

Study: Celebrity endorsements do not help political candidates

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If you're running for office - and want to shore up support from young voters - you want Hollywood's support, right? Wrong. Two new studies from North Carolina State University show that young voters are not swayed by celebrity endorsements of political candidates - and sometimes voters like the candidate less as a result of receiving a celebrity's endorsement.

"Celebrities have been involved in politics for a long time, but there is an increasing interest in the role celebrities play in presidential politics," says Dr. Michael Cobb, associate professor of political science at NC State and co-author of a paper describing the studies. "We set out to determine if celebrity endorsements influence voting decisions, particularly among young people."

The researchers did two separate studies including more than 800 college students, evaluating whether endorsements from celebrities - including Angelina Jolie and George Clooney - would affect voting behavior if they endorsed a political candidate. The results? The studies found that celebrity endorsements do not help political candidates - but they can hurt them.

"In one of the studies, for example, we found that by exposing young people to a celebrity endorsement, they liked the candidate less and were less likely to vote for him," Cobb says.

In addition, the researchers found that a political endorsement can

backfire on the celebrities themselves. "Self-identified Democrats who were told in a study that George Clooney endorsed a Republican candidate reported that they liked him less and found him less attractive," Cobb says. The researchers found similar results among self-identified Republicans when they were told that Clooney had endorsed a Democrat.

"The positive effects of a celebrity endorsement are minimal for politicians," Cobb says. "Instead, it's much easier for perceptions of a celebrity to be adversely affected by giving his or her endorsement."

But while the impact of a celebrity endorsement is minimal, Cobb says that there are circumstances when such an endorsement may be helpful to a political candidate. For example, if a celebrity attends a political rally, it could boost attendance. "Are you more likely to attend a political event if the candidate is slated to appear by him or herself, or if the candidate is going to appear with Madonna?" Cobb asked.

Endorsements may also help candidates distinguish themselves from a crowded field during primaries, Cobb says, when party affiliation is not a factor, since all of the contenders are in the same party.

The research, "Seeing Stars: Are young [voters](#) influenced by celebrity endorsements of candidates?," was co-authored by Cobb and NC State undergraduate Kaye Usry. The paper was presented April 22 at the 68th Annual Conference of the Midwest [Political Science](#) Association in Chicago.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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