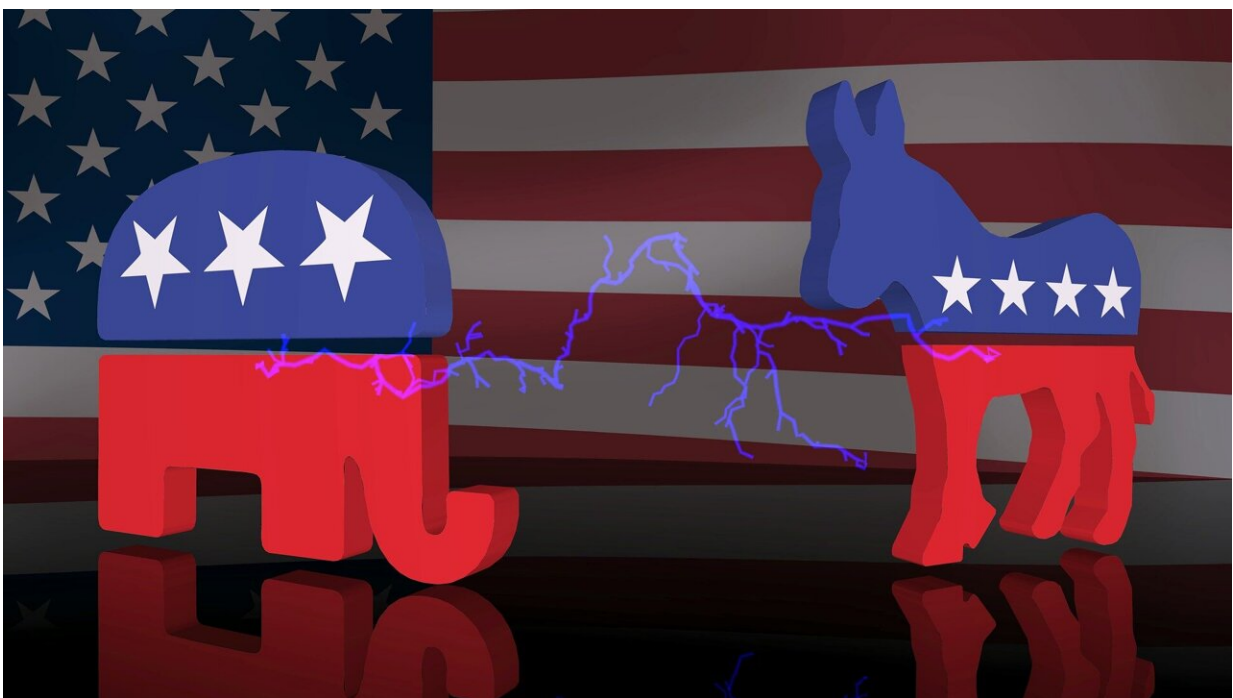


Study finds that for Republican men, environmental support hinges on partisan identity

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Who proposes a bill matters more to Republican men than what it says—at least when it comes to the environment, a recent study found.

In an experiment with 800 adults, researchers used an article describing a

hypothetical U.S. Senate bill about funding state programs to reduce [water pollution](#) to test partisan preferences, changing only the political affiliation of the proposal's sponsors.

Democrats in the study who favored the proposal supported the [legislation](#) no matter who proposed it and at higher levels than the Republican participants. Republicans' support varied, however, dropping about 18% when it was described as being proposed by Senate Democrats as opposed to a group of Republican or bi-partisan senators.

When the researchers looked more closely at that change, they found the drop was primarily driven by gender: with support from Republican men decreasing an average of 24%. The findings were reported in [The Sociological Quarterly](#).

"While we know that Republicans have a lower level of support for environmental legislation than Democrats, when we take the exact same piece of legislation, if it's Democrats sponsoring it, Republican support drops tremendously," said lead author Azdren Coma, a Washington State University sociology doctoral candidate.

"If you break it down by gender, it's Republican men who are the ones that are really responding to external political cues."

The study adds to a range of research showing people's decisions are often guided by their political and group identities, Coma said.

"We want to follow our group—or more importantly, oppose the other group. That may be the essence really of polarization in America," he said.

Other studies have also shown that women have more support for environmental issues and there is a certain level of "party sorting" with

more women choosing to be Democratic than Republican.

Working with co-authors Erik Johnson of WSU and Philip Schwadel of University of Nebraska, Coma sought to clarify the partisan and gender differences around environmental support. Protecting the environment is usually coded as a Democratic issue, the authors noted, and some issues, like climate change, are highly polarized.

For this experiment, the researchers purposely chose an issue related to states' ability to control their water bodies, which has been shown to have Republican support. The hypothetical bill in this study proposed giving [federal funding](#) to states to improve water quality. It also used an unnamed group of senators rather than a U.S. president or specific legislators to help reduce the influence of specific political figures.

The study showed that partisan identity was very important for Republican men's support but not as much for women. Republican women's support for the bill was lower than Democratic women's, but it didn't vary much depending on the party affiliation of the bill's supporters. In other words, they supported the bill about the same amount even if Democratic Senators were proposing it.

The findings need to be replicated with larger groups and with different issues, but the study adds evidence that party likely trumps substance, at least for Republican men on this issue.

For those who want to pass more legislation that protects the environment, the study suggests that having bipartisan support may be more important than the actual contents of the legislation itself, Coma said.

For voters, the findings should raise awareness of the undue influence of partisanship—as other studies have shown that Americans actually agree

on many core issues.

"Especially for an issue that you think your party does not support, you might take a step back to take an extra minute to think as objectively as possible, whether or not that legislation is going to be something that would benefit you or not," Coma said.

More information: Azdren Coma et al, Elite Cueing, Gender, and the Partisan Gap in Environmental Support, *The Sociological Quarterly* (2024). [DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2024.2347917](https://doi.org/10.1080/00380253.2024.2347917)

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