Populists and the Representation Gap in the 2016 Election

Wendy Rahn and Howard Lavine
University of Minnesota
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Abstract

To understand the origins and nature of populism, and thereby shed some light on Trump's surprising victory, it is important to identify the circumstances in which it ebbs and flows in the electorate. Contemporary approaches highlight the possibility that populism originates in a distinctly *political* source, namely, when existing political parties fail to respond to the desires of large sections of the electorate. We believe that the growing disconnect between generally moderate citizens and their increasingly immoderate elected representatives is an important and underappreciated explanation for Donald Trump's success as a populist candidate. The "failure to converge" (Bartels 2016) by extremist candidates means that the distance between them and the "average" voter in their respective constituencies has grown, precisely the sort of "representation gap" in which populism can take root. Merging the 2016 ANES with information on the ideological extremism of members of the U.S. House, we show that "being out of step" with district constituents is strongly related to people's feelings of elite unresponsiveness, their disapproval of Congress as an institution, and their support for Donald Trump.

We have witnessed for more than a quarter of a century that struggles of the two great political parties for power and plunder, while grievous wrongs have been afflicted upon the suffering of the people. We charge that the controlling influences dominating both these parties have permitted the existing dreadful conditions to develop without serious effort to prevent or restrain them.

--- Preamble to the People's Party Platform, 1892

Historical and popular accounts of populism in the United States naturally gravitate toward leaders who talk in populist ways. Vintage populists, such as "Pitchfork Ben" Tillman, Ignatius Donnelly, Mary Lease, William Jennings Bryan, and Tom Watson, denounced bankers, railroads, English capitalists, and corrupt politicians as enemies of the people. Their fiery discourse drew on the Jeffersonian ethic of producerism, a notion vague and capacious enough to submerge regional and economic differences among farmers, wage earners, artisans, and small merchants (Kazin 1995). A unifying vocabulary of evangelical Protestantism[1] (and popular nationalism[2]) provided additional rhetorical tools to construct a homogenous moral community, a "people" engaged in a righteous battle against its oppressors.

The People's Party failed as a political movement, but its distinctive discursive strategy remains intact. At various times in American political history, others have drawn on its rich legacy to pursue their own political ambitions. [3] Depicting themselves as "outsiders" who can take on the ruling class in the name of the people, and thereby restore the rightful democratic order, a number of political aspirants have reached into the populist repertoire to fuel their

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[1] Kazin (1995); Williams and Alexander (1994).

[2] With nativist undertones, see Gerteis and Goolsby (2005) and Kazin (1995).

[3] *They've got a set of Republican waiters on one side and a set of Democratic waiters on the other side, but no matter which set of waiters brings you the dish, the legislative grub is all prepared in the same Wall Street kitchen* (Huey Long, as quoted in Brinkley 1982)

While most Americans are working harder and longer to make ends meet, the other two candidates and their political parties have worked hand-in-hand with the special interests to pass the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)… [We] stand for intelligent international trade. We are against stupid, one-sided trade deals that ship our jobs overseas. (Ross Perot 1996)

What truly matters is not which party controls our government, but whether our government is controlled by the people. January 20th, 2017 will be remembered as the day the people became the rulers of this nation again (Donald Trump 2016).

own desires for public office (Bonikowski and Gidron 2015). Colorful personas, simple language, and unusual political pedigrees frequently accompanied their deployment of the populist patois, further bolstering their claims to be the people's champion.

To be successful, populist claims-making needs to identify the source of the people's grievances in a ways that make sense to those hearing the message and offer plausible reasons for why these demands are not being met. As our opening quote from the preamble to the Ohama platform conveys, the populists of the late 19th century blamed the two major parties for causing their misfortune. The political parties served as convincingly culprits, for then, as now, the parties in Congress were highly polarized, locked in a fierce national competition to control federal patronage (Lee 2016). Many states, on the other hand, were monopolized by one party, a legacy of the Civil War. While the "solid South" is well-known, less appreciated is the fact that the Republican Party dominated many non-Southern state legislatures at the time as well (Ansolabehere, Hansen, Hirano, and Synder 2010). Indeed, in the North, the People's Party was strongest precisely in those places where competition between the two parties was the weakest, such as in Nebraska and Kansas. In neighboring Iowa, however, a fusion of the Democratic and Greenback parties in the 1880s provided a real electoral threat to Republican lawmakers, making them more sympathetic to agrarian demands, extinguishing the "Prairie Fire" that burned in the Great Plains (Ostler 1992). In other words, in areas where voters felt better represented, the populist message was not nearly so resonant.

On the campaign trial, Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders fit the populist mode in terms of their rhetoric, drawing a sharp contrast between a powerful, uncaring, and self-serving elite and its victims, "the people," ordinary Americans whose concerns, they claimed, went unheeded (Oliver and Rahn 2016). But why two such unusual candidates proved so popular during a time of generally improving economic conditions, one attractive enough to overpower the political establishment and secure an Electoral-college victory, remains undertheorized.

Populism and the Representation Gap

To understand the origins and nature of populism, and thereby shed some light on Trump's surprising victory, it is important to identify the circumstances in which it ebbs and flows in the electorate. As Oliver and Rahn (2016) note, populist movements tend to be

"temporal and fleeting." Political analysts and scholars have often pointed to structural economic forces as the principal basis of populism (e.g., the "losers of globalization" thesis; Kriesi et al. 2006; Spruyt et al. 2016). For example, as students of European populism have argued, globalization has led to both greater economic competition and cultural diversity, leaving those unable to cope with such societal changes feeling alienated from political life (e.g., Spruyt et al. 2016). We agree that people who feel economically (or culturally) vulnerable are likely to be especially supportive of populist sentiment; however, job losses due to outsourcing (and automation) have been ongoing for decades. Thus, the globalization thesis—on its own—would appear to be an incomplete answer to the question of *why now*; that is, why did public demand for populism in the United States appear to crest in 2016?

Contemporary approaches highlight the possibility that populism originates in a distinctly *political* source, namely, when existing political parties fail to respond to the desires of large sections of the electorate. This can occur when parties become ideologically distant from their voters or when they ignore the issues that their voters would like to see on the public agenda (Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2017). From this perspective, when voters come to believe that elites are not addressing their needs, a "representation gap" arises, characterized by a breach between voters' collective hopes and actual the policy outputs of the political system (Oliver and Rahn 2016). As Mudde and Kaltwasser explain, "under certain circumstances, the sovereign people can feel that they are not being (well) represented by the elites in power, and, accordingly, they will criticize—and even rebel against—the political establishment" (p. 10). This, they note, can "set the stage for a populist struggle to 'give government back to the people" (p. 10).

To date, populist theorizing has not explicitly focused on the nature and sources of variation in the quality of political representation. However, the concept of a representation gap hinges on the existence of such variability—e.g., temporal, spatial, subgroup—in the responsiveness of the political system. With respect to subgroup variation, Bartels (2016b) and Gilens (2012) find that government responsiveness is strongly tilted toward the most affluent citizens. As Gilens notes, "under most circumstances, the preferences of the vast majority of Americans appear to have essentially no impact on which policies the government does or

doesn't adopt" (2012: 1). In a similar vein, both institutional features of the political system (e.g., gerrymandering, malapportionment) and incentives faced by politicians (e.g., to pursue policies that dovetail with the preferences of their most active voters) ensure that some voters will be better represented than others (for a review, see Enns and Wlezien 2011). With respect to temporal variation in responsiveness, Ansolabehere, Snyder and Stewart (2001) find that American public's policy preferences are better reflected in political outcomes during certain periods more than in others. In analyzing the ideological positioning of House candidates over time, they find that candidates became substantially more responsive to the interests of their districts between the 1940s and 1970s, but that responsiveness waned in the 1980s and 1990s. In the research, we examine whether the magnitude of such variation at the individual level is systematically linked to the expression of populist sentiment.

Polarization and Political Representation

Although scholars disagree about the mechanisms underlying it, there is little dispute that the U.S. Congress is now an institution characterized by unprecedented levels of partisan polarization. As the parties in Congress have become more homogenous internally and their centers of gravity have shifted to the extremes, the capacity of Congress to do its job has declined (Barber and McCarty 2015), its public reputation has suffered (Ramirez 2009), and Americans' faith in the trustworthiness of the federal government has been undermined (Hetherington and Rudolph 2015). Elite polarization has fueled ideological sorting in the mass public, sharpened the policy differences between rank-and-file Democrats and Republicans (Levendusky 2009), especially those that are politically active (Pew 2014), and has stimulated affective polarization or negative partisanship where partisan identifiers increasingly dislike the opposing party (Abramowitz and Webster 2015; Mason 2014).

Despite the growing divide among the most committed mass partisans, the public is still largely centrist. Yet, voters often face polarized choices at the ballot box, forced to choose between two relatively extreme candidates for the House and Senate (Ansolabehere et al. 2001; Bafumi and Herron 2010; Burden 2010) and the Presidency (Bartels 2016). Policy divergence between contenders for office actually may make voters *less* responsive to the ideological positions of the candidates because partisans become even more motivated to

support their party's candidate regardless of his or her platform (Johnston, Lavine and Federico 2017; Rogowski 2016; Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2016), and it may also reduce turnout, especially among the less political sophisticated (Rogowksi 2014).   Ideological conflict among political elites, therefore, may reduce the ability of the electorate to hold representatives accountable for their actions once in office. For these and other reasons,[4] extremists may remain in office despite being "out of step" with many of their constituents.

We believe that the growing disconnect between generally moderate citizens and their increasingly immoderate elected representatives is an important and underappreciated explanation for Donald Trump's surprising victory. The "failure to converge" (Bartels 2016) by extremist candidates means that the distance between them and the "average" voter in their respective constituencies has grown, precisely the sort of "representation gap" in which populism can take root. Oliver and Rahn (2016) have documented how longitudinal change in levels of party conflict has helped power more populist attitudes over time in the aggregate. [5] Our aim here is to apply their notion of the representation gap spatially and at the microlevel, asking whether individual citizens experience a *subjective* representation gap when they are represented by Members of Congress who are more extreme (where an objective representation gap[6] is most likely to occur), and, if so, with what consequences? We focus for

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[4] Lee (2017) argues that increased competition for majority party control of Congress has changed the focus of the parties' strategies from winning individual contests in states and districts to maximizing the prospects for control of the institution, thereby nationalizing what once were more candidate-centered contests. Bonica and Cox (2017) find that this growing party-centeredness has reduced the electoral penalty that ideological moderates faced when voting with their respective parties in Congress. Extremism in Congress may also be related to the dependence of Members on campaign donors (Bafumi and Herron 2010), especially donors from outside the district (Barber 2016; Baker 2016).

[5] They measured party conflict using the yearly percentage of party unit votes in Congress which they found to track more closely with populist attitudes in the 1980s and 1990s than the more typical DW-NOMINATE-based measure of partisan polarization. However, in the 21st century, party unity votes and ideological polarization in Congress have moved in lockstep. DW-NOMINATE scores may not be the best way of measuring partisan warfare in certain historical periods. For example, partisan polarization, as measured by DW-NOMINATE scores, was low in the 1930s and the late 1940s and early 1950s, even though the parties were strongly at odds with each other over the New Deal and the Fair Deal, respectively (Clinton, Katznelson and Lapinski 2014). Not coincidentally, in our view, in both these periods several populist politicians emerged, Huey Long and Father Coughlin in the former (see Brinkley 1982) and Henry Wallace, Estes Kefauver, and Joe McCarthy in the later. Given the close correspondence between DW-NOMINATE polarization and other measures of partisan conflict in the contemporary era, however, we believe that our use of it to measure excessive partisanship in Congress is justified.

[6] Political representation can be understood theoretically in many ways (compare Disch 2011; Mansbridge 2003, Rehfeld 2009). In the empirical tradition launched by Miller and Stokes's (1963) foundational article, representation has been conceived in dyadic terms, as the correspondence between a Representative's

this paper on the U.S. House of Representatives, but, as Senators are now nearly as extreme as their House counterparts, we will include them in a later investigation.

Data and Measures

As a measure of a representative's ideology, we use their DW-NOMINATE scores for the 114th Congress (available here https://voteview.com/). We calculated **Member Extremism** as the absolute value of their associated score and rescaled these scores to lie between 0 and 1. The poles of our extremism measure are anchored by Representative Kyrsten Sinema, D-AZ, at the moderate end, and Representative Dave Brat, R-VA, at the extreme end.[7] We merged these scores with the 2016 American National Election Studies using the House district codes available in the data release.[8]

We are interested in whether the extremism of a Representative is related to various indicators of political discontent. The measures vary in levels of abstraction, starting with evaluations of an individual's own Member of Congress, moving to approval of Congress as a

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preferences and that of his or her constituents *in the aggregate*, usually assessed by either mean or median constituent opinion. Achen (1978) distinguishes different statistical relationships between these two quantities, each of which measures a different notion of representativeness. Responsiveness is the degree to which a representative's behavior shifts in response to changes in the preferences of the represented and is usually captured by the coefficient estimated from a regression of members' preferences on average constituent opinion. Spatial proximity, on the other hand, sometimes labeled "many-to-one-congruence" (Golder and Stramski 2010), is the closeness of the representative's preference to the constituency's mean preference. Ideally, congruence and responsiveness would be related, but one does not guarantee the other (Matsuka 2010; Lax and Phillips 2012). Note that responsiveness and congruence as studied in the empirical literature are estimated using measures of public opinion aggregated to some level, such as congressional districts or states, or aggregated into different groups, such as high- or low-income (as in Bartels 2016; Gilens 2012) or partisan subconstituencies (Clinton 2006). Our focus, instead, is on the relationship between an individual citizen and his or her Member of Congress, what Golder and Stramski (2010) call one-to-one congruence.

[7] Brat upset Eric Cantor, former House Majority Leader, in the Republican primary in June of 2014. His insurgent victory was treated as a resounding rejection of the Republican Party establishment.

[8] Ideally, we would have preferred as a measure of the "objective" representation gap, the absolute distance between a Member's DW-NOMINATE SCORE (or some other measure of MC's policy positions) and an individual citizen's own ideology. However, measuring congruence, either at the individual- or congressional district-level, requires that Representatives and their constituents be measured on the same scale, the so-called "common space" problem. Recent studies have used a variety of techniques for surmounting this problem, all of which require that individuals and political candidates respond to the same or nearly the same set of policy choices so that these choices can be jointly scaled using Bayesian IRT models (see, e.g., Shor and Rogowki 2016; Adams et al. 2017). We would appreciate suggestions from conference attendees about ways we might be able to develop common space measures of ideology using the ANES as the CCES, which has been used by others to create common space scales because it asks about specific roll call votes, does not have good measures of political discontent.

whole, and concluding with a scale of populist attitudes where the targets are more diffuse, such as the "the people running the government," "public officials," and "politicians."

Our first dependent variable is the **Subjective Representation Gap**, which we expect to be most closely related to levels of MC extremism. The ANES contained a question suited to capturing this sentiment: *How good a job would you say U.S. Representative [name of U.S. House Representative preceding the election] does of keeping in touch with the people in your district -- does [he/she] do [a very good job, fairly good, fairly poor, or a very poor job keeping in touch with the people in this district?* Of course, "keeping in touch" could mean many different things to respondents, not all of which are related to policy representation (e.g., Steffensmeier, Kimball, Meinke, and Tate (2003). Studies of vote choice in House elections, however, indicate that voters weigh spatial proximity to their Representatives in reaching their decisions (Adams et al. 2016; Ansolabehere and Jones 2010; Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002; Nyhan et al, 2012; Shor and Rogowski),[9] suggesting that substantive representation is important to them, although shared partisanship also plays a large role, independently of policy congruence (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2016; Ansolabehere and Jones 2010). Additionally, voters appear to punish their incumbent MCs for being too party loyal (which is related to their ideological extremism; Carson, Kroger, Lebo and Young 2010)

Our second dependent variable is **Disapproval of Congress** as an institution. Responses could range from strong disapproval (coded 1) to strong approval (coded 0). High levels of partisan conflict reduce support for the institution in the aggregate (Ramirez 2009) and at the microlevel (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011). We test explicitly whether being represented by an ideological extremist itself affects approval of Congress as a whole and whether experiencing a subjective representation gap (partly as a result of having an extreme Representative) reduces people's confidence in the entire institution.

Our third dependent variable is **Populist Attitudes**, a scale constructed on the basis of a factor analysis of the standard ANES trust in government and external efficacy questions as well as several new items that we added to the 2016 ANES as part of its participation in the

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[9] Although, as noted, their ability to do so may be hampered when the candidates are extremely far apart from each other ideologically.

Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems (CSES) consortium. The CSES items were drawn from various survey studies of populism in Latin America and Western and Eastern Europe (e.g., Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove 2014; Spruyt, Keppens, and Van Droogenbroeck 2016). All ten items (see Appendix) loaded on the first factor, all with loadings in excess of .40. The second factor extracted had an eigenvalue of less than .7 with no item loadings greater than .4. Therefore, we generated factor scores from the loadings on the first factor and rescaled the measure to range from 0 (least populist) to 1 (most populist).

In our last analysis, we assess how these three different measures of political discontent affected support for Donald Trump, measured as the difference between respondents' rating of him on the feeling thermometer versus Hillary Clinton in the pre-election survey. Our model of **Comparative Candidate Evaluation** pits political discontent against other prominent explanations for Trump's strength in the electorate, including **Racial Resentment** (Telser 2016), concerns about **Immigration**, and **Authoritarianism** (Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Stenner 2005). We measure racial resentment with the four questions that routinely appear in the ANES to assess negative attitudes toward Blacks. Attitudes toward immigration are based on a question that asks respondents whether they would like to see levels of immigration increased, left the same, or decreased, and levels of authoritarianism are based on the four standard child-rearing questions that have been regularly included in the ANES since 1992. We also included **Moral Traditionalism**, a scale comprising four items, to capture the strong support given to Trump by conservative Christians.

Each of our models includes two indicators of economic grievances. The economics vs. culture debate has been a preoccupation of much of the post-election commentary, with analysts staking out different positions. Inglehart and Norris (2017), for example, conclude that "cultural backlash" rather than individual economic insecurity is the primary reason behind the "populist explosion" (Judis 2016), disrupting established party systems in much of the developed world, albeit acknowledging that this support for populist political forces is set in a context of longer-term economic changes such as declining real incomes for less well-educated populations and rising economic inequality, leading to what they call "existential insecurity." However, as we noted in the introduction, these changes have been ongoing for some time,

and thus, the "globalization losers" hypothesis does not take us very far in understanding, in the case of Trump, why now. Moreover, no existing studies of which we are aware have adequate measures of "existential security" that could be compared to socio-cultural variables. Instead, researchers rely on conventional measures of *egocentric* and *sociotropic* economic evaluations that may be partly endogenous to candidate choice.

Fortunately, the 2016 ANES included questions that are, in our view, an improvement over the items typically used to test theories of economic voting. The first asks whether "as far as you and your family are concerned, how worried are you about your current financial situation?" Unlike the usual retrospective question, the **Financial Worries** item asks respondents for an emotional reaction to their contemporary economic situation. We combined two additional questions to construct a measure of **Sociotropic Mobility Pessimism**, a measure we believe maps on well to the concerns of many about the viability of the American Dream given present economic trends. The first asks for a long-term retrospective judgment: "When it comes to people trying to improve their financial well-being, do you think it is easier, harder, or the same as it was 20 years ago?" The second asks people to evaluate "how much opportunity" there is for "the average person" in today's America. Interestingly, in an analysis not shown, we find that both Republicans *and* Democrats are more optimistic about the American Dream compared to Independents. In contrast, partisanship weighs heavily on people's retrospective assessments of the nation's economy. Democrats (Republicans) are far more (less) likely to say that the economy has improved compared to Independents. In other words, there appears to be far less partisan rationalization in people's judgments about economic mobility than in their responses to the "classic" sociotropic retrospective question.

Results

In our first, analysis, we regressed our measure of the subjective representation gap on member extremism (i.e., DW-nominate scores), party, ideology, the economic variables, and authoritarianism. Unsurprisingly, when partisans are represented in the House by a fellow traveler (i.e., when co-partisanship equals 1), they experience a smaller gap. However, when partisans have a MC from the opposite side of the aisle (i.e., when co-partisanship equals 0), they feel even more unrepresented than do political Independents, as indidcated by the

positive and similarly sized coefficients on the Republican and Democrat dummy variables. Conditional on partisanship, liberals feel more unrepresented than do conservatives. More central to our analysis, both member extremism and sociotropic mobility pessimism are associated with wider representation gaps. Moving across the range of member extremism is associated with a 10.4-percentage point decline in the subjective quality of representation, and moving across the range of sociotropic economic pessimism is associated with a 6-percentage point decline. As Table 1 shows, however, there is no hint that (egocentric) financial worry is linked to the quality of representation; nor is authoritarianism.

--Table 1 here—

We next examine the predictors of congressional disapproval as a whole. This model includes the same variables as in Table 1; however, we now include the subjective representation gap as a predictor, as such perceptions are likely to generalize to disapproval of the institution of Congress as a whole. We present two models, one with and one without member extremism, to examine whether the quality of subjective representation *mediates* the impact of member extremism on congressional disapproval. As Table 2 shows, the strongest predictor in the model is sociotropic mobility pessimism, such that the most pessimistic respondents are approximately 17-percentage points more disapproving of Congress than their most optimistic counterparts. Moreover, as in the analysis of the subjective representation gap, our egocentric measure of economic well-being—financial worry—is not statistically linked to attitudes toward Congress. Three other findings deserve mention in this analysis. First, both the subjective representation gap and (objective) member extremism are positively associated with disapproval of Congress, and second—as model 2 shows—the subjective quality of representation does not mediate the impact of member extremism. Finally, highly authoritarian respondents are about 10-percentage points *less* likely to disapprove of Congress than are their low authoritarian peers.

--Table 2 here—

We now turn to explaining populist sentiment itself. As the models in Table 3 indicate, member extremity is significantly associated with support for populism, but the effect is slightly smaller (and becomes non-significant) when the subjective representation gap—which exerts a

9-percentage point effect in increasing support for populism—is in the model. Unlike for our two previous measures of political discontent, in this analysis both egocentric and sociotropic forms of economic anxiety are significantly associated with populism; however, the impact of the latter is approximately three times larger—14 to 5 percentage points—in heightening populist sentiment. Finally, the analysis indicates that Democrats (vs. independents) are less populist, whereas being a co-partisan of one's member of Congress is unrelated to populism. Finally, there was no relationship between populism and authoritarianism. In sum, the strongest inputs to populism include feeling unrepresented and feeling (sociotropically) pessimistic about economic mobility.

--Table 3 here—

Finally, we come to the question of candidate support. Here, we examine how our standard variables, in addition to our three measures of political discontent, influence evaluations of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Two models of comparative candidate evaluation (Trump minus Clinton, recoded to a 0 to 1 scale) are shown in Table 4. Net the effects of partisanship, ideology and moral traditionalism (all of which exerted strong effects), both racial resentment and a preference for decreased immigration exerted significant and substantively large (20 and 14 percentage points, respectively) effects on support for Trump over Clinton. These findings are unsurprising; the former has been demonstrated in several prior analyses (e.g., Schaffner et al. 2017; Wood 2017), and the latter was a salient aspect of Trump's message, reflected in his announcement speech and at his rallies throughout the campaign.

--Table 4 here--

Beyond the effects of political (and moral) orientation and cultural backlash attitudes, two of our three measures of political discontent—populism and congressional disapproval—were related to candidate evaluations. Populism exerted an 11-percentage point effect (in a pro-Trump direction) and congressional disapproval was about half that size in the same direction. Member extremism also exerted a statistically significant (5-percentage point) effect in support for Trump (see Model 1), but disappeared when the two measures of discontent were included in the model (see Model 2). In contrast to others' work (e.g., Inglehart and Norris

2016; Schaffner et al. 2017), we find that economic evaluations also matter; however, as in our prior analyses, it is the *sociotropic*—not the egocentric—aspect of economic perceptions that are important. Net the effects of the "cultural" factors, our measure of sociotropic mobility pessimism exerted a significant (8-percentage point) effect in a pro-Trump direction.

Finally, despite the seemingly authoritarian quality of Trump's campaign (e.g., his appeals to "law and order," his ethnocentrism and "strong" leadership style), we find no trace of an effect of authoritarianism on comparative candidate evaluation. Those who preferred children to have the qualities of "obedience," "good manners," "respect of elders," and "being well behaved" were no more likely to support Trump over Clinton that those who preferred children to be "independent," "curious," "self-reliant," and "considerate."

Conclusions

We have shown that Donald Trump tapped a large reservoir of political discontent in the American electorate, a reservoir stocked by the polarized nature of political representation in the US Congress. Fed up by politics as usual, citizens registered their dissatisfaction by giving their support to the candidate who promised, among other things, to be their voice against a corrupt and "stupid" political establishment.

We have emphasized in this paper that an increasingly polarized politics has contributed to the attraction of populist ideas. When bottom-up demand is matched by elite supply, a "populist moment" (Oliver and Rahn 2016; Rahn 2017) may be in the offing. In the case of election 2016, the realization of this populist potential was made possible by the failure of the Republican establishment to coalesce around a candidate (Cohen, Karol, Noel, and Zaller 2016), a coordination failure that we believe has its roots in the kinds of attitudes we have studied here.

Extremism contributes to political disaffection by widening the representation gap between citizens and their elected representatives. Extremism could fuel political disaffection through mechanisms other than policy congruence as well. Congressional ideologues, for example, are especially likely to communicate with their constituents in ways that tarnish the reputation of the opposing party, especially when their party is in the minority in Congress or when it does not occupy the Presidency (Goodman, Grimmer, parker and Zlotnick 2015; Lee

2017). As the fortunes of national parties shift over time, the brands of *both* parties are likely to suffer as voters are exposed first to negative messages about one party and then, when the institutional positions of the parties changes, hostile rhetoric about the other party. As a consequence, citizens' may come to believe (rightly so), that the pursuit of partisan advantage is more important to their Representatives than they are.   This may explain why MC extremism in our models continues to exert a direct effect on congressional disapproval and support for Trump even when the more egocentric subjective representation gap is in included. Historically in the U.S., populism has been the response to this excess partisanship as "the people" use the ballot box to signal their displeasure with the governing class. Whether the most recent populist uprising provides the kind of electoral shock necessary to correct the present polarization-induced dysfunction of the political system remains to be seen.

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**Table 1: Relationship between MC Extremism and
the Subjective Representation Gap**

	Subjective Representation Gap
MC Extremism	0.104
	(0.030)**
Co-partisan	-0.186
	(0.016)***
Republican	0.097
	(0.020)***
Democrat	0.088***
	(0.017)
Ideology	-0.076
	(0.015)*
Worried Finances	0.001
	(0.020)
Mobility Pessimism	0.061
	(0.029)*
Authoritarianism	-0.035
	(0.019)
R^2	0.101
N of Obs.	3275
N of Districts	432

**Table 2: Relationship between MC Extremism,
the Representation Gap and Congressional Disapproval**

	Congressional Disapproval	
	(1)	(2)
MC Extremism	0.096	0.088
	(0.031)**	(0.033)**
Representation Gap		0.106
		(0.027)***
Co-partisan	-0.033	-0.011
	(0.018)	(0.019)
Republican	-0.014	-0.024
	(0.023)	(0.023)
Democrat	-0.038	-0.051
	(0.019)*	(0.019)**
Ideology	-0.042	--0.047
	(0.033)	(0.034)
Worried Finances	-0.025	-0.032
	(0.025)	(0.026)
Mobility Pessimism	0.175	0.176
	(0.036)***	(0.037)***
Authoritarianism	-0.109	-0.099
	(0.023)***	(0.024)***
R^2	0.123	0.131
N of Obs.	3309	3172
N of Districts	432	432

Model includes age, education, sex, race and ethnicity. Standard errors clustered by congressional district
*** p > .001 ** p < .01 * p < .05

**Table 3: Relationship between MC Extremism,
the Representation Gap and Populist Attitudes**

	Populist Attitudes	
	(1)	(2)
MC Extremism	0.033	0.024
	(0.016)*	(0.017)
Representation Gap		0.089
		(0.014)***
Co-partisan	-0.012	0.005
	(0.009)	(0.009)
Republican	-0.010	-0.018
	(0.012)	(0.012)
Democrat	-0.029	-0.033
	(0.009)**	(0.009)***
Ideology	0.042	0.044
	(0.018)*	(0.019)*
Worried Finances	0.054	0.053
	(0.012)***	(0.013)***
Mobility Pessimism	0.145	0.140
	(0.017)***	(0.018)***
Authoritarianism	0.010	0.019
	(0.011)	(0.012)
R^2	0.099	0.118
N of Obs.	3336	3197
N of Districts	432	432

Model includes age, education, sex, race and ethnicity. Standard errors clustered by congressional district
    *** p > .001 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table 4: Relationship between MC Extremism,
Political Discontent, and Comparative Candidate Evaluations

	Comparative Candidate Evaluations	
	(1)	(2)
MC Extremism	0.052	0.040
	(0.023)*	(0.022)
Representation Gap	-0.019	
	(0.017)	
Congressional Disapproval		0.051
		(0.014)***
Populist Attitudes		0.111
		(0.026)***
Co-partisan	0.001	0.006
	(0.012)	(0.011)
Republican	0.108	0.111
	(0.015)***	(0.014)***
Democrat	-0.173	-0.169
	(0.013)***	(0.013)***
Ideology	0.237	0.237
	(0.024)***	(0.023)***
Worried Finances	0.000	-0.003
	(0.016)	(0.016)
Mobility Pessimism	0.099	0.081
	(0.023)***	(0.022)***
Moral Traditionalism	0.169	0.172
	(0.023)***	(0.023)***
Racial Resentment	0.200	0.195
	(0.020)***	(0.020)***
Immigration	0.147***	0.143
	(0.019)	(0.018)***
Authoritarianism	-0.017	-0.006
	(0.016)	(0.016)
R²	0.640	0.653
N of Obs.	3178	3166
N of Districts	432	432

Model includes age, education, sex, race and ethnicity. Standard errors clustered by congressional district
*** p > .001 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Appendix: Items comprising the Populist Attitudes scale

- *How often can you trust the federal government in Washington to do what is right? [Always, most of the time, about half the time, some of the time, or never]*
- *Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?*
- *Do you think that people in government [waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it]?*
- *How many of the people running the government are corrupt? [All, most, about half, a few, or none]?*
- *Public officials don't care what people like me think? Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly]*
- *Most politicians do not care about the people (Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly]*
- *Most politicians are trustworthy. (Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly]*
- *Politicians are the main problem in the United States. (Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly]*
- *Most politicians care only about the interests of the rich and powerful. (Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly]*
- *How widespread do you think corruption such as bribe taking is among politicians in the United States: [Very widespread, quite widespread, not very widespread, or it hardly happens at all)*