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**The Hinge of Fate?
Economic and Social Populism in the
2016 Presidential Election
A Preliminary Exploration**

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Support for populism is often attributed to xenophobia, racism, sexism; to anger and resentment at immigrants, racial or ethnic minorities, or “uppity” non-traditional women. According to these accounts, people who feel socially resentful may reject established politicians as favoring those “others” over people like themselves, and turn to outsider populist leaders.

But it is also possible that those who back populist movements or politicians may suffer from real material deprivations: many years of low or stagnant incomes; job losses; inadequate housing or health care; blighted communities; and years of budget cuts (Autor et al., 2016) (Autor et al., 2017) (Storm, 2017) (Temin, 2016) (Monnat and Brown, 2017) . They may blame governments and established politicians for doing little to help.

Of course social and economic factors may interact with each other in complicated ways. Anti-immigrant attitudes may reflect fears of job competition as well as cultural anxiety. Economic deprivation may make people susceptible to demagogic scapegoating that blames their troubles on foreigners. Gender and racial stereotypes, too, may be exacerbated by economic suffering – or activated by political appeals.

We hope to help sort out which specific sorts of economic and social factors have been how important in producing support for populism, by examining a particular case: the remarkable rise to the U.S. presidency of Donald J. Trump, which surprised, dismayed, and aroused active opposition from nearly the entire establishments of both major U.S. political parties.

The present paper offers a preliminary look at some *proximate* causes of Trump's success: the beliefs, attitudes, and preferences among individual Americans that permitted or facilitated Trump's electoral success. Our data are drawn mostly from the American National Election Survey for 2016. This is a national sample which has only recently opened to researchers. Fitting its data into longer term trends and, especially, contextualizing it with the specifics of geography and local economies takes time and we ran out of it for this paper. As a consequence, we have not yet been able to address how historical events and long-term trends that – over a period of many years – led up to and may have been fundamental causes of the outcome of the election. That is a very large yellow flag, given the strong evidence that place and long run economic trends figured substantially in both the primaries and the outcome of the general election (Monnat and Brown, 2017) (Guo, 2016).

Claims and Evidence to Date

Many Democrats, as well as a fair number of analysts of exit polls and election surveys, have argued that social appeals and social attitudes were critical to Trump's success.

Hillary Clinton herself, for example – in addition to claiming that Russian agitprop and intervention by FBI Director James Comey tipped the electoral outcome – has maintained in her post-election book that relentless, years-long sexist attacks upon her as a woman, as well as demagogic slurs on Mexican and Muslim immigrants plus dog-whistle hints of racism toward African Americans, were crucial to her loss to Trump (Clinton, 2017).

Indeed it is plain that Clinton *was* subject to relentless sexist attacks, both in 2016 and over the course of many years before that. Through his slurs on various other women, Trump made clear that he thought they should be judged chiefly by their appearances and (one infers) by their deference to men (Blair, 2015) (Kranish and Fisher, 2016) (Allen and Parnes, 2017).

It is also true that Trump's campaign rhetoric was designed to mobilize and inflame resentment of immigrants from Mexico. As he famously expressed it as he declared for the Presidency: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (Staff, 2016). Building a "Great Wall" between the United States and Mexico became a centerpiece of his campaign public appeal. Trump also tried to channel fears of terrorism into opposition to Muslim immigrants and Muslims more generally, going so far as to denigrate the mother of a military hero who had been killed in Iraq. (Allen and Parnes, 2017). Since at least 2011 Trump had also pushed questions about where Obama was really born and whether he was a closet Muslim – slurs that conveyed to racially resentful whites in the South and elsewhere that he would not kowtow to African Americans (Allen and Parnes, 2017) (Green, 2017) (Kranish and Fisher, 2016).

Some analyses of election exit polls and of the American National Election Study appear to indicate that these appeals to social antagonisms and resentments were in fact important to Trump's support among voters (Tesler, 2016). It has

become conventional wisdom that angry white men – especially working class men – motivated by social resentments – were critical to Trumps victories.

But Trump also put forward strong criticisms of the American economy and American economic policy. And, unlike nearly every establishment Republican – including his all primary election opponents and most leading Republicans in Congress – Trump took highly popular, pro-worker stands on two major issues of economic policy: reducing economic harm to American workers from immigration, and protecting workers from the wage-reducing impact of international trade. He also promised to build up jobs through an infrastructure program. Less loudly, but fairly clearly, Trump indicated that he would preserve and protect social safety net programs like Social Security and Medicare (Ferguson et al., 2017).

It seems quite possible that Trumps electoral support may have reflected these economic factors as well.

It is no secret that, as of 2016, many Americans had suffered from major economic stresses and dislocations. Workers in the United States – far less protected by government social welfare programs than workers in most advanced countries – had suffered especially keenly from the wage and income stagnation that global wage competition and automation (itself partly a reaction to that competition) produced beginning in the 1970s. By 2016, U.S. median family incomes had barely increased at all in forty years, while the incomes and wealth of the most affluent Americans had soared. Many American workers had lost their jobs and had been forced into less-well-rewarded work (or had dropped out of the workforce altogether) when factories closed and moved abroad to China or

elsewhere. Whole communities were devastated, especially in small-town middle America and almost everywhere in the “rust-belt” of the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic states. Many Americans have also never recovered from the collapse of housing values in 2008 or the hits to their pensions took during the same crisis. (Temin, 2016) (Storm, 2017) (Lazonick, 2009) (Weil, 2017) .

Material distress does not just mean lack of money for food, clothing, shelter, and other such consumption goods. In the United States – with its patchwork health-care system – millions of people still lack health insurance. When they are desperate they may be able to obtain care in costly hospital emergency rooms, but that can be too late. Americans who cannot afford routine preventive measures or early care can expect to suffer more from disease and to have shorter lifespans. Many Americans living in economically stressed communities have turned to drugs (in the current opioid epidemic, for example), which bring their own special kinds of pain and suffering. (Case and Deaton, 2017) (Monnat and Brown, 2017) Young men and women faced with bleak economic prospects often volunteer for the U.S. armed services; many of them are sent to warzones abroad and face danger, traumatic stress, debilitating wounds, or death (Kriner and Shen, 2017).

In 2016, eight years after President Obama took office amidst high hopes, many distressed Americans may have concluded that the Democrats’ promises were hollow, that the Democrats had done very little to help.¹

¹ The Democrats did enact the Affordable Care Act. But this law does not protect many Americans from vast financial losses or secure access to care in many areas of the US. See the discussion in FERGUSON, T., JORGENSEN, P. & CHEN, J. 2017. *Industrial Structure and Political Outcomes: Donald Trump and the 2016 Election.* *Institute for New Economic Thinking.* Edinburgh.

The Democrats' "control" of the federal government was always tenuous, and after 2010 it was nonexistent. . Throughout Obama's tenure, a hostile Supreme Court stood ready to block or eviscerate any progressive economic legislation that slipped through. But it is not surprising that many citizens blamed inaction on the Democrats as well as establishment Republicans.)

Several social scientists have in fact shown – using aggregate data – that the level of support for Trump was particularly high in distressed areas or communities (Monnat and Brown, 2017) (Autor et al., 2017) (Autor et al., 2016) (Guo, 2016). These are places where average incomes had fallen or stayed stagnant over a long period; places that suffered from closing s of factories and mines or high unemployment; places where trade with China had had especially negative impacts; places with high rates of opioid addiction and suicides, and relatively high rates of casualties from military service (Kriner and Shen, 2017). All tended to show relatively high levels of support for Donald Trump.

For methodological reasons, including the great difficulty of merging survey responses and aggregate data into a single data set, we are not yet ready to report on the precise connections between these factors and individuals' voting decisions. But our analysis of the 2016 American National Election Study (ANES) carried out the by Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan does enable us to begin to identify the proximate social and economic attitudes that affected individuals' voting decisions in that year.

The ANES data allow us to ask two distinct questions: what led people to vote for Trump in the primary elections that won him the Republican nomination for the

presidency? And what factors led voters to prefer him over Hillary Clinton in the general election?

How did Trump Defeat Other Republicans for the Nomination?

Few observers anticipated Trump's nomination as the Republican candidate for the presidency. After all, he was widely seen as an ignorant, unserious buffoon. Trump ran against some sixteen other candidates, many of whom boasted impressive resumes and put forth attractive public personas (Ferguson et al., 2017). These included former Florida governor Jeb Bush (the top establishment favorite, with a huge reservoir of campaign money), Senator Marco Rubio (the main establishment backup); Scott Walker (the hard-right governor of Wisconsin, a short-lived hope among some Republican donors and officials); and Chris Christie (governor of New Jersey). Also the chameleon Ted Cruz – Ivy-League trained and Goldman-Sachs allied, but also the socially far-right preacher's son who inspired many evangelical Christian activists to throng Republican caucuses, and who was the last Trump opponent left standing in the spring of 2016. In addition, the field included – at least briefly – Governors John Kasich of Ohio (an alleged “moderate”) and Rick Perry of Texas; a lone woman, former Hewlett-Packard executive Carly Fiorina; the African –American surgeon Ben Carson; blasts-from-the-past Newt Gingrich and Mike Huckabee; and flash-in-the-pan Bobby Jindal, governor of Louisiana.

How did Trump manage to beat all these rivals? What, if anything, does the answer tell us about the roots of populist revolts?

It is important at the outset to recall that in the peculiar U.S. electoral system, candidates are generally nominated through *primary elections* in which turnout is generally low (often only 15 or 20 percent or fewer of eligible citizens vote; in 2016 Trump clearly drew in more voters, but turnout in the Republican primaries only reached 17% (Desilver, 2016). These mini-electorates are not only small, but also very unrepresentative. This holds even more for the caucuses that some states use in place of primaries or along with them. These latter are often dominated by the most dedicated and extreme political activists. This means that the nominees who make it onto general election ballots in November need not come anywhere close to pleasing average American voters, even before we consider the influence of political money. Far from it. With enough money and activist support, candidates can win nominations despite holding views that differ starkly from the supposedly all-powerful “median voters” in their states or districts.

In heavily one-party districts or states, extremist nominees can often win general elections and actually take office.² This, along with their often peculiar campaign financing is one key factor in the rise of “Tea Party” politicians, of the far-right Freedom Caucus in Congress, and of extremely right-wing governors and state legislators in many dominantly Republican but not extremely conservative states (Ferguson et al., 2013).

² For a discussion of the undemocratic results of the U.S. nomination process, see Page and Gilens (2017, chs. 6, 8.) and FERGUSON, T. 1995. *Golden Rule: The Investment Theory Of Party Competition And The Logic Of Money-Driven Political Systems*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Historically, U.S. presidential elections – with their generally high visibility and often vigorous competition – have been different. Hoping for success in the general election, both parties have usually nominated candidates who were – or at least *seemed* – relatively centrist, among the candidates who were able to finance a campaign. But not in 2016. In that year, Republican donors, activists, and primary election voters were an exceptionally extreme bunch. For that reason, accounting for Trump’s nomination can only illuminate the roots of populism among a *small, atypical* – though electorally important – segment of the U.S. population.

Just how atypical Republican primary voters were can be seen from various states’ exit polls and – for a broader picture of the entire country – the ANES national surveys.

In the autumn 2016 election study, all ANES respondents were asked whether or not they had voted in a primary election. A substantial number indicated that they had done so. Of those, about half said they had voted for a Republican candidate – for Trump or for another Republican. (They could have done this by voting either in a “closed,” Republicans-only primary, or in some cases in an “open” Republican primary in which independents and the occasional Democrat could participate. Thus the Republican voters we analyze include a few Democrats who voted for Trump or some other Republican candidate. The press made a certain amount of fuss about these defectors, but they constituted only 6 percent of all Republican primary voters.

These Republican-voting ANES respondents constitute a generally reliable and representative nation-wide sample of Americans who voted, though the

reliability of autumn survey respondents' recollections of their primary-season votes is not likely to be perfect, of course. But, from past experience, we believe it was generally good. The social desirability of misrepresenting having voted in a primary election was probably not very great, since a large majority of Americans – for a variety of reasons – regularly fail to do so.

These data make clear that 2016 Republican primary voters were quite different from the American population as a whole, and substantially different even from typical Republicans. They were only a bit more frequently male (52 percent), but much older, whiter, more religious, and presently or previously married.

Fully 42 percent of Republican primary voters were sixty years old or older. (Twenty percent were 70 or older.) Only 4 percent were Hispanic, and fewer than 1 percent were African American. Their annual incomes were substantially higher than the median U.S. income at the time: two-thirds got \$60,000 or more per year. Nearly all said they attended religious services at least a few times a year (only half of one percent said “never”), and a substantial 28 percent described themselves as “born again.” Only 9 percent said they had never been married. Just over one percent described themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Demographically, then, the Republican primary electorate was not by any means a microcosm of today's diverse, rainbow-like America.

The differences extended to attitudinal matters as well. On a host of issues, Republican primary voters were far more conservative than Americans as a whole.

In response to a seven-point liberal/ conservative self-rating scale, for example, fully 81 percent of Republican primary voters described themselves as

“conservative” (either just plain conservative, or “slightly” or “extremely” so.) A bare 3 percent called themselves even slightly “liberal.”

Most Republican primary voters – undoubtedly including some who turned out to vote precisely for this very reason – were worried about immigration. Only 11 percent, for example, said it was “not at all likely” that immigration would take away jobs. Only 33 percent disagreed even “somewhat” that immigrants increase crime rates in the United States. A solid 61 percent majority of Republican primary voters favored building a wall between the United States and Mexico; only 17 percent opposed this even a little. (In the U.S. adult population as a whole, this sentiment was reversed; see our Power Point.)

Clearly Latino immigrants from Mexico – especially illegal immigrants – were the chief focus of anti-immigration feelings. But fears of terrorism and aversion to Muslim immigrants apparently played a part as well. Fully 77 percent of Republican primary voters opposed allowing Syrian refugees to enter the United States. (Only 8 percent favored entry even “a little.”) Relatedly, only one third of Republican primary voters were “moderately,” “very,” or “extremely” sure that President Obama was not a Muslim. Two thirds at least tentatively entertained the completely false notion that Obama was a Muslim, and nearly 40 percent were at least “moderately” sure he was. Fertile ground for attacks on the “Other.”

As to race, more than half of Republican primary voters – 57 percent of them – agreed “somewhat” or “strongly” that blacks “must try harder to get ahead.” Most downplayed the extent of racial discrimination or black suffering. Large majorities opposed programs to assist African Americans.

Even though many women voted in the Republican primaries, very few Republican primary voters described themselves feminists. Very few Republican primary voters supported the right to have abortions. Many of them appeared to harbor sexist attitudes and to tolerate crude behavior toward women. For example, two thirds (66 percent) said that the notorious “*Access Hollywood*” videotape – which had recorded Trump boasting about having groped and forced sex upon women – “should not matter” more than perhaps a little bit.

Not surprisingly – with Democratic President Obama nominally in charge of the U.S. economy at the time – very few (only 13 percent) of Republican primary voters approved of Obama’s handling of the economy. Nearly half (46 percent) said the U.S. economy had got somewhat or much worse in the past year. (Only 9 percent said somewhat or much better, despite a modest cyclical recovery in actual levels of employment, wages, incomes, and GDP growth.

Several other survey questions also support the point that Republican primary voters were discontented about the state of the economy as a whole and about their own place in it. An overwhelming number agreed that the United States was on the “wrong track.” Many blamed immigration or international trade for our economic troubles. (They did not, however, generally blame trade *agreements*. The 28 percent who opposed such agreements were outweighed by the 38 percent who favored them, while about one third neither favored or opposed; here the specific question wording may be less than perfect.) As we have noted, a majority of Republican primary voters worried that immigration takes jobs away from native Americans.

All in all, the Republican primary electorate was ripe for right-populist appeals of the sort that Trump was making. This is especially true for the immigration and trade issues. On those issues, Trump heavily emphasized his economic nationalist and nativist stands, which were quite distinctive from those of the other Republican candidates. The other candidates, like establishment Republicans in Washington and elsewhere, almost universally backed free international trade. (Free trade is very important to donors who run or own multinational corporations that import or export goods, including retailers (Ferguson et al., 2017) Most of the Republican candidates and Republican establishment also favored substantial levels of immigration, though they were very quiet about it. (Immigration, especially of high-tech workers, tends to increase corporate profits by providing a supply of low-cost labor from abroad.

So which factors – social and/or economic – were most important in Trump’s primary victories over his Republican opponents?

Correlates of Trump support in the primaries. A big advantage of the ANES data is that they include responses to a host of questions concerning many different attitudes and preferences about various economic and social factors that are of theoretical interest to us. We can, therefore, use the ANES subsample of Republican primary voters to assess the impact of those factors upon individuals’ voting decisions.

As a first step, we examined simple bivariate relationships between a wide range of respondents’ attitudes and their voting or not voting for Trump in Republican primaries.

A good many factors were significantly related – though most of them only modestly so – to Trump votes. Several different sorts of anti-*immigration* attitudes and preferences, for example, were associated with voting for Trump rather than other Republican candidates. These included support for building a wall between the United States and Mexico (the strongest relationship³); not allowing Syrian refugees into the United States⁴; negative “feeling thermometer” scores toward illegal immigrants and toward Hispanics⁵; support for deporting *children* who had entered the country illegally⁶; the nativist sentiments that true Americans must have American ancestry, and that they must be born in the United States⁷; and the perceptions that immigration takes jobs away from Americans and increases crime rates.⁸

Several attitudes reflecting *racism* – or at least non-positive feelings toward African Americans or unwillingness to help them by means of government programs – were also associated with Trump voting. These included the somewhat callous sentiment that Blacks should “try harder”;⁹ the opinion that Blacks should be given

³ R=.34***. Pearson correlation coefficients are useful – though not perfect (they are affected by the extent of population variance) – for making comparisons across a large set of independent variables. In this case their appropriateness is increased by the ANES practice of asking questions with multiple responses that get at various *degrees* of support or opposition. We recoded all such responses to form monotonic, ordinal – though not necessarily perfectly linear – scales.

⁴ R=.29.

⁵ R=.21 and .18, respectively.

⁶ R=.22.

⁷ R=.21 and .19, respectively.

⁸ R=.17 and .19, respectively.

⁹ R=.20***. ((FTNT meaning of asterisks supra if they are included.))

no “favors”;¹⁰ negative feelings toward Black Lives Matter;¹¹ and the remarkable view that *slavery* had not been particularly hard on Blacks.¹²

We will see later, however, that – according to our multivariate analyses – anti-Black attitudes had little or no *causal impact* upon Trump’s primary votes. Perhaps this was because Trump did not much emphasize racial issues during the primary season. Or (a cynic might suggest) because in this respect there was not much to choose from among the Republican candidates.

Anti-Muslim feelings, as well, were associated (in the bivariate sense) with Trump votes. Negative feelings toward Muslims – registered on a one-hundred-point “feeling thermometer” – were significantly related to voting for Trump.¹³ Acceptance of the false notion (long encouraged by Trump) that President Obama was a Muslim – which of course may have bundled together feelings about Obama himself and about African Americans generally, along with disdain for Muslims – correlated rather substantially with Trump primary voting.¹⁴ Even more closely related was the opinion that Syrian refugees should not be allowed into the United States.¹⁵ (This item, too, bundled together several disparate attitudes: along with reactions to the mistaken perception that such refugees are overwhelmingly Muslim (they include many Christians), it probably tapped (non)altruism and perhaps fears

¹⁰ $R=.18^{***}$.

¹¹ $R=.13^{***}$

¹² $R=.13^{***}$. Extreme unconcern about slavery, however, was rather uncommon among Republican primary voters: only 26% said that the legacy of slavery and discrimination continues to disadvantage African-Americans.

¹³ $R=.17^{***}$.

¹⁴ $R=.25^{***}$.

¹⁵ $R=.29^{***}$.

of terrorism. But collateral evidence suggests that fears of terrorists slipping into the United States hidden amongst refugees was not a big factor. (ANES questions that asked more directly about terrorism showed little or no relationship with Trump voting in the primaries.¹⁶) All the Republican candidates were resolutely anti-terrorist and scornful of the Obama administration's efforts to protect the United States, so Trump did not stand out a great deal in this respect.

Voting for Trump in the primaries was also associated with certain *anti-women* or anti-feminist attitudes. The biggest correlation was with a subsequent denial that the *Access Hollywood* video should matter – though of course that relationship may have been inflated by the explicit mention of Trump in the survey question. The sentiments that women do “not appreciate” men, that they “leash” men, and (to a lesser extent) that they “seek favors” and “complain,” too, were significantly related to voting for Trump over other Republican candidates.¹⁷

Respondents' rejection of self-identification as feminists was also modestly related to Trump voting.¹⁸ Notably, however, opposition to various policies of importance to women was *not* much related to whether primary voters supported Trump or some other Republican. This was true of rejecting the idea that women are discriminated against; of opposition to abortion; and of opposition to equal pay for women.¹⁹ The reason may be that nearly all the other Republican candidates –

¹⁶ For worry about terrorism, $r=.03$ n.s.; for favoring troop use to fight ISIS, $r=.03$ n.s. The correlation was a significant (though modest) $.13^{***}$ for approval of torturing terrorists, but Trump's generally macho stance and openness to violence may have been more important here than the particular objects of torture.

¹⁷ $R=.21^{***}$, $.21^{***}$, $.12^{**}$, and $.12^{**}$ respectively.

¹⁸ $R=.11^{**}$.

¹⁹ $R=.07$ n.s., $.05$ n.s., and $.02$ n.s., respectively.

especially Trump's persistent opponent Ted Cruz – also expressed opposition to such policies.

Similarly, although the ANES asked about a number of traditional feelings or *traditional values*, few of them – only (if one wishes to include it) opposition to making it more difficult to purchase guns, and the vague sentiment that people should adjust to changes in the world ²⁰ -- correlated with Trump support in the primaries. Again, the other candidates – especially Cruz – also expressed fairly extreme conservatism about “family values” and other traditional matters, so that there was no particular reason for traditionalists to pick Trump.

Overall, however, it is clear that socially conservative attitudes in several realms – especially with respect to immigration and Hispanics, African Americans, Muslims, and women – were at least modestly associated (in the bivariate sense) with voting for Donald Trump in 2016 Republican Party primary elections.

But the same thing is also true of certain *economic* attitudes, feelings, and perceptions, particularly those related to *discontent* with perceive lack of economic progress.

Those who disapproved of President Obama's handling of the economy, for example, had a fairly substantial tendency to vote for Trump over other Republican candidates.²¹ So did those who believed that the U.S. economy had gotten worse rather than better in the past year.²² This was also true, though to a lesser extent, of those who expected the economy to be worse *next* year, and those who said they

²⁰ R=.13*** and .11**, respectively.

²¹ R=.22***.

²² R=.19***.

were *personally* worse off financially [than they had been a year before].²³ The economically discontented gave more support to outsider Trump than to the other Republican candidates, nearly all of whom held public office and – even in the case of renegade, establishment-criticizing Senator Ted Cruz – may have been partly blamed for economic failures. (The relatively strong showing of Cruz in primaries and caucuses, however, suggests that he may have escaped such blame more effectively than the others.)

Trump voting in the primaries was also related to opposition to free trade agreements²⁴ – one of Trump’s signature issues. And, as noted above, it was related to economic aspects of immigration, particularly the sentiment that immigration costs American jobs.

Despite Trump’s hints at Left economic populism, however, Trump voting was *not* much related to liberal attitudes on social welfare or social spending policies, as indicated by liberal-tilting self-placement scales on government spending,²⁵ or on government guarantees of jobs or incomes.²⁶ Nor was Trump primary voting significantly related to support for taxing millionaires more²⁷ (despite Trump’s promise to tax hedge-fund managers and other “paper pushers” just like everyone else), or to support for regulating banks more strictly.²⁸

²³ R=.11 and .11, respectively.

²⁴ R=.17***.

²⁵ R=.03 n.s.

²⁶ R=.01 n.s.

²⁷ R=.03 n.s.

²⁸ R=.04 n.s.

What, exactly, do the many significant social and economic correlations mean? As we know, correlation does not necessarily demonstrate – although it may be a necessary condition for – causation. So which of these social and economic factors actually had how much *effect* upon decisions to vote for Trump in the primaries?

Influences on Trump primary voting. We can get a better handle on the question of causation through multivariate regression, which is designed to produce estimates of the independent impact of each variable included in the analysis.²⁹

In this context, the great number and variety of relevant ANES survey questions constitutes an embarrassment of riches. We cannot possibly include all of them in any one regression. If there is any measurement error at all in independent variables (and there always is), even slight over-inclusiveness of correlated independent variables can cause problems – particularly attenuated coefficients and big standard errors. It is important to choose independent variables wisely. But wise choices may involve as much art as science.

We began our multivariate analyses by heeding the usual exhortation: let *theory* be your guide to model specification. Fine. But of course few social scientific theories are either iron-clad or deterministic. Moreover, the choice of independent

²⁹ When analyzing non-experimental data like ours, regression cannot in fact be guaranteed to produce accurate estimates of causal impact: estimates can be thrown off by spuriousness (which results from the omission of truly causal factors that are correlated with included independent variables) or by reciprocal causation, in which “dependent” variables actually influence “independent” ones. The former problem can ameliorated by the inclusion of as many theoretically plausible causes as possible. The latter is harder to deal with; it calls for close scrutiny and a touch of humility.

variables should consider measurement issues, too. Among the many social and economic ANES variables that are theoretically relevant to our concerns, we needed to pick those (and not too many of them) that provide the best available measurement of the relevant concepts. We needed to include independent variables that are not of direct theoretical interest to us but that may be expected to have independent effects of their own. To omit them could tend to inflate estimates of the effects the included factors.)

Such considerations often lead researchers to “try out” a series of model specifications and pick the one or ones that “perform best” according to some criterion or other (e.g., maximizing explanatory power, as indicated by R-squared.) This sort of data-dredging should be avoided. It violates the assumptions that underlie statistical significance tests. (Try often enough – say twenty or thirty times – and just by chance you will nearly always find *some* coefficient that looks statistically significant.³⁰)

As a result of careful work – or was it just very good luck? – we have been able to avoid that pitfall. The results presented here are those from the very first regression analysis we conducted. (We did perform some subsequent analyses, but only for the purpose of sensitivity testing: exploring how much the results would differ if we substituted different measures of the same concepts, or if we added factors not previously considered.)

³⁰ To put this another way: when using the p-less-than .05 significance criterion, if twenty regressions are performed, at least one coefficient is likely to look significant due to chance alone.

The results of our logistic regression on primary election vote choices are displayed in Table 1. Despite our efforts at parsimony, this table includes a lot of independent variables. It may take a little time to assimilate.

(Table 1 about here)

Table 1 indicates that the biggest independent influences upon primary votes for Trump were three primarily *social* attitudes: feelings that the *Access Hollywood* videotape of Trump's sexual boasting about women should or should not matter; opinions that Syrian refugees should or should not be allowed into the United States; and support for or opposition to building a wall between the United States and Mexico.

The coefficients for each of those three variables are highly significant (at the .01 level) and substantively large. There is one caveat: the explicit mention of "Trump" in the video question may have inflated that estimate, if favorable feelings about or intentions to vote for Trump influenced judgments that the tape should not matter. This is one example of a common problem, in which two way causation can complicate reliance on conventional regression.)³¹

No other coefficients are significant at better than the .05 level, though at that level there are indications that perceptions that women "leash" men, perceptions that immigration takes native Americans' jobs, and opposition to free trade

³¹ Our regression shows a negative sign on the question of whether immigrants take jobs away from Americans. The bivariate correlation is clearly the other way. This sort of reversal is a classic sign of multicollinearity, which we think likely derives from the powerful relation to the Wall issue.

agreements – as well as judgments that the United States needs a “strong leader” (a factor not of direct interest to us) – may be related to primary voting for Trump.

For purposes of sensitivity testing we explored certain variations in model specification. We tried including various measures of nativist sentiments about what an American must be, for example. None of the model variations we explored produced significant new coefficients for effects on Trump primary voting,

Our conclusion from this analysis is that the *proximate causes* of voting decisions in the Republican primaries were chiefly social rather than economic, apart from the imperfectly worded trade question. Note that this finding, in itself, would not necessarily imply that those social factors *contributed to Trump’s support* in the primaries: they did so only if most voters agreed rather than disagreed with Trump on the vote-shaping issues. As we have seen, however, the Republican primary electorate was extremely conservative and tended to agree with Trump’s stands on many of these issues. So most of the social factor that affected voting decisions did in fact tilt the outcome in favor of Trump. That is: within the rather small, unrepresentative Republican primary electorate, social rather than economic populism constituted a major part of Trump’s support. (We will see that in key respects the general election was quite different.)

But taking the longer view, where did the social anxieties and resentments come from? Might they have had economic roots?

In this paper, which is based on individual-level survey data from 2016, we have only been able to discuss certain election-year, proximate causes of Trump’s success. In the In the near future, however – using aggregate-level data that we plan

to merge into our individual-level ANES files – we will explore a further hypothesis; that the negative, resentful social attitudes that benefitted Trump in the Republican primaries were themselves heavily influenced by objective, long-term conditions of economic decline, as (Autor et al., 2017), (Case and Deaton, 2017), and (Monnat and Brown, 2017) suggest. Such influence could have occurred either through the natural human tendency to blame someone for one’s ills, or through calculated efforts by politicians and affluent elites to redirect anger about economic grievances away from themselves and toward scapegoats, such as foreigners, non-traditional women, and racial or ethnic minorities.

In any case, in the following section we will see that certain economic factors had greater proximate effects upon voting in the *general* election than in the primaries. We will also see that Trump actually *lost* rather than gained electoral support on certain social issues. Perhaps most importantly, we will see that certain economic factors (most notably opinions about key social welfare policies) were important precisely because they did *not* have the big effects that are generally expected when Republicans run against Democrats.

How Did Trump Beat Hillary Clinton and the Democrats?

The story of the 2016 general election is quite different from the story of the primaries, both because the choice set of candidates was very different – Republican Donald Trump versus Democrat Hillary Clinton, rather than Trump against fifteen or sixteen other Republicans – and because the electorate was very different: it much more closely resembled the adult population of the United States than the

small, unrepresentative set of Republican primary voters did. These differences altered the importance of certain social and economic factors in voting decisions and in the electoral outcome. Their effects undermine the argument that Trump's social populism was crucial to his victory and that economic factors did not matter.

Of course social factors cannot possibly explain the "popularity" of Trump among the American electorate, because Trump was not in fact popular. (His average pre-election rating on a 100-degree "feeling thermometer" was a very chilly 36 degrees, well below the 50-degree neutral point.) Trump won the general election – just barely, and only in terms of electoral votes, not the popular vote – only because his opponent was rather unpopular as well. Hillary Clinton, despite her broad experience and deep knowledge of government and the prospect of making history as the first woman president, suffered from widespread doubts about her trustworthiness and candor. She also suffered from indications of ties to Wall Street, and from her emphasis on identity politics rather than bread-and-butter issues related to jobs and incomes. Clinton's average pre-election thermometer rating was a rather cool 42 degrees, not much better than Trump's. Taken together, Trump and Clinton may have been the most unpopular pair of major-party candidates in American history.

In short: this is not a case of a populist candidate winning overwhelming electoral support. What needs explaining is something different; how a populist candidate with all of Trump's flaws was able to get *anywhere close* to winning a presidential election against a serious major party opponent.

What Americans were thinking. A useful starting point for understanding Trump's support is a brief examination of how Americans were thinking about the issues of the day. It turns out that Trump's general election audience – in sharp contrast to his Republican primary audience – was considerably less open than one might think to his social stands. There were real limits to the extent to which the American public was receptive to the sorts of xenophobic, racist, and sexist appeals that supposedly made Trump popular. Some of his social postures cost him votes. On the other hand, the general electorate was more receptive than many observers imagine to Trump's economic appeals.

Trump's crude talk and actions toward women, for example, did not go over at all well with most Americans. Most were appalled by the *Access Hollywood* videotape of Trump boasting about his groping of women. Indeed, tracking polls indicate that after the October 7 release of the tape and the October 9 first debate, Trump's support dropped significantly.³²

True, in some quarters Trump's crude remarks may have been accepted as showing candor and a disdain for "political correctness" – but only among a minority. True also, in the end many women – including a majority of college-educated women – voted for Trump, but surely not because of his sexism.

Trump's hints at racism toward African Americans, Latinos, and Muslims also were not well designed to appeal to the general election audience.

³² ALLEN, J. & PARNES, A. 2017. *Shattered -- Inside Hillary Clinton's Doomed Campaign*, New York, Crown. State that in the course of ten days, Clinton's lead rose from 4.7 points to 7.0. But the interpretation of this is complicated by the simultaneous October 7 WikiLeaks release of the Podesta emails and the intelligence community's release of a report on Russian interference in the election.

Despite years of “birther” campaigns (encouraged by Trump) and allegations that President Obama was a Muslim, for example, in 2016 many more Americans (37 percent) said they were “very” or “extremely” sure that Obama was *not* a Muslim than were very sure he was (11 percent.) (Those who expressed some degree of uncertainty also tilted heavily toward thinking he was not.)

Again, Trump’s often-repeated promise to build a Wall between the United States and Mexico was not well calculated to appeal to many Americans, at least not as a serious policy proposal. It may have helped fix in voters’ minds his more popular stands on other aspects of immigration policy (cracking down on illegal immigrants; reducing *legal* immigration; not allowing Syrian refugees into the country.) Those stands very likely helped him win votes – at least partly because of economic fears of wage competition and job losses. But the specific policy of building a wall (which most experts considered unnecessary, ineffective, environmentally devastating, and extremely expensive) was favored by only 33 percent of Americans, with 46 percent opposed (the rest were neutral or unsure.)

Trump’s slurs against immigrants from Mexico as “murderers” and “rapists” did not resonate well with most Americans, either. To be sure, the public tilted toward favoring decreased rather than increased levels of legal immigration, by 44% to 16%. Large majorities opposed illegal immigration, and most Americans did not feel warm toward illegal immigrants. On Feeling Thermometer ratings, their average was a chilly 42 degrees. But their feeling thermometer rating of Hispanics averaged a very warm 68 degrees, far more favorable than the ratings of Trump himself. Most Americans disagreed with the idea that immigrants harm our culture

(55-19), and opinion tilted strongly (44-27) against the notion that immigrants increase crime rates.

We have emphasized that most Americans disagreed with Trump on these three particular matters – the *Access Hollywood* video, the canard that President Obama was a Muslim, and the promise to “build a wall” against Mexico – because we will see that attitudes concerning those matters were very important in people’s general-election voting decisions. But in each case the views of most Americans went *against* Trump. In each case he *lost* rather than gained support as a result of these primarily social appeals.

On economic issues the situation was more complicated. Trump had a more receptive audience concerning certain economic aspects of immigration: three quarters (76 percent) said it was at least “somewhat” likely that immigration takes jobs away from native Americans. (Note, however, that opinion did, however, tilt toward thinking that immigration was good rather than bad for the economy as a whole, by 51% to 21%. On Trump’s other signature economic issue, the need to protect Americans’ jobs from the pressures of free international trade, he could also appeal to prevailing worries.³³

With economic inequality at an extremely high level, a big majority of Americans (67 percent to 15 percent) favored imposing higher taxes on millionaires. This posed a problem for billionaire Trump, whose quietly released tax plan actually *cut* taxes sharply for most millionaires. He may have defused

³³ Note that opinion actually tilted in *favor* of the trade agreements that Trump criticized, however, by a two-to-one margin, though many Americans had no clear opinion. The breakdown was 40-20 with 40% neither in favor nor opposed.

potential opposition somewhat, however, both by saying almost nothing in public about the specifics of his tax plan and by his references to taxing hedge-fund managers and other “paper-pushers” “just the same as everyone else.”

Particularly important as a potential danger to Trump was the quite progressive stand of most Americans on many specific issues of social welfare policy. In 2016, just as in previous years, large majorities favored spending more rather than less on Social Security. Majorities favored government help with jobs and wages, with health care, with better schools, and many other things (Page and Gilens, 2017). Those opinions can usually be counted on to produce votes for Democrats.

We will see that an important part of the 2016 story was the *lack* of any big Democratic advantage on social welfare issues. Trump apparently defused them, to a large extent, with his incessant talk about providing more better-paying *jobs* – which won him the votes of a good many union members. He promised a big infrastructure program that would put people to work again. He argued that limits on immigration, and the revision of “unfair” trade agreements, would also protect Americans’ jobs.

Moreover, Trump frequently reassured Americans that he would “protect” their benefits from Social Security and Medicare -- the same programs that Paul Ryan and other congressional Republicans had spent years trying to cut. Since Trump as president-elect and president almost completely embraced the orthodox Republican conservatism of Mike Pence, Mitch McConnell, and Paul Ryan, is easy to forget his campaign postures of Left economic progressivism, But he did in fact run,

to a substantial extent, as an economic progressive. This distinguished him from other Republicans and helped defuse a potential Democratic advantage.

Hillary Clinton did not help herself in this regard with her “stronger together” campaign that – in contrast to Bernie Sanders’ primary season campaign – emphasized identity politics rather than jobs, wages, health care, education, and other traditionally Democratic issues (Allen and Parnes, 2017) (Ferguson et al., 2017).

In a sense, the critical economic issues of social welfare policy became important precisely because of their relative *absence* in contrasts between Trump and Clinton. When it came to voting in November, they were the dog that did not bark.

On the positive side, the biggest thing that Trump had to work with was undoubtedly the high level of *discontent* with how things were going in the United States. In autumn 2016, a remarkable *three quarters* (74 percent) of Americans agreed that the country was on the “wrong track.” This sentiment no doubt partly reflected social unease. But a big part of it had undoubtedly grown out of the decades of stagnant wages and incomes in the United States, the hollowing out of many communities, and the perceived failure of the U.S. government – including the Obama administration and its member Hillary Clinton – to do much about it.

A related aspect of Americans’ thinking that was helpful for Trump was the widely shared feeling that America needed a “strong leader” who could get things done. In the ANES survey, nearly twice as many respondents (53 percent) agreed with that proposition than disagreed with it (26 percent). Trump was well

positioned to argue that he, a master of the “art of the deal,” could get things done where others had failed.

Which factors affected general election voting? It would be idle to enumerate all the independent variables in the ANES survey that were correlated with choices between Trump and Clinton. There are too many. Dozens of them were highly significant statistically (at the .01 level.) Many of the correlations were much larger than comparable correlations from the primary season: in many cases $r=.50$ or higher.

Many of the social and economic independent variables were also highly correlated with each other. This is to be expected in a general election setting, where voters’ options are narrowed to just two candidates, and where the candidates differ in ways that evoke whole configurations of interrelated issues.

Under these conditions, multiple regression analysis is essential in order to sort out which factors had an independent effect on voting and which were only spuriously related to vote choices.

We specified a regression model that aimed to include the best available measures of all social and economic factors of interest to us, together with a few factors of less direct interest that appeared likely to affect votes.

The results of the logistic regression are displayed in Table 2 – a rather lengthy table that may take some time to grapple with. Our discussion focuses on the first column, which includes only the variables that we believe to be, potentially, direct causes of voting decisions. This specification treats party loyalties as

“standing decisions” that summarize (and possibly affect) the more specific attitudes of interest.

We do not believe that “controlling” for party or ideology is appropriate here, because we are interested in the direct effects of the attitudes. Controlling for factors that may influence the independent variables of central interest is generally a mistake, since it tends to produce inaccurate (attenuated) estimates of the coefficients of interest. Moreover, the ‘party identification’ variable suffers from the defect of being partly an effect rather than a cause of candidate evaluations and voting choices. (Party “leaners,” and weak identifiers, in particular, appear to be susceptible to changing party ties in response to particular candidates and political environments).

Still, in order to accommodate those who insist on controlling for party or ideology, the second column of Table 2 reports results when the standard Michigan seven-point party identification scale is added to the regression equation. The third column shows results when the seven-point liberal-to-conservative scale is included. Clearly, controlling for party or ideology has little effect on our results.

(Insert Table 2 about here)

Superficially, the results look quite similar to those from the primaries. Once again certain social factors are seen as having a very big impact: especially feelings about whether the *Access Hollywood* video should matter, but also beliefs about whether or not President Obama was a Muslim, and support for building a wall between the United States and Mexico (which undoubtedly has an economic as well as a social component; we have no way to sort out how much of each.) The meaning

of this for the *electoral outcome*, however was quite different than in the primaries. Among the highly conservative Republican primary voters (who arguably resembled what Hillary Clinton unguardedly referred to as “deplorables”), attitudes that tended toward sexism and anti-Hispanic, anti-Black, and anti-Muslim racism all clearly helped Trump. In the general election they *hurt* him. They cost him votes, because they went against the views of most Americans.

Voting in the general election was certainly affected – as in the primaries – by beliefs that the United States needed a “strong leader.” That helped Trump. So did the widespread perceptions that the United States was on the “wrong track” (again, we cannot be sure to what extent those perceptions focused on social matters and to what extent on economic.) And Trump was helped by the widely shared view that the U.S. position in the world had weakened.

Certain economic factors emerged as more important in the general election than in the primaries. The strong tilt of opinion in favor of taxing millionaires, for example, cost Trump some votes. Views about trade agreements may actually have cost him a bit, too, given the substantial public support for such agreements. (Most Americans, however, favored more protection of jobs or compensation for their loss, attitudes favorable to Trump.) Opinions about the balance between providing government services and cutting spending may have been a wash, because of the nearly even division of opinion among Americans. (31% services, 32% cut spending.)

Of great importance, however, is the *absence* of impact upon vote choices of attitudes about the social welfare policies that usually benefit Democrats – on

government help with jobs or incomes, or with health insurance, for example. (Other social welfare attitudes had too feeble bivariate relations with voting choices to include in the regression analysis, with one exception: Social Security. That helped Clinton.) This, we have suggested, is the dog that did not bark: the set of factors that could have helped Clinton and the Democrats but failed to do so. That unexpected *non*impact of a set of economic issues may have been critical to Trump's victory.

All in all, Trump's electoral success in November 2016 may well have owed more to his gestures at Left (economic) populism than to his Right (social) populism. The former found a more receptive audience among American voters.

Conclusion

We found that in the Republican *primary* elections, the effect of purely economic factors was limited. Donald Trump did indeed – as many commentators have claimed – profit from several kinds of social attitudes that one might characterize as sexist, racist, or xenophobic – resentment of women and negative feelings toward Latinos, African Americans, Muslims, and foreigners. But this worked only because of the exceptionally conservative and socially resentful nature of the small, unrepresentative Republican primary electorate. To conclude that this constituted a populist revolt with primarily social roots is correct only if we are speaking of revolt among a very small (though electorally consequential) and unusual part of the U.S. population.

In the *general* election, Trump's postures toward Latinos, African Americans, Muslims, and especially women (as exemplified by the *Access Hollywood* tape) appear to have cost him votes.

Moreover, in the general election certain economic factors may have come more to the fore and helped Trump. More important, the very *absence* of the usual Republican deficit on social welfare issues – jobs, incomes, education, health care and the like – may have been a critical factor in Trump's success. Trump's strong emphasis on the importance of providing good jobs and wages for workers – his Left economic populism if you will – may well have been crucial. In short, the roots of Trump's particular brand of populist revolt may have been more economic than social.

We have more to work to do. In order to sort out the full interplay of social and economic factors we will need to take account of the years of negative economic trends in the United States – stagnant wages and incomes, factory closings and job losses, the destruction of whole communities. Those events may well have caused or facilitated the rise of the social resentments that carried Trump to victory in the Republican primaries and that were by no means totally absent in the general election. To analyze these matters we will need to combine historical, aggregate data on what has been happening in the places where individual Americans live, together with the ANES data on what they were thinking and feeling in 2016. We hope to begin this analysis soon.

Table 1. Predictors of Voting for Trump in a 2016 Republican Primary

	(1) Unweighted	(2) Population-Weighted
Immigration takes jobs	-0.226* (0.108)	-0.134 (0.125)
Immigrants increase crime	0.158 (0.115)	-0.0158 (0.131)
Build a wall between the U.S. & Mexico	0.373** (0.138)	0.393* (0.153)
Allow Syrian refugees	-0.474** (0.158)	-0.484** (0.178)
Blacks should try harder	-0.0145 (0.125)	-0.00413 (0.133)
Women leash men	0.233* (0.0970)	0.321** (0.114)
Trump video should matter	-0.466** (0.144)	-0.480** (0.162)
Guns should be difficult to buy	0.120 (0.101)	0.105 (0.110)
Know Obama not Muslim	-0.161 (0.107)	-0.0748 (0.124)
Approve Obama's handling of economy	-0.0391 (0.189)	-0.0602 (0.222)
Economy is better now	0.0622 (0.114)	-0.0269 (0.129)
Favor trade agreements	-0.181* (0.0843)	-0.107 (0.0984)
Need a strong leader	0.325* (0.135)	0.325* (0.150)
Constant	-1.095*** (0.190)	-1.141*** (0.228)
Observations	643	643
Log-Likelihood	-373.8	-345.1

Note: Cell entries are X-standardized logit coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. Unweighted data.³⁴

³⁴ It is important to use the ANES weights in calculating percentages of responses, in order to faithfully represent in the population of interest. In regression analyses this consideration is outweighed by the greater statistical precision (and adherence

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

to the assumptions of statistical tests) that comes with treating each survey respondent equally.

Table 2. Predictors of Voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election (Unweighted)

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)
Party identification		1.779***	
		(0.224)	
Liberal/ conservative ideology			1.041***
			(0.260)
Immigration takes jobs	0.0523	0.143	0.151
	(0.173)	(0.193)	(0.188)
Immigrants increase crime	0.140	0.0799	0.124
	(0.178)	(0.199)	(0.199)
Build a wall between U.S. and Mexico	0.571***	0.752***	0.443*
	(0.159)	(0.185)	(0.174)
Allow Syrian refugees	-0.345	-0.324	-0.242
	(0.187)	(0.209)	(0.206)
Feelings about Black Lives Matter	-0.328	-0.378	-0.425*
	(0.189)	(0.216)	(0.213)
Gov't should help Blacks	-0.250	-0.165	-0.217
	(0.194)	(0.224)	(0.220)
Feminist self-description	-0.285	-0.220	-0.237
	(0.163)	(0.180)	(0.181)
Women control men	0.0897	0.0470	0.179
	(0.148)	(0.170)	(0.165)
Trump video should matter	-2.016***	-2.054***	-1.947***
	(0.204)	(0.237)	(0.224)
Know Obama not Muslim	-0.547**	-0.679**	-0.561**
	(0.180)	(0.209)	(0.199)
Favor legality of abortion	-0.397**	-0.295	-0.253
	(0.149)	(0.172)	(0.168)
Lifestyle is breaking down	-0.102	-0.0815	-0.187
	(0.180)	(0.196)	(0.210)
Country is on wrong track	0.784***	0.835***	0.605**
	(0.185)	(0.226)	(0.200)
Make guns difficult to buy	-0.152	0.0322	-0.139
	(0.147)	(0.169)	(0.165)
Aware of global warming	-0.105	-0.246	-0.257
	(0.178)	(0.221)	(0.204)
Economy is better now	-0.0911	-0.00153	-0.0131
	(0.198)	(0.236)	(0.216)
Unemployment is up	-0.296	-0.131	-0.382
	(0.182)	(0.216)	(0.204)

Favor more gov't services & spending	-0.458*	-0.0479	-0.421*
	(0.180)	(0.212)	(0.205)
Favor private health insurance	0.125	-0.252	0.0820
	(0.189)	(0.215)	(0.208)
Gov't should see to jobs and incomes	-0.334	-0.296	-0.254
	(0.195)	(0.222)	(0.219)
Favor taxing millionaires	-0.513**	-0.575**	-0.422*
	(0.159)	(0.175)	(0.176)
Favor trade agreements	-0.363*	-0.321	-0.319*
	(0.148)	(0.169)	(0.161)
Regulate banks	-0.0756	-0.108	-0.0125
	(0.155)	(0.175)	(0.173)
Torture terrorists	-0.130	-0.160	-0.262
	(0.155)	(0.184)	(0.173)
Favor increasing defense spending	0.0793	-0.0871	0.0679
	(0.165)	(0.192)	(0.184)
Need strong leader	0.529**	0.450*	0.469*
	(0.179)	(0.201)	(0.192)
US world position is weaker	-0.467**	-0.227	-0.492**
	(0.157)	(0.191)	(0.175)
Gov't is corrupt	-0.0629	-0.0296	-0.129
	(0.154)	(0.177)	(0.169)
Constant	-0.413*	-0.438*	-0.507**
	(0.166)	(0.192)	(0.191)
Observations	1,586	1,586	1,447
Log-Likelihood	-193.3	-150.7	-163.2

Note: Cell entries are X-standardized logit coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. Data are unweighted.

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

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