

Republicans Are Becoming Less Educated

Nerds to the left.

There are several key attributes that define the *Republican Party* in its modern incarnation: its overwhelming whiteness; its self-reported religiosity; its slavish devotion to a man who boasts he **could shoot supporters and not lose** a single vote, thus proving his point. Moving forward, that list should probably also include as a distinguishing factor the fact that the party is less educated than its Democrat political rivals, and growing increasingly more so.

That's according to a study released earlier this month by the *Pew Research Center*. The polling organization now finds **"the widest educational gap in partisan identification** and leaning seen at any point in more than two decades" between Republicans and Democrats. In 1994, the majority of U.S. residents with four-year college degrees leaned or identified as Republican, at 54 percent; just 39 percent of college graduates leaned or identified as Democrats. As of 2017, those numbers have switched exactly, with the majority of college degree holders now leaning *Dem-ward*.

Voters with post-graduate degrees are even more likely to cast their votes for Democratic politicians, *Pew* finds. Sixty-three percent of postgraduates identify as *Dems* or *Dem-leaning*, while just 31 percent describe themselves as Republican or *GOP leaning*. That's a huge difference from back in the mid-1990s, when postgraduates were almost equally likely to opt for either party, with 45 percent supporting Republicans and 47 percent backing Democrats.

While *Dem* ranks have filled with more educated voters, Republicans saw increased support by those whose highest education attainment level is a high school diploma or less.

"Among those with no more than a high school education, 47 percent affiliate with the GOP or lean Republican, while 45 percent identify as Democrats or lean Democratic," Pew researchers write in their report.

That's a shift from the late 1990s and early aughts, when a plurality of those without college degrees voted Democratic, 47 to 42 percent.

As always in America, race can't be removed from these numbers. Since 2009—the first year of Obama's presidency—*Pew* researchers have found that

"white voters with no more than a high school education have moved more to the GOP."

In the near-decade that has elapsed since then, among voters without a degree,

"Republicans have held significant advantages, including a 23-percentage-point lead in 2017 (58 percent Republican, 35 percent Democratic)."

Whites with college degrees mostly leaned or identified as Democrats at 49 percent, just slightly outpacing the 46 percent who lean or identify as Republican. Among whites with postgraduate degrees, "59 percent align with Democrats and 37 percent Republicans."

Pew notes that

"white voters continue to be somewhat more likely to affiliate with or lean toward the Republican Party than the Democratic Party (51 percent to 43 percent)."

An obvious contributor to the declining education level within the GOP is the party's hostility toward higher education, which has grown more ardent in recent years, but dates back decades. In 1952, then-vice presidential candidate Richard Nixon labeled Democratic presidential contender Adlai Stevenson an "egghead", a reference to both his intellect and emerging pate. People often point to William F. Buckley as epitomizing a more enlightened and pro-intellectual conservative movement, but that just gives posh transatlantic accents too much credit while ignoring what's actually being stated. In fact, the *National Review* founder in 1963 declared he

"should sooner live in a society governed by the first two thousand names in the Boston telephone directory than in a society governed by the two thousand faculty members of Harvard University."

(He also argued American blacks weren't quite civilized enough to have civil rights, because he was awful on multiple fronts.) In his campaign for California governor, Ronald Reagan suggested that "universities should not subsidize intellectual curiosity", an argument that collapses in on itself under the weight of its vacuousness. And George W. Bush won infinite points with the anti-intellectualism crowd when he announced he wasn't much for

"sitting down and reading a 500-page book on public policy or philosophy or something."

The cumulative effect of so much literal big, dumb posturing is a pervasive culture of animosity toward not just education, but sites of learning themselves. Institutions of higher learning are among the primary targets of Republican ire in the "culture wars," with conservatives imagining universities as liberal indoctrination factories staffed by Marxists who transform impressionable white youth into Communist feminazi agents of their own racial extinction.

Last year, Pew researchers discovered that

"a majority of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents (58 percent) now say that colleges and universities have a negative effect on the country, up from 45 percent last year."

The same poll found 72 percent of those who identify or lean Democrat believe colleges are a positive impact on society. Similarly, a 2017 Gallup survey found that just one-third of Republicans and GOP leaning voters have "a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in colleges." Conversely, a majority, 56 percent, of Democrats gave higher education a thumbs up. Republicans and Democrats who expressed no-confidence votes in colleges did so for vastly different reasons: GOPers complained campuses are "too liberal and political," while Dems said

“colleges are too expensive, are not well-run or have deteriorating quality, or that college graduates aren't able to find jobs.”

The GOP opposition to the learnedness is also manifest in overtly anti-education policy and various other consequences. The most plainly obvious might be how Donald Trump's know-nothingness, along with a healthy dose of racism, ultimately granted him access to the nuclear codes.

“I love the poorly educated!” Trump condescended to supporters during his campaign.

In Wisconsin, Scott Walker is currently fighting to eliminate 13 liberal arts courses of study from the University of Wisconsin because why know stuff you can't immediately put a price on?

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos—those four preceding words only make sense because of the GOP war on education—is scrapping Obama-era rules benefitting college faculty and students. Teachers in a handful of Red States have been forced to walk out on classes in an effort get decent pay and per-student spending. From the White House's proposal to hack up budgets for science agencies to its attacks against journalists reporting facts and statistics, GOP anti-intellectualism is a driver of a not-small portion of its goals.

College isn't for everyone, obviously—just ask dropout Bill Gates, whom conservatives also hate. But the devaluation of education and knowledge, and the idea book learnin' is anathema to societal well-being, is obviously absurd and destructive. As a rule, in every Congress including this majority-Republican body, nearly every member has a four-year degree, and the number of House and Senate legislators who possess postgraduate educations is far higher than in the general population.

If nothing else that proves the elite GOP lawmakers actually do value education, at least when they're thinking about themselves and their children. It's only their voters they want to keep disinterested in learning, convinced that knowing less is somehow better.

□ Kali Holloway is a senior writer and the associate editor of media and culture at AlterNet.