

Emotional Voting, Racial Animus and Economic Anxiety in the 2016 Presidential Election

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Abstract: In the wake of Donald Trump’s presidential election victory, several competing theories were offered purporting to explain Trump’s appeal to American voters. These included arguments that Trump voters were mostly “white working class” voters who felt left behind in an increasingly globalized economy; that Trump voters were those who simply felt negatively about the direction of the economy; or that Trump voters were attracted to the candidates use of overtly racialized language against minority groups such as immigrants and Blacks.

This paper utilizes data from AdSAM, an emotional response survey system, to measure the emotive responses of likely voters toward candidates in the 2016 election. The survey also measured emotional responses towards issues including immigration, the economy, and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The results suggest that the strongest predictors for voting for Trump were negative feelings towards the economy and negative responses to the BLM movement, and emphasizes emotional, rather than cognitive responses as explaining support for Trump.

Introduction

Following Donald Trump’s Electoral College victory in the 2016 presidential election, researchers offered several alternative theories explaining Trump’s appeal to voters, including economic anxiety, authoritarian tendencies, or positive reactions towards Trump’s racist and sexist appeals. This paper first summarizes the literature on the election results, before then relating more broadly to the contention in the literature between rational and emotional voting. Rather than considering voters rational actors who select the candidate closer to them on some ideological spectrum (Downs 1957), emotional voting suggests that voters may simply select the candidate who resonates with them emotionally or delivers the highest level of consonance with their own identity (Bruter & Harrison 2017).

The research’s primary contribution to the literature is the unique manner in which respondents’ positions are measured. There is an increasing body of literature (Lodge and Taber 2012; Westen 2008; Garry 2014) that suggests emotionality plays a critical role in the formation of opinion towards candidates and relevant policy topics. In order to measure emotional (rather than rational) responses to candidates and relevant topics, this paper uses a method developed specifically to measure the emotional response of individuals to verbal stimuli known as AdSAM.

The advantages of measuring emotional responses rather than traditional public opinion polling are briefly summarized here.

A number of more traditional explanations for Trump support—economic anxiety, racist ideologies, status threat, or authoritarian personalities—implicitly suggest an *emotional* basis for Trump support. For instance, economic anxiety theories suggest that the state of the present or future economy engenders feelings of anxiety or fear, which drive voters towards certain candidates who propose easy solutions to complicated problems. These fears are developed as the result of information that comes from personal economic planning, including personal social networks and the media (Ansolabehere, Meredith, Snowberg 2014). Measuring the emotional responses of Trump and non-Trump voters to relevant topics is interesting because most theories that explain Trump’s rise are explicitly *cognitive*; they emphasize how individuals rationally acquire and make sense of the world. Nevertheless, these theories also imply that voters should also have strong *emotional* responses to the economy or race, respectively. By measuring the emotional response of voters to relevant candidates or topics in the 2016 election, this study can more precisely isolate what affectively drove voters towards Trump or other candidates.

This paper first summarizes the literature regarding “traditional” explanations for Trump’s support and victory as a function of economic anxiety, racial animus, status threat, and/or authoritarian personalities. This paper next develops a set of testable hypotheses from these traditional hypotheses and then operationalizes them through a unique emotional response survey system known as AdSAM. The research then provides a detailed explanation of AdSAM and how it operationalizes the relevant independent and control variables. This design allows for testing the degree to which emotional bases for Trump support run in parallel with more traditional “cognitive” or “rational” explanations for Trump’s success. By measuring emotional response directly, this paper provides a strong test of theories of economic anxiety, racial animus, and status threat as primary drivers of support for Donald Trump. Finally, the results are discussed and re-contextualized within the growing literature on the 2016 election.

Literature Review

This section briefly examines some of the most common factors that scholars offered to explain the 2016 outcome, including economic anxiety, racial animus, and status threat. Testable hypotheses are then developed from each of these strands of research, which can be tested using our emotional survey response system.

Economic Anxiety

Perhaps the most prominent “common sense” explanation for Trump voters was that they were voters “left behind” by globalization, a process thought to lead to stagnant wages and a sense of anxiety about the future (Levitz 2017). These voters felt alienated from their government and were compelled to vote for the “outsider” candidate who had no previous political

experience. The Trump campaign policy included a strong sense of economic protectionism: threatening companies with higher tax rates if they moved jobs abroad, opposing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and promising to bring back coal jobs to Kentucky. Coupled with Trump's electoral victory, which largely hinged on strong showings in classic "rust-belt" states--especially Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Ohio--it is not hard to imagine that Trump voters were largely motivated by economic concerns.

Generally, these "economic anxiety" arguments were paired with ethnographic accounts of the "white-working class," who were allegedly at greater risk to outsourcing in a post-industrial society. Early work suggested that "economic anxiety" is a strong predictor of support for Trump, at least at a county level (Kolko 2017, Casselman 2017). When compared to the 2012 General Election results, counties whose jobs were particularly susceptible to outsourcing seemed to move towards Trump at greater rates than counties with diverse, more service-oriented job profiles. Importantly, however, many other classic proxies of the economy seem to do a poor job in predicting support for Trump. Regions with higher unemployment rates were no more likely to vote for Trump than regions with lower employment rates (Kolko 2017). The difference, then, is that it is not "objective" economic conditions of the state or county in which the voter resides that ought to best predict Trump support. Instead, the subjective, *emotional* response to questions about an individuals' economic future ought to correlate with voting for Trump.

Previous works have emphasized objective conditions of the economy, including GNP/GDP, as driving voter perception of the economy (Abramowitz 1996). However, traditional economic explanations of voting behavior (Kramer 1983) have been called into question by critiques that voters consider not their own personal economic conditions but rather their overall *perceptions* of the economy (Scicchitano 1983). Authors such as Nadeau and Lewis-Beck (2001) have demonstrated that under certain conditions, the aggregate perception of the economy is more successful in predicting presidential voting than more "objective" measures of the economy. The researchers, therefore, expect that anxiety and negative opinions about the economy--*not* individual economic conditions-- will correlate significantly with Trump support, leading to the first hypothesis:

- *Hypothesis 1: Voters who display more negative, insecure, and pessimistic emotional responses towards the economy generally are more likely to indicate support for Trump.*

Racial Animus and Status Threat

In contrast to economic arguments, other scholars argue that Trump's appeal is a function of darker undercurrents within the electorate, including his blatant appeals to authoritarianism, racism, and sexism. According to the authoritarian argument, Trump appealed to authoritarian voters in the American electorate, who were energized and galvanized by Trump's explicit authoritarian appeals (Choma 2017, MacWilliams 2017). In particular, adherence to right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO)

helped explain Trump's appeal to certain sectors of the electorate. SDO, drawing on the work of Pratto et. al (1994), is defined as the belief that there ought to be a hierarchy of some groups over others--in this context, SDO was operationalized as agreement with statements such as the belief that America is a primarily "white" country that ought to serve white interests. Higher levels of agreement with statements that emphasized RWA or SDO were significantly ($p < .001$) and positively correlated ($r = .29$ and $r = .32$, respectively) with intention to vote for Trump in the 2016 General Election, controlling for partisan affiliation (Choma 2017).

Perhaps the most prominent explanation for Trump's support was racial animus among Trump voters, who held latent, anti-immigrant, and anti-Black sentiment that were mobilized by Trump's explicit racial appeals. White Trump supporters are more likely to support housing-assistance policies if they are primed with an image of a white applicant rather than a Black applicant (Luttig et. al 2017). Trump supporters were also more likely to express anger about the policy and blame beneficiaries of the policy if the beneficiary in question was Black. Importantly, these theories argue that these racist views were not created by Trump; rather, they are learned during adolescence and childhood (Sears 1993) and are "activated" by the salience of Trump's racial views.

Closely related to theories of racial animus are theories that point to the increasing salience of identity politics and white status threat as the main drivers behind Trump's rise. Sides, Tesler, & Vavreck (2018) argue that narratives which emphasize voter anger ignore "who was angry and why"--namely, white Americans were angry towards groups that had seemingly risen in status during the Obama administration, namely Blacks, Muslims, and immigrants. The increased salience of these groups caused an "activation" of whites' racial and religious identities, which drove support for Trump. Experimental research supports this theory--Major, Blodorn, and Blascovic (2016) found that voters who strongly identified as white were more likely to support Trump once they were reminded that by 2042, non-whites will constitute a majority of U.S. citizens.

Trump's support was at least partially caused by raising the specter of the United States losing its primary white "identity." Fear of changing demographics may lead to a sort of white "backlash," in which voters identify Trump as capable of maintaining the United States as a primarily white country. Mutz (2018) summarizes this as the "status threat" theory--leveraging unique panel data from 2012 and 2016, she shows that individuals who perceived the rising status of non-whites as a threat to white livelihood were more likely to support Trump. Essentially, increasing demands from domestic minority groups (such as Blacks) as well as fears of globalization led whites to crave a return to more hierarchical social and political arrangements and a maintenance of the status quo.

This leads to a rise in the appeal of nostalgic conservatism, which emphasizes more positive feelings towards in-group members (whites) and more negative feelings to outgroup individuals (Blacks & immigrants). Importantly for Mutz (2018), for a group to be perceived as a threat, they must also be viewed as sufficiently powerful. For this reason, she argues that due to

their inherent weakness, immigrants would not be viewed as a threat, while Blacks, due to their seeming cultural ascendancy in the immediate wake of a two-term Black president, *would* be viewed as a threat. This survey asked directly about respondents' feelings towards the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, a social movement with the explicit goal of raising the social status of Black Americans. Coupled with a question about negative feelings towards immigrants, this research design allows for teasing out which particular "strand" of anti-non-white behavior drove our subgroup of Trump supporters. The racial threat literature therefore suggests the following hypothesis:

- *Hypothesis 2: Voters who display more negative, insecure, and pessimistic emotional responses towards Black Lives Matter (BLM) are more likely to vote for Trump.*

Hypothesis 2 can therefore be best understood as the "racial threat" hypothesis. Authors have pointed out that, despite Trump being most famously associated with anti-immigrant rhetoric, Trump rallies were more commonly sites of frequent violence against Black protesters, and that white Trump voters displayed a higher tendency to consider Black people closer to apes than white Republicans generally (Watts 2017, Jardina & Piston 2016).

Nevertheless, Trump's campaign did contain explicitly racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric-- famously initiating his campaign by labeling Mexicans as people who were bringing drugs, criminals, and rapists into the United States, and frequently promising that he would build a "great wall" on the U.S/Mexico border to drive down illegal immigration. It is natural to expect that Trump supporters would have a visceral reaction to immigrants generally, which leads to our third hypothesis:

- *Hypothesis 3: Voters who display more negative, insecure, and pessimistic emotional responses towards immigrants are more likely to vote for Trump.*

While Hypothesis 2 speaks to the racial threat literature, hypothesis 3 is best understood as the "nativist" or simply "anti-immigrant" hypothesis. By determining which variables are significant in our logistic model, we are able to determine which of the two "strains" of anti-minority sentiment most clearly drove our sample—anti-immigrant or anti-Black.

Methods

Data Collection

The data were collected from a survey administered during the last week of the presidential campaign in 2016 and was the third of three cross-sectional surveys administered throughout the campaign. The surveys were conducted prior to the general election, and as a

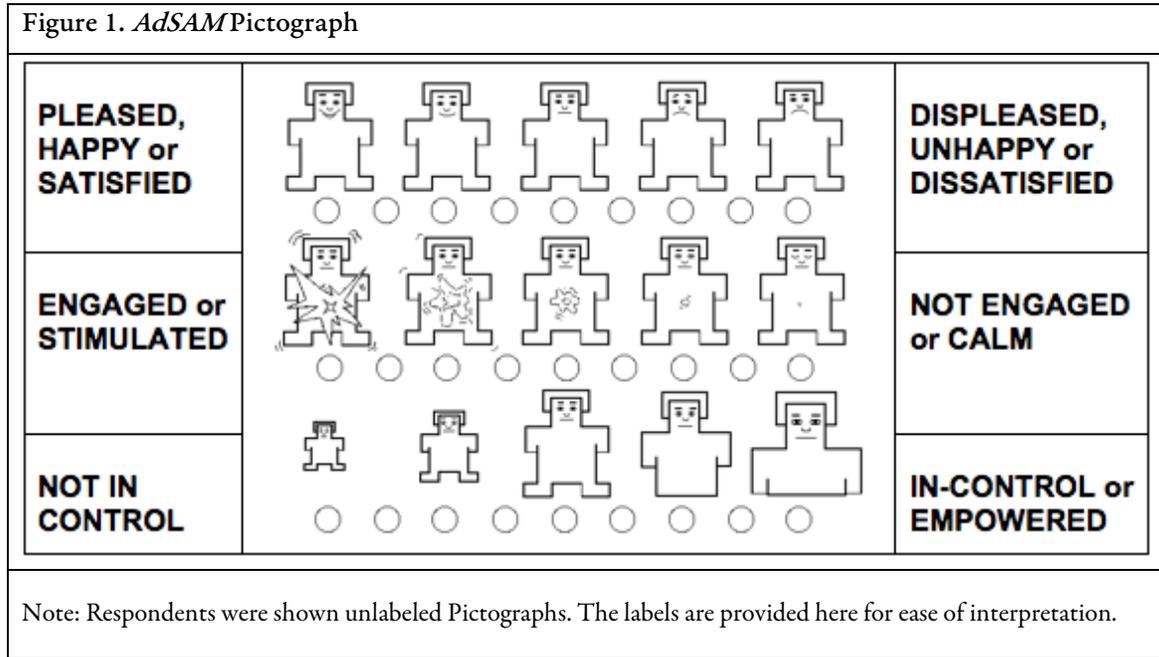
result, the dependent variables are an “indication that they will vote for Trump” in the general election rather than actual voting behavior. The survey was administered through Amazon’s MTurk platform and collected 326 unique responses. Much attention has been given to survey designs using MTurk in recent years, with a wide variety of researchers (Arceneaux 2012, Ahler 2014) turning to MTurk due to its dramatically lower cost and ability to recruit relatively diverse samples of subjects (Berinsky et. al 2012). Nevertheless, there are significant concerns about generalizing from a non-randomly selected sample: the chief concerns within the literature appear to be the degree to which the sample is externally valid (Krupnikov & Levine 2014), and whether or not individuals who fulfill MTurk surveys are paying sufficient attention to their responses, leading to concerns about data quality.

With regards to external validity, while the sample is non-random, the collection of demographic data allowed us to control for factors known to impact political preferences, including partisan identification, age, race, education, sex, and income. Additionally, our findings appear in line with the larger literature on the 2016 election, providing some evidence that the types of individuals who fulfilled the survey may not be systematically different from the average voter. Nevertheless, concerns about external validity can never be completely eradicated—however, due to the unique measurement mechanism of AdSAM, this data would have been prohibitively expensive to collect in any other way. Furthermore, previous research has suggested that at least in the field of political psychology, MTurk samples offer “substantively identical” findings as gold-standard surveys such as the ANES (Clifford, Jewell, & Waggoner 2015). Additionally, concerns about attention can be mitigated in two ways: first, an attention check was inserted halfway through the survey to determine if individuals were actually reading and responding to the questions, rather than randomly satisficing. Moreover, recent research has suggested that MTurk respondents actually pay at least as much, if not *more* attention than average survey populations (Paolacci et. al 2010, Weinberg et. al 2014).

AdSAM Response System

The survey was conducted through the administration of Attitude Self-Assessment Manikin (AdSAM), an emotional response modeling survey system designed to measure respondents’ reactions to survey questions along three dimensions: appeal, engagement, and empowerment. This measure is widely used in research and marketing, with the original dimensions refined by Morris (1995) in its present form. AdSAM has the advantage of measuring the emotional aspects of individual public opinion through its utilization of human pictographs or manikins. Each question was posed in the format “How do you feel about blank?” For instance, a respondent may be asked “How do you feel about businessman Donald Trump?” Rather than simply indicating if they approve or disapprove of then-candidate Trump, respondents are prompted to indicate how they feel on the three aforementioned dimensions of emotional response: *satisfied/dissatisfied*, *engaged/calm*, and *in-control/out of control*. Their responses are indicated on a scale from 1-9, each number indicated by a different pictograph

shown below. Responses were then recoded so that scores of “1” indicated negative feelings (dissatisfaction and lack of control), while “9” indicates positive feelings.



AdSAM has a number of advantages over traditional survey methodology. First, it captures the emotional response of respondents, unchanged by rationalization. Rather than verbalizing how they feel, respondents are simply able to indicate their feelings by filling in a bubble. The visual measurement is superior because verbal measurement requires cognition to translate emotions into words, therefore losing the “raw” emotion of interest. Additionally, the precise meaning of emotionally laden words can vary from person to person.

Due to its multidimensionality, it also allows the researcher to consider more than simple approval or disapproval. Emotional responses are not unidimensional in the way that simple support or opposition to a candidate is—an individual may support a candidate because they feel that they are losing control over their own life and their candidate offers a way to “take back their country,”; because they are afraid of perceived changes in the country that threaten their way of life; or because the candidate quite simply makes them feel happy or sad. Understanding which dimensions of emotional response are driving candidate support allows us to better understand the appeal of certain candidates or topics within the 2016 presidential election.

For this project, only the dimensions of *in control/not-in control* and *satisfied/dissatisfied* were included in the model. The reasons for this are theoretically justifiable and make analysis of the results easier to interpret. The *in control/not-in control* measure allows one to determine the level of insecurity that respondents feel when prompted by the survey questions: essentially, this can be understood as the amount of anxiety that these prompts engender. This becomes immediately relevant when one considers explanations for Trump’s support: theories which

suggest that Trump supporters sought to “take back control” of their previous dominant position (the racial threat hypothesis); or those that argue that Trump voters suffered from high levels of economic insecurity (the economic anxiety thesis) are both suggesting an emotional basis for voting behavior. The *satisfied/dissatisfied* measure allows researchers a direct measurement of how positively or negatively individuals *feel* towards a prompt, rather than their cognitive position on the topic. Finally, due to high levels of engagement in the election across our sample, the *engaged/calm* dimension was largely omitted from the analysis. This is to be expected, as regardless of partisan orientation, we would expect individuals to be highly engaged in such a high salience election, especially given how late in the campaign the survey was administered. Each AdSAM variable is therefore the composite measurement of the *satisfied/dissatisfied* and *in control/out of control* dimensions for a separate question prompt, with a theoretical minimum of two and maximum of eighteen.

Independent Variables

This model includes a set of independent variables designed to test the three hypotheses proposed earlier, as well as a set of controls known to influence voting behavior. The variables designed to test the three hypotheses directly are *Individual Economy*, *General Economy*, *Black Lives Matter*, and *Immigration*. Individuals’ perception of the economy was measured through the response to the prompt “How do you feel about your ability to afford a major expense in the next 6 months?” Individuals who do not seem worried about their ability to afford a major expense are likely those who are not particularly anxious about their own subjective economic conditions. The variable *General Economy* is the score for the question prompt “How do you feel about the general state of the United States Economy?” The *Black Lives Matter* and *Immigration* variables were the composite score for the questions “How do you feel about the Black Lives Matter movement?” and “How do you feel about the state of immigration in the United States?” respectively.

Additionally, the model included a number of controls known to influence candidate preference, including age, race, income, education, sex, and party identification. Race was controlled for through two dummy variables indicating whether respondents were Black or Hispanic (variables named *Black* and *Hispanic* respectively). Income was controlled for through a categorical variable with income brackets of \$0-19,999, \$20,000-49,999, \$50,000-99,999, \$100,000-149,999, and above \$150,000. Age was also included as a categorical variable, with respondents indicating whether they were between 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, or 55+. Education was collapsed into a single dummy variable (*College Grad or More*) to determine if the role of non-college-educated whites in Trump’s victory were also significant in ordering emotional responses to candidates and topics such as BLM. A *Republican Dummy* variable, indicating whether a respondent either identified as a Republican or leaned Republican, was

included due to the wide literature that indicates that party ID is a primary driver of vote choice and that its effect is only increasing over time (Miller 1991, Bartels 2000).

Results

While this paper is largely concerned with the degree to which the proposed independent causal variables—the *Individual Economy*, *General Economy*, *Immigration*, and *BLM*—can predict Trump support, the basic descriptive statistics were also examined to see how Trump supporters varied from non-Trump supporters in the sample. In order to establish that Trump voters and non-Trump voters differed significantly on the explanatory variables, a series of independent t-tests were conducted. Groups were divided along those who indicated that they would vote for Trump (N=128) and those who indicated they would vote for Clinton or a third-party candidate (N=198). Clinton and third-party candidates were grouped together to examine the difference between Trump voters and the non-Trump population. Four separate *t*-tests were conducted on the explanatory variables, and the results are summarized in the table below.

Variable	Trump Voters (N=128)		Non-Trump Voters (N=198)		<i>t</i>
	M	SD	M	SD	
BLM	8.06	3.73	10.82	3.39	6.76**
Immigration	6.59	3.56	9.02	3.21	6.26**
Personal Economy	7.74	3.96	8.12	4.26	.79
General Economy	6.43	3.40	8.88	3.28	6.50**

*significant at the $p < .05$ level (two-tailed); **significant at the $p < .01$ level (two-tailed)

The Levene's test was significant for the *BLM* ($F=.02$) and the *Immigration* ($F=.002$) variables and so equal variance was not assumed for these variables. The Levene's test was not significant for the two economic variables at the $p=.05$ level for both the *Individual & General Economy* variables ($F=.21$ & $F=.07$, respectively). Based on the difference of means tests, Trump voters were found to hold significantly more negative emotional feelings towards the Black Lives Matter movement ($t=6.76, p<.001$), the state of immigration ($t=6.26, p<.001$), and the general state of the economy ($t=6.50, p<.001$). Interestingly, the variable measuring perception of one's own

economic prospects was not significantly different between Trump and non-Trump voters, suggesting that the negative feelings that Trump voters held towards the economy may have been on a sociotropic rather than individual level.

A logistic regression with voting Trump as the dependent variable was then conducted, to see if the possible explanatory variables for Trump support were still significant when controlling for a number of factors known to influence candidate preference formation. The final models for the dependent variable “Vote Trump” are shown below, which is simply coded “1” if the individual indicated voting for Trump and “0” if they indicated any other candidate.

Variable	β	SE	OR
Immigration	-.07	.06	.94
BLM	-.19**	.05	.83
Personal Economy	.04	.05	1.04
General Economy	-.20**	.06	.82
College Grad	-1.08**	.41	.34
Age	.15	.14	1.16
Female	-.09	.37	.92
Income	-.11	.21	1.11
Republican Dummy	3.71**	.41	40.85
Black	-.47	.65	.63
Hispanic	.03	.93	1.03
Constant	1.32	1.06	.22

*significant at the $p < .05$ level (two-tailed)
 **significant at the $p < .01$ level (two-tailed)
 Model $\chi^2 = 229.9$, $df = 11$, $p < .001$

Table 2 presents the results of the logistic regression to analyze the effect of negative feelings towards Black Lives Matter (BLM), immigration, demographic data, and concerns about the economy on propensity to indicate support for Donald Trump. The Trump model was statistically significant ($X^2=232.8$, $p<.001$), and explained 68.6% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in voting for Trump rather than another candidate, correctly classifying 87.1% of cases. Ultimately, four individual covariates were significant in predicting support for Trump: being a *Republican*, negative feelings towards *BLM*, concerns about the *General Economy*, and not being a *College Grad*. Unsurprisingly, being a member of the Republican party is significant in

predicting support for Trump, with self-identified Republicans over 40 times as likely to vote for Trump than non-Republicans. The odds of voting for Trump also decreased by 17% for each one-unit increase in positive feelings towards *BLM* as measured by our index variables and decreased by 18% for each one-unit increase in positive feelings towards the *General Economy*. In line with verified voting records, college graduates were also 66% less likely to indicate support for Trump compared to those who had not earned a college degree. Neither the *Immigration* nor *Personal Economy* variables were significant in predicting voting patterns for Trump, nor were the other control variables (*Black, Hispanic, Female, Income, or Age*). The demographic variables likely were not significant due to the high correlation between certain demographic factors and partisan identification.

Discussion

The results demonstrate the degree to which economic and racial concerns permeated patterns of presidential support in the 2016 General Election. Support was found for many of the “commonsense” media narratives that propagated after the election of Trump: that college graduates were far less likely to support Trump (Pew Research 2018); that Trump voters were more likely to hold more pessimistic views of the economy (Friedman 2017); and that Trump voters were likely to hold negative views of non-white Americans, especially Black people (McElwee & McDaniel 2017). Of course, all three of these can be true at once.

After a review of the literature, this paper proposed three hypotheses. First, this project hypothesized that voters who display more negative and insecure emotional responses are more likely to indicate support for Trump. Utilizing a question regarding the general state of the economy, it was shown that Trump voters held significantly more pessimistic views towards the economy than non-Trump voters, and the *General Economy* variable was overall significant in the logistic model. Clearly, then, one cannot simply jettison explanations which point to the primacy of perceptions of the economy as driving vote choice in the 2016 election—subjective beliefs about the general state of the economy were at least as important as cultural factors (Morgan 2018).

Importantly, however, neither the objective economic indicator variable (*Income*) nor the variable asking about subjective finances (*Personal Economy*) were significant in predicting Trump support—this suggests that in contrast to the “Americans left behind” thesis, our sample of Trump voters was no worse off than the average American. Rather than voters being concerned about their *own* personal finances or employability, voters may instead have been compelled to vote based on how they felt about the aggregate state of the economy. They therefore engaged in sociotropic voting, a process whereby individuals support candidates who they believe will serve the economic interests of the majority of (or most deserving) citizens (Kinder & Kiewiet 1981). Likewise, our emphasis on the emotional aspect of preference formation suggests that voters

likely are not “analyzing” in the cognitive sense at all—rather, they are emotionally responding to the candidate who generates positive feelings towards the economy more generally.

Perhaps the most striking finding was in support of Hypothesis 2, which suggested that Trump voters were more likely to display negative and insecure responses to groups which challenged the white hierarchy; in particular, the Black Lives Matter (*BLM*) social movement. A logistic regression found that negative feelings towards *BLM* was the third most potent predictor of Trump support, trailing the *Republican Dummy* and only marginally less powerful than the *General Economy* variable. As articulated by the status threat literature, for the dominant group to be motivated by the threat of an outgroup, that group must be perceived to be increasing in status and be a credible threat to the in-group (Mutz 2018). This is archetypal of the *BLM* movement, which explicitly challenges pre-existing power structures, and which may have led to a white backlash vote. It is important to bear in mind that the measures were not merely tapping approval or disapproval of the topics in mind. The *BLM* variable is an index variable combining *satisfaction/dissatisfaction* and feelings of *control/lack of control* that the topic generates in the respondent. The fact that Trump voters feel both negatively towards *BLM* and believe that it causes them to in some way to lose some control over their lives/country is essential for interpreting the results. These findings lend credence to theories that perceive of Trump’s victory as at least partially a backlash against groups that seek to disrupt existing moral boundaries and the traditional position of the white-working class (Lamont, Park, and Ayala-Hurtado 2017).

This racial threat hypothesis is further strengthened by the fact that emotional responses to immigration generally were *not* significant predictors of indication to vote for Trump. Nevertheless, there are a number of confounding reasons that this might be so. Trump voters, for instance, may have lukewarm feelings towards immigrants but strongly negative feelings towards particular immigrants, such as Mexicans. As a result, the survey question asking them about the “general state of immigration” may not have sufficiently tapped into feelings of antipathy against non-white immigrants. Alternatively, immigrants may simply not have been perceived as threatening to white interests: unlike Black Americans, they are not U.S citizens, and many do not speak the same language or compete for the same jobs as white Americans.

Finally, Trump and non-Trump voters were clearly split along education lines, with college graduates far less likely to support Trump than non-college graduates, controlling for other relevant factors. This divide was perhaps the single greatest change between the 2012 and 2016 election—Clinton massively improved upon Obama’s performance among college-educated voters, while her support collapsed among less-educated voters (Silver 2016a). This may fit with previous sociological research that suggests that educational attainment is highly correlated with white liberalization on race issues. Simply put, more educated people are less likely to espouse racist policies or sentiments than less educated people (Farley, Steeh, Kryson, Jackson, and Reeves 1994). Higher levels of racial resentment among Trump voters, then, may be a function of the large educational divide that erupted during the 2016 general election.

Conclusion

This study sought to utilize the unique AdSAM response system to ascertain the role that emotion played in the 2016 election. By analyzing feelings of *satisfaction/dissatisfaction* and feelings of ontological insecurity (*control/lack-of-control*) among a small portion of the electorate, this study found significant support for a number of “commonsense” theories about the appeal of Donald Trump in the 2016 election. The sample of Trump supporters *did* generally have more pessimistic views of the economy as a whole, however, Trump voters were *not* significantly more pessimistic about their own personal finances. However, the results *do* support the finding that education was a key divide among the electorate, with Trump voters less likely to indicate that they were college graduates than Clinton supporters within our survey. This finding is consistent with a number of other studies (Galston & Hendrickson 2016, McGill 2016, Kerr 2016) that show that Trump received a higher proportion of support from non-college-educated voters both during the primaries and the general election. This gives some assurance that the analysis is externally valid. Additionally, the categorical income variable was not significant.

The assessment of Trump’s support as largely driven by the “white-working class” is, therefore, split. If by “white-working class” we mean the less educated, then Trump voters were indeed “working class.” However, evidence regarding how income factored into Trump’s support is much less clear. While some find that Trump voters were unusually less wealthy than the average Republican voter over the last 60 years (Silver 2016b), others point out that the majority of low-income voters cast their ballot for Clinton. The distinction, of course, is that poor *whites* were more likely to vote for Trump than poor *non-whites*, who overwhelmingly supported Clinton. Theoretically, this suggests that was not so much the absolute level of income that drove the “white-working class” uprising; rather, it is the very fact that they were white.

Indeed, this is the primary substantive finding: much of what drove Trump’s support was a growing sentiment of racial anxiety among the white population. By demonstrating that Trump voters hold broadly negative views of the Black Lives Matter movement, controlling for other factors, this study shows that Trump voters are unusually motivated by racial concerns. This provides support for hypotheses that argue that ideas about race undergird support for Donald Trump. When it comes to peddling narratives about Trump’s support as mostly a function of the return of the “white working class,” it may be time to turn our attention towards the racial component of the phrase.

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