

How political nostalgia predicts political outcomes

July 27 2021, by Laurie Fickman



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Nostalgia, defined as a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, has become a growing focus of research in personality and social psychology. Though it may seem counterintuitive, nostalgia has been

proven to be a great motivator of future behavior. Take for example, fans of former President Barack Obama. When the 2016 election of President Donald Trump left over half of the United States' electorate reeling, it contributed to nostalgia for the days of President Obama (and his administration), even among some conservatives.

"Obama nostalgia emerged as an independent predictor of political attitudes, political engagement intentions, voting intentions, and political engagement," reports Adam Fetterman, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Houston. Fetterman conducted an aptly named set of studies: "Bring back my Barry to me: Nostalgia for Barack Obama and political outcomes," and is reporting his findings in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*.

"Our findings extend the literature on individual differences in nostalgia proneness and reinforce the motivational potency of nostalgia in the political domain," said Fetterman.

To provide support for his hypothesis that individual differences in nostalgia for Barack Obama would predict outcomes in the political arena, Fetterman conducted studies among 904 undergrad students and U.S. adults, measuring their nostalgia for President Obama, attitudes toward the Trump presidency, political engagement intentions, political ideology and party identification.

"Obama nostalgia predicted negative attitudes toward the Trump presidency, stronger political engagement intentions and voting intentions, and actual political engagement, above and beyond competing predictors including [political ideology](#), prior support for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election and voting behavior in 2016," reports Fetterman.

Nostalgia for a particular politician or administration may also play a key

role in political campaigns. Fetterman's studies suggest that political ads or speeches that invoked Obama in a nostalgic manner may have been effective for swing voters in 2020.

"Undoubtedly, there are other predictors of political engagement but as hypothesized, Obama nostalgia predicted negative attitudes toward the Trump presidency, stronger [political engagement](#) intentions, and stronger voting intentions," said Fetterman.

Fetterman was joined in his research by Tim Wildschut and Constantine Sedikides, both from the University of Southampton, United Kingdom.

More information: Matthew Baldwin et al, Remembering the real me: Nostalgia offers a window to the intrinsic self., *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (2014). [DOI: 10.1037/a0038033](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038033)

Provided by University of Houston

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