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The rally-'round-the-flag phenomenon after the death of Osama bin Laden may not have been limited to President Obama's popularity. Our recent study suggests the killing of Osama bin Laden also unleashed a rally effect between citizens. Specifically, bin Laden's death appears to have raised the interpersonal trust typically lacking between self-identified Democrats and Republicans.

A week prior to the killing of bin Laden, we ran a series of "trust game" experiments to test whether partisanship conditioned trust with subjects at the University of Mississippi. In line with our forthcoming paper,¹ we expected co-partisan trust (Democrat-Democrat, Republican-Republican) would be higher than rival partisan trust (Democrat-Republican, Republican-Democrat).

Roughly half way through recruiting for the study news broke that bin Laden had been killed by US Navy SEALs in Pakistan. This intervention in the national political environment provided a unique opportunity to examine if what has been commonly observed for political leaders, the rally-'round-the-flag effect, shaped people's willingness to trust rival partisans. The results indicate a large and significant decline in trust discrimination between co- and rival partisans, which we interpret as a rally-'round-the-flag effect among citizens and across party lines.

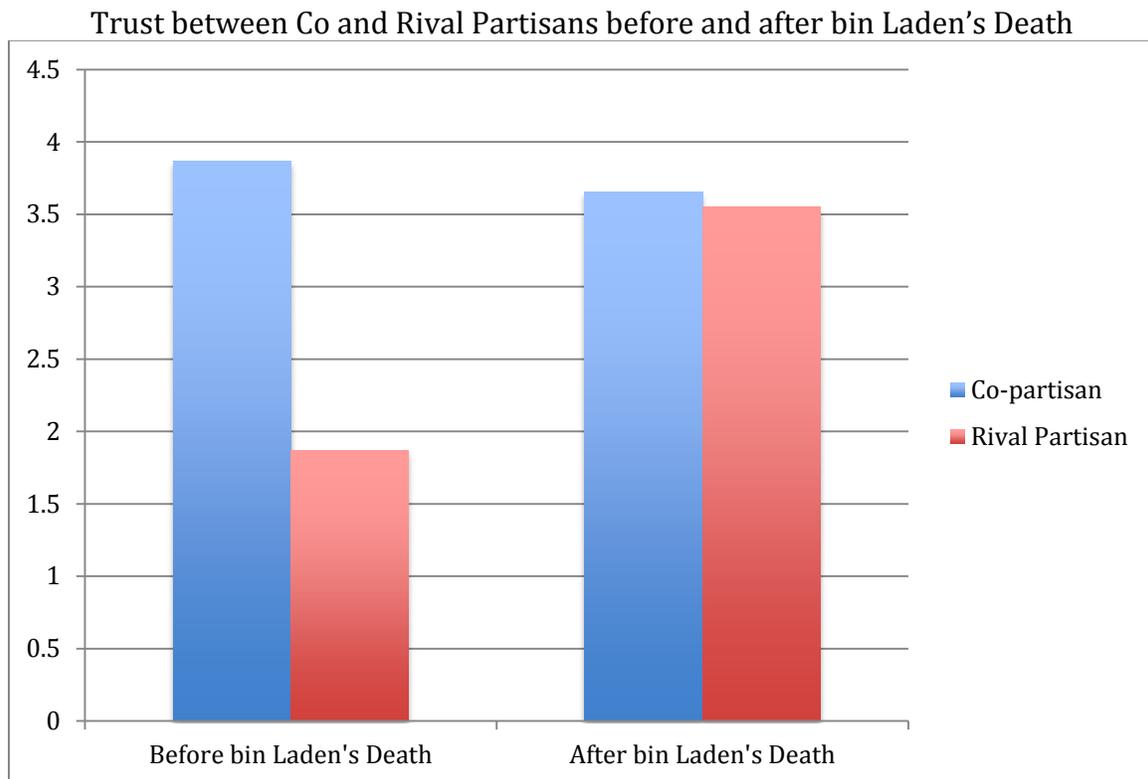
Our online trust game was played by randomly assigned anonymous players who did not meet before playing. Player 1s were told that we would conduct 6 lotteries of \$100. They were then told that we had allotted them 10 lottery tickets, and that they have the option to share some, none, or all of it with Player 2, who was also given 10 tickets at the outset. Then Player 1s were told that any sum shared will be tripled before giving it to Player 2, and that Player 2 will be given the same options—to return some, none, or all of it to Player 1.

Trust is measured as the amount Player 1 sends to Player 2. Since Player 2 has no incentive to return any of the money, Player 1 should pocket the 10 tickets and to pass none of them to Player 2. However, on average, both players give significantly above the equilibrium amounts, a finding that holds in an array of diverse contexts. In other words,

¹ "The Politics of Interpersonal Trust and Reciprocity: An Experimental Approach," *Political Behavior*.

trusting behavior on the part of Player 1 is not completely misplaced in Player 2 because Player 2 often reciprocates, thereby honoring the trust placed in them by behaving in a trustworthy manner.

After controlling for differences between subjects who before and after bin Laden's death², we found that rival-partisan trust discrimination dropped precipitously after his death. The figure below shows before bin Laden was killed, the average trust gap between co-partisans and rival partisans in the matched data set was 2.00 tickets, a statistically significant difference ($p < .0001$). Afterwards, the partisan trust gap dropped by 95% to a difference of 0.102 ($p = 0.807$).



This experimental evidence is in line with observational evidence³ that social capital in America increased in wake of 9/11, but somewhat more limited since overall trust in people whose partisanship was unknown and trust in co-partisans did not register significant changes.

² We matched subjects using 3-1 propensity score matching based on gender, age, family income, religious service attendance, political efficacy, generalized trust, cognitive ability, political information levels, partisanship, and strength of partisanship.

³ Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Together," *American Prospect* 11 February 2002. Thomas H. Sander and Robert D. Putnam, "Still Bowling Alone? The Post 9/11 Split," *Journal of Democracy* 21(1):9-16.