

## **Dissertation Abstract:**

How people resolve their individual interests with those of the groups they belong to is a critical question in the social sciences. Previous work has shown that the ability to sanction group members increases cooperation and decreases free-riding on group efforts. The first part of my dissertation research shows that installing a group leader—a single group member given sole ability to punish—can successfully maintain public good production.

This result is perhaps surprising, because giving one individual sole punishment power means that group leaders can contribute nothing with no risk of being punished, while punishing others for not contributing. Indeed, the work showed that leaders with self-regarding tendencies (proselfs) do become “corrupted” by power. But other-regarding (prosocial) leaders are ennobled by power, contributing to the public good and encouraging their group members to do so as well. The result was that groups with prosocial leaders were better off than those with self-regarding leaders or standard peer to peer sanctions.

Of course, the benefits of prosocial leaders can only accrue to groups if prosocials actually ascend to leadership positions. Thus, one important question is whether prosocials do tend to end up as leaders of collective action groups. In the previous research leaders were appointed, rather than elected. It thus remains unclear if groups actually select the “right” leaders to lead them. If groups fail to select prosocials for leadership positions, it seems that, based on our previous work, leaders will ultimately harm the groups they lead. But an alternative possibility is that the leaders groups select become the right leaders. Election, rather than appointment, may reduce differences in leader behavior among prosocials vs. proselfs. Thus, leadership may ultimately benefit groups if groups select the “right” leaders—or if the leaders they select become the right leaders. Here I propose an extension of the first phase of the dissertation research on leadership and public good provision. Specifically, how does the leader selection process impact both leaders and the group as a whole? First, I examine whether electing leaders, rather than appointing them, benefits groups by enhancing contributions to a public good when people can compete for the leadership position. Second, when competition for leadership is possible, do prosocials and proselfs cooperate at approximately equal rates? And, as a result, are they elected to leadership positions approximately equally? Finally, I examine whether elected leaders—proselfs in particular—lead their groups more successfully than appointed proselfs. The research will clarify the conditions under which groups facing collective action problems do and do not benefit from leadership.