

“Determinants of Political Ideology Among Young People”

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Introduction

How people form their individual political opinions is one the most intriguing topics in political research. While political campaigners, analysts, and candidates try to gain our support using various tactics, most citizens develop political views on their own. While some may persuaded on different specific political issues, his or her general view, whether liberal, moderate, or conservative, has already been determined. While it is nearly impossible to pinpoint what leads a person to his or her political ideology, researching the key determinants of one's ideology is critical to understanding how and why people make the voting choices they do, and therefore who they put in office to run this nation.

Of all demographics that make up a person's profile, and help political analysts predict how he or she will vote, one of the most influential aspects of a person's profile is where they grew up and their parent's political inclinations. We are most affected our environments growing up, including where we are from, and how much our parents feel about politics. While we may be heavily influenced by our home environments and our parents, many citizens grow and develop different beliefs as they experience new things, one of the most influential being college. Whether people generally become more liberal or more conservative over the course of college is hard to determine, but the question of which environment affects young people in college more in interesting and potentially

attainable. As the media typecasts the states into “red” and “blue” states, I think it would be interesting to research how those collective state political opinions affect the people who comprise them. Which is a better determinant of how a person will vote, the state in which they grew up, or the state in which they attend college?

I hypothesize that if a young person is from a state of a particular ideology, his or her political ideology, and voting history will be the same as that ideology of their home state. I also hypothesize that the state in which the student goes to college will have no relation with the individual political ideology. I plan to investigate this hypothesis using the results from the questionnaire. I will use several questions in the questionnaire in order to more accurately assess the relationship between the variables of the political ideology of the state and the person’s political ideology.

Central Research Question

The conceptual underpinnings of my analysis are that I think one’s political environment contributes to the growth of their political ideology. Within this broader idea, my research will investigate the extent to which the political ideology of a person’s permanent residence works to determine their political ideology, compared to the state in which he or she attended college. While views may develop and grow during the intellectually rich years of college, those four years will not have as large an impact on the political ideology of the person as the political environment of the permanent residence has over the first eighteen years of their lives.

Thousands of dollars are spent on political campaigns every year, and all the candidates are trying to work their way into the hearts of voters. Over the years, the methods of campaigning have become more and more similar to those of marketing.

While a candidate may have a certain political ideology, they mold their platforms and speeches to the context of the voters they are addressing, and always keep in mind that they are trying to win an election. While so much time and effort is spent on attracting voters to one candidate or another, for the most part, voters have a political proclivity before they begin to consider the competing candidates, whether in a primary or a general election. Many demographics combine to make up a person's political profile, and one of the most significant is the environment in which a young person grows up helps to determine how they consider political candidates. From this concept, I developed a central research question, which is does the political ideology of the respondent's home residence affect their political ideology, and does the state in which the participant attends college affect their political ideology?

I decided to research this question for a number of reasons. I am currently taking a class called the "Meaning of America," in which we read and discussed Alexis de Tocqueville's understanding of American life and politics in his book Democracy in America. One of the points made by Tocqueville was that democracy has the opportunity to engender homogenous thought in America. As a French aristocrat, he observed that Americans are more practical than intellectual, and that Americans base all of their opinions on the ideas of others. While this may be a harsh critique of Americans, it may also be quite accurate. The idea that we form our opinions based on the opinions of those around us led me to think about how young people form their political ideologies. In an article discussing campaigning tactics, I read about how some campaigners maintain that young people's ideologies are the product of their parent's thoughts and those of their surrounding environment, particularly of institutions present in their lives,

mainly schools. I wondered how the campaigners distinguished between the environment and schooling of the young person's first eighteen years in their permanent residence, versus the four more intellectually stimulating and often more politically active years he or she spends in college, in possibly a different state.

This research question is definitely worth exploring because how people develop their political ideologies is critical for understanding how and why the nation votes as it does. The past election led to an incredibly partisan Congress, and an extremely controversial Presidential administration. It is significant to explore how young people in particular form their opinions given the most recent government administration and their political surroundings. While it would be interesting to investigate this research question including all voting-age Americans, it is most important to explore the question as it relate to young people. The comparison between the person's college state and home state provides a background with which to test if the home state does have any effect, and if the college campus locations are able to breed liberal or conservative minds. The population of young voters (age 18-24) is also one of the most aggressively campaigned groups in America. In 2004, 47% of this age group voted, which was 11% more than did in 2000 (YoungVoter Strategies.org). Many marketing and campaign groups work to encourage young people to be politically active and political candidates speak across college campuses, all to emphasize that the young people are the leaders of tomorrow, and a very important group to conquer. As young people become a larger focus of campaigns it is significant to research this possible factor, which may contribute to their ideology's formation.

Hypotheses

My first hypothesis is that if the respondent's political ideology will be the same as the political ideology of the person's permanent resident state. For example, if a person's permanent state has been identified as a Republican state, then his or her political ideology will be conservative or Republican. Along the same line of reasoning, if the person's permanent state has been identified as a Democratic state, I hypothesize that his or her ideology will be liberal or Democratic. In this case, the independent variable is the political ideology (Democratic or Republican) of the permanent resident state. The dependent variable is the political ideology of the person who is from that state. The second hypothesis I propose is that there will be no correlation or relationship between the political ideology of the state in which the student attends/attended college and the student's political ideology. Therefore if the person attends college in a state identified as being Republican, this variable will not make them more likely to be Republican. While the four years students spend in college may be more intellectually stimulating and politically activating, I believe that the political ideology of the person's permanent residence is more likely to determine his or her political ideology. While most people derive their ideas and political opinions from their parents, they may also identify largely with the people they are surrounded by. People in the same areas and states may have similar social classes, income, ethnicity, and therefore similar political concerns and opinions. While people may develop and grow in college, I think that the political ideology of the location of the college does not determine the political ideology of the college campus. In the same way, people may develop a new sense of self while in college, but are still rooted to their pre-college ideas and backgrounds. Therefore, I do

not think that their political ideologies will be determined by the politics of the location of their college or university.

Questions from Survey

I used several questions from the survey to help to answer my research question. In order to address the independent variable of the political ideology of states, I first identified each state as Republican or Democratic based on the results of the 2004 Presidential election. The independent variable in the first hypothesis is the political ideology of the permanent residence of the respondent. To address this variable, I used the question that asks, “In what state is your permanent residence?” (Stateper). I coded each state with a political ideology and by selecting the state that he or she permanently resides in, the respondent provides the information for the independent variable. In the second hypothesis, which addresses the state in which the person attends college, I used the question that asks, “In what state do you attend college?” (Statsc). Only the respondents who answered, “Yes” to the previous question, which is “Are you currently enrolled full-time in a four year college or university”, answered the question about the location of their college (wsb216). These two questions regarded permanent residence and location of college or university provide the information for the independent variables for the respective hypotheses.

The dependent variable is the same for both hypotheses and therefore will be tested using the same questions from the survey. The dependent variable for both independent variables is the respondent’s political ideology. I used the question “Do you consider yourself: <3> Democrat <2> Republican <1> Independent <0> I don’t know”

(pid). In all of the questions in the survey, this question most directly pinpoints the political ideology of the respondent. These questions work to directly address the variables in my hypotheses and therefore provide the information necessary for investigating the conceptual underpinnings of my research question.

The Survey

Polimetrix completed the survey. Polimetrix programmed a web survey by hosting and inviting Polimetrix panelists to achieve 1000 interviews. They included a lottery for \$100 as an incentive. The survey was given to a nationally representative sample of people age 18 to 24. The group of 1000 respondents was from the American Community Study conducted by the Bureau of Census. The interviews were divided into two groups. 500 people in the sample were full-time college students in a 4-year college or university. The other half of the sample was made up of non-college students who are not full-time military, although part-time military people were included. The length of the questionnaire was 20 minutes, and the survey was delivered through the Internet.

Polimetrix conducted a total of 1,629 interviews with their panelists and selected 1,000 closest matching cases to the target sample. Polimetrix's *Response Rate Report* describes the process and results of the survey: "Post-stratification weights for the final sample were constructed by ranking the sample marginals to the population marginals for age, race, education, and gender in two ways. One set of weights represents the characteristics of the college and non-college respondents separately. The second set of weights represents the 18-24 populations as a whole on these four variables. There were two groups of respondents for [the] study. 993 respondents were invited directly to [the] study from the set of active panelists. Of these, 95.2% qualified for the study. The

within-panel response rate for those invited was 31.2% (AAPOR's RR3 formula with an estimated eligibility of 95.2%). The remaining 636 interviews were conducted with screen outs from other studies that were fielded at the same time. Of the eligible respondents who were redirected to [the] study, 66.7% completed" (YouGovPolimetrix). The response rates for this survey were typical for questionnaires and accurately targeted the sample population.

This underlying population of ages 18 to 24 is appropriate because I am attempting to gauge the opinion of young Americans and how they form their political ideologies. The population's restrictions on college and/or military involvement are useful and should reflect the spectrum of people with different political party ideologies. Full-time college students and full-time military respondents would skew the results to show the typical demographics of these two groups and therefore affect the results for my dependent variable. A more varied sample group will provide for a more accurate depiction of the public's opinion. The independent variables in of my hypotheses are the states in which the respondent permanently resides and the location of his or her college or university. In order for my hypotheses to be genuinely investigated it is necessary that the sample population vary widely in location. It is also critical that half of the sample population attends a 4-year college. The independent variable of my second hypothesis requires that the respondent be a college student because they must identify the state where his or her college is located. Because of this requirement I only used half of the sample population for all of my analysis in order to provide an accurate comparison.

The optimal way to take a sample from the underlying population would be an Internet questionnaire. The population includes 18-24 year olds, who are most likely to

have computers and the ability to easily navigate the survey online (Nardi 2006). Interviewing these respondents face-to-face would not be necessary because of the straightforward nature of the questions; in addition, interviewing this sample group would be more difficult and costly than an Internet survey. Completing the survey using telephone calls would be inefficient and ineffective because the average refusal rate is over 60% (Class notes 9-13-07). The response rate for this survey on the Internet was 66.7%. An internet questionnaire would also minimize costs for reaching participants, standardize questions to provide for consistency in testing and therefore more accurate results, be excellent for measuring opinions and attitudes, can guarantee anonymity, are better for sensitive subjects, and are easier for the interpretation of results when using closed-ended questions (Nardi 2006). However, there are disadvantages as well: there is a higher potential for respondents to provide incorrect or misleading information when not dealing with a person face-to-face, the return rate could be low for a computer-based survey, close-ended questions can be limiting, and most importantly it can be difficult to infer causation from a questionnaire (Nardi 2006). While it is important to note that there are also disadvantages to questionnaires, this form of sampling is the best for this underlying population and for the questions being addressed.

Results

Pid 3 point party ID* State partyperm State party of permanent residence Crosstabulation College Students only

			Statepartyperm State party of permanent residence		Total
			1.00 Republican	2.00 Democrat	
Pid 3 point Party ID	1 Independent	Count % within Statepartyperm State party of permanent residence	192 34.3%	111 33.7%	303 34.1%
	2 Republican	Count % within Statepartyperm State party of permanent residence	152 27.1%	82 24.9%	234 26.3%
	3 Democrat	Count % within Statepartyperm State party of permanent residence	216 38.6%	136 41.3%	352 39.6%
Total		Count % within Statepartyperm State party of permanent residence	560 100.0%	329 100.0%	889 100.0%

Pid 3 point party ID* Stateparty Dominant party of state at college Crosstabulation

			Stateparty Dominant party of state at college		Total
			1.00 Republican State	2.00 Democrat state	
Pid 3 point party ID	1 Independent	Count % within Stateparty Dominant party of state at college	106 35.9%	197 33.2%	303 34.1%
	2 Republican	Count % within Stateparty Dominant party of state at college	82 27.8%	151 25.5%	233 26.2%
	3 Democrat	Count % within Stateparty Dominant party of state at college	107 36.3%	245 41.3%	352 39.6%
Total		Count % within Stateparty Dominant party of state at college	295 100.0%	593 100.0%	888 100.0%

Pid 3 point party ID Stateparty Dominant party of state at college* state partyperm state party of permanent residence crosstabulation

Statepartyperm State party of permanent residence				Stateparty Dominant party of state at college		Total
				1.00 Republican State	2.00 Democrat State	
1.00 Republican	Pid 3 point party Id	1 Independent	Count	92	99	191
			%	34.2%	34.3%	34.2%
		2 Republican	Count	77	75	152
			%	28.6%	26.0%	27.2%
		3 Democrat	Count	100	115	215
			%	37.2%	39.8%	38.5%
	Total		Count	269	289	558
			%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
2.00 Democrat	Pid 3 point Party ID	1 Independent	Count	13	97	110
			%	54.2%	32.0	33.6%
		2 Republican	Count	5	76	81
			%	20.8%	25.1%	24.8%
		3 Democrat	Count	6	130	136
			%	25.0%	42.9%	41.6%
	Total		Count	24	303	327
			%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Discussion

The results of the study show that my first hypothesis was incorrect. I hypothesized that the party of the permanent residence state would determine the political ideology of the person from that state. The results show no such correlation. According to the first table, out of the people who were from a Republican state, only 27.1% identified themselves as Republican and 38.6% said they were Democrats. 34.3% of

people from Republican states identified themselves as Independent. These results demonstrate that the hypothesis is incorrect and that being from a Republican state does not increase the likelihood that the person will be Republican or conservative. If anything, being from a Republican state may be negatively correlated with developing a Republican ideology.

On the other hand, if a person is from a Democratic state, 41.3% developed Democratic ideologies. While this statistic is not significant to demonstrate causation between the two variables, it is significantly higher than the relationship in regards to Republicans, which was only 27.1%. It is also critical to note that 38.6% of people from Republican states identified themselves as Democrats and only 24.9% of people from Democratic states identified themselves as Republican. While the data does not show a definite correlation, the patterns suggest that overall young people are more Democratic than Republican. The likelihood of being from a Republican state pushes young people more toward becoming Independent or Democratic than Republican. These results may simply be demonstrating that young people are becoming more dissonant from their roots in general.

The crosstabulation between the party identification and the dominant party of state at college shows similar results, which proves this aspect of my hypothesis to be correct. I hypothesized that the college state's dominant political party would not affect the political ideology of the person, and the results prove that there is no correlation. This part of my hypothesis was meant to contrast the positive correlation with the permanent residence and political ideology. For that purpose, the hypotheses in its entirety are wrong. The results from the second table above show parallel results to the

first table. 27.8% of students whose college is in a republican state are republican, 35.9% are independent, and 36.3% are democrat. Similarly, 41.3% of people who attend college in Democratic states are Democrats, 25.5% are Republican, and 33.2% are Independent. These findings are consistent with the finding from the first hypothesis that there is no evident causation or correlation between the political party of the college's state and the ideology of the student. The results are also similar in that they all show a tendency to be more Democratic or Independent than Republican.

The third table provides a crosstabulation between both independent variables and the dependent variable. The results show that if a person is from a Republican state, and attends college in a Republican state, the likelihood of that person being conservative is 28.6%, which demonstrates that the hypothesis is incorrect that the environment helps to determine one's political ideology and also proves to show how not many young people are republican. If a person is from a Democratic state and attends a college in Democratic state, the likelihood of that person being a Democrat is 42.9%, which is 14.3% higher than that same cross-tabulation but for Republicans. While the percentage 43.9% does not show enough support for the hypothesis to be true, it does show the pattern that more young people are Democratic. Another statistic, which demonstrates this pattern in the results, is that only 26% of people from a Republican state who attend a college in a Democratic state are Republican, while 39.8% of those people are Democrats. Another significant finding is that if a person is from a democratic state and attends a college in a republican state, the likelihood of becoming an independent is 54.2%. Moreover, young people today are becoming more Independent or Democratic

than Republican, and the influence of the political party of their home state or state of their college is negligible.

It is possible that parental influences are not as strong as I thought in the formation of political ideology, or that the parents of this generation of respondents are not politically knowledgeable or active at all and therefore this generation is forced to identify with an ideology on their own. It is also possible that George Bush's current Republican administration's actions in Iraq has led to more people Democratic or becoming indifferent to politics.

The lack of support for my hypothesis found in the paper could also be attributed to the way in which the states were categorized as Republican or Democratic. The states were identified as being Republican or Democratic based on the Electoral College results from the 2004 election, and this procedure may have been flawed. Instead it may have been more helpful to address this research question by investigating the parent's specific influences on their children's political ideology, which would have utilized different questions in the survey. Overall, the questions used worked to address my research question. Neither the environment in which a person grows up nor the environment in which they attend college determines a young person's political ideology.

Critique of Survey

The problems that may have occurred in answering my research question cannot be attributed to faults in the survey. The survey accurately targeted my sample population, as college students were the focus of the study and of my research question. The question used to provide information for the dependent variable of political ideology worked well. This question directly asked for a political party identification. The

questions, which addressed the independent variables worked well to assign each respondent to a permanent resident and to a college location, but the way that I decided to categorize the states into political parties may have been flawed. If I were to redo this study, I would categorize the states into Republican and Democratic states using a poll from 2000, and from 2007. These polls would demonstrate the political heartbeat of the permanent resident states as this generation was growing up, and at the time the respondents were taking the survey, which would provide an interesting comparison.