

Did Obama's election kill the antiwar movement?

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Since 2003, the antiwar movement in the United States has had much to protest with Americans fighting in Iraq, Afghanistan and now Libya, but the movement—which has dropped off sharply the past two years—may be more anti-Republican than antiwar, says a University of Michigan researcher.

A new study by U-M's Michael Heaney and colleague Fabio Rojas of Indiana University shows that the antiwar movement in the [United States](#) demobilized as Democrats, who had been motivated to participate by anti-Republican sentiments, withdrew from antiwar protests when the Democratic Party achieved electoral success, first with Congress in 2006 and then with the presidency in 2008.

"As president, Obama has maintained the occupation of Iraq and escalated the war in [Afghanistan](#)," said Heaney, U-M assistant professor of organizational studies and political science. "The antiwar movement should have been furious at Obama's 'betrayal' and reinvigorated its protest activity.

"Instead, attendance at antiwar rallies declined precipitously and financial resources available to the movement have dissipated. The election of Obama appeared to be a demobilizing force on the antiwar movement, even in the face of his pro-war decisions."

Heaney and Rojas analyzed the demobilization of the antiwar movement by using surveys of 5,400 demonstrators at 27 protests mostly in

Washington, D.C., New York, Chicago and San Francisco from January 2007 to December 2009. The surveys asked questions on basic demographics, partisan affiliations, organizational affiliations, reasons for attending the events, histories of political participation, and attitudes toward the movement, war and the political system.

In addition, the researchers observed smaller, more informal events at which antiwar activists gathered, including Capitol Hill lobby days, candlelight vigils, fundraisers, small protests, planning meetings, training sessions, parties, the National Assembly of United for Peace and Justice and the U.S. Social Forum. They also interviewed 40 antiwar leaders about their personal backgrounds, the inner workings of the antiwar movement, political leaders and the Democratic Party.

Their study found that the withdrawal of Democratic activists changed the character of the antiwar movement by undermining broad coalitions in the movement and encouraging the formation of smaller, more radical coalitions.

After Obama's election as president, Democratic participation in antiwar activities plunged, falling from 37 percent in January 2009 to a low of 19 percent in November 2009, Heaney and Rojas say. In contrast, members of third parties became proportionately more prevalent in the movement, rising from 16 percent in January 2009 to a high of 34 percent in November 2009.

"Since Democrats are more numerous in the population at large than are members of third parties, the withdrawal of Democrats from the movement in 2009 appears to be a significant explanation for the falling size of antiwar protests," Heaney said. "Thus, we have identified the kernel of the linkage between Democratic partisanship and the demobilization of the antiwar movement."

Using statistical analysis, the researchers found that holding anti-Republican attitudes had a significant, positive effect on the likelihood that Democrats attended antiwar rallies. The results also show that Democrats increasingly abandoned the movement over time, perhaps to channel their activism into other causes such as health care reform or simply to decrease their overall level of political involvement.

For members of third parties, holding radical political attitudes had a significant, positive effect on the likelihood that they would attend antiwar rallies. They also had a more negative view of Obama's handling of Iraq, compared to Democrats, nonparty members and even Republicans.

"The withdrawal of Democrats from the movement led to the collapse of its largest and broadest coalition, which resulted in the fragmentation of the movement into smaller coalitions and left it relying more on individual organizations acting independently," Heaney said. "The adjusted balance of power among activists in the movement promoted the expression of more radical and anti-Obama attitudes by leading organizations.

"Overall, our results convincingly demonstrate a strong relationship between partisanship and the dynamics of the antiwar movement. While Obama's election was heralded as a victory for the antiwar movement, Obama's election, in fact, thwarted the ability of the movement to achieve critical mass."

More information: Study: Partisan dynamics of contention (PDF)
[www-personal.umich.edu/~mheane ... cs_of_Contention.pdf](http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mheane...cs_of_Contention.pdf)

Provided by University of Michigan

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