

Liberals, conservatives differ in response to bin Laden's death

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"The findings support the idea that liberals and conservatives react in different ways to major events," said William Chopik, Michigan State University assistant professor of psychology. Credit: Michigan State University

Conservative Americans remained unwaveringly suspicious of foreigners following Osama bin Laden's death, while liberals dropped their guard briefly before returning to more vigilant beliefs, finds a provocative new study led by a Michigan State University scholar.

The findings, online now in *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, suggest conservatives and liberals respond differently to major events and may have implications for promoting peace and reducing conflict with people who challenge one's core values.

"Liberals tend to be more malleable, so their beliefs can change, whereas conservatives are sort of always on guard," said William Chopik, MSU assistant professor of psychology and one of Forbes' "30 Under 30" for Science in 2016.

There are potential benefits and drawbacks to both viewpoints, Chopik noted.

"Liberals are impressionable in the sense that they readily use information to shape their views when maybe they shouldn't. But then again, maybe conservatives are too on edge - always expecting something to happen when it is very unlikely to happen. This has implications for things like how politicians appropriate money for defense and approach diplomacy, but also how ordinary people approach everyday situations with others they disagree with."

Chopik and Sara Konrath of Indiana University surveyed 480 people on their views toward [foreigners](#) for five weeks after bin Laden's death by U.S. military forces on May 2, 2011. Participants read two essays about the United States ostensibly written by foreigners - one pro-America and one anti-America - and then evaluated the truth of each essay, their agreement with each essay and also rated the authors' likeability, intelligence and knowledge.

Immediately following bin Laden's death, liberals evaluated foreigners much more favorably than conservatives, the study found. As the weeks passed, however, liberals became increasingly more biased toward foreigners. Conservatives' views did not change and remained more negative toward foreigners than liberals' views at all points during the study.

Interestingly, the researchers had conducted the five-week survey a year before bin Laden's death and found that liberals' viewpoint of foreigners did not fluctuate during that period (but liberals remained overall more favorable of foreigners than did conservatives).

Chopik said liberals and conservatives tend to draw on different moral foundations that stress different values. Liberals tend to prioritize tolerance and fairness, while conservatives tend to draw on a broader set of values that include those stressed by liberals, but also loyalty and authority.

"It is possible that people's responses to bin Laden's death depended on their political orientation, Chopik said. "The findings support the idea that [liberals](#) and conservatives react in different ways to major events."

Provided by Michigan State University

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