

College roommates found to have influence on first year students' political ideology

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A team of researchers affiliated with several institutions of higher learning in the U.S. has found that the political ideology of a college roommate may exert more influence on first-year students than their instructors. In their paper published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the group describes their analysis of surveys they

conducted back in 2009 and 2010 and what they learned from them.

In recent years, several well-known Republican leaders in the U.S. have expressed concerns about ideological impact on [college students](#). Many have suggested that because major universities are considered to be liberally oriented, college students might be swayed to become more liberal during their time spent at school. In this new effort, the researchers tested this idea by polling students at two very well-known known Universities—the public University of Michigan and private Cornell University. Students completed two online surveys—one in August of 2009, and the second in April of 2010. The purpose of the surveys was to find out if the students had a change in ideology during their freshman year of college. In all 1,632 students completed both of the surveys.

The researchers found very little ideological change in most students over the course of their first year of college. The number of students who described themselves as liberal declined from 47 to 44 percent, while those who described themselves as conservative increased from 18 to 19 percent. In the survey, the researchers also asked the students about the ideology of their roommates. They found that for those students who did change their ideology, the majority swung toward the ideology of their roommate—and that it was most pronounced for students shifting to a more conservative outlook. The researchers were unable to find any changes in ideology attributable to [student](#)'s professors or the college political climate. The researchers suggest their findings indicate that the most influential people on first year [college](#) students are the people they spend the most time with—their roommates. And if they do wind up shifting their ideological outlook, they are more likely to become more conservative.

More information: College roommates have a modest but significant influence on each other's political ideology, *Proceedings of the National*

Academy of Sciences (2020).

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