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The Roots of Right-Wing Populism: Donald Trump in 2016

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ABSTRACT

Using survey data from the American National Election Study (ANES) and aggregate data on Congressional districts, this article assesses the roles that economic and social factors played in Donald J. Trump's 2016 "populist" presidential candidacy. It shows the hollowness of claims that economic issues played little or no role. While agreeing that racial resentment and sexism were important factors, the article shows how various economic considerations helped Trump win the Republican nomination and then led significant blocs of voters to shift from supporting Democrats or abstaining in 2012 to vote for him. It also presents striking evidence of the importance of political money and Senators' "reverse coattails" in the final result.

Introduction

Donald Trump's unexpected victory in the U.S. presidential election of 2016 shook the world to its foundations. Ever since, an outpouring of commentary has tried to understand how it happened. Most political science discussions have concluded that Trump won by adeptly playing on social anxieties, rather than economic grievances. They argue that he was elected by "deplorables," fueled by racial resentment, sexism, and fear or dislike of immigrants from abroad. Economic issues, many say, made little or no difference (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018; Mutz 2018; Tesler 2016; Schaffner, MacWilliams, and Nteta 2018; Sides 2016; cf. also Tesler 2012; Lopez 2017).[1]

Researchers in several fields have published studies that raise questions about these conclusions. Several scholars working in rural health sociology have shown that "deaths of despair" and related social and economic pathologies have multiplied in the United States at much faster rates than in other developed countries. They have also shown that areas hit especially hard by these maladies voted more heavily for Trump (Case and Deaton 2017; Monnat and Brown 2017). A number of economists have sought to explain the election results by reference to various economic forces. Autor et al. (2017) argue that imports from China hit key states in the Electoral College hard enough to tip the election to Trump. Frey, Berger, and Chen (2018) by contrast, identify not trade, but technological change—specifically robots—as crucial; they argue that workers in pivotal states (including several instanced by Autor et al. (2017)) voted for Trump out of fear that automation was taking their jobs away.

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[1]A widely read summary by a distinguished economist is Krugman (2018): "Study after study has found that racial resentment, not economic distress, drove Trump voters."

Both the sociologists and the economists rest their conclusions on aggregate studies of voting behavior in particular areas. The sociologists usually use county level data; the economists draw their evidence from a variety of units, including some that do not map easily on to conventional election units, such as particular "labor markets." The additional layers of complexity make drawing links between individual voting decisions and confounding factors, such as racism or misogyny difficult, making it easy for skeptics to hurry past the difficulties. Automation and import pressures also often operate in either the same or nearby geographical areas, so that teasing out the effect of one or the other is difficult, perhaps even impossible, with existing data.

This article is written out of the conviction that it is high time to resolve the tensions between these contrasting accounts. It looks closely at data for individual voters drawn from the 2016 American National Election Study (ANES), but in the context of the congressional districts in which they live. This deliberately "multi-level" approach provides powerful evidence against claims economics did not importantly influence voting in 2016. We find that social anxieties certainly did play an important part in Trump's victories—particularly in the 2016 Republican primaries, where many voters were indeed motivated by resentments related to race, ethnicity, immigration, and gender. Social issues were important in the general election as well. But the real picture looks considerably more complicated when the full range of evidence is considered: Economic factors mattered, too, at both stages.

Moreover, in the general election—in contrast to the primaries—many leading social factors actually tended to *hurt* rather than help Trump. Furthermore, the social and economic factors were deeply intertwined with each other in voters' minds. The importance of economic factors comes through particularly clearly when we examine aggregate (congressional district-level) contextual data, and when we analyze why some Americans *switched* from voting for Obama (or not voting) in 2012, to voting for Trump in 2016.

Right-Wing Populism

We begin our analysis with a look at Trump's electoral appeals. These are commonly agreed to reflect a form of "populism." We do not disagree, but, by comparison with the radically different campaigns for the Presidency mounted, for example, by Senators Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren, the real estate titan's political effort clearly represents a form of *right-wing* populism. Right-wing populism—including the relatively mild Trumpian version—tends to embrace strong, authoritarian leaders; to exploit social divisions; to blame social scapegoats (immigrants, minorities, and women) for suffering and distress; and, once in office, to pursue policies that do little or nothing to deal with economic grievances that may fuel the discontents that motivate supporters.[2]

We believe that an important mechanism for translating such discontents into right-wing populism is what Hannah Arendt in her famous discussion of imperialism strikingly termed an "alliance between the mob and capital" (Arendt 1973, 147). The central idea is that wealthy elites may deliberately exploit mass economic discontent and channel it away from economic reforms (which would be costly to elites) and toward social resentments and social scapegoats (Arendt 1973, Chapter Five, Section III, 147). This defuses political threats to elites and can help them gain or maintain political power to defend their privileges.

Such a strategy, we believe, is most likely to be successful when there is a reservoir of popular discontent (often, perhaps, primarily economic in origin), and a plausible *story* about social scapegoats that can be made to resonate with important segments of the public. In the United States, this has been facilitated by the nation's long history of racism, sexism, and suspicion of foreigners, together with post-9/11 fears of terrorism. By 2016, a candidate like Trump could exploit

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[2]The literature is gigantic; Ferguson et al. (2018) analyze the various streams in more detail than we can here.

very concrete grievances—a full scale "dual economy" had developed, in which increasing numbers of Americans were working at low wages with little prospect of ever joining the middle class (Temin 2017; Storm 2017; Taylor and Omer 2018; Ferguson, Jorgensen, and Chen 2018a; Weil 2017). The Great Recession of 2008–2009 had also saddled many Americans with further job losses, bankruptcies, and loss of their homes to foreclosure.

Recovery from that Recession was slow and uneven, with the wealthy leaping ahead while most Americans struggled to regain their former positions. Despite initial high hopes for the new Obama administration, by 2016 establishment politicians of both parties seemed to many Americans to be unable or uninterested in helping ordinary citizens, though they had quickly bailed out big banks with cheap loans and subsidies (Tooze 2018; Burnham and Ferguson 2014; Ferguson and Johnson 2009a, 2009b). As the campaign got underway, most Americans viewed both political parties negatively. Some three quarters of the public said the country was on the "wrong track."[3] Lots of fuel was available for lighting fires of right-wing populism.

Leaders of both parties had enthusiastically embraced and encouraged free international trade and technological progress (see, e.g., Ferguson, Jorgensen, and Chen 2018a). The establishments of both seemed to downplay or ignore distress and discontent resulting from cheap imports, flight of capital abroad, and high levels of immigration. In the run-up to 2016, a few political entrepreneurs—notably including Steve Bannon and Donald Trump—devised and experimented with scapegoat narratives.

In his early public flirtations, Trump proceeded in a trial and error fashion, mostly fitting the general patterns of right-wing populism, but also including some distinctively American features and—like many other right-wing populists before him—making carefully calculated nods to some of the most popular elements of *left*-wing populism.

By the time of the 2015–2016 campaign, he had honed a highly effective message that included denigration of Mexican and Muslim immigrants, demonization of Chinese exports of cheap goods that undermined American jobs and wages, and subtle evocations of misogyny and racism aimed at women and African Americans (Kranish and Fisher 2016; Blair 2015; Green 2017). He usually avoided overtly racist rhetoric, which would have been socially unacceptable. Instead, he indirectly evoked whites' racial anxieties by making insulting remarks about particular African American individuals or groups; by stoking whites' resentments against the real or imagined effects of affirmative action; and especially by attacking the first black president of the United States, Barack Obama (Kranish and Fisher 2016; Blair 2015; Green 2017; especially Green 2017, 31). Similarly, Trump avoided wholesale attacks on women per se (who, after all, constituted a majority of the electorate). But he tossed demeaning insults at particular women who looked like easy targets.

In his speech announcing his candidacy, Trump charged that in international trade, China and Japan "kill us," "beat us all the time." He asserted that Mexico is "killing us economically," and then shifted to a broadside against Mexican immigrants, declaring (with his trademark disdain for evidence): "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists." Trump went on to blast Islamic terrorism and ISIS, and to lament the costs of the Iraq war, after which (he said) ISIS and Iran got "the oil." This concise catalog of foreign threats and foreign policy failures was well designed to feed xenophobia.[4]

Trump's scapegoating of foreigners was not as crude as is sometimes remembered, however. He disclaimed any animus against foreign people generally: "l like China"; their leaders were smart. "I love the Saudis," despite their alleged failure to pay for U.S. military protection. Even about Mexican immigrants, he noted that "some, I assume, are good people."

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[3]See, e.g., the NBC/Wall Street Journal poll of July, 2016, available on the web at https://www.scribd.com/document/318507755/NBC-Wall-Street-Journal-National-Poll
[4]See the text of Trump's announcement speech, available at the UCSB American Presidency Project archive, at http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=110306

Trump's chief targets, instead, were American elites, including "donors," "lobbyists," the "powerful," and the corrupt politicians they controlled. (Trump claimed to be a self-funder, free from such influence.) Above all he blamed the "stupid," "clueless" U.S. negotiators who, he said, had repeatedly sold out the United States with terrible trade deals and who had sent brand-new U.S. equipment to Iraq and Yemen only to have it abandoned on the battlefield.

He also shot a few arrows toward his leading rivals for the Republican nomination, such as unnamed "other people" who "want to cut the hell out" of Social Security. He noted that Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio were "unable to answer" the simple question of whether the Iraq War was a good thing or a bad thing. (Trump himself falsely claimed to have opposed the war from the start.) Bush, he said, was "weak on immigration."

Trump linked his negative attacks to more or less plausible, though generally vague, policy proposals: to build a "great wall" on the border with Mexico and have Mexico pay for it; to be "tougher on ISIS"; to "stop Iran from getting nuclear weapons"; to "immediately terminate" "Obama's illegal executive order on immigration"; to "fully support and back up the Second Amendment"; to "reduce our $18 trillion debt"; to "strengthen our military"; and to "take care of our vets."

Near the close of his announcement speech, Trump spoke in favor of several highly popular government programs that are more often associated with *left* populism. He promised to "save Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security without cuts." At some length, evoking his experience as a builder, Trump promised to "[r]ebuild the country's infrastructure": bridges, roadways, and airports that he said were far inferior to those of China or Qatar. He would do so "on time, on budget, way below cost." Although these promises did not fare well after Trump took office, they were repeated frequently throughout the campaign and may well have helped attract voters.

In the Republican primaries that began in early 2016, a phalanx of well-known Republicans—including several with well-polished credentials and appealing personas—emerged to battle Trump. Most were vulnerable to attack as facilitators of the "disastrous" free trade deals and "open" immigration policies that Trump was excoriating. Rubio (of Latino ancestry) and Bush (a proud Spanish speaker with a Hispanic wife) were particularly vulnerable among Republican primary voters for their past backing of immigration reforms that would have included some form of the dreaded "amnesty" and a path to citizenship. All of Trump's opponents had enthusiastically supported free international trade, though some had experimented in the past with various minor qualifications (for the wrinkles, see Ferguson, Jorgensen, and Chen 2018a). Several had quietly supported the Paul Ryan plan to, as Trump put it, "cut the hell out of Social Security." After years of backing major policies that were anathema to the Republican base, all these GOP mainstream candidates were standing on shaky ground. Trump shook that ground.

Once he won the Republican nomination, Trump turned his full fire onto Hillary Clinton and the Democrats. Clinton—with her globe-trotting history, her six-figure speaking fees, and her ties to Wall Street—was a rather easy target at which to direct resentments of out-of-touch elites, rich donors, and pro-globalization politicians who pandered to them. Trump also pursued a "strong leader" theme, repeatedly speaking of the need for "competence," and touting his supposed self-made economic success and wizardry at making deals. He also promised to "bring jobs back to our country," to "renegotiate NAFTA," and to "withdraw from the Transpacific Partnership, another disaster." He would "stand up to China on our terrible trade agreements." He promised to "massively cut tax rates for workers and small business." He would "get rid of regulations" that send jobs overseas; "give students choice and allow charter schools to thrive"; "end tenure" that rewards bad teachers; "work closely with African American parents and students" on education; and "repeal and replace the disaster called Obamacare." Trump promised to "restore honor" to government, protecting classified information and forbidding senior officials from trading favors for cash. These details of Trump's message help account for how voters reacted.

Table 1. Predictors of voting for Trump (*vs.* other GOP candidates) in the 2016 primaries.

Variables	(1)	(2)
Limit imports	0.680***	0.771***
	(0.249)	(0.244)
Build wall w/ Mexico	1.384***	1.491***
	(0.360)	(0.402)
Allow Syrian refugees	−1.850***	−1.989***
	(0.520)	(0.527)
Gov't should reduce ineq.	1.109***	1.243***
	(0.390)	(0.390)
Politicians only care about rich	0.717*	0.774**
	(0.363)	(0.375)
Constant	−1.949***	−2.146***
	(0.415)	(0.474)
N	595	595
Pseudo-R2	0.14	0.14

Note: Cell entries are 0–1 standardized logit coefficients. (1) is based on survey logistic regressions, while (2) is based on mixed logistic regressions with survey weights at the first level. Standard errors in parentheses.
***$p < .01$, **$p < .05$, and *$p < .1$.

Trump's Primary Victories

To judge how voters reacted to Trump and his messages in the Republican primaries, we analyzed the ANES data on 2016 primary voting. These data are less than perfect: sample sizes are relatively small and are based on respondents' recall in autumn 2016 of their behavior from the previous winter or spring. But while some failures of memory and motivated errors undoubtedly occurred, the respondents reporting Trump primary votes certainly were strong Trump supporters, whether or not they actually voted. The responses are well worth analyzing.

In a number of regression analyses, we explored the effects of many variables that one might expect to capture Trump's unique appeal *vs.* the appeal of all other Republican candidates. We analyzed survey questions related to immigration, free trade, racism, sexism, xenophobia, jobs, incomes, health care, firearms, foreign policy, and the New Deal-type social welfare policies that Trump promised to protect.

The regression models displayed in Table 1 represent the best that we have been able to specify. They account for a reasonable proportion of the variance in GOP primary voting, though of course not nearly as much as when one analyzes general election choices between the two major parties—where a host of strong partisan-related attitudes become relevant. We estimated both logistic regressions and random intercept models, trying to take advantage of congressional district data to control for influences that spill over from neighboring districts. The random intercept (or "mixed model") can be thought of as an estimation of the general equation for each congressional district. It should pick up systematic variation across districts and thus be more accurate, but with this qualification: Existing software for complex surveys makes it difficult to estimate mixed models in the presence of complex weighting schemes. We used "level 1" ANES respondent weights, but could not include "level 2" weights to adjust for varying numbers of respondents in different congressional districts. In any case, both techniques produced very similar results (Cf. Ferguson et al. 2018, 21, Note 36).

As Table 1 makes clear, support for or opposition to building a Wall against Mexico was strongly related to voting for Trump (as *vs.* any of his opponents) in the GOP primaries. The coefficient for the Wall variable is quite substantial and highly significant at the .001 level. Holding other variables at their means, moving from one extreme to the other on this variable changes the probability of voting for Trump by 33 percentage points. The issue of Muslim (and, according to Trump, potentially terrorist) immigrants also played a big part in primary voting. Attitudes for or against allowing Syrian refugees into the country had a large and highly significant coefficient. Those who strongly opposed allowing refugees were (with other independent

Table 2. Opinions of GOP primary voters *vs.* the population.

	GOP primary voters (%)	Population (%)
Favor building wall	63	33
Very/extremely likely immigration takes jobs	53	37
Oppose Syrian refugees	77	50
Wrong Track	94	74
Trump Video should matter a lot or great deal	13	44
Obama not Muslim	30	50
Disagree that slavery's legacy makes things hard	63	41
US world position is weaker	86	54
Favor free trade agreements	37	38

Source: American National Election Study Data.

variables set at their means) 40 percentage points more likely to vote for Trump than those who strongly approved. Both the Wall and Muslim immigrants evoked populist stands by Trump that were quite different from the stands of the other candidates.

These factors were not only "important" in the usual sense of accounting for variations in support or opposition; they also clearly *helped* Trump in the primaries. As Table 2 indicates, the Republican primary electorate was very different from the voters who decide general elections. They practically constituted an "alternate universe" that was older, whiter, richer, and far more conservative in ideology. In 2016, substantial majorities of Republican primary voters—though not Americans as a whole—declared they favored the Wall and opposed Syrian refugees (see Table 2). Among these very conservative Republican primary voters, Trump's anti-immigration stands won him votes and constituted an important part of his populist appeal.

Notably absent from the vote-affecting variables in Table 1, however, are two factors that are sometimes thought of as crucial to Trump's appeal: racial resentment and sexism. This is less surprising than it may seem. For one thing, neither racial resentment nor sexism had leapt to some sort of peak in 2016. Since at least Richard Nixon's famous "southern strategy" in 1968, coded— sometimes barely so—appeals to racism had been a mainstay of national Republican campaigns for office.[5] In 2008, Barack Obama's rise as a national candidate was accompanied by an outpouring of venomous racism. But contrary to much writing on the subject, the most reliable measures of racism we have been able to identify—the "racial resentment" scale developed by Donald Kinder and colleagues—do not suggest that overall racism greatly increased under Obama's presidency (Kinder and Sanders 1996).[6] Both in the population as a whole and among Republicans, mean scores on both scales actually *dropped* a bit from 2012 to 2016.[7] But between 2008 and 2016 polarization between party identifiers increased, with the proportion of high scorers on both racial resentment and modern sexism increasing among Republican identifiers and decreasing among Democrats. Whether this mainly represents sorting into the parties or persuasion by party elites, we accept the assessment by Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck, that many Republican leaders deliberately attempted to racialize opposition to President Obama, especially in regard to health care (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018; Tesler 2012; Temin 2016, 2017). The modestly increased homogeneity on these issues among the Republican electorate reduced both issues' importance in Republican primaries.

More important is the fact that there was *little difference* between Trump and other GOP primary candidates, hence little reason to cast votes based on racial resentment or sexism. In the

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[5]Here again, the literature is very large. See, e.g. (Ferguson and Rogers 1986) for the earlier years; for later years, cf., the papers cited *supra*, Note 1.

[6]We spent considerable time comparing various other approaches; see the discussion in (Ferguson et al. 2018).

[7]For race, the scores run as follows. In 2008 the overall weighted mean was 3.46; for Republicans, 3.84; for Democrats, 3.18. In 2012, the corresponding scores were 3.52, 3.99, 3.11. In 2016, 3.19; 3.78; 2.63. The GOP primary mean in 2016 was 3.84; for Trump primary voters, 3.99. For sexism, the scores run as follows. The overall weighted mean for 2008 was 2.54; for Republicans, 2.80, for Democrats, 2.38; in 2012, the corresponding numbers were 2.48; 2.71; 2.28; for 2016, 2.34; 2.88; 2.03; the GOP primary weighted mean was 2.85; for Trump voters, 2.74.

primaries Trump's racist and sexist language—which proved to be important in November—was usually rather guarded. His policy stands related to race and gender did not markedly distinguish him from the other Republican candidates in the primaries. Nearly all those candidates were on record opposing policies that were important to African Americans, including government help with health care. Nearly all held traditional views of women's roles in marriage, families, and employment. In this restricted field, Trump did not stand out.

For the same reason, voters' feelings about whether America was on the "wrong track," or whether it needed a "strong leader to take us back to the true path" and their demographic position as "white," did not much affect their voting decisions in the Republican primaries.

As Table 1 indicates, our analysis led to a further important qualification to any "social anxieties above all" view of the contest for the GOP nomination: several economic factors played big parts in primary voting. The high-impact "Wall" issue had an economic dimension: keeping out low-wage labor competition. Consistently with Trump's campaign stands, support for limiting imports was also a substantial factor in Trump voting. So, perhaps surprisingly, were two attitudes usually associated with left-wing (Bernie Sanders-style) rather than right-wing populism: advocacy of government action to reduce economic inequality, and the sentiment that "politicians care only about the rich." These genuinely populist positions, along with Trump's refusal to attack Social Security, helped mark Trump off from the rest of the Republican field.

Our analysis of GOP primary voting provides one useful window on the roots of Trumpian populism. Indeed, it can be argued that Trump's performance in the primaries is particularly relevant, since the primaries set populist Trump against a number of definitely non-populist Republican candidates, while avoiding any confusion raised by the presence of a host of standard Republican *vs.* Democrat issues in a two-party general election contest. Analysis of the primaries puts a sharp focus on what factors distinguished Trump's right-wing populism from establishment Republican conservatism.

Still, this analysis was confined to the rather small subset of active and intense Republicans (and a few independents) who reported turning out for the 2016 Republican primaries. What can we learn from voting decisions by a much broader population in the general election?

Trump's General Election Victory

The November contest was very different. It involved a much broader electorate; an intensely partisan battle between Republican and Democratic nominees; and, of course, contrasts between Trump and a particular Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton, with all her distinctive strengths and weaknesses. To cross-sectionally analyze voting choices between two candidates with opposite partisan affiliations and many distinctive personal characteristics is not the ideal way to assess the roots of populism *per se.* Those voting choices tell us only about the *relative* appeal of two candidates (both rather unpopular), each with multiple attributes. Still, we can at least learn something about what factors distinguished Trump's right-wing populist appeal from the appeal of a rather orthodox (though gender trail-blazing) Democrat.

Once again we used ANES data to explore a host of plausibly relevant independent variables, from attitudes concerning race (particularly the racial resentment scale) and attitudes toward women (the modern sexism scale, and feelings about the Access Hollywood audiotape of Trump's boasting about his sexual aggressiveness toward women); to attitudes toward immigration from Mexico or Muslim countries; to policy preferences concerning jobs and incomes programs, Social Security, the Affordable Care Act, and other social welfare issues; to assessments of whether the economy or the respondent's personal finances had improved or worsened; to general judgments on whether the country as a whole was on the "right track" or the "wrong track."

We analyzed these and other theoretically relevant variables in a number of exploratory regressions, in order to assess which variables best measured the relevant concepts and to get an idea

Table 3. Predictors of 2016 general election Trump voting.

Variables	(1) Logistic	(2) Mixed logistic
Racial resentment	3.907***	4.531***
	(0.365)	(0.447)
Modern sexism	4.081***	4.760***
	(0.537)	(0.636)
Disapprove of ACA	3.233***	3.794***
	(0.270)	(0.354)
Wrong track	2.273***	2.638***
	(0.282)	(0.359)
Limit imports	0.903***	1.072***
	(0.226)	(0.218)
White	1.243***	1.427***
	(0.248)	(0.270)
Constant	−3.267***	−3.762***
	(0.346)	(0.414)
N	1,998	1,998
Pseudo-R2	0.62	0.61

Note: Cell entries are 0–1 standardized logit coefficients. (1) is based on a survey logistic regression, while (2) is based on a mixed logistic regression with survey weights at the first level. Standard errors in parentheses.
Pseudo-R^2 calculated by McFadden's method.
***$p < .01$, **$p < .05$, and *$p < .1$.

of which concepts might have the biggest impacts on voting choices. The results of two particularly interesting "final" regressions are given in Table 3.

As Table 3 indicates, in November 2016 two major types of social attitudes—racial resentment and modern sexism—had large and highly significant ($p < .01$) effects on voting choices between Trump and Clinton. Moving from the minimum to the maximum value of racial resentment (holding other variables at their means) makes a difference of 72 percentage points in the likelihood of voting for Trump over Clinton, with a change of 77 percentage points for an equivalent change in modern sexism. These massive figures are consistent with the big party-related gap in feelings of racial resentment, together with Trump's continuing—if sporadic—language denigrating particular African Americans. And they fit with the contrast between Trump—with his fairly frequent sexist language and the release of the Access Hollywood audiotape—and Clinton, an outspoken feminist and the first woman to have a serious shot at the U.S. presidency (see, e.g., Allen and Parnes 2017 on the campaign).[8]

The independent significance of the "white" (as *vs.* black or Latino) variable underscores the likely role of racial attitudes in 2016, particularly as related to Latinos. But it may also reflect certain other attitudes correlated with a respondent's race that are not well captured by the measures included in the equation—perhaps conservative white Christians' attitudes about such social issues as abortion, and probably economic as well as social tensions concerning immigration.

The importance of racial resentment and sexism is broadly consistent with other scholars' analyses of ANES and other data (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018). We must note, however, that—possibly because we explored a broader range of variables—we found once again that certain economic factors also came through as important determinants of 2016 general election voting. The sentiment that America was on the "wrong track"—which had a significant independent impact—was probably driven in good part by economic anxieties. Beyond that, voters who favored limiting imports were (by a smaller but still quite significant margin) more inclined to vote for Trump than voters who opposed such limits.

Trump's opposition to the Affordable Care Act also appeared to affect votes, with an estimated coefficient nearly as big as for racial resentment and sexism. Attitudes about the ACA, however—

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[8]The racial resentment and modern sexism coefficients are roughly equivalent to attitudes about the ACA, and at least twice as big as the other coefficients.

despite their large coefficient and very high estimated significance level—contributed to an unacceptably high level of multicollinearity: a Condition Index of 16.3. Experiments with this variable in a variety of contexts convince us that Michael Tesler's analysis is correct: the many Republican attacks on "Obamacare" had succeeded in linking the ACA to racial anxieties (Tesler 2012). At the same time, a series of statistical tests have persuaded us that voters' views on the ACA and other social welfare programs—traditionally quite strong predictors of choices between Republican and Democratic candidates—almost certainly did play some part in November voting decisions in their own right, though some of those effects were muted by Trump's nods leftward. But multicollinearity makes it difficult to be sure of the precise magnitude of effects (Ferguson et al. 2018, Note 44).

In order to deal with the possibility that our Table 1 findings are an artifact of party identification, we added to this model respondents' positions on the seven-point party identification scale. We do not generally favor "controls" of this type in attitudinal regressions, because if party affiliation is either a cause or a consequence of the other attitudes, coefficient estimates will tend to be biased (Ferguson et al. 2018, Note 47). In this case, however, the ambiguous role of party identification need not be addressed. Adding a party control had little effect. The estimated coefficients for some clearly party-related factors ("right track," racial resentment, modern sexism, and especially white race of the respondent) seemed to drop a bit, but not much in relation to their standard errors; they remained large and highly significant. When demographic factors were added too, the substantive results continued to hold.

We can confirm the importance of economic as well as social matters in voters' minds—and reveal certain kinds of complexity and ambivalence in peoples' thinking—by examining what Americans actually said, in their own words, in response to open-ended questions about the parties and candidates.

In Americans' Own Words

When "closed" questions are carefully designed they can be tremendously helpful for data analysis. Yet even the best-designed questions tend to impose the designers' categories and intellectual frameworks upon respondents and can lead researchers to miss concepts and connections that actually motivate voters.

Fortunately, from its earliest years the ANES has included a set of eight "open-ended" questions that allow respondents to explain—in their own words—what (if anything) might make them want to vote for or vote against the Republican and the Democratic candidate, and what they like and what they dislike about the Republican and Democratic parties. Several scholars have made good use of these open-ended questions, usually by regrouping detailed codes provided by ANES into broader categories of theoretical interest (see, e.g., Stokes, Campbell, and Miller 1958; Kelly 1983; Wattenberg 1998; Wattenberg 2002; Geer 1988; Geer 1991).

Recently, however, a special ANES task force determined that the very detailed official ANES coding schemes (with some 600 coding categories) have been unreliable. The task force recommended a very different, far more concise coding scheme (Lupia 2018; Survey, 2008). But neither that nor any other official coding scheme has so far been implemented. Instead, the ANES simply provides Excel sheets that record the raw texts of respondents' comments.

These raw data are very useful, but also messy. They display the full richness of everyday speech, but by the same token they leave in place many misspellings, sentence fragments, and ellipses, so that even simple word counts can be unreliable. (In 2016, for example, there were a number of references to "Begazi" [Benghazi] or "foren" [foreign].) Moreover, meanings are sometimes elusive. Respondents do not always use technical or Beltway-approved terms, nor, a fortiori, the language of economic theory.

We have, however, been able to explore the prevalence of certain concepts—particularly related to international trade, imports, outsourcing, economic globalization and the like—by reading the responses carefully and doing our own substantive classifying and coding. And after correcting numerous spelling errors, we were also able to do some suggestive and relatively straightforward word counts.

First some basic findings. In 2016, most respondents replied to one or more of the open-ended questions. Only about 5% had nothing at all to say to any of them—a figure in line with past benchmarks going back to the 1950s. As others have noted, since the 1980s many more respondents have typically mentioned considerations about candidates (94% in 2016) than about parties (41% in 2016) (Wattenberg 1998, 2002; Geer 1988, 1991).

Where Clinton is concerned, one issue stands out: Corruption. Fully 17% of all respondents offering any comment on Clinton (or 10% of the total respondent pool) mentioned this concept. Here there was little disjunction between explicit term and broader concept: many respondents employed the term "corrupt" itself. This may reflect the widely publicized Bannon-inspired book by Peter Schweitzer, or a right-wing media campaign, and/or Trump's frequent references to "crooked Hillary," "the most corrupt candidate in history" (Green 2017; Ferguson, Jorgensen, and Chen 2018b; Schweitzer 2015; Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018). It does not come out nearly as clearly in any ANES closed-question data that we are aware of.

In evaluating Donald Trump, mentions of strong leadership or plain-spoken style were definitely common, expressed in a variety of terms, and from a variety of perspectives. About 12% of all those offering comments about Trump praised his "power," "action," "straight-shooter" character, or "brutal" honesty. Many respondents expected that Trump would be more active in keeping the country "safe" and in "saying what the [public] is scared to say."

Our analysis of open-ended questions also brought home to us the importance of a set of issues that has thus far played surprisingly little part in scholarly discussions of 2016 voting: issues concerning international trade, globalization, plant relocation, and imports.

On these issues, the gap between common speech and "elite discourse" was unusually wide, so that neither closed questions nor simple word counts of open-ended responses could give an accurate picture of Americans' thinking. Only occasionally did explicit comments about "free trade" crop up in the interviews: perhaps only 25 mentions in the entire data set. But this is quite misleading as a guide to the true extent of public concern. A variety of other terms and expressions related to free trade were in fact fairly common, mostly as either admiring comments about Trump or critical remarks about Clinton. We estimate that 7% of all respondents, across all the candidate and party questions, alluded to free trade, globalization, or closely similar themes. For spontaneous remarks with no prompting, this strikes us as a significant figure. Broad mentions of economic concerns were the most common of any general topic, appearing among an additional 15% of respondents across the entire data set.

Comparison of respondents' answers to closed- and open-ended question brings to light a striking ambivalence in popular attitudes that has often escaped notice. Since the time of the New Deal, the corporate mainstream, the mass media, and conventional economics have generally treated free trade as the incarnation of sound public policy and right thinking (Stiglitz 2004). The heavy weight of the official mind on this topic appears to have percolated down to many voters, but not with complete success. When we checked for consistency between open-ended responses and responses to canned, closed-ended questions about whether or not more trade is good or whether reciprocal trade treaties make sense, we found that many who voiced agreement with the generalized pro-trade sentiments embodied in closed questions, nonetheless spontaneously expressed qualms in response to the open-ended questions. Only the closed question about limiting imports (a substantial predictor of voting choices) tended to draw consistent responses that mirrored some of the skepticism voiced in the open-ended data.

We believe that these divergently expressed sentiments reflect real ambivalence in voters' minds. We suspect that many voters profess to believe in free trade so long as it is also "fair trade," or consider "free trade" in the abstract (but not necessarily concrete examples of it) to signify a Good Thing. They may silently qualify their pro-trade responses to the closed-ended questions in ways not captured by the response alternatives—for example, wanting various types of relief from (or compensation for) import pressures. As we will see, skepticism about imports appears to have been an important ingredient in decisions by many whites who had voted for Obama in 2012 to switch and vote for Trump in 2016, just as it led many primary voters to support Trump.

Economic Distress and Its Geography

It is no secret that much of middle America has long suffered economic distress. Starting around the early 1970s, the "rust belt" and much of rural America have experienced the shuttering of factories and small businesses; job losses; stagnant or declining wages; departures by young people; and the hollowing out of whole communities. Families, already hard-pressed to pay their bills, have been devastated by unexpected traumas from layoffs, medical emergencies, or the loss of retirement pensions. Young people, if lucky enough to get into college, have been burdened with enormous student-loan debts. Some distressed Americans have resorted to opioids or suicide. Remarkably—in this rich country—life expectancies have actually dropped among certain groups, especially older white men. (Case and Deaton 2017; Monnat and Brown 2017; Ferguson, Jorgensen, and Chen 2018b)

Economic distress appears to have reached a peak after the 2007–2008 financial crisis and Great Recession, when many families were unable to make mortgage payments and thousands lost their homes to foreclosures. Recovery from the Great Recession was disappointingly slow and uneven. The wealthiest Americans rather quickly recouped their riches, while most of their fellow countrymen continued to be mired in economic troubles. Politicians in Washington came to be seen as more eager to help their big-money donors (including "too big to fail" banks) than to help under-water homeowners or distressed workers. Looking back at the second decade of the twenty-first century, it seems clear that the United States was becoming ripe for populistic revolt (see, for example, Johnson and Kwak 2010; Ferguson and Johnson 2009a, 2009b; Burnham and Ferguson 2014).

Using aggregate data—mainly at the county level—a number of economists, public health experts, sociologists, and others have documented the *geographic* unfolding of this economic distress and its expression in rising opioid use and suicide rates, along with declining life expectancies. Many have investigated its causes (Case and Deaton 2017; Monnat and Brown 2017).

Economists have suggested that the causes of distress have included fundamental economic and technological shifts in the country. One is a sharp rise in global economic competition from low-wage countries abroad, which has undercut U.S. jobs through imports of cheap goods and has lured U.S. capital to move abroad, accelerating the pressure on U.S. jobs and wages. Economists have found evidence connecting imports into vulnerable areas with levels of voting for Trump and similar conservative or right-wing-populist candidates in the United States and other countries (Cf. Autor et al. 2016, 2017 on the Clinton vote in 2016, though see also Shen and Silva 2018).[9]

Automation, too, may have displaced substantial numbers of Americans from well-paid jobs. Efforts by businesses to off-shore—or to contract out within the United States—work formerly

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[9]The (Autor et al. 2016) paper has since been expanded. Our reference is to the earlier one and not the most recent version, which raises additional issues this article cannot take up. For other countries, see, for example (Alabrese et al. 2019); (Dipple, Heblich, and Gold 2015).

performed by their U.S. employees has led to substantial declines in wages. Government policies (e.g., at the National Labor Relations Board, along with macroeconomic austerity) have powerfully accelerated this process, as has the focus on "shareholder value" among American corporations. Other scholars have implicated home mortgage difficulties in the rise of Trump, and still others have pointed to the whole configuration of economic distress (including suicides, opioids, and declining life expectancies) as tending to produce high levels of Trump support (Ferguson, Jorgensen, and Chen 2018b; Temin 2017; Storm 2017; Taylor and Omer 2018; Weil 2017; Lazonick 2017a; Lazonick 2017b; Frey, Berger, and Chen 2018).

Of course, ecological inference has its hazards. Lots of things were going on at once in these distressed areas, and aggregate data are not ideal for sorting out which ones mattered how much in the minds of voters. Ultimately, we plan to link aggregate and survey data in such a way that we can untangle what actually motivated individuals' voting decisions on election day 2016 and what had led—over time, and in geographical context—to those motivations.

At minimum, however, the aggregate findings are highly suggestive, indicating that there were several large elephants in the room and that some of them likely fueled the populist revolt that brought Donald Trump to the presidency. As a first step toward bringing together aggregate- and individual-level-data, we have conducted our own aggregate study of geographical units: *congressional districts*, which are highly relevant politically and can be directly linked to ANES survey data on individual respondents. These have the drawback that their boundaries shift over time, setting limits to how far back it is feasible to go, but for this article the time period is more than long enough to be revelatory.

Congressional Districts and Trump Voting

From a variety of sources, we assembled a great deal of information about economic and social characteristics of each U.S. congressional district in the period leading up to the 2016 elections.[10] These data confirm the widespread impression that troubles and distress of many kinds tended to cluster in the same congressional districts, with many of them located in rural America (particularly in border states and the south) or in the "rust belt."

We are chiefly interested in precisely *which* factors, social and/or economic, made how much difference in producing Trump votes. Accordingly, we performed a number of spatial regression analyses—designed to control for spatial autocorrelation—at the aggregate (congressional district) level.

Some findings from spatial regressions (with OLS results also given for comparison) are displayed in Table 4. This relates fundamental economic characteristics of congressional districts—namely the relative size of a handful of industrial sectors in each district—to Trump voting in 2016. Large oil and gas, coal, agriculture, and manufacturing sectors all had positive influences on size of the aggregate Trump vote. A large information sector had a strong negative, pro-Democratic influence.

District industrial structure made a big difference. Even in a simple OLS analysis, these sectors account for more than a third of the variance across districts in Republican vote share. In the spatial model—which takes better account of spillover effects from neighboring districts—

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[10]Much of our congressional district data ultimately derives from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. But we drew from other datasets as well, such as that produced by the Social Science Research Council's Measure of America, available at http://www.measureofamerica.org/congressional-districts-2015/. We also used Policy Map's compilations for the 115th Congress. Data on presidential voting by congressional district came from the set constructed by the Daily Kos, at https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2013/07/09/1220127/-Daily-Kos-Elections-2012-election-results-by-congressional-and-legislative -districts. We used the Daily Kos' compilation of data on religious affiliations, at https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2018/1/7/ 1728838/-The- Daily-Kos-Elections-guide-to-the-nation-s-religious-populations-by-congressional-district. Also helpful was a set of economic and social data issued by the Economic Innovation Group of Washington, D.C. We used their 2017 study, which drew on data for earlier years. Their recent studies are available at https://eig.org/dci.

Table 4. Effects of congressional district economic structure on 2016 Republican Presidential vote share.

	OLS	SDM
Intercept	37.920 (2.564)***	19.231 (3.131)***
% Agriculture	1.083 (0.324)***	1.381 (0.343)***
% Manufacturing	0.888 (0.155)***	1.661 (0.194)***
% Share of coal in electricity	0.104 (0.209)***	0.037 (0.060)
% Employment oil and gas	2.930 (0.644)***	2.128 (0.569)***
% Information sector	−3.728 (0.676)***	1.006 (0.755)
Spatially lagged 2016 Republican Presidential vote share		0.619
Spatially lagged % agriculture		−0.946 (0.510)'
Spatially lagged % manufacturing		−1.404 (0.254)***
Spatially Lagged share of coal in electricity		−0.024 (0.69)
Lagged percent employment oil and gas		−0.257 (0.915)
Spatially lagged % information		−4.461 (1.040)***
AIC	3386.249	3238.182
Multiple R-squared/pseudo-R-squared	0.371	0.569
Moran's I Residuals	0.356	0.007
Moran's I SD	0.031***	0.030

$'p \leq .10$, $*p \leq .05$, $**p \leq .01$, and $***p \leq .001$.
Note: SDM: spatial Durbin model, $N = 424$.

Table 5. Effects of congressional district social characteristics on 2016 Republican Presidential vote share.

	OLS	SDM
Intercept	14.868 (2.073)***	1.225 (2.165)***
% Evangelical	0.698 (0.38)***	0.4999 (0.074)***
% Hispanic	−0.233 (0.022)***	−0.373 (0.029)***
% Black non-Hispanic	−0.636 (0.028)***	−0.762 (0.025)***
% High school	0.806 (0.063)***	0.787 (0.066)***
Veterans as % of eligible voters	1.090 (0.149)***	1.094 (0.166)***
Spatially lagged 2016 Republican Presidential vote share	–	0.677
Spatially lagged evangelical	–	−0.288 (0.087)***
Spatially lagged % Hispanic	–	0.335 (0.037) ***
Spatially lagged % black non-Hispanic	–	0.636 (0.045) ***
Spatially lagged % high school	–	−0.397 (0.098) ***
Spatially Lagged veterans as % of eligible voters	–	−0.901 (0.222)***
AIC	2989.691	2767.275
Multiple R-squared/pseudo-R-squared	0.801	0.884
Moran's I residuals	0.431	0.026
Moran's I SD	0.031***	0.031

$***p \leq .001$.
Note: SDM: spatial Durbin model, $N = 433$.

industrial structure accounts for still more of the variance in vote shares, more than half of it (Ferguson et al. 2018, 37–38). Large, highly significant coefficients include those for the oil and gas sector (a Republican mainstay, which Trump championed); the manufacturing sector (often battered by imports that were decried by Trump); and agriculture (another Republican mainstay, big in many rural communities that had been particularly devastated by economic distress and had failed to participate in the anemic recovery of the Obama years). These results strongly suggest that economics mattered.

Table 5 displays an alternative modeling approach keyed to social groups and demographic variables, including some with obvious relations to economic structures as well as to long-term party loyalties. Here yet more of the across-district variance in Trump's vote share is accounted for: more than four-fifths of it. Districts with many veterans, many high-school-only residents (in contrast to those with either more or less formal education), or many Evangelicals, produced many Trump votes. On the other hand, districts with many African American or Hispanic residents (substantial numbers of whom have low incomes) tended to side with Clinton, the Democrat.

These results fit with Trump's unique campaign stands as well as with long-term party divisions. Trump's promise to "make America great again," for example, likely resonated with veterans—who also tended to be older and to be on the receiving end of economic distress. Their influence seems to have been especially strong in districts where they represented relatively large shares of eligible voters as opposed to a high percentage of the population as a whole. Trump's economic stands clearly appealed to many high-school-only workers, who were particularly vulnerable to job competition from imports. (Note the interesting and sometimes-overlooked point that the relationship between education level and the Trump vote was non-linear.) Trump's espousal of social conservatism—despite his own conspicuous lack of religiosity or conventional morality—and his explicit commitments to modify laws they detested no doubt tended to attract Evangelicals (Vogel and Goodstein 2017; Ferguson, Jorgensen, and Chen 2018a, 38). By contrast, Trump's denigration of immigrants from Mexico surely cost him support from Hispanics, even beyond their prior tendency to support Democrats. Similarly, his barely disguised racism, his appeals to white nationalism, and his opposition to government programs that were important to African Americans, undoubtedly tended to turn off African Americans, who in any case had mostly been Democrats for years.

Switches toward Trump among Congressional Districts

As we noted earlier, however, the *level* of Trump's general-election support in 2016 is a very imperfect indicator of the appeal of Trump's brand of right-wing populism as opposed to the generic appeal of Republican *vs.* Democratic candidates. Some pro-Trump districts might have voted for a yellow dog as long as that dog was not a Democrat.

To assess the unique appeal of Trump-style populism it is more helpful to analyze *changes* in the level of congressional districts' support for Republican presidential candidates. Given the considerable similarities between Democratic candidates Obama in 2012 and Clinton in 2016 (particularly in terms of their issue stands and their group allegiances), an *increase or decrease* in Trump's 2016 vote share compared to the 2012 vote share won by establishment Republican Mitt Romney should mostly signal the distinctive appeal of Trumpian populism in each district.

Accordingly, we performed a series of aggregate spatial regressions on the change in Republican vote share between 2012 and 2016 by congressional district. The most important results are reported in Table 6, which zeroes in on several specific and highly relevant predictors and accounts for very substantial portions of the variance.

The first regression model makes clear that drops (or below-average gains) in median incomes or employment levels in districts led to more Trump (2016) than Romney (2012) votes. So did higher proportions of district bridges that were judged to be "structurally deficient"—a subtle but powerful indicator of the inability or unwillingness of state or local governments to fund infrastructure repairs. Such fiscally starved districts tended to shift votes toward Trump. Districts with substantial Mormon populations, on the other hand, were less attracted by Trump (whom several of their elders had criticized) than they had been to the Mormon Mitt Romney in 2012.

The second regression model in Table 8 confirms these points and adds another: that a drop over four years in the number of business establishments in a district led to substantially more votes for Trump than Romney had won four years earlier. Business failures or relocations hurt the incumbent Democrats.

All in all, these district-vote-change regressions provide some of the strongest evidence we have yet discussed for the proposition that growing economic distress—or a sense of being left behind in an uneven recovery—was an important factor in the appeal of Trump-style populism. But this cannot be the end of the story.

Table 6. Effects of congressional district characteristics on *changes* on GOP presidential vote share from 2012 to 2016.

	OLS	SDM	OLS	SDM
Intercept	6.739	3.751	6.326	3.195
	(0.740)***	(0.899)***	(0.884)***	(0.997)**
Median income in $1,000s in Cong	−0.126	−0.139	−0.118	−0.142
Dist, change, 2012–2016	(0.101)***	(0.011)**	(0.013)***	(0.012)***
Change in employment 2011–2015	−0.170	−0.022	−0.122	0.007
	(0.034)***	(0.030)	(0.053)*	(0.040)
% of All bridges structurally	0.205	0.113	0.199	0.109
Deficient, 2016	(0.034)***	(0.038)**	(0.040)***	(0.043)*
% Mormon	−0.325	−0.345		
	(0.023)***	(0.053)***		
% Change in no. of business			−0.238	−0.095
Establishments 2011–2015			(0.066)***	(0.052)'
Spatially lagged dif. in GOP vote		0.642***		0.703***
2012–2016 (ρ)				
Spatially lag. median income in		0.096		0.114
Cong Dis 2012–2016		(0.015)***		(0.017)***
Spatially lagged change in		−0.169		−0.145
employment		(0.051)***		(0.074)'
Spatially lagged percent of all		−0.113		−0.147
bridges		(0.054)*		(0.061)*
Spatially lagged % Mormon		0.248		
		(0.053)***		
Spatially lagged change in no. of				−0.051
businesses				(0.095)
AIC	2301.943	2124.415	2451.846	2237.393
Multiple/pseudo-R-squared	0.567	0.719	0.390	0.635
Moran's I residuals	0.424	0.006	0.437	0.036
Moran's I SD	0.030***	0.030	0.030***	0.030

'$p \leq .10$, *$p \leq .05$, **$p \leq .01$, and ***$p \leq .001$.
Note: SDM: Spatial Durbin Model. $N = 436$, incl. District of Columbia.

Table 7. Predictors of 2016 switching to Trump among 2012 Obama voters.

Variables	(1) Switch from Obama in 2012 to Trump in 2016	(2) Mixed logistic with survey weight
Wrong track	2.822***	3.005***
	(0.507)	(0.559)
Racial resentment	3.570***	3.864***
	(0.784)	(0.791)
Modern sexism	4.011***	4.223***
	(1.029)	(1.228)
Limit imports	−0.648	
	(0.636)	
White	−0.140	1.566***
	(0.712)	(0.401)
Limit imports x white	1.491*	
	(0.817)	
Need strong leader	2.650***	3.346***
	(0.597)	(0.590)
US less secure	.661*	1.115***
	(0.335)	(0.377)
GOP senate race in state	2.601***	3.074***
	(0.381)	(0.476)
District's median earnings, 2013		−2.358**
		(1.066)
		−
Constant	−7.178***	−8.631***
	(0.888)	(0.980)
N	928	1,207
Pseudo-R2	0.58	0.42

Note: Cell entries are 0–1 standardized logit coefficients. (1) is based on a survey logistic regression, while (2) is based on mixed logistic regressions with survey weights at the first level.
Pseudo-R^2 calculated by McFadden's method.
Standard errors in parentheses. ***$p < .01$, **$p < .05$, and *$p < .1$.

Table 8. Predictors of 2016 voting for Trump among 2012 non-voters.

Variables	(1) 2012 Non-vote to 2016 Trump vote	(2) Mixed logistic with survey weights
Racial resentment	2.002***	2.929***
	(0.567)	(0.886)
Modern sexism	1.603**	2.138**
	(0.714)	(1.034)
Limit imports	0.751**	1.352**
	(0.361)	(0.552)
Income level	1.073**	1.527**
	(0.524)	(0.692)
US less secure	0.575	0.841*
	(0.363)	(0.485)
Gov't should not guarantee jobs	1.380**	1.742**
	(0.594)	(0.812)
GOP senate candidate in state	3.654***	5.565***
	(0.407)	(0.805)
Constant	−4.467***	−6.783***
	(0.805)	(1.175)
N	521	521
Pseudo-R^2	0.39	0.40

Note: Cell entries are 0–1 standardized logit coefficients. (1) is based on survey logistic regressions while (2) is based on mixed logistic regressions with survey weights at the first level as discussed in note 36.
Pseudo-R^2 calculated by McFadden's method.
Standard errors in parentheses ***$p < .01$, **$p < .05$, *$p < .1$.

Back to Individual-Level Data: Predicting *Changes* in Voting Decisions

As we have acknowledged, the search for roots of support for populism among individuals must ultimately focus on analyses of *individuals'* attitudes and behavior, using individual-level survey data. Accordingly, we return to the 2016 ANES data, bearing in mind an important lesson from our aggregate analyses: that the analysis of *changes* over time in attitudes and behavior is more likely to illuminate the roots of populism than is a typical static analysis.

Fortunately, ANES asked 2016 voters what they had done in 2012: whether they voted for Obama, or voted for Romney, or did not vote. Of course, people's recollections of their actions four years earlier are subject to various errors, including wishful thinking as well as simple failures of memory (Wright 1993). Still, the recall data appear to be sufficiently reliable to be worth analyzing. Indeed, there may be reasons to prefer them to the so-called "validated vote" data, which we have also examined. Latino and Black voters are more likely than Whites to be unlisted or incorrectly listed in voter-matching databases. States also vary widely in their record-keeping on voting behavior, with frequencies of inaccurate and missing data varying across state lines (Grimmer et al. 2018; Berent, Krosnick, and Lupia 2016; Ferguson et al. 2018, Note 63).

Using the ANES recall data, it is a simple matter to record reported changes in behavior between 2012 and 2016. Vote switching can come in different forms. Some people ($n = 154$, out of 1,728 ANES respondents who in 2016 recalled a 2012 Obama vote) switched all the way from voting for Obama to supporting Trump. Others ($n = 187$) came in from the cold: they switched from non-voting in 2012 to voting for Trump in 2016. And still others ($n = 139$) went out into the cold: they changed from voting for Obama in 2012 to non-voting in 2016. Each member of the latter two groups helped Trump only half as much as straight switchers from Obama to Trump.

We discovered that the different kinds of switchers tended to come from different groups of people and to be influenced by different factors. To be sure, racists and sexists (along with those who occupied apparently racist or sexist positions on the relevant scales for reasons of policy or ideology rather than prejudice) did indeed rally around Trump, as our tables 7, 8, and 9 indicate. But these factors explain only part of his appeal.

Just as one would expect, both switching from Obama to Trump and switching from non-voting to casting a ballot for Trump were also strongly predicted by feelings that the country was on the "wrong track," feelings that were likely fueled by a combination of social and economic discontent. Switchers from Obama to Trump were also swayed by feelings that the U.S. "needs a strong leader," and that the United States was now "less secure." Residing in congressional districts that had been relatively left out of the Obama recovery (as indicated by 2013 earnings) also appears to have played a role in the switchers' decisions, though our earlier note about weights in the mixed models dictates caution.

Both new voters who went for Trump and those who switched from voting for Obama also tended to favor protection from imports. Whites who had voted for Obama were particularly affected by this view—there was a statistically significant interaction. Since they had previously voted for Obama (an African American), racial resentment seems unlikely to have been the only important determinant of these white voters' moves toward Trump; fears about import pressures on wages seem pertinent. Voters who had not voted in 2012 but came out for Trump were moved mostly by the same factors, but also by a negative reaction to the idea that government should guarantee jobs for Americans. This appears to be an instance in which Trump's leftward nods to mute the usual partisan impact of social welfare issues did not operate; possibly it points to some mobilization of former Tea Party members toward the end of the campaign.

Another factor appears to have affected both sets of new Trump voters (as opposed to formerly pro-Obama dropouts)—one that has thus far received little or no attention. As late as early October, not only many polls, but also the Iowa Electronic Market betting odds, suggested that the Democrats had a serious chance of winning control of the Senate. In the final weeks of the campaign, however, a wave of money supporting Republican candidates poured into many Senate races. In a dramatic turnaround, the Republicans retained control of the Senate. This came with a striking twist: for the first time in American history, the alignment of winning Senate candidates with the outcome of the presidential race within the state was perfect—the same party won both, with no exceptions (Ferguson, Jorgensen, and Chen 2018a, 20–21; see also Ferguson, Jorgensen, and Chen 2019).

Observing a strikingly similar wave of last-minute money into the Trump campaign (Ferguson, Jorgensen, and Chen 2018a) proposed that the two waves reinforced each other, helping Trump to overcome the Clinton lead. Our present evidence supports this "reverse coat tails" effect. Having a GOP Senate campaign in the state appears to have strongly affected new voters for Trump, both those who had voted for Obama in 2012 and those had not voted at all.

The third type of switch that helped elect Trump involved voters who voted for Obama in 2012 but then did not vote in 2016. Our scrutiny of the characteristics of these drop-outs indicates that very few conservative voters took this path (as one might expect of people who had all voted for Obama); almost all were either liberal or moderate in their views. But these "into the cold" voters were often poor—living on the margins of existence in America. They appeared to be very slightly more sexist than most Democrats, but they were also rather heavily female. Our suspicion is that the perceived Wall Street orientation and affluent tilt of the Clinton campaign detracted from Clinton's appeal to less affluent voters. As a group, this bloc of nonvoters tended not to perceive important differences between the two major parties.

The regression analysis reported in Table 9 estimates the independent impacts of such factors. 2012 Obama voters who abstained in 2016 tended to be motivated by racial resentment, but also by desires to limit imports, perceptions that the U.S. was less secure, and disapproval of the Affordable Care Act (which, given their relatively liberal orientations, we suspect reflected disappointment with its provisions rather than a conservative rejection of the basic idea). They also tended to be young, to have lower incomes, and to see little difference between the parties.

Table 9. Predictors of not voting in 2016 among 2012 Obama Voters.

Variables	(1) 2012 Obama vote to 2016 voting Clinton	(2) Mixed logistic with survey weight
Racial resentment	1.565***	1.854***
	(0.490)	(0.612)
Limit imports	0.628**	0.539
	(0.309)	(0.352)
Income	−1.235***	−1.411***
	(0.449)	(0.506)
US less secure	0.767***	1.080***
	(0.291)	(0.294)
Disapprove of ACA	1.755***	1.661***
	(0.425)	(0.511)
See no party differences party differences	0.800**	1.096***
	(0.315)	(0.422)
Age	−2.299***	−2.860***
	(0.736)	(0.849)
Constant	0.007	−0.154
	(0.612)	(0.698)
N	879	879
Pseudo-R2	0.20	0.19

Note: Cell entries are 0–1 standardized logit coefficients.
Pseudo-R^2 calculated by McFadden's method.
Standard errors in parentheses. ***$p < .01$, **$p < .05$, and *$p < .1$.

What Influenced Social Attitudes?

We need to mention an important question that we cannot yet answer: what impact, if any, did accumulating economic distress have upon the social attitudes (e.g., racial resentment and modern sexism) that we found to be important in 2016 voting decisions and in individuals' switches between 2012 and 2016?

We suspect that economic factors—especially economic distress caused by import pressure, plant relocation, and other mechanisms that have restrained wage growth—were important long-term influences upon the social attitudes that had big proximate effects on 2016 voting. Scapegoating works best if there is something unpleasant to blame the scapegoats for.

In order to pin down the extent of any such effects we will need to consider more fully the dynamic interplay of economic, social, and political factors over time. And we will need to estimate full multi-level models that take into account both geographical contexts and individuals' attitudes and characteristics. This is a challenge, particularly when simultaneously coping with spatial autocorrelation across geographic units and with complex weighting schemes for the individual survey data. (For this reason, and for the analysis of long time series, aggregate county-level data may be superior to congressional-district data.) One of the principal aims for our future work is to do it. We also need to explore more carefully the distraction/manipulation hypothesis: that politicians and others have deliberately channeled economic distress to exploit, amplify, or even create social resentments.

Conclusion

The conventional wisdom is wrong, or at least seriously incomplete. Donald Trump was *not* elected president of the United States by an avalanche of "deplorables" motivated only by racism, sexism, and xenophobia.

To be sure, social anxieties and resentments were important, especially in the 2016 Republican primaries—an alternative universe populated by a relatively small, intense band of activists who were indeed susceptible to such appeals. In the general election, too, racism and sexism affected some voters, though to a much lesser extent and with decidedly double-edged impact. Most

Americans are not extreme sexists or racists. The net effect of Trump's race-related appeals is unclear, and he almost certainly lost rather than gained general election votes due to his perceived sexism. Furthermore, any discussion of Trump's "appeal" should not lose sight of the fact that Trump was very unpopular and actually lost the popular vote. Still, without question Trump's scapegoating message did activate and exploit social resentments that affected voting behavior, both positively and negatively.

At every stage of the 2016 elections, however, *economic* factors also played a big part. Possibly a bigger part. Leading up to 2016, millions of Americans had suffered from job losses, stagnant or declining wages, home foreclosures, medical crises, and hollowed-out communities. Many blamed economic globalization, cheap imports, the immigration of low-wage workers, and automation. Many were fed up with both major parties, both of which had backed free international trade and high levels of immigration without, apparently, a lot of concern for those who were negatively affected.

Our findings, based on several different types of data, make clear that Trump's economic-based appeals were central to his success. Particularly his uniquely populist focus on trade, economic growth, and immigration. In the Republican primaries, in the general election, and in changes from to 2012, we repeatedly found that key economic factors had big effects on individuals' voting decisions and on aggregate congressional-district vote totals.

Attitudes about limiting imports emerged as especially important in the primaries, in the general election, and among 2016 switchers or abstainers who had voted for Obama in 2012. Because of Trump's leftward nods, desires to reduce income inequality and concerns that politicians only care about the rich moved GOP primary voters toward Trump rather than establishment Republican candidates. Opposition to job guarantees also appears to have pushed some 2012 non-voters to turn out for Trump in 2016 (which may reflect support from adherents of the Tea Party movement).

Many economic factors affected aggregate vote totals across congressional districts, including the size of certain industrial sectors (e.g., manufacturing, battered by cheap imports). Aggregate 2012–2016 shifts in congressional district vote-shares from Romney toward Trump were moved by low median incomes, negative changes in employment, starved public works (measured by structurally deficient bridges), and negative changes in the number of business establishments.

Not only were several major economic factors important; our analysis suggests that the social and the economic were *intertwined,* both in Trump's rhetoric and in the minds of many voters. The boundaries between the two are fuzzy.

In responses to the ANES open-ended "likes" and "dislikes" questions, many Americans expressed worries about trade in nonstandard ways that qualified or contradicted their apparently pro-establishment answers to closed questions. Many also alluded to the complex mixture of social and economic anxieties that animate reactions to immigration: unease about different-looking and differently speaking foreigners, but also concern about job competition. What could superficially appear to be xenophobic views of Mexicans or Muslims sometimes instead reflected genuine (if exaggerated) worries about jobs or about potential terrorism. Much the same thing may be true of certain attitudes that can sound racist: mistaken perceptions of affirmative action, for example, can lead to resentment of African Americans and opposition to policies seen as unfairly benefiting them (see, for example, Hochshild 2016).

We suspect that this fuzzy mixture of the social and the economic partly reflects dynamic processes that work over many years, in which economic and social factors reciprocally influence each other in explicitly political discussions and more informal discursive processes. We also suspect that fundamental economic trends (economic globalization and technological advances) may have been even more important than social trends (increased ethnic diversity, advances by women and minorities) in fueling increased social resentments. Particularly if something like Arendt's "alliance of mob and capital" occurred, in which wealthy elites deliberately inflamed

(even created) and channeled economic distress into social resentments. Our analysis of Trump's scapegoating hints at this. But to untangle the dynamic processes will require different data than we have at present. These are issues for future research.

Our present evidence makes clear that *economic* aspects of Trump's message—often explicitly linked to more or less plausible policy proposals—were quite important. His deviations from Republican orthodoxy on trade and immigration were crucial in the primaries and powerful in the general election as well. His nods to criticisms of the wealthy and support for left-leaning economic policies (on infrastructure, jobs, Social Security, and Medicare) undoubtedly helped defuse the usual advantage they bring to Democrats in general elections.

Our evidence bears on how one might combat right-wing populism if one wished to do so. Would broader economic appeals help or not? Should the Democrats just embrace ethnic and gender diversity and count on favorable demographic trends? Or should they try to win back white working class voters through left-oriented economic policies on jobs, wages, health care, and the like? Our findings suggest that the latter strategy, combined with more cautious treatment of immigration and international trade, might bear fruit.

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