New study shows Clinton lost election because of growing working class opposition to war

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Since Hillary Clinton's defeat in the 2016 elections, the corporate press, the Democratic Party, and a host of self-proclaimed left-wing groups that operate in the Democrats' orbit have attempted to prove that Trump's election was the product of bigotry and backwardness in the white working class.

This false narrative is further exploded by a new report titled "Battlefield Casualties and Ballot Box Defeat: Did the Bush-Obama Wars cost Clinton the White House?"

Published in June by Douglas Kriner of Boston University and Francis Shen of the University of Minnesota Law School, the study concludes that the Democratic Party lost the 2016 election because working class voters in poorer areas hit hardest by military casualties from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan saw the Democratic Party as the primary party of war and militarism. They abstained or voted for Trump as a result.

Kriner and Shen break down the shift away from the Democratic Party from 2012 to 2016 on a state-by-state and county-by-county basis and compare the shift with soldier death rates from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The authors find "extreme" levels of disparity between county casualty rates. Just over half of all counties had a casualty rate of 1 or fewer deaths per 100,000 from Iraq and Afghanistan, while a mere 10 percent of counties have casualty rates of over 7 war deaths per 100,000 residents. The counties with the highest casualty rates are the poorest and least educated.

Kriner and Shen find a strong positive correlation between Republican shift in 2016 and death and injuries from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Each state's rise in the casualty rate by one person per million residents corresponded with a roughly .25 percent swing from Obama in 2012 to Trump in 2016.

The authors conclude that if the casualty rates in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin were lowered by 10 people per million, Clinton would have won all three states. Trump won each state by less than 1 percent, pushing him past the 270 electoral vote mark required to win election.

"Our analysis predicts that Trump would have lost between 1.4 percent and 1.6 percent of the vote if the state had suffered a lower casualty rate. As illustrated in Figure 2, such margins would have easily flipped all three states into the Democratic column. Trump's ability to connect with voters in communities exhausted by more than fifteen years of war may have been critically important to his narrow electoral victory."

This process played out even more acutely on a county-by-county level: "Trump was even more successful in surpassing Romney's 2012 performance in communities that had suffered disproportionately high casualty rates."

Kriner and Shen explain that anti-war sentiment among the poorer sections of the population most impacted by the war has been a dominant, subterranean feature of American political life for over a decade.

In 2004, one-and-a-half years after the Bush administration launched the war in Iraq, the authors point out that although Bush won reelection, "he lost significant electoral ground in states and communities that had paid the heaviest share of the war burden in casualties."

In 2006, when the Democrats won both houses of congress, Kriner and Shen note that "Republican losses were steepest among communities that had suffered disproportionately high casualty rates in Iraq." They note, "In both 2004 and 2006, voters in these communities became more likely to vote against

politicians perceived as orchestrating conflicts in which their friends and neighbors died."

Similarly, the authors explain that Barack Obama won the 2008 election in large part as a result of popular opposition to the war in Iraq, which Obama claimed to oppose.

"The electoral punishment suffered by Republicans in the 2000s was a story of both casualty and economic inequality," Kriner and Shen write. "The communities suffering the most from the fighting overseas were communities with lower income and education levels. These communities, in turn, increasingly turned against political candidates insisting on more combat."

But while "voters in such communities increasingly abandoned Republican candidates in a series of elections in the 2000s," their opposition to war expressed itself in a turn away from the Democrats in 2016.

After benefiting from the groundswell of opposition provoked by the Bush administration's wars, the Obama administration continued the wars and sent tens of thousands more troops to Afghanistan. His administration was the first in US history to spend a full two terms at war.

Under Democratic Party leadership, the government launched new wars in Pakistan, Libya, Somalia, and Syria. Clinton ran her 2016 campaign on calls for escalating US intervention in Syria and threatening war with Russia, a nuclear armed power. It is a testament to the record of the Democratic Party that Trump's jingoistic program could be viewed by many as the more "dovish" option.

Kriner and Shen's statistics reveal a powerful fact about American politics: the working class is tired of being used as cannon fodder in imperialist war.

However, they add, "In the post-election analysis of the 2016 cycle, discussion of war fatigue has been all but absent. This oversight may plausibly be due to the fact that most American elites in the chattering class have not, at least in recent years, been directly affected by on-going conflicts. Children of elites are not as likely to serve and die in the Middle East, and elite communities are thus less likely to make this a point of conversation. The costs of war remain largely hidden, and an invisible inequality of military sacrifice has taken hold."

Indeed, the Democratic establishment and their pseudo-left supporters live in a different world than the workers whose racism and sexism they blame for Trump's election.

Young people living in rural and semi-rural areas hit by decades of deindustrialization and nonstop cuts to social programs make up the bulk of the armed forces of US imperialism. High unemployment and low education often leave the military or National Guard as the only stable work options. Many regions with high recruitment rates also suffer under the weight of the opioid crisis and heavy rates of drug and alcohol abuse. While 7,000 soldiers died in Iraq and Afghanistan, tens of thousands of veterans have killed themselves; a total of 20 each day.

But efforts by the Democratic and pseudo-left press to ignore the growth of anti-war sentiment are not, as Kriner and Shen claim, an "oversight." The stock portfolios of the wealthiest 10 percent of the population depend on a constant supply of working class youth whose bodies and minds can be sacrificed to secure resources and cheap labor for the banks and corporations to exploit abroad.

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