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*Research Article*

The political benefits of student loan debt relief

Mailory E SoRelle and Serena Laws

Abstract

Are people likely to reward politicians who support canceling student loan debt? This paper draws on original conjoint and survey experimental data to assess the effects of student debt relief proposals on voter behavior. Using data collected 3 months prior to Biden’s announcement of a specific plan for broad-based student debt relief, the paper addresses two interrelated questions: How do policy details—such as eligibility restrictions and the amount of debt canceled—shape voter support for candidates who embrace student loan cancellation? And second, will executive action by President Biden increase Democrats’ chances of winning in 2022 or 2024? We find evidence to suggest that candidates who support student debt relief plans offering generous debt cancellation while minimizing eligibility restrictions get the largest boost in support from voters, especially for key Democratic constituencies. We also find that executive action on student debt increases the likelihood that key groups would support Democratic congressional candidates in upcoming electoral contests. These results offer the first systematic evidence exploring the potential political ramifications of enacting student debt relief.

**Hint:** This is journal is only published electronically, so there are no page numbers.