experiment administered to respondents from the largest ethnic group in Karachi (N=1200). Respondents evaluate hypothetical incumbents whose attributes have been randomly varied along two dimensions: provision of public goods and provision of descriptive representation. Results show that co-ethnic politicians receive slack for under-provision of material goods when they emphasize how their position allows them to confer respect and status on the ethnic group. Further, respondents from lower social classes are more likely to strongly identify with their ethnic identity and hence place a higher value on descriptive representation. The paper uses interview and descriptive survey data to show that this is because social class partially determines individuals' likelihood of encountering disrespectful treatment on the basis of their ethnicity by the police, security services, bureaucrats, and non-coethnics. These results have implications for our understanding of Karachi's political trajectory and on the interplay of ethnicity and class more generally.