Partisanship and Foreign Policy

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Introduction to Research

This study explores how partisanship affects attitudes towards foreign policy. In particular how it impacts views on defense spending, whether the war on terror was worth the cost, and the approval of the President handling the war in Afghanistan. Throughout much of the Cold War period there has been strong bipartisanship amongst the two political parties. Due to the looming threat of a potential all out war with the Soviet Union the cooperation between the two parties was necessary to insure the security of the nation. Congress seemed to take a step back and allowed the executive branch to assume a leading role on matters of foreign. Following the end of the Cold War, Congress began to regain its clout over foreign policy affairs. With this came an increasing divergence within Congress specifically towards foreign policy.

• More recently in a post 9/11 context partisanship discrepancy between Republicans and Democrats has increased even more.

• Republicans perceive foreign policy in terms of military threats especially from terrorist networks and state regimes that sponsor them.

• While Democrats focus on economic and humanitarian issues.

• Attitudes towards defense spending have fluctuated throughout the course of the Cold War.

• In the beginning Democrats favored increasing military defense spending while Republicans were opposed to it.

• In the mid 1960’s the party attitudes had switched and Republicans became more supportive of increasing the funds for defense spending while the Democrats became more opposed.

Theory

In the post 9/11 climate Republicans have taken a more interventionist approach on matters of foreign policy while Democrats are represented to be more dovish and isolationist. Because of this Republicans would lean towards increasing defense spending more than Democrats.

Result

Quantitative data revealed no significant difference between Republican and Democrat attitudes towards increasing defense spending. Data showed that Democrats much more supportive of decreasing defense spending or keeping it as it is.