

**The Dynamics of Prosocial Leadership:
Power and Influence in Collective Action Groups**

Ashley Harrell

This project bridges insights from theories of collective action, power, and influence to address the conditions under which group leaders solve collective action problems. Specifically, I show how group leaders' behaviors impact the success of collective action groups as a whole via both power and influence processes. The results of a laboratory experiment support the prediction that other-regarding (prosocial) leaders increase their contributions to the group after ascending to leadership, while self-regarding (proself) leaders reduce their contributions. Further, I show that rank and file group members are influenced by their leaders' contribution behaviors; as a result, prosocial-led groups as a whole are substantially more productive than proself-led groups. Indeed, as predicted, prosocial leaders were even more effective in maintaining large group contributions than the standard peer sanctioning system, where the ability to punish others is distributed equally among all group members. Importantly, these results suggest that prosocial leaders—but not proself leaders—are an effective solution to collective action problems. Therefore, I also address whether group members tend to select prosocials for leadership positions (Study 2a), and whether they are able to identify prosocials when all group members are able to compete for the leadership position by vying to be elected to the role (Study 2b). Results from these studies suggest that people prefer prosocials for the leader position, and that while group members do compete for leadership, both prosocial and proself individuals compete at similar rates, such that prosocials remain higher

contributors than their prosel self counterparts. As a result, prosocials are particularly likely to be selected for leadership positions when group contributions are known. Study 2b also demonstrates that groups that hold democratic elections for leadership may induce more cooperative behavior in their members not only once the leader is installed, but even before leadership hierarchies emerge as a result of competition to be elected. Taken as a whole, the findings suggest that putting power and influence in the right hands solves collective action problems and promotes collective welfare. Leadership—specifically, democratically elected, prosocial leadership—promises an effective solution to collective action problems.

