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Tweeting Identity? Ukrainian, Russian, and #Euromaidan*

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Abstract: Why and when do group identities become salient? Existing scholarship has suggested that insecurity and competition over political and economic resources as well as increased perceptions of threat from the out-group tends to increase the salience of ethnic identities. Most of the work on ethnicity, however, is either experimental and deals with how people respond once identity has already been primed, is based on self-reported measures of identity, or driven by election results. In contrast, here we examine events in Ukraine from late 2013 (the beginning of the Euromaidan protests) through the end of 2014 to see if particular moments of heightened political tension led to increased identification as either “Russian” or “Ukrainian” among Ukrainian citizens. In tackling this question, we use a novel methodological approach by testing the hypothesis that those who prefer to use Ukrainian to communicate on Twitter will use Ukrainian (at the expense of Russian) following moments of heightened political awareness and those who prefer to use Russian will do the opposite. Interestingly, our primary finding is a negative result: we do not find evidence that key political events in the Ukrainian crisis led to a reversion to the language of choice at the aggregate level, which is interesting given how much ink has been spilt on the question of

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