

9/11 produced permanent shift to Republican party among new young US voters, research says

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Research led by the University of Warwick's Centre for Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy has found that not only did the events of 9/11 produce an immediate shift in favour of the Republican party among new young US voters but that shift persisted into later years. The research shows that party strategists should focus on winning over voters when they are young.

The researchers, Professor Sharun Mukand, from the University of Warwick, and Professor Ethan Kaplan, from Stockholm University and the University of Maryland, looked at whether the mere act of registering for a political party today can affect future politics by causing enduring support for that party. Their results clearly show that the decision to register with a political party today can have effects that last for years, perhaps even for a lifetime.

The researchers examined the political affiliations of a group of first-time voters in California who registered to vote when they became eligible, at age 18. Because of slight differences in their birthdates, these voters registered just before and just after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The attacks caused a nationwide political shift toward the right, as George W. Bush's emphasis on the war on terror and homeland security boosted his public approval ratings to the peak of his presidency.

The results of their analysis are striking. Two basically identical groups of people take up markedly different political agendas. They find that voters with birthdays in September were more likely to register as Republicans than voters with birthdays in August – by more than two percentage points. The political affiliation of these voters persisted through to the year 2008 - with those born in September consistently remaining two percent more likely to be Republican. This was true even for those voters who moved and, thus, had to change their registration."

This research may explain why politically partisan realignments happen very slowly. When President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights act in 1964, he said that his Democratic Party had “lost the South for a generation.” In fact, the loss took a generation to take place. Clear, persistent support for the [Republican Party](#) among Southern whites only emerged in 1994.

Professor Sharun Mukand from the University of Warwick said:

“Our research shows that party strategists should focus on winning over voters when they are young. However our findings have important implications for the political arena and for public policies. Policies may persist simply because support for a party endures. In particular, if voters are unwilling to shift political allegiance in response to new, politically relevant information, then policies out of tune with changing times may live on.”

The researchers note that 9/11 is not the only moment in the last decade of US politics which had a significant impact on young voters.

Professor Ethan Kaplan said: “Consider the implications of our findings when applied to the 2008 U.S. election. In this election, according to Pew Research Center, two third of voters ages 18-29 voted for Obama in 2008. This compares to 53 percent of the general population. Our

analysis suggests that this gap between the Obama “youth voters” and the general population is remarkably persistent over several election cycles. Indeed, our calculations suggest that the 2008 youth vote gap will be a phenomenon affecting US elections for decades to come.”

More information: The full paper can be found at: bit.ly/j71A27

Provided by University of Warwick

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