

## Exercise illustrating Dan Posner's Social Identity Matrix

The exercise below works for a class of 10 students. You can adapt the numbers to make it work for the class of your size as well.

Bring 10 scraps of paper. Write the following on them.

- Red King (on 3 pieces)
- Red Queen (on 2 pieces)
- Red Jack (on 1 piece)
- Orange King (on 1 piece)
- Orange Queen (on 1 piece)
- Blue Jack (on 1 piece)
- Orange Jack (on 1 piece)

If you have multiple decks of cards, you could also just hand out cards using suits instead of colors.

Explain the demonstration to the class. There is a pot of candies that we might think of as the spoils of the election. For the above example, it probably makes sense to have 12 candies in the pot. Let the students know how many are in the pot. Emphasize that each individual should play to maximize the number of candies that they personally receive.

Explain that the election might come down to a competition between candidates representing different colors or it might come down to an election representing different ranks (king, queen, or jack).

Have the students draw one card each or 1 piece of paper each.

Discussion begins. During this period, the students should show each other their cards and should identify others who might share their electoral interests. They can try to persuade each other of this, but they should be wary of promises made before an election to share resources after it. Each group should consider whether it is better off aligning with others belonging to its suit or others belonging to its color.

The nomination begins. Students can nominate a candidate identified by their suit or identified by their rank. If the students play the game correctly, the red kings will nominate a king. The red queens and red jacks will try to nominate a red candidate. But the red kings will instead vote for the king and the kings will win the election, getting to split the candies amongst themselves. If the orange queen, orange jack, and blue jack get creative, they might push for a different dimension of politics.

Discussion:

- Along with the students, draw the social identity matrix on the board. Walk through the logic together.

- What are the key assumptions on which this model depends? Asked differently, what rule changes might lead to a different outcome (imperfect information about the students' cards, different electoral rules, people caring about things other than their share of the pie, it being harder to divide the pie equally on some dimensions than others, different dimensions of conflict in society etc ).
- Move to a discussion of American politics. What might some of the dimensions be, rather than rank and card color? (Gender, age, income, education, region, race, religion, etc.)
- In recent years, some have argued that the Democratic party in the US faces a dilemma. Should it cater to the economic interests of the working class? Or should it aim to build a coalition of historically marginalized groups? How does the logic employed by Posner apply? What are its limits? (Here I expect that students will become very critical of the model.)