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Editor’s Preface to the Spring Edition

Here at Elon University, we are extremely grateful for the opportunity to host the Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics for the coming years. We are proud to present the Spring 2021 issue, and congratulate all authors published in this issue.

This journal seeks to highlight the intellectual curiosity that has led to innovative scholarship in all subfields of political science, scholarship that addresses timely questions, is carefully crafted, and utilizes diverse methodologies. We are committed to intellectual integrity, a fair and objective review process, and a high standard of scholarship. Through this publication, we aim to accentuate student achievements in political science research and showcase the works of undergraduate scholars, some of which has been traditionally ignored in the broader field of political science literature, despite representing the future of this discipline.

As an editorial team composed entirely of women, we understand that this occurrence is not a common one. Following the lead of the all-female American Political Science Review (APSR) Editorial Board, we are excited to promote research in the areas of “American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, public law and policy, racial and ethnic politics, the politics of gender and sexuality and qualitative and quantitative research methods.” This journal values the relationships formed through student-faculty collaboration and aims to inspire a culture of intellectual curiosity that expands far beyond the college campus. In addition to recognizing the academic endeavors of undergraduate students, we hope to further encourage and empower students to seek out knowledge and realize their potential in contributing to growing scholarship in a variety of disciplines.

In the journal’s first year, we want to emphasize our appreciation for all the individuals who have made this first publication possible. Our advisors, Dr. Laura Roselle, Dr. Baris Kesgin, and Dr. Aaron Sparks, have been unwavering in their support of us throughout this entire process. Without their consistent support and insights, this issue would not have been possible. In addition, we would like to thank the entirety of the Political Science and Policy Studies Department at Elon University, as well as our Faculty Advisory Editorial Board reviewers for all of their hard work and support.

Going forward, we are excited to create a culture within our Editorial Board that embraces these values and continues to strive for excellence for the remainder of the journal’s tenure at Elon University. Thank you for your continued support and readership of our publication, we hope you enjoy our first edition.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Board at Elon University
Submission of Manuscripts

The Journal accepts manuscripts from undergraduates of any class and major. Members of Pi Sigma Alpha are especially encouraged to enter their work. We strive to publish papers of the highest quality in all areas of political science.

Generally, selected manuscripts have been well-written works with a fully developed thesis and strong argumentation stemming from original analysis. Authors may be asked to revise their work before being accepted for publication.

Submission deadlines are October 1st for the Fall edition and February 1st for the Spring edition. Manuscripts are accepted on a rolling basis; therefore early submissions are strongly encouraged.

To submit your work, please email psajournalelon@gmail.com with an attached Word document of the manuscript. Please include your name, university and contact details (mailing address, email address, and phone number) in a separate document.

Submitted manuscripts must include a short abstract (approximately 150 words), citations, and references that follow the *APSA Style Manual for Political Science*. Please do not exceed the maximum page length of 35 double-spaced pages, which includes references, tables, figures, and appendices.

The Journal is a student-run enterprise with editors and an Editorial Board that are undergraduate students and Pi Sigma Alpha members at Elon University.

The Editorial Board relies heavily on the help of our Faculty Advisory Board consisting of political science faculty from across the nation, including members of the Pi Sigma Alpha Executive Council. Due to the time committed to the manuscript review process, we would like to remind students to submit only one manuscript at a time.

Please direct any questions about submissions or the Journal’s upcoming editions to the editors at Elon University: psajournalelon@gmail.com.
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Sedimentation of Bias in No Promo Homo Policies: Anti-Gay Narratives in State Curriculum Laws

Meg Cummings, Wesleyan University

Before 2017, eight states retained anti-gay curriculum laws to control the discussion of homosexuality in sex education curricula: Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah. While proponents of “no promo homo” policies claim their usefulness in maintaining the neutrality of schools to social issues, the laws themselves call for the active denigration of homosexuality in the classroom. This article uses William Eskridge’s (2000) sedimentation of anti-gay bias theory to analyze the language of the eight laws’ use of the three tell-tale narratives about homosexuality: first, the “unnatural” nature of homosexual intercourse, followed by the diseased minds and bodies of homosexuals, and finally, the threat to the family and children posed by homosexuality. The anti-gay curriculum laws all utilize at least one of the three sedimentary layers in making their no promo homo arguments, transparently denigrating non-heterosexual sexual orientations despite claims to a neutral school environment.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In 2014, 315 copies of a Utah health textbook, costing a total of $24,000, were shelved by district officials for violating the state’s laws on health curriculum standards. In a section titled “Building Healthy Relationships and Understanding Sexuality,” the book included several references to sexual orientation, including language such as “Gays and lesbians seek love, friendship, communication, validation, companionship, and a sense of stability just as heterosexuals do” (Donatelle 2014, 162-163). On a different page was a picture depicting two men embracing and smiling at the camera. All sections that mentioned sexual orientation were scrawled out by a pen wielded by a district official; even the photo of the two men had an “x” over their faces (Rosky, 2017). The portions of the health textbook dealing with sexual orientation were marked for elimination by the district because they violated a provision of Utah’s sex education curriculum law that banned instruction in the “advocacy of homosexuality” (Utah Code § 53A-13-101(1)(c)(iii)).

In addition to Utah, Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas restrict (or formerly restricted) homosexuality in sex education, though individual states vary in content and enforcement. Most of the laws were originally passed in the late 20th century throughout the 1980s and ’90s; Oklahoma and Louisiana mark the earliest in 1987 and Utah the latest in 2001. Collectively, these laws are known as “no promo homo” laws for banning the “promotion” of homosexuality in sex education classes. In spite of the differences in the language across these laws, this paper will argue that they use strikingly similar narratives to forward anti-gay policy. Within the framework posited in Eskridge’s (2000) sedimentation theory of legal arguments levied against homosexuality, these laws limit or entirely restrict discussion of any non-normative sexual orientation in sex education class, by silencing information about queer identities or by actively promoting harmful narratives about homosexuality and queer people that they are diseased or criminals.

Sedimentation of Bias in No Promo Homo

The term “no promo homo” itself was originally coined by queer and legal theorist Nan Hunter to describe the 1978 Briggs Initiative, which diverged from previous anti-gay legislation by banning a particular viewpoint—the “advocacy” of homosexuality—rather than simply discriminating against a group of people (Hunter 1993). Legal scholar William Eskridge took Hunter’s concept of no promo homo and expanded it to explain the nature of anti-gay discourse over the past century. The result was Eskridge’s theory of the sedimentation of anti-gay discourse, which tracks three distinct strains of anti-gay prejudice that proceeded over a generation. First came the natural law argument about the “unnaturalness” of homosexuality, then the disease argument, levied against both the physical and psychological health of homosexual individuals, and then the social republican argument, which claims to protect the fabric of society, and thus positions homosexuality as a threat to families and children (Eskridge 2005). Eskridge describes how the oldest of these (natural law) served as base layer for the discourse that followed, and then the subsequent medical argument served as a base for the social republican (Eskridge 2000). Eskridge writes,
“Antigay discourse itself has changed, with social republican arguments superseding medical arguments, which earlier had superseded natural law arguments. But the old arguments do not disappear; they remain as foundational layers over which new arguments intellectually sediment” (1331). These no promo homo laws that restrict sex education curricula directly map onto the sedimentary layers of anti-gay prejudice posited by Eskridge to create what he describes as the no promo homo umbrella argument: The theory that anti-gay discourse eventually took the position that “progay changes in law or norms would encourage homosexuality or homosexual conduct. The slogan is ‘no promotion of homosexuality.’ In slang, no promo homo” (Eskridge 2000, 1329). The curriculum laws are a perfect distillation of Eskridge’s theory of sedimentation; each law engages with at least one of the anti-gay logics that have consolidated into the no promo homo umbrella argument. He writes,

> Each new identity was linked up with other societal concerns and formed a layer over, rather than displaced, the old identity.... Law has been one mechanism for preserving the bottom layers of the identity, for connecting old concerns with new ones, and for presenting each new identity as if it always had existed as a natural regulatory category (Eskridge 2000, 1329).

The no promo homo laws of Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah each engage in the type of anti-gay rhetoric that has sedimented in Eskridge’s no promo homo theory: employing the unnaturalness, medicalization, and social republicanism arguments to varying degrees. In the following sections, the sources of these types of rhetoric are interrogated and mapped onto sections from the states’ no promo homo legislation, using statements from lawmakers at the time of passage to bolster these claims.

Natural Law Sedimentation

When describing the lowest layer in the sedimentation theory, Eskridge writes, “The original justifications for antigay policies rested in religious natural law traditions: Sodomy is sinful and sodomites [are] abominations” (Eskridge 2000, 1338). The American classification of sodomy as unnatural and detestable conduct is fundamentally rooted in Christian theology; the early Christian church taught that “dishonorable passions” of those who “exchanged natural relations for unnatural” went against God (Eskridge 2008, 1). The case for sodomy as a historically reviled crime, and thus serving as the basis for anti-gay discrimination, is never made more clearly than in the oral arguments and concurring opinion for *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986), which asserted there was no right to private homosexual sodomy under the Fourteenth Amendment. Through emphasizing “centuries-old tradition” and “conventional morality,” Michael Hobbs—the Georgia assistant attorney general arguing for the state—relied heavily on natural law reasoning in his oral arguments defending the sodomy criminalization law (Hobbs, oral arguments in *Bowers v. Hardwick* 478 U.S. 186 (1986)). “The simple fact is that homosexual sodomy, which is what is involved in this case, has never in our heritage held a place [in this country].... Our legal history and our social traditions have condemned this conduct uniformly for hundreds and hundreds of years” (Hobbs, oral arguments in *Bowers v. Hardwick* 478 U.S. 186 (1986)). The repeated condemnation of sodomy as an abomination contrary to the natural laws and moral character of the nation made an impression on Chief Justice Burger’s concurring opinion, in which he writes,

> As the Court notes...the proscriptions against sodomy have very ‘ancient roots....’ [Sir William] Blackstone described ‘the infamous crime against nature’ as an offense of ‘deeper malignity’ than rape, a heinous act ‘the very mention of which is a disgrace to human nature,’ and ‘a crime not fit to be named....’ To hold that the act of homosexual sodomy is somehow protected as a fundamental right would be to cast aside millennia of moral teaching” (Bowers v. Hardwick 478 U.S. 186 (1986)).

The characterizations of sodomy in *Bowers v. Hardwick* exemplify the use of natural law arguments against homosexual conduct as a legal reasoning enforced against anyone who engaged in the targeted activities. It is not hard to see how this line of reasoning could be applied in the context of anti-gay curriculum laws; only two years earlier, a dissenting opinion in the Tenth Circuit Court case striking Oklahoma’s original no promo homo law had declared “Sodomy is malum in se, i.e., immoral and corruptible in its nature.... Any teacher who advocates, solicits, encourages or promotes the practice of sodomy...is in fact and in truth inciting school children to participate in the abominable and detestable crime against nature” *(Nat’l Gay Task Force v. Bd. of Educ.,* 729 F.2d 1276 (10th Cir. 1984)). The natural law arguments used to justify the laws that enforced the criminalization of sodomy also appeared in arguments for restriction of school curriculum. Several of the no promo homo laws that constrain discussion of homosexuality in sex education classes specifically reference the state’s sodomy laws, despite the 2003 Supreme Court decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* that declared the criminalization of homosexual behavior unconstitutional. Alabama’s statute specifies that all curriculum materials should include “An emphasis, in a factual manner...that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state” (Alabama Code § 16-40A-2(c)(8) (2020)). Texas’ curriculum laws actually mention the state’s unconstitutional sodomy ban in two places: the statute legislating AIDS prevention education materials for minors requires that they “state that homosexual conduct is not an acceptable lifestyle and is a criminal offense under Section 21.06, Penal Code” (Tex.
It wasn't only physical characteristics that marked the homosexual as a diseased individual; the conception of homosexuality as a psychological condition has perpetuated this second layer of anti-gay prejudice sedimentation. Dr. Gregory Herek, expert on homophobia and professor of psychology, writes, “By the end of the 19th century, medicine and psychiatry were effectively competing with religion and the law for jurisdiction over sexuality” (Herek 2016). Believed to be abnormal, caused by unstable family dynamics, and reversed by advocating behaviors that conformed with gender role expectations, homosexuality was pathologized as a mental disorder by the American Psychological Association (APA). A 2009 report by the APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation reviewed the history of these theories of homosexuality in classifying it as a mental disorder:

Significantly impacting psychiatric thought in the mid-20th century, these theories were part of the rationale for including homosexuality as a mental illness in both the first (1952) and second (1968) editions of the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), thus reinforcing and exacerbating sexual stigma and sexual prejudice (APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation 2009, 22).

One decade after gay rights activists launched a campaign to remove homosexuality from the DSM, the APA voted to remove homosexuality in 1973.

Law, psychiatry, and citizenship converged in the 1967 Supreme Court case of Boutilier v. Immigration and Naturalization Service, in which the Court determined that the provision in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 that excluded persons with a “psychopathic personality” from entry was intended by Congress to include homosexuality. Justice Clark’s opinion for the majority affirmed the deportation order, writing, “We, therefore, conclude that the Congress used the phrase ‘psychopathic personality...’ to effectuate its purpose to exclude from entry all homosexuals and other sex perverts” (Boutilier v. Immigration and Naturalization Service 378 U.S. 122 (1967)). Like Canaday’s work on the regulation of perverse bodies for American citizenship in the early twentieth century, the designation of homosexuality as a mental disorder was used for determining the ideal U.S. citizen. The pathologization of homosexuality was codified not only in works of the psychiatric community, but the legal and social structures of the United States, entrenching homosexuality as an abnormal psychological condition and perpetuating further stigma.

Perhaps the most salient association between homosexuality and disease in the context of sex education curriculum is the emphasis on the riskiness of homosexuality in HIV/AIDS education materials. After all, it was Surgeon General C. Everett Koop’s 1987 report on AIDS, urging sex education for young people to prevent AIDS, that spurred many states to enact sex education statutes. Crucially, Koop’s
report explicitly called for “frank, open discussion about sexual practices—heterosexual and homosexual” (Koop 1987, 1). Koop wrote, “[Fear of AIDS] was compounded by personal feelings regarding the groups of people primarily affected—homosexual men and intravenous drug abusers.... It is time to put self-defeating attitudes aside and recognize that we are fighting a disease—not people” (1). However, other policymakers were not as consistent in erasing prejudice against groups affected by AIDS. The heavy associations between homosexuality and AIDS started early in the epidemic; AIDS was known as “the gay disease” or “the gay plague” as early as 1983 (Mendicino 1987). Douglas Crimp, queer theorist and AIDS activist, writes in “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic”: “Language destined to offend gays and inflame homophobia has been, from the very beginning—in science, in the media, and in politics—the main language of AIDS discussion” (Crimp 1987, 239). The federal government’s response provided an example of rhetoric that consistently inflamed homophobia in the face of the AIDS epidemic. A domestic policy advisor in the Reagan Administration named Gary Bauer said in opposition to a gay representative on the AIDS Commission: “While it is true that homosexuals have been major victims of AIDS, they are also responsible for its spread. Recent studies show the average gay man with AIDS has had over 150 different sexual partners in the previous 12 months” (Brier 2009, 94). These examples illustrate the extent to which U.S. policymakers were committed to painting gay and bisexual men as not only the victims of AIDS, but also its greatest perpetrators, constructing the figure of the promiscuous and diseased homosexual. Through this rhetoric, gay people “remain (despite overwhelming epidemiological evidence to the contrary) not only people with AIDS but the people with AIDS” (Nunokawa 1991, 2).

Three states’ anti-gay sex education laws specifically mandate the discussion about homosexuality within the context of sexually transmitted diseases: Arizona, Oklahoma, and South Carolina. Arizona’s AIDS education statute included a (now-repealed) provision that read, “No district shall include in its course of study instruction which... Suggests that some methods of sex are safe methods of homosexual sex” (Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 15-716(C)(3) 2018). This statute’s insistence that gay sex is dangerous or risky reinforces the associations with disease; there are safe methods of homosexual sex, just as there are instances of heterosexual sex that can lead to the spread of sexually transmitted infections. Oklahoma’s statute follows in the same vein: the Oklahoma statute requires that AIDS prevention education specifically teach students that “engaging in homosexual activity, promiscuous sexual activity, intravenous drug use or contact with contaminated blood products is now known to be primarily responsible for contact with the AIDS virus” and “avoiding the activities specified in paragraph 1 of this subsection is the only method of preventing the spread of the virus” (Okla. Stat. Ann. tit. 70 §11-103.3(D)). This statute, similar to Arizona, paints with a broad brush: it condemns all homosexual activity as primarily responsible for AIDS and implores students to avoid such activity if they don’t want to contract AIDS, reinforcing “homosexual acts as synonymous with disease and death” (Knauer 2000, 475). South Carolina’s statute explicitly restricts discussions of homosexuality to a disease context: “The program of instruction provided for in this section may not include a discussion of alternate sexual lifestyles from heterosexual relationships including, but not limited to, homosexual relationships except in the context of instruction concerning sexually transmitted diseases” (S.C. Code Ann. 59-32-30(A)(5)). While this statute doesn’t explicitly link homosexuality and AIDS, it does only allow any discussion of homosexuality to take place in a framework that advances the disease logic of anti-gay prejudice.

Debate of Arizona’s law in particular serves as a useful example in tracking the power of the disease discourse in AIDS education. In 1991, when the bill was originally passed, The Arizona Daily Star published a story on the bill’s passage, quoting the sponsor of the no promo homo amendment, Republican Representative Karen Mills: “‘Many people today still believe that homosexuality is not a positive, or even an alternative, lifestyle,’ Mills said. ‘Medical science has shown that there are no safe methods of homosexual sex’” (Reinhart 1991). These blatant falsehoods about the riskiness of homosexual sex served as the basis for the no promo homo law in 1991; in 2019, a similar line of reasoning was used by Arizona Senator Eddie Farnsworth, a Republican, as he explained his opposition to the repeal of the no promo homo law. He said,

[The Arizona legislature passed the original 1991 bill] because of the statistics reflecting the spread of AIDS among certain populations and demographics.... Sixty-seven percent of [people who contract AIDS in a year] are gay men. Now that’s not castigating any group; it’s just a fact.... It’s intended to reflect that a certain lifestyle actually leads to the spread of this particular disease. That’s based on the statistics.... [The statute] reflects the actual facts of how [HIV is disproportionately spread] (Arizona Senate Floor, 4/11/2019).

Farnsworth’s comments here exemplify Nunokawa’s theory about gay people being reduced to the people with AIDS. He makes no effort to acknowledge how the statute conflated homosexual sex with unprotected sex, and instead insists that the statute reflects a simple truth about HIV transmission. The consistency of the narrative of disease and homosexuality across nearly three decades illustrates the potency of the disease trope to justify anti-gay curriculum laws.

Social Republican Sedimentation

The next layer of sedimentation of anti-gay prejudice according to Eskridge’s theory is an appeal to social republicanism: Eskridge writes, “When the medical establishment voiced doubts about that antigay position,
Social republican arguments were added: Homosexuals disrupt families and children’s sexual development” (Eskridge 2000, 1338). To gay rights opponents, any acceptance of homosexuality—through same-sex marriage laws, anti-discrimination ordinances, or approval of homosexual teachers—signaled a threat to the family. In the course of her Save the Children campaign against Dade County’s anti-discrimination law, anti-gay rights activist Anita Bryant utilized the social republican argument to emphasize the threat to the family posed by homosexuality. After her success in repealing the Florida law, Bryant traveled the country, using the same family-based rhetoric in her crusade against anti-discrimination laws, proclaiming the fight against laws that “attempt to legitimize a lifestyle that is both perverse and dangerous to the sanctity of the family, dangerous to our children...dangerous to our survival as one nation, under God” (Eskridge 2005, 1018). Bryant’s narrative continued throughout the '90s: The 1992 campaign to pass Colorado’s Amendment 2—which would have banned any jurisdiction from passing anti-discrimination laws—featured another iteration of the social republican threat. The organization Colorado for Family Values, the primary supporter of Amendment 2, distributed advertisements and pamphlets that declared “To this angry, alienated minority, the family is the symbol of everything they attack” and “‘Militant’ gay rights people want to destroy the family and the state’s churches” (1043). While these arguments were expressed at the local level across the country, policymakers at the federal level also invoked homosexuality as a threat to the family. Advocating for the passage of the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996, Georgia Republican Representative Robert Barr made this line of reasoning explicit: “The very foundations of our society are in danger of being burned. The flames of hedonism...are licking at the very foundations of our society: the family unit” (142 Cong. Rec. H7480-82 (daily ed. July 12, 1996) (statement of Rep. Barr)). The continued reference to the threat to the family underlines the social republican layer of sedimentation: Homosexuality is a threat to the family, and therefore, to the very foundation of a moral society. Opponents to gay rights continually invoke Christian religious language and imagery to paint the threat posed by the promotion of homosexuality to the normative family. These social republican arguments have a lot in common with a lower layer of sedimentation—natural law—as both find their roots in Christian ideals of natural sexual and family relations, though social republican arguments have been modernized to appeal to a more diverse audience (Eskridge 2000).

In the social republican argument, children are also at risk should homosexuality be accepted. The homosexual as the existential threat to the family and children’s sexual development are interrelated; since homosexuals cannot produce children on their own to carry out their agenda, they must recruit. A 1977 advertisement for Bryant’s Save Our Children campaign makes this explicit: “This recruitment of our children is absolutely necessary for the survival and growth of homosexuality—for since homosexuals cannot reproduce, they must freshen their ranks” (Eskridge 2005, 1017). The social republican argument works with the myth of the queer child in an effort to ensure all children are heterosexual and not recruited by predatory homosexual adults. In this way, homosexuals function as a kind of “folk devil,” a constructed social figure used to drum up moral panic. In this case, the panic is the idea that children are at risk. Sociologist Kerry Robinson explains: “This folk devil is constructed as preying on and corrupting young, vulnerable, ‘innocent’ children. It is one seen to challenge, through the perceived hedonistic ‘homosexual lifestyle,’ the ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ moral social order founded upon the values and practices of the hegemonic heterosexual family” (Robinson 2008, 114). This conceptualization of homosexuality as a folk devil demonstrates the importance of children to the stability of the (heterosexual) family unit, and thus social order.

The enactment of no promo homo laws, like curriculum laws, can protect children from the influence of homosexuality. Eskridge explains, “The most popular version of the no promo homo argument is that a progay shift in state policy will be a signal to the wavering adolescent that homosexuality is okay, and the wavering adolescent might then choose homosexuality as her sexual orientation” (Eskridge 2000, 1366). If the wavering adolescent can be recruited into homosexuality, thus destroying the family unit, then precautions must be taken to ensure that they do not receive the signal that homosexuality is okay. The implementation of curriculum laws that preclude discussions of homosexuality is one way to achieve the goal of preventing homosexual recruitment of innocent children. Founded in 1983, the group Citizens for Excellence in Education, which advocates the “Christianizing” of public education, specifically targeted LGBTQ-friendly curriculum materials as a recruitment tactic of the gay rights movement. Dr. Richard Simonds, the organization’s founder, writes in a plea to his supporters: [The] gay rights movement is sweeping our nation's schools.... Students are told it is a normal acceptable life-style and that they can't criticize it because they don't know until they try it.... Children have been lied to and then RECRUITED into the homosexual/lesbian lifestyle.... Public school programs like 'Project 10,' 'Children of the Rainbow' and 'Project 21' are some of the many programs of homosexual/lesbianism promotion and recruitment...It's Sodom and Gomorrah all over again. Will we wait until our society is engulfed in homosexuality/lesbianism and AIDS, or stop it now? (People for the American Way 1996).

Simonds’ inflammatory rhetoric exemplifies the connection between school curricula and homosexual recruitment. The public-school programs mentioned by Simonds in the quote above (Project 10, Children of the Rainbow, Project 21) were initiatives that introduced
accurate information about the diversity of sexual orientation and advocated for the acceptance of all sexualities in public school curricula in the 1980s and ’90s. The positioning of these curriculum programs as recruitment and “Sodom and Gomorrah all over again” exemplifies the role no promo homo curriculum laws fill in the social republican stratum of anti-gay rhetoric. Fears about curriculum that acknowledges, let alone accepts, divergent sexual orientations, are made serve as the “promotion” of homosexuality to children and in their subsequent “recruitment” into the homosexual lifestyle. The core messaging is this: If children receive positive messages about homosexuality, they will abandon heterosexuality and threaten the most cherished institution—the family.

Turning to the language of the no promo homo laws themselves, the majority of state statutes engage with the social republican layer by including provisions to prevent teachers from portraying homosexuality in a positive light. Louisiana’s statute restricts any representation of homosexuality. The statute reads: “No sex education course offered in the public schools of the state shall utilize any sexually explicit materials depicting male or female homosexual activity” (La. Stat. Ann. §17:281(A)(3) 2020). The statute does not impose any similar restriction on materials depicting heterosexual sex activity. Utah’s (now-repealed) statute curtailed any positive representation of homosexuality by “prohibiting instruction in...the advocacy of homosexuality” (Utah Code § 53A-13-101(1)(c)(iii) 2016). Utah officials at the time of the bill’s passage noted the importance of avoiding student interest in controversial topics like homosexuality; then-State School Superintendent Laing gave a quote to The Deseret News saying, “It’s important that teachers as educators answer questions without unduly piquing interest in subjects” (Toomer-Cook 2001). These laws would silence any positive discussions of homosexuality, leaving only instruction that reinforces heterosexuality as the norm. The goal of the laws is to restrict students’ access to information about non-heterosexual sexuality—either through prohibiting the “advocacy of homosexuality” or an imbalanced presentation of instruction on sexual health. The specific phrasing in the laws evoke Simmonds’ inflammatory rhetoric about “promotion” of the homosexual lifestyle to young people, the central claim of the social republican sedimentation.

Interactions Between Multiple Layers of Sedimentation

The no promo homo laws of other states exemplify the ways in which the layers of anti-gay prejudice can intermingle social republicanism along with natural law and/or disease elements. Alabama and Texas’ statutes include not only provisions that condemned homosexual activity as illegal, citing natural law arguments about the abominable nature of sodomy, but also call on educators to describe homosexuality as unacceptable and a risk to health. Alabama’s statute includes language that requires course materials to have “An emphasis... from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public” (Alabama Code § 16-40A-2(c)(8) (2020)). Texas’ sex education law is identical, also requiring “emphasis, provided in a factual manner and from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public” (Tex. Health & Safety Code Ann. §163.002(8) (2020)). The laws of these two states hit on two additional layers of sedimentation; not only does the statute attempt to dissuade youth from homosexuality by portraying it as unacceptable to the public, it also grounds this in a public health framework, further associating homosexuality as a medicalized condition.

Arizona and South Carolina’s laws not only associate homosexuality with disease or dangerous sexual activity, but also prohibit portraying homosexuality as a viable alternative to heterosexuality. Arizona’s AIDS education statute reads, “No district shall include in its course of study instruction which: 1. Promotes a homosexual life-style. 2. Portrays homosexuality as a positive alternative life-style” (Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 15-716(C) 2018). This language in Arizona’s statute exemplifies the use of no promo homo laws to restrict positive descriptions of homosexuality, and thus not sway “the wavering adolescent” who might be tempted to engage in homosexuality. South Carolina’s statute ties the social republican arguments with the disease reasoning even more tightly together. Instruction in sex education classes in South Carolina “may not include a discussion of alternate sexual lifestyles from heterosexual relationships including, but not limited to, homosexual relationships except in the context of instruction concerning sexually transmitted diseases” (S.C. Code Ann. 59-32-30(A)(5) 2020). Here, the wavering adolescent can be dissuaded from homosexuality as “alternate sexual lifestyles from heterosexual relationships” are only discussing in the context of disease. The sex education laws employ a number of Eskridge’s tactic in denigrating homosexuality as an unnatural and detestable sexual practice, a medicalized condition of a diseased body or mind, or a threat to the building blocks of society—the family and the child. Table 1 below illustrates how each state’s laws engages with the three layers of Eskridge’s sedimentation theory of anti-gay prejudice, including the language that demonstrates an appeal to each anti-gay logic.

No Promo Homo Umbrella Argument

Curriculum laws that utilize any of the three narratives of anti-gay prejudice employ what Eskridge conceives of as the no promo homo umbrella argument. He explains, “No promo homo incorporates all three traditions into a single all-purpose argument. Thus, no promo homo not only ‘modernizes’ antigay discourse, but also allows modern tropes to mingle with ancient ones” (Eskridge 2000, 1338). These no promo homo arguments engage with the three discourses while streamlining anti-gay bias into what Eskridge refers to as the “standard argument”:
1. If the state adopts policy x (abandons policy y), it would be endorsing and promoting homosexuality or homosexual conduct.

2. The state ought to endorse and promote good lives and good conduct and ought not to endorse and promote less good lives and conduct.

3. Homosexuality and homosexual conduct are not as good as heterosexuality and heterosexual conduct.

Therefore, policy x should not be adopted (policy y should be retained)" (1329).

A line of reasoning advanced in the oral arguments for Bowers v. Hardwick presents an example of how the no promo homo argument can modernize the earlier layers of discourse sedimentation. A statement by Laurence Tribe, the attorney defending Michael Hardwick and challenging Georgia’s sodomy criminalization in Bowers, exemplifies how the natural law discourses become less acceptable and thus must be modernized with the more recent layers of sedimentation—in this case, the social republican argument. Tribe argues, “[It] would certainly be a legitimate argument for the state to advance, unlike the tautology it advances here, we outlaw it because we don’t like it, we think it’s immoral. It would be a legitimate argument, that this is a properly tailored means of encouraging marriage” (Tribe, oral arguments in Bowers v. Hardwick 478 U.S. 186 (1986)). Tribe characterizes the state’s argument as illegitimate; “we don’t like it, we think it’s immoral” is a succinct distillation of the natural law argument for sodomy criminalization, rooted in the perceived immoral or abominable nature of the act. Tribe offers an updated anti-gay rhetoric that would have merit: the

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**Table 1: Layers of Eskridge’s Anti-Gay Prejudice in No Promo Homo Laws**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Statute</th>
<th>Natural Law</th>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Social Republican</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>Alabama Code § 16-40A-2(c)(8)</td>
<td>“homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state”</td>
<td>“An emphasis... from a public health perspective...”</td>
<td>“homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 15-716(C)</td>
<td>“No district shall...[suggest] that some methods of sex are safe methods of homosexual sex”</td>
<td>“No district shall [promote] a homosexual lifestyle... [portray] homosexuality as a positive alternative life-style”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>La. Stat. Ann. §17:281(A)(3)</td>
<td>“Teaches the current state law related to... homosexual activity”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“No sex education course offered...shall utilize any sexually explicit materials depicting male or female homosexual activity”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>Miss. Code Ann. § 37-13-171(e)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>Okla. Stat. Ann. tit. 70 §11-103.3(D)</td>
<td>“engaging in homosexual activity...is now known to be primarily responsible for contact with the AIDS virus”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>S.C. Code Ann. 59-32-30(A)(5)</td>
<td>“may not include a discussion of alternate sexual lifestyles...except in the context of instruction concerning sexually transmitted diseases”</td>
<td>“may not include a discussion of alternate sexual lifestyles from heterosexual relationships including...homosexual relationships”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Tex. Health &amp; Safety Code Ann. §§ 163.002(8)</td>
<td>“homosexual conduct is...a criminal offense under Section 21.06, Penal Code”</td>
<td>“emphasis, provided in a factual manner and from a public health perspective...”</td>
<td>“homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>Utah Code § 53A-13-101(1)(c)(iii) 2016</td>
<td>“prohibiting instruction in...the advocacy of homosexuality”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
social republican protection of marriage, and thus the family. In fact, he asserts that the legitimate argument for sodomy bans would be for encouraging (heterosexual) marriage. This statement maps easily onto Eskridge's standard no promo homo umbrella argument:

1. If sodomy bans were abandoned, it would be endorsing and promoting homosexuality or homosexual conduct.
2. The state ought to promote good lives and good conduct.
3. Homosexuality and homosexual conduct are not conducive to heterosexual marriage, and are therefore not good lives and not good conduct.

Therefore, sodomy bans should not be abandoned.

Thus, the no promo homo umbrella argument updates and modernizes the natural law argument against sodomy decriminalization, also relying on a more recent layer of anti-gay bias: the social republican argument. Arguing against the promotion of homosexuality on the grounds of encouraging a normative heterosexual marriage—and, by extension, the family unit described by Robinson (2008)—is more acceptable than using a natural law argument as the framework for the no promo homo umbrella reasoning.

Statements from Oklahoma legislators during the 1987 passage of the state's curriculum law serves as another useful example of how the no promo homo umbrella argument uses previous iterations of anti-gay discourses in the context of curriculum laws as a foundation for the arguments advanced by no promo homo proponents. In this case, it's the logic of the association between homosexuality and disease. An article in *The Oklahoman* detailing how the bill passed the House Education Committee describes an interaction between Republican Representative Frank Pitezel and state Health Department employee Dr. Greg Istre:

Pitezel, pointing to a statistic given by White that 72 percent of the Oklahoma cases involve homosexuals, asked Istre, 'If you really want to stop it, are you going to tell these children that homosexuality is not the way to go?' Other members said that not making students aware homosexuals are in a high-risk group would be tacitly condoning homosexuality (Casteel 1987).

This quote illustrates the use of Eskridge's standard argument in a no promo homo law, this time in the context of the disease discourse. This claim also maps easily onto the three-step standard argument laid out by Eskridge (applied to Tribe's comments regarding the sodomy ban above):

1. Not including homosexuality in the statute would have been seen as condoning homosexuality.
2. The state should be endorsing good lives and conduct.
3. Homosexuality should not be encouraged specifically because of its connection to disease (in this case, AIDS).

The purpose of the law is to not encourage or condone homosexuality, which is rationalized through the rhetoric of disease.

Eskridge contends that the standard no promo homo umbrella argument as a framing for anti-gay prejudice is necessary to sustain opposition to the gay rights movement among a diverse group of people. In addition to modernizing old tropes, the no promo homo argument is also multi-purpose. Eskridge explains:

"[No promo homo] can appeal to different conceptions of the good, including utilitarian concerns about the sexuality of children, old-fashioned natural law conceptions of acceptable sex or gender roles, and republican concerns about public culture. Therefore, the no promo homo argument not only facilitates coalitions of people with different concerns, but is also more flexible, allowing the coalition to expand as new kinds of concerns are identified (Eskridge 2000, 1343).

The flexibility of the argument allows several discourses to fall under the no promo homo umbrella, especially considering how opinions against homosexuality have evolved over the course of the past century. The sedimentation of the three anti-gay logics itself reflects how earlier arguments had to be manipulated and sublimated, influencing more recent ones but remaining unsaid in the public discourse.

South Carolina's law provides an example of the no promo homo umbrella argument's flexibility in using arguments that respond to concerns of different coalitions, yet maintaining the ultimate goal of not promoting homosexuality. While writing the original bill, the South Carolina legislature had rejected language that would have appealed to a natural law argument. A 1988 article in *The State* describes the controversy: "The sticking [point] had been...Rep. Mike Fair’s push for tougher language to discourage teachers from telling students that homosexuality was merely an alternative lifestyle. Fair, R-Greenville, wanted to require teachers to say that such behavior is immoral and illegal” (LeBanc 1988). Other lawmakers were content with the existing language that restricted discussion on homosexuality strictly to the context of disease. The failure of Representative Fair to include a natural law argument—the designation of homosexual behavior as “immoral” and “illegal”—demonstrates how no promo homo arguments must be retooled to respond to cultural shifts. It was no longer acceptable to name homosexuality as immoral and illegal in the text of the law; instead, lawmakers were assured that homosexuality would not be encouraged by limiting discussion to the disease framework.

The different ways in which the states used the no promo homo argument—whether the law was situated within a natural law, disease, or social republican framework—demonstrates the flexibility of the specifics of the no promo homo argument. The core purpose, however, remains the same across the states: to restrict discussion of homosexuality unless
it occurs within the prejudice discourses set up by Eskridge. While there are variations between states, each law maps easily onto Eskridge’s sedimentation theory of anti-gay prejudice. Requiring educators to reiterate narratives about homosexuality as linked to disease and immorality or prohibiting them from advancing homosexuality as a counter to the normalized narrative of heterosexuality creates a school that is actively denigrating homosexuality.

Millions of youth attend schools in which no promo homo policies are in place. Students in those schools are subject to a school curriculum that omits accurate and needed information about sexuality and reinforces a history of anti-gay rhetoric by evoking the sedimented cultural narratives surrounding homosexuality. Any scholarship looking to uncover the effect of the statutes on students cannot understand their true damage without understanding the history of homophobia that they were founded in.

REFERENCES
Arizona Senate Floor Session Part 2—Final Reading #1—Apr. 11th, 2019.


**NOTES**

1 Utah became the first state to remove their law from the books after a 2017 repeal, Arizona followed suit in 2019, and South Carolina halted enforcement after a court order in 2020.

2 In 1973, the APA did retain the diagnosis of “ego-dynastic homosexuality” which included a persistent lack of heterosexual arousal and feelings of distress surrounding homosexual contact. In 1986, this category was removed for the DSM-III; while a diagnosis of “ego-dynastic sexual orientation” remains, it does not specifically target homosexual orientation.

3 Both Oklahoma and Arizona’s no promo homo laws are in their AIDS education provisions; South Carolina’s law is in a comprehensive sex education statute, not specifically related to AIDS education.
Frame Convergence as Policy Dialogue: Healthcare Rhetoric in 2020 Congressional Races

Hannah Liu, St. Olaf College

Robust dialogue between candidates on important issues is an essential component of a healthy democracy. Previous literature on campaign dialogue primarily uses issue engagement as a measure for dialogue, but because campaigns use heresthetic maneuvering to avoid highlighting the same aspects of an issue, this measure of dialogue is inadequate in fulfilling democratic norms set out by the literature. This paper addresses this gap, introducing an alternative measure of dialogue — frame convergence — which occurs when two opposing candidates in a race use the same frame to address an issue. Using healthcare as a case study, this study compares frame usage in 2020 U.S. House campaign websites to determine if and when frame convergence occurs. Results indicate that frame convergence tends to occur more often in more competitive races, and that issue ownership dynamics have a relationship with which frames candidates choose to engage.

INTRODUCTION

For decades, scholars have theorized about the role of campaigns in shaping a legitimate and representative democracy. Dahl (1998) considers “enlightened understanding” to be an important criterion in which to judge a democracy (37). Enlightened understanding requires that members of a democracy have “equal and effective opportunities for learning about the relevant alternative policies and their likely consequences” (Dahl 1988, 37). Accordingly, meaningful engagement between candidates, or campaign dialogue, is essential during elections, since voters are “capable of picking the side of the issue that matches their political principles when they are exposed to a full debate” (Sniderman and Theriault 2004, 149). How, then, can a debate be determined as “full” enough to support a democracy?

Criteria in the campaign communication literature sets a baseline for campaign discourse that fully realizes democratic norms of representation. First, clear campaign dialogue should help voters understand their choices in an election. Voters must be able to discern the positions of all candidates on salient issues to make informed decisions (Lipsitz 2013). Second, discourse should be specific enough that voters are able to distinguish candidates from one another (Benoit 2007). Third, candidates should address similar aspects of an issue, so they are not presenting voters with “dueling monologues rather than true dialogue” (Sigelman and Buell 2004, 650). Altogether, healthy campaign debate can generate new ideas and dynamic policy solutions that create a fuller sense of representation (Mansbridge 2003).

These criteria are juxtaposed with the measures of dialogue used in prior research. Campaign dialogue literature has primarily considered “dialogue” as occurring when two candidates discuss the same issue (Banda 2013; Kaplan, Park, and Ridout 2006; Sigelman and Buell 2004; Simon 2002; Xenos and Foot 2005). Although this sort of policy engagement is necessary for campaign dialogue to occur, it is not a sufficient condition to fulfill the normative standards of democratic representation as they are set out by the literature (Dahl 1998; Mansbridge 2003). The use of strategic heresthetic framing by campaigns has caused opposing candidates to talk around each other, even when they are discussing the same issue. Instead of addressing the opposition, candidates manipulate a stockpile of available considerations to highlight the parts of their issue positions they perceive as most advantageous, while avoiding genuine discourse — all the while leaving voters woefully ill-informed (Campbell 1960; Delli Carini and Keeter 1991). This paper proposes an alternative way to evaluate campaign dialogue by looking at not only if, but how candidates are talking about issues. Using healthcare as a case study, this paper determines if candidates in the same race are framing healthcare in the same way, an occurrence called “frame convergence,” on their campaign websites. If candidates are engaging on the same issue with the same frame, they are much more likely to be in dialogue with one another. Results of the study indicate that frame convergence occurs in a majority of the races where both candidates have healthcare pages on their websites but is more likely to occur in races that are more competitive. Additionally, issue ownership dynamics have a relationship with which frames opposing candidates choose to engage.
For these reasons, the operationalization of issue engagement as ‘talking about the same issue’ often falls short of the normative standards of authentic campaign dialogue. In the next section, one of these mechanisms — heresthetic — is explored in greater detail to unpack how common campaign strategies sit in tension with genuine engagement on issues.

**Framing as a Heresthetic Maneuver**

Heresthetics, as described by William Riker in *The Art of Political Manipulation* (1986), is a rhetorical tool used by politicians to alter the conditions of a situation or informational environment in their favor. It is a tool set apart from other rhetorical strategies, because instead of aiming to convince, it is used to manipulate (Riker 1986). Heresthetical maneuvers allow candidates to “clear the obstacles and exploit the opportunities of the institutional environment” (Shepsle 2003, 313). Framing is a heresthetic maneuver because it does not change the composition or details of a policy position, but rather highlights certain aspects over others to change the issue’s salience or public perspective (Arbour 2014; Chong and Druckman 2007; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000). It capitalizes on existing opinions and values to shape different narratives of the same issue. Campaigns will often use polls and focus groups to identify the symbols and messaging that will resonate with people (Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier 2004; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000). In this way, framing can especially benefit the underdog in a race, such as a candidate talking about an issue that is not owned by their party or running in a district where they are unlikely to win (Shepsle 2003). If a candidate lacks competence in certain aspects of an issue, they can strategically select their words to make other parts of the issue seem more important.

Like issues, frames are also owned by parties. Arbour (2014) looked into the use of frames in 2004 House and Senate races and found that the partisanship of the candidate was the main determinant of what frames would be used. “Republican” frames were used by Republican candidates and “Democratic” frames were used by Democrats (Arbour 2014). To illustrate, on the issue of taxes, the focus on “corporate tax cuts” would be considered a Democratic frame, while “cutting or reducing taxes” in general would be considered a Republican frame (Arbour 2014). Campaigns also strategically select frames depending on the characteristics of a district. Arbour (2014) found that “Republican” frames tend to be used in Republican districts, and “Democratic” frames used in Democratic districts.

Although it has typically been assumed that the norm for opposing candidates is to “talk past each other” (Ceaser and Busch 2001, 47), framing issues the same way can actually open the way for true dialogue. For example, in the 2020 Minnesota Congressional District 2 race, the candidates both employed the choice frame. The Republican in the race opted to expand choice by opening healthcare plan buy-ins across state lines, while the Democrat highlighted the public option.
Both candidates consider the freedom of choice in healthcare, but they are still distinguishing themselves from each other in a productive way. As an additional incentive, addressing the opposing side’s frames can actually be politically rewarded. Jerit (2008) found that proponents of healthcare reform have had more success increasing support for reform when devoting more time to topics raised by the opponents and addressing their concerns. In the week immediately following proponents of healthcare addressing opponent frames, such as the frame of big government, public support for healthcare reform increased (Jerit 2008). In other words, engaging with the same frames and having policy conversations can have an effect on policy perception.

Frame Trespassing

There is one more form of engagement to be considered, trespassing. Issue trespassing occurs when candidates address an issue that is owned by the opposing party, regardless of if the other candidate in the race also addresses the issue. Damore (2004) found that candidates who were trailing in the polls were more likely to use issue trespassing as a way to jumpstart their campaigns. Issue trespassing and frame trespassing do not necessarily indicate dialogue between campaigns since voters do not always receive issue position information from both candidates in a race. Nonetheless, ownership dynamics make trespassing a necessary precondition for frame convergence to occur on owned issues. Moreover, to the extent that trespassing is occurring, it suggests that a candidate is engaging with the larger context of party cues and ownership, so it is worth considering in this study.

HYPOTHESES

Candidates engaging on similar frames can move campaign discourse closer to true dialogue by centering the conversation around common aspects of an issue area. The literature points to several circumstances that should encourage frame convergence.

Druckman et al. (2010) found that issue convergence is relatively common on at least one issue, but less common for multiple issues. Frame convergence requires that candidates both include positions about healthcare on their websites and engage on the same frame. Additionally, previous findings in the literature suggest that the standard practice is for candidates to talk around each other, even when they are speaking on the same issue (Lipsitz 2013, Sigelman and Buell 2004). Consequently, frame convergence on the issue of healthcare will occur in fewer than half of 2020 U.S. House races (Hypothesis 1).

Previous literature has overwhelmingly found that increased levels of competitiveness lead to greater occurrences of issue engagement (Banda 2013; Kaplan, Park, and Ridout 2006; Sigelman and Buell 2004; Simon 2002; Xenos and Foot 2005). Competitiveness could also potentially encourage higher levels of frame convergence. Since campaigns strategically engage on the same issues when races are more competitive, that strategy is likely to continue down to their frame selection. Accordingly, more competitive races are expected to have higher levels of frame convergence (Hypothesis 2).

District partisanship is also a potential predictor of engagement. Druckman et al. (2010) found that partisanship was only a predictor of issue engagement for weakly owned issues. However, Arbour’s (2014) study specifically into frames found that district partisanship determined where certain frames were used. This leads to mixed expectations about whether hypothesis 3 will be supported by the data: Democratic frames will be used in Democratic districts and Republican frames will be used in Republican districts (Hypothesis 3).

Druckman et al. (2010) found that open seat races tended to have more issue dialogue. On the other hand, Xenos and Foot (2005) found that incumbents were actually more likely to engage in issue dialogue, suggesting that lower levels of issue dialogue would occur in open seat races. Like district partisanship, this leads to mixed expectations about whether open seat status will produce significant results. Thus, this paper hypothesizes that open seat status will not be a significant predictor of frame convergence (Hypothesis 4). Regardless of the ultimate effect of the presence of an incumbent, it is worth considering as a possible predictor of frame convergence.

Republicans are more likely to try to sound like Democrats as an electoral strategy, since the public views Democrats as more competent in the issue area of healthcare (Egan 2013). Therefore, Republicans will trespass on Democratic frames more often than Democrats trespass on Republican frames (Hypothesis 5).

METHODS

Case and Frame Selection

Frame convergence is tested for in a single policy domain, healthcare. Healthcare is an appropriate choice for several reasons. First, issue salience is correlated with higher levels of discussion on the issue (Druckman et al. 2010). Healthcare has been a salient issue over many election cycles, but it has become especially important in recent years (Gollust, Fowler, and Niederdeppe). Therefore, candidates are likely to take positions on healthcare on their websites. Second, healthcare’s long history in the public sphere has generated several policy alternatives, providing opportunities for candidates to take specific positions while distinguishing themselves from each other. Finally, healthcare is an especially compelling issue to study since, as pointed out by Gollust, Fowler, and Niederdeppe (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic may have opened the issue agenda for healthcare in ways considered impossible before. In order to understand and identify the frames to be used in the study, this paper examines the recent history of healthcare reform, which has been marked by three
different periods coinciding with the last three presidencies before the Trump administration.

In the years leading up the 1992 Election, the U.S. healthcare system was becoming increasingly costly, inefficient, and inadequate (Sage 2016). There was weak oversight, a lack of structural safeguards against cost overruns, and a serious disparity in quality of care across the country (Sage 2016). The Bill Clinton campaign and administration pushed for more regulation in the industry, while also keeping the greatest worries of the time in mind: the budget deficit and the need for economic rejuvenation (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000). In 1988, when Congress attempted to raise premiums on Medicare for higher income seniors to make the program more cost effective, the mass public made it clear that they desired a certain level of government involvement in the healthcare industry (Sage 2016). In fact, because Medicare was so popular amongst the American public, Republicans were advised against using words like “cut” or “change” and instead opted to use phrases such as “slow the rate of growth” (Schaffner and Sellers 2009).

During the 1992 election, a number of competing frames were used to influence public perception of healthcare reform, including security, big government, and choice (shown in Table 1). While the Clinton campaign pushed for regulation, universal health coverage, and cost limitations under the security frame, the Bush campaign pushed for free market principles, expanding coverage through tax incentives and increasing efficiency to cut costs under the big government and choice frames (Winter 2005).

Clinton’s model of “managed care” failed in many respects, and healthcare continued to be a costly and inefficient system (Sage 2016). Arbour’s (2014) study of the frames used in the 2004 election includes research specifically into healthcare frames. During this election, the framing strategies noticeably diverged between Democrats and Republicans. Democrats streamlined their healthcare messaging into two dominant frames: reducing overall costs of healthcare, under an economy frame, and making healthcare affordable, under the security frame. Republicans focused on completely different and much more specific frames: breast cancer research, tort reform, and children’s healthcare (Arbour 2014). There was, however, some frame convergence in making healthcare more affordable. Arbour (2014) found that some frames used in Democratic districts, such as health care affordability, were used no matter what the candidate’s leaning was.

In 2010, Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law. In many respects, the Affordable Care Act aimed to improve the health care system in the same way Clinton’s system of “managed care” did, but with different branding to shake the failed reputation of the previous policy (Sage 2016). Health care policy campaign communication was largely abandoned by Democrats from the implementation of the program until the 2018 election because of its general unpopularity in the public (Gollust, Fowler, and Niederdeppe 2020). In today’s debate over health care, several of the old frames from the previous debate are still applicable, but new frames have emerged in the new era. For example, Republicans have now introduced a focus on pre-existing conditions and a “repeal and replace” frame (Gollust, Fowler, and Niederdeppe 2020).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Party Ownership</th>
<th>Political Era(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Jerit, Winter</td>
<td>DEM</td>
<td>Clinton Administration, 1992 Election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Quo (against)</td>
<td>Jerit</td>
<td>Clinton Administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescription Drugs</td>
<td>Arbour</td>
<td>2004 Election</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Government</td>
<td>Winter, Jerit</td>
<td>GOP</td>
<td>1992 Election, Clinton Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeal and Replace</td>
<td>Gollust et al</td>
<td>Trump Administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>Jerit</td>
<td>Clinton Administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Jerit</td>
<td>Clinton Administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>Jerit</td>
<td>Clinton Administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer research</td>
<td>Arbour</td>
<td>2004 Election</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Healthcare</td>
<td>Arbour</td>
<td>2004 Election</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>1992 Election</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tort reform</td>
<td>Sage, Arbour</td>
<td>Clinton Administration, 2004 Election</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Table 2. Healthcare Frames Selected for Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Party Ownership</th>
<th>Sample Words and Phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Jerit, Winter</td>
<td>DEM</td>
<td>Accessible, affordable, costs, quality, deductibles, coverage, co-pays, right, uninsured, universal, comprehensive, pre-existing conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescription Drugs</td>
<td>Arbour</td>
<td>DEM</td>
<td>Pharmaceutical, big pharma, prescription drug prices, price gouging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Government</td>
<td>Winter, Jerit</td>
<td>GOP</td>
<td>control, Washington, regulation, expansion, oversight, single-payer, bureaucrats, government, efficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>Jerit</td>
<td>GOP</td>
<td>Debt, deficit, expensive, cost, jobs, invest, economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>GOP</td>
<td>Choice, control, decisions, force, forced, option, competition, transparent, market, competition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this study, a number of frames used in previous research that are relevant in the current context are selected. Previous literature on healthcare framing is referenced to identify the frames that are most dominant in current healthcare discourse (Table 1). Several of the frames are unlikely to be found in 2020 healthcare discourse because their use was largely confined to earlier iterations of the debate. For example, Benning, Ashby, and Chapp (2020) found that children’s healthcare is rarely talked about amongst Republican candidates nowadays. One thing to note is that there are few frames that the literature has identified as emerging from the Obama and Trump administrations (Table 1). Although additional scholarship is needed to fill this gap since healthcare framing has evolved over time, there are few steady frames that campaigns have used throughout several political eras. This study selects five frames that are most applicable to today’s political dialogue as described by Gollust, Fowler, and Niederdeppe (2020).

Table 2 includes the healthcare frames that are searched for in the campaign website data for as well as the previous study or studies it is referenced from. One reason these particular frames are chosen is because they are policy-focused, rather than rhetorical practices. Although group-centric frames, such as mentioning children or families, are very commonly used in campaign rhetoric, they are less focused on specific policies. Additionally, the use of “Obamacare” versus the “Affordable Care Act” could be a frame in itself, but the invocation of Obama’s name is, again, more of a rhetorical strategy rather than one that could produce actual policy dialogue. Another reason these frames are selected is because they are specific enough to generate policy discussion, but they are also general enough to allow candidates to take multiple sides on the issue. Accordingly, the “big government” frame is adjusted to “role of government” to allow space for policy discussion within the frame.

DATA

The U.S. House campaign website data used in the study are taken from the 2020 Congressional Coding Collection compiled by student researchers at St. Olaf College as part of an American Politics seminar. The Congressional Coding Collection, which receives support from the college, includes data from 2008-2020 and its principal investigator is Professor Christopher Chapp. Coders copied and pasted issue page text into text documents, separated according to the way the text was delineated by headings. The text documents were then organized into issue categories. The data was collected between October 2nd and October 16th, 2020. Other than separating the text into individual documents, the website text was not edited. Although most previous studies use media sources or campaign ads, websites capture an “aggregation of a campaign’s communication” (Druckman et al. 2010, 7). The average voter may not encounter campaign websites regularly, but they provide a good proxy for all other types of campaign communication (Druckman et al. 2018). Websites are appropriate for this analysis not because of their intended or actual audience, but because they give an inclusive view of the campaign’s overall communication strategy. Additionally, website content is direct communication from the campaign, rather than a newspaper’s “filtered report” of candidates’ activities (Kaplan, Park, and Ridout 2006, 726). In fact, journalists are frequent visitors of campaign websites and use website information to write their articles (Druckman et al. 2018, Bimber and Davis 2003). Finally, websites can actually encourage higher levels of position taking (Xenos and Foot 2005), and are much more representative, especially for lower salience races, than other forms of media due to their low cost and accessibility (Druckman et al. 2010).

Frame Dictionary Creation

To assign frames to candidate issue documents, a relative frequency analysis is conducted in the R package quanteda, then frame dictionaries are generated to identify frames being used by each candidate when discussing healthcare.2 Relative frequency analysis is a tool that compares target texts with reference texts to identify distinctive words in the target texts. In order to select target texts for each of the five frames, 80 healthcare issue pages of House candidates in 2018 were randomly selected. Because of the developments in healthcare policy discourse over the last decade, the most
From this human validation process, the economy
Then, the cutoff needs to be adjusted for each frame. At
present in the text. However, at this cutoff point, some texts
proportion of 0. If the standardized proportion of an issue
the presence of frame was set at the mean, a standardized
were selected based on the general description of frames in
frames in the study. First, all words that are not significantly
distinctive at a level of p < 0.05 from every cutoff point are
removed from the lists for each frame. Then, relevant words
are selected based on the general description of frames in
the literature. Finally, different tenses of words are added to
increase the accuracy of frame detection. For example, the word
“affordable” is added to the security frame as a sense of “afford.”
The final dictionaries can be viewed in Appendix 1.

Measuring Frame Convergence
A dictionary-based analysis on the 2020 healthcare
issue pages is used to evaluate the presence of frames for each
candidate. First, the number of words in each frame that
appear in each text is compared to the full word count in a
proportion. This way, longer documents are not given undue
weight for the presence of the frames. All issue pages under 40
words are also removed so very short issue passages are not also
given undue weight. Next, the proportions are standardized,
since some frame dictionaries have words that are naturally
used more often in campaign rhetoric.

Human validation is needed to set the cutoff points
that determine the presence of frames. At first, the cutoff for
the presence of frame was set at the mean, a standardized
proportion of 0. If the standardized proportion of an issue
page was above 0 for a certain frame, the frame was considered
present in the text. However, at this cutoff point, some texts
that contained a frame were not being designated as such.
Therefore, the cutoff needs to be adjusted for each frame. At

the ideal cutoff point, the texts with standardized proportions
above the point would not include texts that did not include
the desired frame. To validate the system and determine the
optimal cutoff point for each frame, the texts are ordered from
highest to lowest by their standardized proportion. Then, the
test cutoff points are decreased by increments of 0.25 from
0. Between increments, 3 issue page texts above and below
the cutoff point to determine if the point suitably detects the
frames. From this human validation process, the economy
dictionary is determined to not be able to pick up the frame
reliably, likely because there were not enough occurrences in
the 2018, so it is removed from analysis.

Predictors
The Cook Partisanship Voter Index is used to measure
district partisanship. The Cook Political Report is a standard
for measuring competitiveness and district lean in political
research and has been used in previous studies on framing
(Arbour 2014, Druckman et al. 2010). A more negative
score indicates a more strongly Democratic district, while
a more positive score indicates a more Republican district.
The absolute value of the PVI is used to measure race
competitiveness. Lower scores indicate more competitive races
and higher scores indicate less competitive races. The Cook
PVI score is an appropriate measure of competitiveness because
it reflects campaign perception of race intensity better than a
post-election measure, such as win margin, would.5

Open seat status is determined by data collected with
the 2020 Congressional Campaign Archive. A t-test confirmed
that open seat races were not significantly more or less
competitive than races with an incumbent by both measures,
so there is no collinearity with competitiveness. Incumbency,
a candidate level predictor for frame trespassing, is also
determined by data collected in the Archive.

FINDINGS
Issue Engagement
As expected, Democrats are more likely to have
healthcare as an issue on their webpages than Republicans.
73.79% of Democrats (321/435) had healthcare pages,
compared to 48.74% of Republicans (212/435). This
difference is significant ($\chi^2 = 52.52, p < 0.0001$). This is
consistent with the claim that healthcare is a Democratic
owned issue (Egan 2013). Logistic regression confirmed that
higher competitiveness makes it more likely for candidates
of both parties to have healthcare pages (Figure 1). Figure
1.1 shows that races that are most competitive (PVI = 0) are
19 percentage points more likely to have issue convergence
on healthcare than moderately competitive races (PVI = 15).
This supports previous literature which found that more
competitive races are more likely to produce issue convergence
(Banda 2013; Druckman et al. 2010; Kaplan, Park, and
Frame Convergence as Policy Dialogue: Healthcare Rhetoric in 2020 Congressional Races

Ridout 2006; Sigelman and Buell 2004). Additionally, Democrats are less likely to have healthcare pages if the district is more Republican (exp coef = 1.04, p<0.0001), but district lean is not a significant predictor for Republicans.

Frame Ownership and Trespassing
Consistent with the literature, the role of government and choice frames are used more by Republicans and the security and prescription drug frames are used more by Democrats (shown in Table 4). Republicans used the role of government frame 42.5% more often and the choice frame 32.3% more often than Democrats. Democrats used the security frame 37.9% more often and the prescription drugs frame 16.7% more often than Republicans. The fact that the difference margin is slimmer for Democratic frames indicates that Republican candidates tend to trespass more on Democrat-owned frames.

This is confirmed by tests for frame trespassing. 324 out of 533 candidates with healthcare pages trespassed, or 60.8%. Overall, 76.5% of Republicans trespassed and 56.3%
Table 3. Healthcare Frame Usage by Party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of Frame</th>
<th>Role of Government</th>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Security</th>
<th>Prescription Drugs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrat (309 total)</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>91.9%</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican (196 total)</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>42.5%***</td>
<td>32.2%***</td>
<td>37.9%***</td>
<td>16.7%**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Colored cell denotes party owned frame. Significance is determined by chi-square test. Estimates are significant at **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 4. Bivariate Predictors of Frame Trespassing (Candidate Level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV: Occurrence of Frame Trespassing</th>
<th>Democrat</th>
<th>Republican</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>Role of Government</td>
<td>Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Occurrences</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness</td>
<td>.988</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PVI</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbency</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.026</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Logistic regression with exponentiated coefficients. Estimates are significant at ***p<0.0001

Table 5. Bivariate Predictors of Frame Convergence (District Level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV: Occurrence of Frame Convergence</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Role of Government</th>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Security</th>
<th>Prescription Drugs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Occurrences</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness</td>
<td>.950*</td>
<td>.988</td>
<td>.975</td>
<td>.962**</td>
<td>.929**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PVI</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.026</td>
<td>.985</td>
<td>.997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Seat</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>.656</td>
<td>.561</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Logistic regression with exponentiated coefficients. Estimates are significant at *p<0.05; **p<0.01

of Democrats trespassed, a difference of 20.2% (p<0.0001). 31.8% of Democratic candidates trespassed on the role of government frame, and 34.3% trespassed on the choice frame. 49.5% of Republican candidates trespassed on the security frame and 47.2% trespassed on the prescription drugs frame (shown in Table 3). As far as predictors of trespassing, only two tests produced significant results. The more Republican a district becomes, the more likely Democrats are to trespass on the choice frame (exp coef = 1.04, p<0.0001). Additionally, the more competitive a race becomes, Republicans become more likely to trespass on the security frame (exp coef = .933, p<0.0001). Running multivariate models with different combinations of the variables did not change the predictors or their predictive strengths.

Frame Convergence
Out of 435 total House races, there were 168 races where both candidates had healthcare pages. Only 39 races out of these 168 races had no occurrences of frame convergence. 71 races converged on one frame, 41 converged on two frames, 16 converged on three frames, and 1 race converged on all 4 frames. As shown in Table 5, both measures of competitiveness demonstrate that competitiveness of a race significantly increases the likelihood of candidates to converge on a frame or multiple frames (p<0.05). Broken down by frame, however, competitiveness is only a significant predictor for the security and prescription drugs frames. The more competitive a race is, the more likely it is for candidates to converge on these frames. District partisanship and open seat status are
Figure 2. Logistic regressions on competitiveness as a predictor for frame trespassing, broken down by frame.  

Grey area indicates a 95% confidence interval.
DISCUSSION

The ability for constituents and candidates to educate and influence each other is an important component in a representative democracy (Mansbridge 2003). Voters need to be informed, not manipulated, for this to exist. Previous research has established that candidates will generally avoid issues brought up by their opponent, but strategically engage on certain issues when it may be electorally beneficial (Banda 2013; Kaplan, Park, and Ridout 2006; Sigelman and Buell 2004; Simon 2002; Xenos and Foot 2005). In 2020, opposing candidates discussed healthcare in only two fifths of House races. Even at the issue level, voters are not receiving all the information they need to make informed decisions. The results of the study within framing tell a similar narrative, but the results identify conditions where true dialogue is more likely to occur.

Although frame convergence occurred in less than half of the races overall, this study found that frame convergence on at least one frame is relatively common when both candidates discuss the same issue (Hypothesis 1). Over three fourths of the races where both candidates had healthcare pages converged on at least one frame. Races having at least some frame convergence is the rule rather than the exception.

Results indicate that competitiveness is the driving force behind frame convergence (Hypothesis 2). District partisanship and open seat status do not have a significant effect (Hypothesis 3 and 4). When broken down by frame, however, it is clear that this strategy is really only being used with the Democratic-owned frames of security and prescription drugs. This likely means that Republicans, ‘underdogs’ in the healthcare arena, are the candidates making the conscious and calculated choices to engage with their Democratic opponents in more competitive races. One example of a calculated choice can be seen in New Hampshire’s 1st Congressional District, a highly competitive race (Table 7, Example 1). The Republican candidate makes clear efforts to highlight that he supports making healthcare more affordable and lowering the cost of prescription drugs.

A counter argument may be raised that Republicans may not be reacting to their opponent, but to potential electoral risks and rewards related to frame ownership. To address this, a closer look can be taken at the frame trespassing results. Since competitiveness is a significant predictor of trespassing on the security frame, Republicans trespass on that frame in more competitive races regardless of if their opponent used that frame or even had a healthcare issue page. It is notable, though, that the same is not true for the prescription drugs frame, even though Republicans trespass on that frame nearly equally frequently. Republicans are only strategically trespassing on the prescription drug frame in more competitive races when the Democratic candidate also discusses healthcare.

Additionally, although there is no relationship between district partisanship and convergence on the choice frame, Democrats tend to trespass on the choice frame in more Republican districts. This indicates that Democrats are not necessarily engaging or having a dialogue on the choice frame, but trying to sound more Republican as their chances of winning become slimmer. Democrats lagging in the polls may be attempting to boost their campaigns with trespassing, as Damore (2004) found was true of issue trespassing. An example of this can be observed in Texas’ 8th Congressional District (Table 7, Example 2). The Democrat in the race is making appeals to choice by establishing that they would like to keep private insurance for those who prefer it. It is notable that Democrats do not employ this strategy with the role of government frame, possibly because they do not believe they can win with that frame.

Overall, Republicans trespass significantly more than Democrats (Hypothesis 5), which makes sense when considering issue ownership dynamics. Altogether this demonstrates that candidates, along with deciding if they should engage on any frame at all, will also deliberately select which frames are the most beneficial to engage with.

There is an important consideration to make that undermines the quality of dialogue still. The existence of frame convergence only indicates that there is a potential for dialogue. Even if candidates are willing to engage each other on the same issue and the same frame, true dialogue may still fail to be produced due to the ambiguity of the language. Candidates can discuss the same issues, but the language may be too vague for voters to discern a candidate’s position. Chapp et al. (2018) found that candidates use increasingly vague language under conditions of risk, such as higher race competitiveness. For this reason, rhetoric that — at first glance
Frame Convergence as Policy Dialogue: Healthcare Rhetoric in 2020 Congressional Races

Table 6. Text Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>GOP</th>
<th>DEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New Hampshire Congressional District 1</td>
<td>“Our healthcare system needs real improvement to make it more affordable and put people in control of their own healthcare decisions — not bureaucrats. Mowers always fight to ensure that those with pre-existing conditions are covered.” “Matt will always fight to ensure those with pre-existing conditions are not denied coverage from insurance companies. In Congress, Matt will also work with President Trump to continue the administration’s progress on lowering the costs of prescription drugs.”</td>
<td>“Chris believes the Affordable Care Act (ACA) represents a significant step forward for our country and has repeatedly voted to thwart Republican attempts to roll back the benefits of this landmark legislation, including protections for Granite Staters with pre-existing conditions.” “Chris opposes all efforts to play politics with Americans’ health care and is working in Congress to support affordable health care for all by: Lowering the cost of prescription drugs by fighting to end special tax breaks for pharmaceutical companies, allow Americans to purchase low-cost prescription drugs from Canada, increase drug pricing transparency, improve access for low-income seniors, and allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Texas Congressional District 8</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>“This plan would offers [sic] Medicare coverage anyone who seeks to use it, but retains the option of private insurance and employer-sponsored health plans for those who prefer that route. This allows many Americans the freedom of choice for their healthcare and eases the burden that the government would shoulder under a pure Medicare for all system.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>California Congressional District 42</td>
<td>We need a healthcare system that gives families more options to find care that fits their needs. We don’t need a government-run system that puts medical decisions in the hands of D.C. bureaucrats who would ration care.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

— meets the criteria issue engagement might actually still fail to provide citizens with authentic policy contrasts. An example of ambiguous language can be seen in Table 7 (Example 3). If text is too vague for voters to discern a position, they still cannot be truly informed.

Additionally, since the literature on frame engagement is limited, the results of the study using website data cannot be compared to a similar study using campaign ads or media sources. However, since the study’s findings on issue engagement and frame trespassing align with previous studies using these alternative data, it is reasonable to assume that website data can act, at the least, as a suitable proxy. At the most, it could be argued that in addition to being a proxy, website data add the aforementioned methodological benefits of higher levels of position taking and accessibility.

Finally, studying a single issue does lead to generalizability limitations. Moreover, because healthcare is a Democratic-owned issue (Egan 2013), the inferences that can be drawn about partisanship and frame trespassing are limited. Nonetheless, clear ownership and an established frame usage history allows us to more easily make assumptions about the effect of ownership on the results of the study. Future research should also test Republican owned issues.

Despite the study’s limitations, the results do expand upon prior research that found that competitiveness improves election information environments (Lipsitz 2011). Findings support the notion that higher levels of competitiveness are associated with higher levels of position taking on healthcare for both parties, as well as the higher likelihood of issue convergence. Additionally, competitiveness encourages
candidates to breach the barriers of issue and frame ownership and engage in dialogue with one another. Both of these trends suggest that increased competitiveness is beneficial towards increasing the amount and quality of information available to voters during elections.

CONCLUSION
A more comprehensive set of criteria for assessing dialogue is needed in campaign dialogue research to fulfill democratic standards of representations. The practice of heresthetics concentrates power into the hands of political elites, which undermines the standard of equality under democracy. When candidates are pushed to narrow in on the same frames, voters may have an easier time comparing the two and making authentic, autonomous decisions. Not only does meaningful dialogue make elections less manipulative, but it also sets a standard of quality for all political discourse. Political actors who are pushed to take clear positions during elections can be held accountable in the next election through promissory representation (Mansbridge 2003). Voters who are given quality information can educate political actors on their evolving desires and push them to develop during their terms through anticipatory representation (Mansbridge 2003). Elections draw a great deal of attention from the public, and political actors should be using that space more productively. As time goes on, the way issues are talked about — whether it be on campaign websites or through media sources — can help American society build towards an enlightened understanding with a fuller sense of representation.

REFERENCES


Frame Convergence as Policy Dialogue: Healthcare Rhetoric in 2020 Congressional Races


### NOTES

2. For more information on quanteda, see Benoit et al. 2018.
3. All the texts for frames were scored, then three student coders gave the texts a second score. Each coder was given the same set of instructions, as well as a codebook with examples, in order to improve intercoder reliability. The codebook is available from the author at request.
4. Frame detection examples are located in Appendix 2 at the end of this document. Frame score cutoff points are located in Appendix 3.
5. Win margin of the race was also tested as a second measure of competitiveness in case there was too much collinearity between my measures of competitiveness and district partisanship. Each measure has its advantages, but ultimately, the win margin acted similarly to the absolute value of the PVI in all models, so it was removed from analysis. Full results available from author at request.
6. Additionally, interacting competitiveness with PVI did not produce significant results. Results available from author upon request.
7. Results of multivariate models can be found in Appendix 4.
## APPENDIXES

### Appendix 1. Healthcare Frame Dictionaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame Dictionary Terms</th>
<th>Term(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of Government</td>
<td>Obamacare, government, oppressive, obama, individual, serve, repeal, state-run, payout, incompetence, controlled, system, federal, congress, president, mandate, takeover, solutions, inefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>doctors, flexibility, employees, decisions, choice, employers, lines, across, free-market, competition, choose, compete, decide, enterprise, free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>jobs, workers, middle-class, stakeholders, trillion, economy, labor, spends, spending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>preventative, benefits, guarantee, coverage, hospitals, services, benefit, access, affordable, accessible, affordable, universal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescription Drugs</td>
<td>drugs, prescription, pharmaceutical, fight, prices, price, gouging, negotiate, prescriptions, contraception, drug, generic, pharma, companies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix 2. Frame Detection Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Frame(s) Present</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania District 8, Democrat</td>
<td>Security, Prescription Drugs</td>
<td>Matt Cartwright is committed to protecting and expanding access to quality, affordable health care for all northeastern Pennsylvanians. Throughout his time in Congress, Matt has consistently worked to protect and expand Medicare, Medicaid, and protections for people with pre-existing conditions. He'll also keep fighting to rein in the big drug companies and pass legislation to end their outrageous price-gouging practices, because no one should have to choose between taking their life-saving medications and other expenses. Health care access has always been essential, but it's even more so as we fight a global pandemic. While a team of Republican attorneys general and the administration try to strip health coverage from millions of Americans during a global pandemic, Matt Cartwright is working to lower your health care costs and strengthen pre-existing condition protections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana District 3, Democrat</td>
<td>Security, Choice</td>
<td>Delivering the Promise of Better Healthcare I made the decision to run because my family saw firsthand the shortcomings of our healthcare system. My son was born with a pre-existing condition that requires annual treatment, and last year because of just a simple policy change, my family's out-of-pocket costs for his treatment increased tenfold overnight. Politicians on both sides of the aisle have been promising to fix our health care system, but I am committed to delivering on that promise because like so many other voters in NE Indiana, this is personal to me. If elected, I will address the attacks on the Affordable Care Act from politicians like my opponent and fix the flaws of the original legislation, including passing a real public option that all Americans can choose for themselves. Our priority in Washington will be to reach universal coverage and bring down premiums and deductibles however we can, to make sure no one has to choose between their own health and bankruptcy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida District 3, Republican</td>
<td>Role of Government, Choice</td>
<td>In Barack Obama's destructive wake as a result of failed Obamacare, consumers have seen a decrease in the quality of medical care while seeing sharp increases in cost. I will continue to fight for a full repeal of Obamacare and offer solutions for a replacement with a system that calls for greater consumer choice and transparency. I will advocate for policies that will allow individuals to purchase health insurance across state lines, for tort reform, and for increased transparency in healthcare costs. Furthermore, it is imperative that we renew the relationship between patients and doctors and seek to remove bureaucratic barriers that pretend to have a better understanding of an individual's healthcare needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois District 7, Republican</td>
<td>Security, Choice, Role of Government</td>
<td>As the most prosperous nation to ever exist, Americans deserve access to quality healthcare, and it's up to our leadership to make care more accessible at a reasonable cost. America needs market-based healthcare, giving customers more choice, and keeping costs down. Patients and their doctors should be responsible for healthcare decisions, not insurance companies or Washington bureaucrats. We should have laws that encourage employers to offer health insurance plans with more flexibility for the consumer, and work for innovative solutions to help self-employed workers—including farmers—because as our &quot;gig-economy&quot; grows, healthcare access should not hold back bold business ideas that grow small- to mid-sized business and strengthen our communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 3. Frame Detection Thresholds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Z-Score Threshold</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of Government</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescription Drugs</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix 4. Multivariate Predictors of Frame Convergence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame Models</th>
<th>Competitiveness</th>
<th>PVI</th>
<th>Open Seat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>0.949*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Government</td>
<td>0.986</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>0.970</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>0.931**</td>
<td>0.977</td>
<td>0.875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescription Drugs</td>
<td>0.930**</td>
<td>0.993</td>
<td>0.675</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Logistic regression with exponentiated coefficients. All three predictors are included in the multivariate models. Estimates are significant at *p<0.05; **p<0.01
Divided We Stand: Political Polarization and Original Co-Sponsorship in the U.S. Senate

Audrey Payne, Texas Christian University

Political polarization has become a central topic of discussion for observers of United States politics in recent decades. Over the past fifty years, political scientists have observed a steady increase in polarization, especially among members of the United States Congress. Many studies claim that this phenomenon has caused factors in Congress such as divisive rollcall voting and legislative gridlock. However, some studies neglect to analyze its indirect, long-term effects on legislative productivity and cooperation on the formulation of legislation in Congress. In an effort to address these issues, this paper begins by discussing the standard perspectives of polarization and its impacts on the legislative branch. It then looks at legislative norms and the tradition of co-sponsorship as a baseline of congressional cooperation. Next, it gathers original co-sponsorship and party affiliation data from three sessions of the Senate from 1991 to 2016 to analyze the prevalence of co-sponsorship and to test whether a growth in polarization affects original co-sponsorship levels within a twenty-five-year period. The essay then concludes by suggesting that an increase in polarization does cause a change in co-sponsorship trends, showing divisiveness through an increase in single-party co-sponsored legislation. However, bills that are co-sponsored across party lines are more likely to pass through the Senate than bills without bipartisan support during these periods, so senators may be able to overcome legislative gridlock through seeking original bipartisan cosponsors.

INTRODUCTION

On June 2, 2019, Republican Senator John Kennedy of Louisiana addressed his Democratic peers in an interview on the CBS news segment Face the Nation. He asserted that the House of Representatives must make a firm decision about whether or not to move forward with the impeachment of President Donald Trump. Senator Kennedy dared the Democrats in the House of Representatives to “go hard or go home,” telling them that they needed to “go to Amazon” and “buy a spine” if they wanted to impeach the president (Zhao 2019). This instance of a member of Congress verbally challenging his peers in a news interview is just one of many examples of the effects of modern political polarization. Polarization appears to have significant impacts on modern political life. From accusatory language between political elites to shifts in roll-call voting behavior to legislative gridlock, polarization has been an influential factor in several facets of government and politics, especially in Congress. In order to realize the definite impacts of polarization on congressional productivity, this question becomes crucial: What is the impact of polarization on the level of cooperation in public policymaking?

In previous studies on partisan polarization indicate that deep ideological divisions have steadily increased in Congress over the past fifty years. Although there is debate in the literature about whether or not this steady increase in the ideological divide among members of Congress is reflected in the electorate, the prominence of polarization has led to significant trends in voting behavior among members of Congress. Over time, ideological divisions have become more consistently correlated with the roll-call voting patterns of Republican and Democratic members of Congress. Research indicates that polarization may be a contributing factor to phenomena such as divisive roll-call voting, legislative gridlock, decreasing amounts of legislation that passes, and limited abilities of members of Congress to be cordial and cooperate with one another (Desilver 2019; Jones 2001; Poole and Rosenthal 2001).

This study explores the effects of an increase in political polarization on legislative behavior of members of Congress by focusing on its impact on the levels of cross-party cooperation. This article conducts its research by analyzing bills and resolutions introduced on the floor of the Senate in three distinct congressional sessions to determine if the instance of bipartisan co-sponsorship decreases with heightened polarization. The data demonstrates that, while the number of bipartisan co-sponsored pieces of legislation does not significantly change across congressional sessions, the number of single-sponsored pieces of legislation decreases and the number of within-party co-sponsored pieces of legislation increases as polarization rises. Furthermore, the higher the level of bipartisan co-sponsorship on a piece of legislation, the more likely the legislation will pass through the Senate. Discovering the answers to these questions aids in determining whether the institutional norms that form the basis of congressional
functions have been broken down by polarization and suggests means by which members of Congress can overcome the hindering effects of polarization.

This research paper first discusses the phenomenon of political polarization, the trends of polarization in Congress, and how polarization impacts legislative productivity and cooperation in the Senate in particular. Then, this paper gathers data on sponsorship, co-sponsorship, and party affiliations in the Senate across three congressional periods. Finally, this article compares the three congressional periods to analyze the impact of polarization on legislative productivity and cooperation in the Senate, as well as discover the impact of bipartisan co-sponsorship on the passage of legislation.

POLARIZATION AS A POLITICAL PHENOMENON

Polarization is a political phenomenon that occurs when two groups become increasingly ideologically distant from each other. In the case of United States politics, polarization manifests when the existing political parties ideologically separate from each other and elected officials increasingly sort themselves along party lines. One study suggests that elected officials in the United States “appear to represent relatively extreme support coalitions” in periods of polarization (Poole and Rosenthal 1984, 1061). When this occurs, the preferences of the overall constituencies of the elected officials may not be well-represented, especially if the official is elected to represent a group of people that have more moderate ideological preferences and voting behaviors.

Political scientists frequently debate whether the electorate in the United States is as deeply polarized as their elected officials. Some argue that, due to factors such as an increase in the ability of the electorate to obtain secondary education and the growing ideological conflict among political elites, the electorate has become increasingly and more deeply divided by polarization (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008, 542). Others argue that the electorate is much less consistently or deeply divided and that distributions of policy views among the electorate have not significantly changed over the past few decades (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2008) (Fiorina 2014). However, these researchers do agree that polarization is becoming a steadily increasing phenomenon among political officials. According to some studies, polarization among political elites has been increasing in the United States and is more polarized now than it has been in the past fifty years (Poole and Rosenthal 2001; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2008). One of the facets of American politics where polarization is the most evident is in the United States legislative branch — Congress.

Trends of Polarization in Congress

Research indicates that Congress has grown steadily more polarized since the 1980s (Farina 2015, 1701). Congress is increasingly split along the liberal-conservative ideological divide that is coming to define the platforms of the Democratic and Republican political parties. This ideological divide impacts how members of Congress vote and the productivity levels of the legislatures themselves. One study found that the liberal-conservative ideological divide accounted for 93 percent of roll-call voting choices that were not unanimous in the 109th House and Senate (Poole and Rosenthal 2007, 106). Some researchers created a more specific definition of polarization to fit the narrative that is present in Congress: “the average distance between preferences of the median Democratic and Republican members” (Farina 2015, 1693). This chart from Voteview.com (Figure 1) depicts the difference between party means in each chamber of Congress over time, which is a frequently used measure of polarization. The difference of party means in the Senate and the House of Representatives increased starting around 1970 and sharply increased after the early 1990s, proving that polarization has risen in Congress (Lewis 2018).

There are several trends in Congress that impact partisan conflict and ideological polarization. Researcher Cynthia Farina describes three criteria that indicate polarization in Congress (2015, 1694). The first observation, ideological coherence, occurs when the two major political parties become more ideologically consistent across a variety of political issues. The second observation, partisan sorting, occurs when members become sorted by party. The last observation, ideological divergence, occurs when the distance between median party preferences significantly increases. Over the past few decades, Congress has fulfilled all three observations described by Farina (2015, 1694).

Roll-call voting behavior is one of the most frequently analyzed measures of partisan splits and ideological divergence in Congress. One study showed that the nature of party control has a “stronger direct effect” on a member of Congress’s roll-call voting behavior than any other variable (Bullock III and Brady 1983, 37). However, polarization affects more than just roll-call voting behavior in Congress, and those implications may affect other norms and behaviors of the legislative branch.

Implications of Congressional Polarization

According to research, political polarization may contribute to issues with legislative productivity. One study found that in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, when neither political party is close to having a veto-proof majority, highly polarized parties are the most likely to cause legislative gridlock (Jones 2001, 129). This may lead to a decrease in the number of significant bills that the legislature is able to successfully pass and turn into law. Although recent Congresses have been able to pass more legislation than the 112th Congress, which enacted a record-low 284 bills, a recent study by the Pew Research Center revealed that the proportion of ceremonial to substantive legislation has increased, suggesting that Congress is not increasing legislative productivity levels when it comes to passing substantive
legislation (Desilver 2019). One study stated that the existence of high levels of polarization in Congress while public opinion seeks a reasonable compromise “raises essential questions about the ability of institutions to represent voters and function properly” (La Raja and Schaffner 2015, 95).

Furthermore, polarization may impede on the ability of members of Congress to cooperate with one another, including reaching compromises or engaging in vote trading, such as logrolling. Despite the fact that members of the House and Senate are expected to follow the norms of the legislature, including establishing friendly relationships with their peers, polarization may contribute to a breakdown of these institutional norms. One study in 1973 asked non-freshman members of the House of Representatives for their opinions about the importance of a variety of congressional norms. Ninety-seven percent of non-freshman representatives agreed that friendly relationships are important, the highest level of agreement of all the norms in the study (Asher 1973, 501). However, with increasing levels of partisan division in Congress, it is possible that the tradition of friendly relationships may diminish with the increase of polarization. As the political parties become more ideologically separated, some researchers claim that “opportunities for coalition building appear to have disappeared” (Farina 2015, 1699). The public rhetoric has already become meaner spirited, making it increasingly difficult for members of Congress to build and maintain friendships.

Co-sponsorship and Polarization

One facet of congressional behavior that may be impacted by polarization is the tradition of sponsorship and co-sponsorship of bills. A sponsor is “a senator who introduces a bill or resolution in the Senate” and a cosponsor is any other senator whose name appears on the bill after the sponsor’s name is listed (Oleszek 2018, 1).

As one of the many traditions of Congress, the act of cosponsoring a bill contributes to the maintaining of friendly relationships that is deemed crucial to members of the House and the Senate. Co-sponsorship is “generally understood to signify a Senator’s support for the proposal” (Oleszek 2018, 2). Members of Congress view co-sponsorship as a means of demonstrating the level of support among peers for the bill or resolution (Oleszek 2018, 2). By contacting their peers through a letter or soliciting them in person, senators can advocate for their bill or resolution in an effort to increase support for the legislation and, hopefully, increase the likelihood that their bill or resolution will pass through the Senate.

Ideology affects the positions members of Congress take on issues and bills and can affect a senator’s choice about whether or not to cosponsor a bill. According to a study, senators are more likely to cosponsor bills if their political views differ from the Senate median and are closer to the views of the bill’s sponsor (Harward and Moffett 2011, 117). However, if the bill is ideologically distant from a senator’s views, he/she becomes much less likely to sign his/her name as a cosponsor on
the bill. According to the study, ideologically extreme senators may tend to cosponsor bills more often than less ideologically extreme senators because they “want to take clearly defined positions that differ from the status quo and move the status quo toward their own preferences” (Harward and Moffett 2011, 132). These ideologically extreme senators are more likely to support a bill that is distant from the ideological median to make a political statement, gain media attention, and shape public discourse to focus on their issue of interest.

Like many other areas of cooperation in Congress, polarization may impact the ability of members of Congress to convince other members to serve as a cosponsor on their bills and resolutions. However, the observations stated above imply conflicting impacts of polarization on co-sponsorship. Because polarization in Congress indicates an increase in the distance of median ideological preferences between Democratic and Republican members of Congress (Farina 2015, 1693), polarization may cause a decrease in the number of bills that are co-sponsored across party lines because senators are not likely to sponsor bills and resolutions that are ideologically distant from their views. However, because polarization indicates an increase in ideological extremism on both sides of the political spectrum, it is possible that the number of instances of co-sponsorship along party lines increase as members of Congress become more polarized. In addition, co-sponsorship may also be a potential solution to polarization’s negative effects on Congress. If a bill is able to receive bipartisan support and cross-party co-sponsorships despite the fact that the two political parties are distant from each other in Congress, it may be able to overcome the legislative gridlock effects of polarization and pass through the Senate. If this is the case, co-sponsorship may be a potential answer to Congress’s concerns about the negative implications of polarization on legislative productivity. However, it is important to note that the Senate is only one chamber of Congress. Studying the Senate alone may technically be an imperfect study of Congress as a whole. However, characteristics of the Senate make it a more effective choice for capturing the effect of polarization on co-sponsorship. For instance, since the Senate has far fewer members than the House of Representatives, it is more likely that senators will establish deeper relationships with opposing party members than in the House. Furthermore, the Senate has a reputation of maintaining a more collegial environment than the House, which will hopefully provide more information about trends of cooperation. Finally, the higher likelihood that members of the House of Representatives can find many like-minded cosponsors might mean that they are less likely to reach across the aisle to extend their list of cosponsors. All of these make the Senate the best fit chamber to study.

This information implies three testable hypotheses:

H1. The higher the level of polarization in the Senate, the fewer the number of cross-party co-sponsored pieces of legislation that will be introduced in the Senate.

H2. The higher the level of polarization in the Senate, the more likely a cross-party co-sponsored piece of legislation will pass through the Senate.

H3. The higher the level of bipartisan co-sponsorship on a piece of legislation, the more likely that piece of legislation will pass through the Senate.

The rest of this article tests these hypotheses by examining Senate bills and amendments from three congressional periods and comparing the output and rates of passage of the legislation generated.

RESEARCH DESIGN
In order to statistically examine the impact of polarization on cross-party co-sponsorship in the United States Senate, this article gathers cross-sectional data for the 1991-1992 congressional session (the 102nd Congress), the 2007-2008 congressional session (the 110th Congress), and the 2015-2016 congressional session (the 114th Congress) in order to compare the three time periods. The bill is the unit of analysis. Each data point represents a piece of legislation in a given congressional session.

This paper collects data for the 4,245 pieces of legislation that were introduced in the Senate during the 102nd congressional session, the 4,623 pieces of legislation that were introduced in the Senate during the 110th congressional session, and the 4,289 pieces of legislation that were introduced in the Senate during the 114th congressional session. These pieces of legislation include bills, Senate resolutions, concurrent resolutions, and joint resolutions. These congressional sessions are included in this paper because the three Congresses each represent progressively higher and higher polarization rates over the years, according to the information from Voteview.com depicting differences in political party means (Lewis 2018). The 102nd Congress occurred before the trend of rapidly increasing polarization began, so it serves as a baseline to compare across differing levels of polarization.

The 102nd, 110th, and the 114th Congresses are included in this paper because they occur during instances of divided government (in these two cases, the president’s political party is different from the majority party in the Senate). This article works with three divided government Senates because unified governments may face fewer consequences of polarization. Since unified governments have the ability to pass legislation with zero bipartisan support, there may be fewer instances of bipartisan sponsorship under those circumstances, which would likely hinder the relevance of the data collected. Furthermore, these congressional sessions occur during the last two years of the incumbent president’s term in office, which hopefully accounts for any changes in senator behavior that might occur in different parts of a presidential term. Additionally, this paper works with 110th and 114th congressional sessions because the evidence will reveal whether
Next, the paper calculates the short-term effects of an increase in polarization on the Senate in ten years or less has affected Senate action. Finally, the 102nd Congress serves as a baseline, providing the opportunity to compare the effects of polarization across the ten-year time span between the 110th and 114th Congresses to the effects of increasing polarization across a longer time period of twenty-five years. However, it is important to note that the party in power and the voting differential may affect co-sponsorship levels in the three sessions. The 102nd Congress, for instance, shifted from a 56 to 58-member Democratic majority. The 110th Congress shifted between a 50 to 51-member Democratic majority, while the 114th Congress shifted from a 54 to 52-member Republican majority. Further research is required to determine the effects of Republican or Democratic control in the Senate on co-sponsorship levels, as well as determining if the strength of partisan control affects co-sponsorship levels. The data analysis includes all introduced bills and amendments from the three congressional periods.

This paper only collects data for original cosponsors. Original cosponsors are involved in the original discussion and formulation of the bill, which represents the levels of cooperation this article intends to measure. Senators that become cosponsors after the bill has been introduced may choose to add their names to make a political statement or other ulterior motives that would hinder the relevance of the information collected.

**Outcome Variables: Output and Passage Rates of Co-Sponsored Legislation**

This paper uses data on legislative output, instances of co-sponsorship, and latest actions on legislation from the official Legislation Record of the United States Congress, accessed through www.congress.gov. Legislation is defined in this study as any bill, act, or amendment to a previous bill that is introduced to the Senate, either to a committee or on the Senate floor. The data set recorded by the Legislation Record of the United States Congress is ideal because it codes valuable information about each piece of legislation. The data include the name and political party affiliation of the original sponsor of the introduced legislation, the number of cosponsors and their party affiliations, and a list of all Senate actions on the legislation, including the latest recorded action. This paper incorporates the data from the Congressional Bills Project, accessed through http://www.congressionalbills.org/research.html, into the research. This data set includes an organized list of each piece of legislation from the 93rd to the 114th Congress. The data set documents each piece of legislation’s bill ID, whether or not the bill passed through the House and Senate, the type of legislation, the name and party identification of the original sponsor, and more.

Each piece of legislation is sorted into one of three categories - single-sponsored, co-sponsored within a single political party, or co-sponsored across party lines. This paper then records the number of cosponsors for each piece of legislation, marks whether or not the legislation passed through the Senate, and marks whether or not the legislation passed through both chambers of Congress.

Next, the paper calculates the percentage of the total pieces of legislation that fit into each of the three co-sponsorship categories, the percentage of legislation from each category that passed through the Senate, and the percentage that did not pass through either chamber. Finally, the paper calculates the percentage of the total pieces of legislation that are not co-sponsored, single-co-sponsored, and co-sponsored by multiple senators and the passage rates of each.

**Methodological Approach**

This paper measures and analyzes the data by comparing the percentages collected from the 102nd Congress, the 110th Congress, and the 114th Congress. Tests of statistical significance are used to determine the passage rates of cross-party co-sponsored bills compared to single-party co-sponsored bills and single sponsored bills within a single Congress. In addition, tests of statistical significance help compare the passage rates of cross-party and single-party co-sponsored bills between the three Congresses. Tests of statistical significance also helped to determine the differences among levels of bipartisan co-sponsorship between the three congressional sessions. Doing these tests reveal if the number of instances of cross-party co-sponsorship increased or decreased with increasing polarization. Finally, this paper assesses whether the legislation co-sponsored across party lines is statistically more effective and more likely to pass through the Senate during times of heightened polarization.

**ANALYSIS**

The research addresses three hypotheses, including predictions that the higher the level of polarization in the Senate, the fewer the number of cross-party co-sponsored bills will be introduced, but the more likely those bills that have higher levels of cross-party co-sponsorship will pass through the Senate. The hypotheses predict a decrease in the percentage of bills that are co-sponsored across party lines from the 102nd to the 114th congressional sessions and a higher passage rate among bills with bipartisan cosponsors than those without.

**Co-Sponsorship Across Congressional Sessions**

In order to determine if co-sponsorship impacts the passage of legislation during periods of polarization in Congress, the data must confirm that the 114th Senate was more polarized than the 110th and that the 110th Senate was more polarized than the 102nd. Reviewing Figure 1 (page 34) which depicts the difference between party means in each chamber of Congress over time, demonstrates that polarization increased in the Senate between the 102nd and 114th Congress (Lewis 2018).

The results from the initial organization of the co-sponsorship data reveal that the majority of bills and
resolutions passed across the three congressional sessions have either a single author with no co-sponsors or one original co-sponsor in addition to the author of the bill. From there, the number of original co-sponsors per piece of legislation greatly decreases. An additional figure to examine in the initial data is the frequency of instances in which the original co-sponsors are members of the opposite political party from the sponsor of the bill. 39.47 percent of all bills introduced in the Senate across the three congressional sessions have at least one bipartisan cosponsor, which is, as expected, much lower than the frequency of original cosponsors in general, which encompasses 62.82 percent of all bills.

One of the key results is the significance of the relationship between the types of original co-sponsorship and the likelihood that a bill passes through the Senate. The independent variables include single-sponsored, sponsored within party lines, and sponsored across party lines (labeled Single, Within, and Across respectively). Establishing the baseline for the strength of the relationships between these variables and the likelihood of a bill passing through the Senate helps determine if these relationships strengthen or weaken during periods of heightened polarization in the Senate. Below are three tables documenting the total number of bills in the 102nd, 110th, and 114th senatorial sessions that fit each category and the relationships between the variables and the passage rates of those bills through the Senate.

All three relationships are statistically significant – single-sponsored and within-party co-sponsored bills have a negative relationship with bill passage. Although these inverse relationships are technically statistically significant, it is likely they are guaranteed statistical significance because of the large sample size of 13,157 bills. These are relatively weak relationships, since their Cramer’s V tests both fall short of reaching -0.2. However, the Cramer’s V for cross-party co-sponsored bills is 0.2490, demonstrating a moderately strong relationship. This suggests that cross-party co-sponsorship increases the likelihood of Senate passage compared to the other types of co-sponsorship. However, these relationships may vary across the 102nd, 110th, and 114th Senates. Employing comparative analysis between the three congressional sessions will help determine if the presence of increasing polarization impacts the strength of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Single Sponsorship and Bill Passage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Pass Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bills With at Least One Co-Sponsor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single-Sponsored</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pearson chi2(1) = 310.2745   Pr = 0.000   Cramer’s V = -0.1536</td>
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<tr>
<th>Table 2. Within-Party Co-Sponsorship and Bill Passage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bills Not Within-Party Co-Sponsored</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within-Party Co-Sponsored</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
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<th>Table 3. Across-Party Co-Sponsorship and Bill Passage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bills Not Across-Party Co-Sponsored</td>
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<tr>
<td>Across-Party Co-Sponsored</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pearson chi2(1) = 815.7643   Pr = 0.000   Cramer’s V = 0.2490</td>
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the relationships between single sponsorship, within-party co-sponsorship, across-party co-sponsorship, and bill passage.

Co-Sponsorship and Polarization Between Congresses

As previously discussed, the Senates of the 102nd, 110th, and 114th congressional sessions faced increasing levels of polarization over time (Lewis 2018). Comparatively analyzing the data among the three congressional sessions will reveal how the increasing polarization affects the levels of original co-sponsorship. The table below demonstrates that there is a statistically significant difference in the total number of cosponsors between the 102nd, 110th, and 114th Senates. Moreover, there are more instances of total co-sponsorship in the 114th Senate than in the 110th Senate and in the 110th Senate than in the 102nd, but the table does not reveal which type of co-sponsorship each co-sponsor falls under. Are there more across-party cosponsors in the 110th and 114th Senates than in the 102nd, or is the increase in co-sponsorship caused by an increase of within-party cosponsors?

Table 5 clarifies the type of original co-sponsorship that caused the changes described in Table 4. Table 5 reveals that there is a statistically significant decrease in the instances of bipartisan co-sponsorship between the 110th and the 114th Senates. This means that the increase in overall original co-sponsorship in the 114th Congress likely comes from an increase in within-party co-sponsorship. However, the 102nd Senate has fewer instances of bipartisan co-sponsorship, despite the fact that it has a lower level of polarization than either of the two other Senate sessions. What does this mean for how significantly the number of bills in each type changed between congressional sessions?

Running tabulations will help determine the significance of the changes in each type of co-sponsorship between the three congressional sessions. The tabulations yielded surprising results. Hypothesis H1 predicts that the higher the level of polarization, the fewer the number of cross-party co-sponsored bills will be introduced in the Senate. According to Table 8, the percentage of cross-party co-sponsored bills did decrease from 44.4 percent to 41.7 percent between the 110th and the 114th Senates, but the percentage of cross-party co-sponsored bills increased from 31.9 percent to 44.4 percent between the 102nd and 114th Senates. While the 110th and 114th Senates appear to confirm the hypothesis, the low frequency of bipartisan co-sponsored bills in the 102nd Senate results in a rejection of the hypothesis. Polarization does not cause a significant change in the percentage of legislation introduced within a congressional session that has original bipartisan cosponsors.

Although H1 is unsupported by the data, the findings in Tables 6 and 7 may help provide an alternative explanation for the decline in bipartisan co-sponsorship as Congress becomes increasingly more polarized. Table 6 shows that the number of single-sponsored bills did not follow the anticipated increase. Rather, over 50 percent of the bills and resolutions introduced on the Senate floor during the 102nd Congress had no original cosponsors. In fact, the number of bills without any original cosponsors decreased from 50.7 percent in the 102nd Senate to 33 percent in the 110th Senate and 28.4 percent in the 11th Senate. In addition, the percentage of legislation that is within-party co-sponsored steadily increases across the three congressional sessions. Table 7 shows that 17.5 percent of the legislation introduced in the 102nd Senate is co-sponsored solely by senators within the sponsor’s own party, while 22.7 percent of the 110th Senate’s legislation and 29.9 of the 114th Senate’s legislation falls in...
that category. Together, these percentages could mean that as Congress becomes increasingly more polarized, senators are more likely to adopt formal co-sponsorship relationships with people in their own political party. The senators may choose to prove their bill’s attractiveness to their party by seeking original cosponsors for their bill instead of introducing it to the Senate without any cosponsors. This alternative explanation aligns with a possible explanation mentioned earlier in the paper.

**Co-Sponsorship and Legislative Outcomes**

Finally, the relationships between co-sponsorship and legislative outcomes by congressional session must be observed in order to determine how polarization impacts legislative output. Below are several tables that depict the relationship between the types of co-sponsored bills and their legislative outcomes, divided by Congress. Each set of three tables depicts the relationships from the 102nd Senate first, the 110th Senate second, and the relationships from the 114th Senate third.

Tables 9, 10, and 11 depict the change in the relationship between single-sponsored bills and passage in the Senate. In all three Congresses, single-sponsored bills are less likely to pass through the Senate.

Tables 12, 13, and 14 depict the relationship between within-party co-sponsorship and bill passage in the Senate. The figures depict a modest, but statistically significant relationship between within-party co-sponsorship and passing through the Senate in the 102nd Congress. The strength of this negative correlation decreases by about .04 between the 102nd and 110th Congress, but then increases by almost .1 between the 110th and 114th Congress. This means that bills that lacked bipartisan cosponsors became less likely to pass through the Senate during the 114th congressional session.
The relationship between cross-party co-sponsorship and passing through the Senate is shown in Tables 15, 16 and 17. Table 15 reveals that the relationship between cross-party co-sponsorship and passing through the Senate in the 102nd Senate is a statistically significant relationship. Unlike the other two variables, cross-party co-sponsorship has a moderately strong correlation with Senate passage. Tables 16 and 17 reveal that the strength of this correlation increases from 0.22 in the 102nd Senate, to 0.23 in the 110th Senate, to 0.3141 in the 114th Senate. Over the course of twenty-five
years (1991 to 2016), the percentage bills that passed through the Senate falling into the bipartisan co-sponsored category increased from 53.3 percent to 78.1 percent, which is a 24.8 percent increase. This does not necessarily prove hypothesis H2, which claims that the higher the level of polarization in the Senate, the more likely an individual piece of legislation with bipartisan cosponsors will pass through the Senate. However, it does suggest that having bipartisan cosponsors is

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<th>Table 13. Within-Party Co-Sponsorship and Bill Passage in the 110th Congress</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bills Not Within-Party Co-Sponsored</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within-Party Co-Sponsored</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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Pearson chi2(1) = 20.3418  Pr = 0.000  Cramer’s V = -0.0663

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<th>Table 14. Within-Party Co-Sponsorship and Bill Passage in the 114th Congress.</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Bills Not Within-Party Co-Sponsored</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within-Party Co-Sponsored</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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Pearson chi2(1) = 112.4071  Pr = 0.000  Cramer’s V = -0.1619

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<th>Table 15. Cross-Party Co-Sponsorship and Bill Passage in the 102nd Congress</th>
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<td>Did Not Pass Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bills Not Cross-Party Co-Sponsored</td>
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<td>Cross-Party Co-Sponsored</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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Pearson chi2(1) = 207.0375  Pr = 0.000  Cramer’s V = 0.2208

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<th>Table 16. Cross-Party Co-Sponsorship and Bill Passage in the 110th Congress</th>
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<td>Did Not Pass Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bills Not Cross-Party Co-Sponsored</td>
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<td>Cross-Party Co-Sponsored</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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Pearson chi2(1) = 244.5385  Pr = 0.000  Cramer’s V = 0.2300
increasingly important in order to move legislation through the Senate. Some might argue that this data does not prove that cooperation before introducing legislation on the Senate floor overcomes polarization, but that the only bills that can pass through the Senate are those that gain bipartisan support. However, since these pieces of legislation in the data are coded with original cosponsors, rather than including senators who sign their name after the bill has been introduced on the floor, the idea that these bills are only being passed through bargaining or political compromise in order to move legislation through the Senate is rejected. These are bills that have legitimate cooperation between parties at the outset. Therefore, it is possible that it is more likely these bills with legitimate cooperation have a better chance of passing when polarization is high. The research can still allow for the conclusion that cooperation at the basic level of drafting legislation can be an effective strategy to overcome the challenges of gridlock introduced by heightened levels of polarization.

In order to check this claim from another perspective, this paper observes the correlation between number of cross-party original cosponsors for each bill and passage rates in the Senate. By observing this correlation, this paper can determine if the relationship stated above holds true. Tables 18 and 19 below show the correlation between number of cosponsors, number of bipartisan cosponsors, and bill passage by Congress. There is an increase in the correlation between the number of bipartisan cosponsors and passage through the Senate from 0.19 to 0.24 between the 102nd and 110th Congresses and an increase to 0.30 in the 114th Congress. Tables 18 and 19 confirm hypothesis H3, which suggests that the higher the level of bipartisan co-sponsorship on a piece of legislation, the more likely the piece of legislation will pass through the Senate. In both tables, the number of bipartisan cosponsors shows a modest and statistically significant correlation with passage through the Senate, and this correlation only increases as the Senate becomes more polarized.

According to the results of this analysis, H1 is unsupported, H2 requires further study, and H3 is supported. All three hypotheses have statistically significant results. Although the data did not provide the expected results for H1, there is a possibility that the data provides an alternate explanation for how polarization affects how many bills and resolutions fall into each co-sponsorship category. Even if an increase in polarization does not directly cause a decrease in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 17. Cross-Party Co-Sponsorship and Bill Passage in the 114th Congress</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Did Not Pass Senate</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bills Not Cross-Party Co-Sponsored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Party Co-Sponsored</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Pearson chi2(1) = 423.0520    Pr = 0.000    Cramer’s V = 0.3141

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 18. Number of Cosponsors and Correlation with Passage</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Congress</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102nd Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110th Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>114th Congress</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 19. Number of Bipartisan Cosponsors and Correlation with Passage</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Congress</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102nd Congress</td>
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<td>110th Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>114th Congress</td>
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</table>
the number of bills that have original bipartisan co-sponsors, senators might be abandoning informal bipartisan negotiation processes that take place after a bill has been introduced on the floor, choosing instead to seek within-party co-sponsors to encourage their partisan colleagues to adopt their legislation in a more formalized competition. H2 shows that a moderate level of correlation between bipartisan co-sponsors and bill passage increases over the twenty-five-year timespan the data encapsulates. Finally, H3 shows a statistically significant correlation between the level of bipartisan co-sponsorship and bill passage.

**CONCLUSION**

This paper aims to examine the impact of polarization on legislative productivity and levels of cooperation among members of Congress. In order to explore these issues, this paper collected sponsorship and co-sponsorship data for each piece of legislation introduced on the Senate floor in the 102nd, 110th, and 114th senatorial sessions. The paper then compared single-sponsored, within-party co-sponsored, and cross-party co-sponsored bills to examine if the type of co-sponsorship impacted the ability of legislation to pass through the Senate, as well as if the number of bills in each category shifted as Congress became more polarized.

Hypothesis H2 revealed an important relationship between co-sponsorship and bill passage and hypothesis H3 is confirmed. As the level of polarization increases in the Senate, the number of cross-party co-sponsored pieces of legislation that are introduced in the Senate are not necessarily affected. However, the number of single-sponsored pieces of legislation decreases and the number of within-party co-sponsored pieces of legislation increases as polarization rises. This discovery reveals that senators are more likely to cooperate with senators of their own political party on the formulation of legislation when Congress is increasingly polarized. However, the data also shows that the higher the level of polarization in the Senate, the more likely bills that are passed have bipartisan co-sponsors. Furthermore, the higher the level of bipartisan co-sponsorship on a piece of legislation, the more likely the legislation will pass through the Senate. These discoveries reveal a potential solution to the issue of legislative productivity. Senators may be able to overcome the decline in bill passage by finding enough original bipartisan co-sponsors to encourage parties from both sides to consider their legislation. This becomes even more prevalent with the realization that these conclusions are established by merely counting bills in three different Senates. Not all bills are equally important when it comes to public policy, so statistical analysis cannot fully capture the significance of this issue. If only a few major bills are fostered to success through cross-party cooperation, those bills could make a crucial difference in the productivity of a congressional session.

This paper provides an introduction to the method of employing co-sponsorship as a measure of legislative productivity during periods of polarization in Congress. However, there are several factors that may impact the results of this data. For instance, this paper covered legislation in the Senate within a twenty-five-year timeframe, but it only covered data in three congressional sessions. A potential topic for further study could be to study co-sponsorship and collect data for more congressional sessions within this timeframe. In addition, this research paper includes every piece of legislation that was introduced on the floor of the Senate during the 102nd, 110th, and 114th Congresses, including bills that are ceremonial in nature (such as naming a federal building after a former president, etc.). It is possible that removing ceremonial bills from the equation and solely focusing on bills that impact public policy may impact the data. An additional note to consider is the possibility that other branches of government may impact the behavior of senators and whether or not they choose to co-sponsor a bill. For instance, if a president belongs to the majority political party and disapproves of a bill, will that make the senators in his same political party less likely to cosponsor the bill? Does the president’s opinion of a bill limit the chance of a bill to receive bipartisan support? Furthermore, do senators that share a political party with the president cosponsor bills more often than senators of the opposite political party? A similar issue may also occur with majority and minority leaders. If senators are considering cosponsoring a bill sponsored by a member of the opposite party, might they be discouraged to cosponsor if their party leader in the Senate disapproves of it? In addition, further research is needed to determine whether the co-sponsorship behavior of an individual senator can skew the data. If a single senator cosponsors hundreds of bills as a personal or political choice, can that affect the ability to compare congressional sessions? Finally, this paper only covers co-sponsorship in the Senate. Would a House of Representatives study yield entirely different results, or would it show an even stronger correlation among the variables?

This research paper provides a new approach to analyzing the impact of polarization that focuses on long-term cooperation and legislative productivity rather than the directly impacted voting patterns. Furthermore, the results of this paper reveal a potential solution to the inhibitions placed on policymaking by the development of polarization in Congress, because polarization breaks down the behavioral traditions in the Senate, cooperation and peaceful communication with other legislators appear to be on the decline. However, if legislators realize that bills are more likely to pass through a polarized legislative body with greater numbers of original bipartisan co-sponsors, they might be encouraged to overcome the pressures of polarization and cooperate with one another to achieve their policymaking goals in Congress.
REFERENCES


NOTES

1 The senators that label themselves as “independent” or “independent Democrat” (Senators Sanders, Lieberman, and King) are labeled Democrats in the data because they caucused with the Democratic Party during the elections pertaining to the time period of the data collection.

2 Even if an original cosponsor later withdrew his or her name from the bill, his or her name is included in the data collection because the measure of levels of cooperation in Congress used in this article is the number of instances of original co-sponsorship.

3 Senator Arlen Specter was a declared Republican during the 102nd and 110th congressional sessions and later switched his identification to Democrat after the 110th congressional session ended. He is listed as a Republican whenever he sponsored or co-sponsored a bill in the 110th congressional session because the Republican Party was his party of identification at the time.

4 Any piece of legislation that initially passed through both chambers of Congress is included in the “passed both chambers” category, even if one of the chambers later passed a motion to reconsider the legislation.

5 If a piece of legislation passed through the Senate with a preamble or amendment added, the legislation is included in the “passed through the Senate” category.

6 The research leaves out analysis regarding the relationships between the different types of co-sponsorship and passage through the House of Representatives. The House is an independent legislative body with different rules and processes from the Senate, which may skew the data if included in an analysis designed for the Senate’s structures and processes in mind.

7 Part of the high frequency of single-sponsored bills can be explained by efforts made by President George H.W. Bush and Senator John McCain to broaden the president’s rescission power. On March 20th, 1992, Senator McCain proposed 68 separate bills attempting to allow President Bush to remove individual pork barrel projects from appropriations bills under the Budget and Impoundment Act. The bills were ruled out of order and never voted on. On April 9th, 1992, Senator McCain introduced an additional 25 bills to approve the president’s new rescission proposals. However, these 93 bills alone are not sufficient to account for the frequency of single-sponsored bills introduced in the 102nd Senate.

Florian Sichart, The London School of Economics and Political Science

This paper adapts Kahneman and Tversky’s (1979) prospect theory for the electoral context in an attempt to elucidate some of the psychological processes underlying the rise of populism. Building on existing theories of recent populist successes in advanced Western democracies, it argues that cultural, economic, and political changes have created a ‘loss mindset’ amongst certain demographics, which have led those demographics to associate the continuation of the post-2008 status quo with the acceptance of a certain loss. Due to individuals’ strong psychological aversion against certain losses and their tendency to discount large losses, voters with such a mindset are more likely to vote for a risky candidate who promises political discontinuity over a candidate who represents the continuation of the status quo. Empirical support for the theory that a loss mindset can lead to risk-seeking electoral behavior is established by analyzing the 2016 US presidential election through a combination of individual-level survey data from the ANES 2016 Time Series Study and an assembled county-level dataset. Using cluster and factor analysis, the paper establishes robust support for the hypotheses that arise from adopting the prospect theoretical model for the 2016 election. Specifically, it finds that: (1) having a loss mindset is associated with a significant increase in support for Trump; (2) the effect of intermediate assessments of change is significantly more pronounced in the domain of losses than in the domain of gains; and (3) highly negative assessments are comparatively less politically salient than highly positive assessments. These findings help explain the appeal that anti-establishment populists hold for economically, culturally, and politically disenfranchised voters. Furthermore, this paper highlights why alarmist warnings by the establishment are often ineffective at countering populist rhetoric.

INTRODUCTION

The 2016 election of Donald Trump as President of the United States marks the provisional pinnacle of the recent rise in support for populist movements in advanced Western democracies. Although many explanations of this trend have emerged, most fall into one of two categories: while economic accounts focus on rising inequality and declining living standards, cultural theories argue that rising populism is symptomatic of a backlash against cultural changes and the rise of post-material ideology. This paper seeks to synthesize the insights gained from these divergent approaches by arguing that cultural, economic, and political factors contribute to creating a ‘loss mindset,’ which leads certain parts of the electorate to associate the continuation of status-quo politics with the acceptance of an imminent loss. Integrating this insight into a prospect theoretical framework based on Kahneman and Tversky (1979) helps account for the ostensible risk-seeking behavior of those who choose populist candidates such as Trump over status-quo candidates such as Clinton. In essence, the framing of elections as choices between losses leads to apparently risk-seeking behavior by voters who, consequently, prefer to vote for a more volatile, anti-establishment candidate with a higher range of potential political outcomes rather than for a status-quo candidate with a narrow range of potential outcomes. This paper argues that this loss mindset is a result of both structural factors — including economic, cultural, and political change — and deliberately created by populist agents who use populism as a heresthetic tool (Greenwood-Hau, Sichart, and Twyman 2021) to politicize certain topics and frame the political discourse in exceedingly negative terms to gain a political advantage.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, the literature on populism is reviewed. It is argued that the conceptual core of populism — anti-elitism — inherently commits populists to anti-status quo rhetoric. Hence, voters who vote for a populist candidate instead of an establishment candidate essentially choose volatility over political continuity. In game-theoretical terms, such voters prefer a risky gamble over a safe bet. Building on Kahneman and Tversky (1979), subsequent sections analyze the success of populism through a prospect theoretical lens. In essence, these sections argue that loss
aversion and individuals’ tendency to discount highly adverse outcomes drive those who have a loss mindset to exhibit risk-seeking electoral behavior. Contrary to existing electoral frameworks based on prospect theory (see Alesina and Passarelli 2019), this insight suggests that Kahneman and Tversky’s (1979) theory does not always predict electoral stability. Instead, if a voter views policy continuity (i.e., the preservation of the new status quo) as the continuation of economic, cultural, or political decline, they will be driven to support candidates representing political volatility.

A combination of survey data from the ANES 2016 Time Series Study and county-level demographic time series data is used to test the hypotheses that emerge from a prospect theoretical account of electoral choice using the 2016 US presidential election as a case study. Despite some methodological issues discussed in later sections, the paper finds strong overall evidence supporting the hypotheses arising from prospect theory.

This paper makes three unique contributions to the ample literature on populism, the 2016 US presidential election, and the growing literature on the importance of behavioral biases and heuristics for analyzing political behavior. First, the theory advanced in this paper extends Alesina and Passarelli’s (2019) prospect theoretical framework by positing an aggrandizing effect, whereby voters are drawn to extreme political choices when the continuation of the political status quo is perceived as accepting an imminent loss. Secondly, the paper provides commanding evidence for the importance of loss-averse behavioral patterns in causing volatile political outcomes. Most previous investigations have focused on showing a correlation between the negativity of an individual’s expectations about the future and their likeliness to support anti-establishment policies (see Carreras 2019). However, this insight is somewhat trivial, as those with negative views of the status quo are naturally keen on political change, whereas those with positive views are likely to support political continuity. This paper supersedes this trivial insight by showing that — in line with prospect theory’s predictions — the magnitude of the effect of marginally negative expectations on electoral choice is much larger than that of marginally positive expectations. These findings are significant as they highlight that voters with moderate views are mobilized more effectively by negative rather than positive rhetoric.

Lastly, this paper contributes to the broader debate on the rise of populist politics by suggesting that a dichotomous view of economic and cultural causes misses the point because both sets of factors contribute — albeit in different ways — to the creation of a loss mindset and, hence, demand for political discontinuity.

**Literature Review and Theory**

**Conceptualizing Populism**

A fundamental assumption on which the validity of the argument advanced herein rests is that populism operates within a logic of political discontinuity. To investigate whether this assumption is reasonable, one must first ascertain the definitional core of this *en vogue* analytical category. As the multifaceted history of populism highlights, this is far from a trivial task. Although contemporary political events have propelled populism to one of the most discussed concepts in social science research, it is not a recent phenomenon. Early examples of populism include peasant movements in 19th century Russia and the United States (Rooduijn 2014; Vergara 2020), as well as the government of Richard Seddon, the Prime Minister of New Zealand at the turn of the 20th century (Nagel 1993). Some have even traced the roots of populism to Puritan colonies that predated the United States’ formation (Fumurescu 2018). More recently, movements commonly labeled as ‘populist’ range from Peron’s Justicial Party in Argentina and Chávez’s United Socialist Party of Venezuela to Perot’s Progress Party in the US and Berlusconi’s Forza Italia (Rooduijn 2014). These movements’ geographical and ideological diversity hints at the fact that populism is not a monolithic category with a clear and unambiguous definitional core.

The contemporary scholarly debate over competing definitions and conceptualizations of populism mirrors this insight. At its core, this debate revolves around how populism links to substantive political-ideological positions. Some scholars understand populism as a ‘thin ideology’ (Mudde 2004) that is minimally defined by a few core components, while others view it as being inextricably linked to substantive ideologies, such as sovereignty (Baldini, Bressanelli, and Gianfreda 2020) or right-wing radicalism (Baier 2016). On the minimal end of the spectrum, Mudde (2004, 543) provides a *de rigueur* definition of populism as a “thin-centered ideology that considers society as ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite.’ This thin-centered ideology holds that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people.” Mansbridge and Macedo echo this view in contending that populism dichotomizes society into two groups — the people and the elite — who are fighting a “morally challenged” battle (2019, 60). Carreira da Silva and Brito Vieira (2019) provide a logic-oriented account, according to which populism is primarily a logic of resentment that operates by splitting society into a morally virtuous in-group and a vilified out-group. Departing from this one-dimensional in-out logic, Corbett (2016) builds on Abts and Rummens (2007) to suggest that right-wing populism is a ‘twofold vertical structure,’ which is antagonistic both upwards (against the social elite) and downwards (against social and economic outsiders). Brubaker (2020) provides a more substantive definition, arguing that populism is not separable in toto from nationalism, as it distinguishes ‘the people’ horizontally vis-à-vis both internal outsiders (the elite at the top as well as those at social margins at the bottom) and external outsiders (the global, cosmopolitan elite at the top, and low-status migrants and refugees at the bottom). Other accounts view populism as a counterbalance...
to increasingly concentrated power (see Boyte 2012; Coles 2012; Grattan 2012; Nagel 1993). While also being located at the substantive end of the spectrum of definitions, these views run counter to those who consider populism as inherently connected to anti-liberal phenomena, such as Euroscepticism (Brasso Sørensen 2020), sovereignty (Baldini, Bressanelli, and Gianfreda 2020), or right-wing radicalism (Baier 2016).

While this paper remains sympathetic to the empirical observation that populism, especially of the right-wing variant most common in advanced Western democracies, often occurs alongside these other phenomena, it nevertheless maintains that those elements do not constitute part of the conceptual core of populism. Hence, due to its virtue of being conceptually distinct, with applicability across a range of geographical and temporal contexts (Rooduijn 2014) without conceptual stretching (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013), this paper adopts a minimal definition of populism akin to that of Mudde (2004). Specifically, it defines populism in terms of four key features: (1) the centrality of ‘the people’ who are conceptualized as a (2) unified group fighting against (3) a corrupt elite (4) under the proclamation of crisis. The latter two aspects of the above definition are crucial for this paper because one of its central assumptions holds that populist politics operate on a platform of advocacy for political discontinuity. While the concept of discontinuity does not constitute part of the definitional core of populism, it is a direct corollary of parts (3) and (4) of the above definition: populist actors who pit themselves against corrupt governing elites and proclaim a state of crisis are necessarily committed to advocating political change. Hence, the internal logic of populism and the external appeals through which political actors utilize it necessitate at least a rhetorical (if not actual) commitment to political discontinuity.

The case of the 2016 US election illustrates this point cogently. Donald Trump ran on a platform of “crisis talk” and advocacy for radical political change (Homolar and Scholz 209, 344). In contrast, Hillary Clinton represented the establishment-candidate par excellence whose primary substantive policy commitment was to “continue the preceding Democratic President’s success” (Gunawan 2017, 50). As shown theoretically and empirically in subsequent sections, the dichotomy of political continuity and discontinuity at the very core of the 2016 presidential race had dramatic implications for voting behavior if viewed through a prospect theoretical lens. This link is especially pronounced among those demographics who — due to economic, cultural, and political changes — associated the status quo that Clinton represented as the continuation of decline and, hence, the acceptance of an imminent loss.

**Explaining the Rise of Populism: A False Dichotomy**

What caused the recent rise of populism in Western democracies, as exemplified by the 2016 US presidential election, the Brexit referendum, and the electoral successes of populist parties ranging from the left-wing Syriza in Greece to Marine Le Pen's far-right Front National? Three major strands of explanations of this rise have dominated the literature thus far: the two outlined previously, related to economics and culture, and a more recent third strand, which transcends the dichotomous ‘culture vs. economics’ debate in search of a more holistic approach. The current paper seeks to contribute to this third set of explanations by arguing that an amalgamation of cultural, economic, and political changes created a loss mindset among some demographics, rendering those particularly receptive to populist rhetoric. Before laying out this theory in full, this paper first turns its attention to existing theories of populism.

Economic explanations argue that a set of economic trends, such as stagnating real wages, increasing inequality, or decreased social mobility, are the primary causes of populism in post-industrial countries. Proponents of this approach argue that those who feel economically left behind are more likely to feel disenchanted with the political establishment, rendering them receptive to populism’s anti-elitist rhetoric. There is rich empirical support for such economic explanations: Colantone and Stanig (2018) find that the level of import shocks is positively correlated with support for anti-establishment parties. Adler and Ansell (2020) show a strong and robust positive relationship between house prices and support for populist parties. Hopkin and Blyth (2019, 215) find that support for populist parties is strongest in countries with higher Gini coefficients, indicating that populist support is positively correlated with higher levels of inequality.

Further, the populist vote share is higher in regions that have been hit harder by deindustrialization (Hopkin 2017). Therefore, the link between economic factors and support for populism is empirically well-established at the aggregate level. However, the evidence is less clear at the individual level, especially considering the 2016 US presidential election. Specifically, there are two crucial problems with the ‘left-behind’ argument that personal economic hardship drives support for populists. First, ‘pocketbook’ voting theories on which individual-level economic explanations of populism rest are not generally well-supported by empirical findings. As Mansbridge (1989) shows, evidence that personal economic situations drive voting behavior is scarce. For example, the newly unemployed are unlikely to blame the incumbent government for their misfortune (Merelman and Sniderman 1977). Even at the level of demographic groups, there is no clear evidence of a link between economic status and political preferences (Kinder, Adams, and Gronke 1984). Second, in the US context, the path of economic recovery on which the US found itself in the year leading up to the 2016 election calls into question the argument that Trump’s victory was propelled by economic dissatisfaction, especially because sociotropic assessments of recent economic events have been shown to heavily influence voting behavior (Achen and Bartels 2016; Wlezien 2015). This may explain why a recent cross-sectional

In contrast to the left-behind thesis, cultural explanations argue that populism is primarily a backlash against cultural change, specifically the rise of liberal post-materialist ideology. Norris and Inglehart (2018, 2017, 2016), the most prominent advocates of this view, argue that the 35 years of security and relative prosperity in developed democracies that followed the Second World War triggered the rise of post-material values that prioritize issues such as environmental protection and women's and minority rights. These are driven by (1) birth cohort effects, whereby cohorts who experienced relative security in their formative years gradually replaced older, more conservative, and materialist generations, and (2) period effects, whereby all generations respond to current conditions, implying that rising post-WWII prosperity also made older generations less materialistic (Norris and Inglehart 2018). These cultural changes — combined with subsequent economic downturns — provoked a counter-reaction in older, less economically secure, and more conservatively oriented cohorts who felt their norms, traditions, and values were under siege. Inglehart and Norris (2017) describe this reaction as a Silent Revolution in Reverse — a value-reorientation towards conservative materialism and a shift towards support for right-wing populists who promise to arrest or reverse earlier ideological changes. Although there is evidence for the importance of cultural factors (e.g., Hopkins 2010; Norris and Inglehart 2019), purely cultural explanations have been challenged as being inconsistent with several empirical findings, such as the fact that nativist accounts of the rise of populism cannot accommodate the rise of left-wing variants. Furthermore, contrary to the predictions of cultural explanations that emphasize the role of value-reorientation due to immigration, support for right-wing populism is most pronounced in rural areas where comparatively few immigrants live (Colantone and Stanig 2018; Cramer 2016).

In response to the deficiencies of the above bodies of research, a third strand of theories of the rise of populism stresses the need to move past the dichotomization of cultural and economic factors. Instead, these theories advocate a more holistic — or systemic — approach to the study of populism, emphasizing the different ways in which cultural, economic, and political factors combine to influence voting behavior. For example, Gidron and Hall (2017) argue that a social integration framework highlights how economic and cultural factors interact to create dissatisfaction with the status quo. They find evidence that both cultural (e.g., LGBT opposition, church attendance) and economic factors (e.g., occupation, social grade) affect feelings of social marginalization. Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) take a similarly systemic approach, arguing that the demand for populism is a result of four historic shifts: (1) feelings of political disenfranchisement caused by a growing cleft between politicians and their citizens; (2) high levels of immigration and associated cultural fears; (3) increased relative deprivation of large parts of the population; and (4) the weakening of the bonds between mainstream parties and their constituencies.

In an attempt to contribute to this growing scholarly consensus, this paper argues that integrating insights from the above-mentioned theories into a single framework based around the concept of loss provides a comprehensive yet parsimonious explanation of the rise of populism. In essence, it argues that various structural changes — such as rising political and economic inequality, stagnating wages, and cultural shifts — caused by immigration and the rise of postmaterialism created a ‘loss mindset’ among certain demographics. In addition, it highlights the role of political agents who both catalyzed and channeled these structural factors to their political benefit. The importance of agency in politicizing structural changes is well established in the literature. Hopkins (2010) argues that immigration becomes politically salient when communities undergo sudden demographic changes while immigration is simultaneously politicized at a national level. Homolar and Scholz (2019) show that Trump's crisis talk framed the 2016 election in a negative light. As a result, voters who perceived themselves as the losers of the political status quo gravitated towards support for political discontinuity. However, this insight alone would be somewhat trivial: those who find themselves on the downside of advantage in the current system will naturally advocate change, as is well-established in the literature on economic voting (Wlezien 2015). However, the classical economic voting literature presupposes voters’ rationality and, as a result, largely ignores the idiosyncrasies of human psychology and the fact that it is the perception of change that motivates political behavior, not the change itself. As the following section shows, integrating the concept of a loss mindset into Kahneman and Tversky's prospect theoretical framework helps us explain this behavior by highlighting the asymmetries in psychological assessments of losses and gains and the differences between the political salience of negative and positive change that result.

A Prospect Theoretical Approach to Voting and Studying Populism

Few studies thus far have tried to use Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) prospect theory to explain political outcomes. Notable exceptions include Weyland (1997), who draws on prospect theory to explain Latin American political leaders' risk-taking in economic restructuring, and Alesina and Passarelli (2019), who adopt the theory for the context of electoral behavior. Nonetheless, overall, political scientists “have shown little interest in [prospect theory]” (Mercer 2005, 1). The current paper seeks to illustrate the usefulness of prospect theory in the hope that this will spark renewed interest in the theory among political scientists.
Kahneman and Tversky’s (1979) prospect theory explains why decision-makers are driven to seemingly risk-seeking behavior in situations where a choice is framed as one between losses. In prospect theory, utility is assigned to gains and losses (relative to a reference point) rather than to final assets. According to Kahneman and Tversky, the decision-making process involves two phases. First, in the editing phase, individuals preliminarily analyze the “offered prospects, which often yields a simpler representation of these prospects” (ibid., 274). This phase includes forming a reference point against which prospects are framed as gains or losses. Kahneman and Tversky observe that this reference point “usually corresponds to the current asset position […]. However, the location of the reference point, and the consequent coding of outcomes as gains or losses, can be affected by the formulation of the offered prospects, and by the expectations of the decision-maker” (ibid., 274). If an individual’s expectations about the future are negative (i.e., they expect a loss), their reference point will not be the neutral status quo but will be shifted towards negativity.

This insight is critical because it expands the range of possible electoral outcomes that loss aversion can account for in the second phase of decision-making, the evaluation phase. Alesina and Passarelli (2019, 937ff) establish a formal model of loss aversion in electoral contexts and show the existence of three effects, all of which lead to an overall status-quo bias in elections: (1) an endowment effect, whereby people get attached to a certain status quo and, since losses weigh heavier than gains, do not readily risk this status quo by voting for a volatile candidate; (2) an entrenchment effect, whereby policy changes are assessed vis-à-vis the initial status quo; and (3) a moderating effect that leads those who hold extreme views to prefer less extreme policies.

On Alesina and Passarelli’s account, these three effects explain the status-quo bias evident in electoral contexts. However, if one departs from the assumption that the reference point against which prospects are assessed is neutral and instead allows it to shift towards negativity, loss aversion predicts risk-seeking rather than risk-averse behavior. This paper refers to this effect as the aggravating effect. In essence, voters who have a loss mindset due to economic and cultural changes are led to view the continuation of status-quo politics as implying further decline. As a result, the strong aversion against certain losses will drive them to support policy discontinuity, even if they accept that this might lead to volatile outcomes and potential high losses. This is illustrated conceptually in Figure 1, which adopts Kahneman and Tversky’s utility function to predict the average utility voters who have a loss mindset will ascribe to certain potential outcomes.

Figure 1: Explaining Trump’s Appeal Using Prospect Theory

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In Figure 1, the reference point of voters who have a loss mindset is shifted to the left of the origin, as is illustrated by the position of the 'SQ-Expectations' line. Such voters are drawn to the more volatile, non-status quo choice because of two mechanisms. First, individuals’ strong aversion against certain losses implies that the status quo choice or candidate (i.e., Clinton) is evaluated highly negatively by those who display a loss mindset. In contrast, the volatile choice (i.e., Trump) appears more attractive because the certainty effect implies that “people underweight outcomes that are merely probable in comparison with outcomes that are obtained with certainty” (Kahneman and Tversky 1979, 263). As a result of the combined effects of the strong aversion against certain losses and the discounting of the possibility of extremely high losses, decision-makers exhibit risk-seeking behavior if their expectation of the future status quo is negative. This combined effect is illustrated in the graph, since the average utility of the larger range of outcomes is higher than that of the small range of outcomes. Note that this is despite the average utility outcome of both choices being equal. Hence, prospect theory predicts that those with more negative assessments of past socio-economic change are more likely to vote for Trump:

\[ H1: \text{Individuals with more negative assessments of change are more likely to support populist anti-establishment candidates.} \]

Furthermore, if moderate losses do indeed weigh more heavily than moderate gains, then one would expect the magnitude of the effect of a loss mindset to be larger than that of a gain mindset:

\[ H2.1: \text{The magnitude of the effect of marginally negative assessments of change on electoral behavior is larger than that of marginally positive assessments.} \]

Lastly, the discounting of extreme losses that prospect theory posits implies that the marginal effect of extreme assessments of change compared to that of moderate assessments will be lower in the domain of losses than gains:

\[ H2.2: \text{The difference in effect between marginal and extreme assessments of change is less pronounced in the domain of losses than in the domain of gains, i.e.,} \]
\[ (\triangle \text{Heavy Loss} – \triangle \text{Marginal Loss}) < (\triangle \text{Heavy Gain} – \triangle \text{Marginal Gain}) \]

To test these hypotheses and establish support for the posited causal mechanism, subsequent sections investigate the effects of loss- and gain-mindsets on Trump’s vote share in the 2016 US presidential election. Hypothesis 1 is confirmed if respondents who professed pessimism about recent change were significantly more likely to state that they were planning on voting for Trump in the 2016 election. Hypotheses 2.1 and 2.2 are investigated by comparing the magnitude of the effects of negative and positive views of change.

\[ \text{Operationalizing Loss} \]

Before turning to the empirical sections of this paper, it is important to first investigate the mechanisms through which economic, cultural, and political changes fuel perceptions of loss. Here, one must distinguish between two different types of changes. First, those that affect voting behavior at the individual level, irrespective of group identity. These macro-changes include rising vertical inequality and cultural change. These changes do not have to affect all groups equally to be classified as individual-level drivers of perceptions of loss: vertical inequality and cultural change have both been shown to have affected different demographic groups asymmetrically. However, in theory, these changes work across group-identity-based cleavages; they first and foremost affect individuals according to their relative position in society rather than their group membership. In contrast, there are drivers of loss that operate primarily at the level of the group. These include horizontal inequality and group-level relative deprivation, both in terms of economic, cultural, and political status. As the following subsections show, these group-based grievances have recently been receiving growing attention, as scholars have repeatedly found that perceptions of status are often more socially and politically salient at the group-level rather than individual level.

\[ \text{Individual-Level Drivers of Perceptions of Loss} \]

Traditionally, the literature on populism has focused on macro-changes in economics, culture, and politics. In the context of the recent populist backlash, the fact that losers of globalization in post-industrialized countries have seen their real incomes and living standards decline over the last decade is well established (Eatwell and Goodwin 2016; Stiglitz 2013). The resulting feelings of decline are further worsened for ideologically traditionalist demographics by recent cultural changes such as the rise of post-materialism (Norris and Inglehart 2019) or by increasing feelings of political disenfranchisement and marginalization (Hopkin and Blyth 2019; Hochschild 2016). Such changes contribute to creating a loss mindset among individuals who expect the socio-economic and cultural decline they experienced in recent years to continue in the absence of political discontinuity.

Of course, these changes do not affect all demographic groups equally, but the literature on the rise of populism has often ignored the group-level differences in how certain macro-level societal change affects political behavior. To an extent, the current paper contributes to that scholarly oversight, as its empirical strategy focuses on attempting to establish an individual-level link between perceptions of loss and support for political discontinuity. However, this focus is owed to the data constraints that limit the scope of this investigation:
the individual-level ANES Time Series survey is the only currently available dataset that is granular enough and covers respondents’ perceptions of change. As will be discussed in the methodology and results sections, the paper does investigate how perceptions of loss operate within various demographic groups by subsetting the ANES data by gender, race, and income bracket. This is an imperfect solution as it is unable to show how group-level perceptions of loss influence political behavior; future work on the role of loss in politics should close the resulting gap by expressly focusing on the effect of perceptions of group-level grievances discussed below.

**Group-Level Grievances and Horizontal Inequalities**

There is growing evidence that group-based perceptions of status are highly politically salient, as recent trends in the literature on political conflict and inequality highlight. Previously, scholars of conflict focused primarily on vertical inequality, i.e., the inequality between individuals at different levels of the social ladder (Weede 1986; Sigelman and Simpson 1977). The focus on inequality between individuals helps explain why those studies often fail to provide conclusive evidence for a link between inequality and conflict. As Østby (2013) rightly points out, relying on measures of individual inequality to try to account for collective participation in political conflict may not be the best approach.

Horizontal inequalities (HIs) — inequalities between groups delineated by racial, cultural, or political identity-cleavages — capture the group-based nature of political action much better. The link between HIs and political conflict is well-established. Gisselquist (2013) shows that societies in which class-based and ethnicity-based cleavages are mutually reinforcing display higher levels of political violence. Similarly, Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch (2011) find that the level of HI is a strong predictor of ethnonationalist conflict.

Interestingly, some key findings of the conflict literature mirror insights from prospect theory. For instance, Must (2016) investigates the causes of conflict in 20 African countries to highlight that it is the perceived rather than the actual level of inequality that explains support for civil unrest, another form of support for political discontinuity. Hillesund et al. (2020, 1) similarly find that perceptions of “horizontal economic and political inequalities […] make conflict more likely.”

Furthermore, Đuverovic (2013) highlights that changes in groups’ relative position—rather than their static position in group-based hierarchies—is the best predictor for support for violence. Specifically, he finds that groups already at the bottom of the economic hierarchy display lower levels of frustration than formerly privileged groups whose position, relative to other groups, is declining. This mirrors a critical insight of the current study, namely that changes in status seem to be a more salient motivator for political action than status per se.

Đuverovic’s findings are especially relevant for the context of this paper, as the US political stage has been dominated by group-identity-based conflict arising from the relative decline of traditionally privileged groups vis-à-vis historically disadvantaged groups who are slowly closing the opportunity gap. In the context of the 2016 US presidential election, three horizontal cleavages are especially relevant. First, the changing racial demographics of the US have been shown to have contributed to the support of Donald Trump “among White Americans whose race/ethnicity is central to their identity” (Major, Blodorn, and Major Blascovich 2016, 931). Furthermore, questions about gender equality were also a significant driver of support for Trump among those with conservative views of gender issues (Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman 2018). Lastly, issues of sexuality have also been shown to have contributed to the appeal of Donald Trump among those with conservative views. In combination, these group-based cleavages have led some scholars to describe the 2016 election as a “possessive investment in white heteropatriarchy” (Strolovitch, Wong, and Proctor 2017, 353).

What do these issues have in common? In all of them, the dominant and (formerly) systemically privileged group has declined relative to the historically disadvantaged group. As society has progressed — albeit in small steps — towards equal opportunity regardless of race, gender, or sexuality, the conservative white heteropatriarchy has lost ground. In other words, privileged demographics were put in a loss mindset, which — as subsequent sections of this paper show — is likely to have contributed to their support for political discontinuity in the form of Donald Trump.

The approach posed herein allows us to integrate the political effects of group-based grievances into a common framework built around the concept of loss. As mentioned previously, despite this potential to accommodate individual-level as well as group-level perceptions of loss, this paper focuses primarily on the former due to data constraints. To show that perceptions of loss are essential drivers of support for Trump regardless of group-based cleavages, the analyses laid out in the following section will be completed not only for the full sample but also for subsets according to race and gender. However, future research into how loss fuels support for political discontinuity should seek to focus specifically on group-based loss, as the literature on horizontal inequality shows this to be a highly salient driver of political behavior.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study uses individual-level survey data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) 2016 Time Series Study and county-level demographic and electoral data from various sources. The ANES dataset covers questions on electoral behavior, public opinion, and a range of other areas such as values and cognitive predispositions from 4,270 respondents (1,180 face-to-face and 3,090 online interviews). The data was collected during a pre-election and a post-election interview;
Disadvantages

Perceptions

2

3

Potential endogeneity

Ecological fallacy

bias can be assumed to bias results in the same direction within partisan groups. This allows the circumvention of reverse causality. In particular, it is unclear whether individuals decide whom to vote for based on their assessment of change or whether they adapt their assessment of change to fit preformed preferences for certain parties or candidates (Rahn, Krosnick, and Breuning 1994).

Two empirical strategies are employed to address this issue of potential choice-supportive bias (Lind et al. 2017). First, in addition to implementing the analyses laid out in Section 4.4.3 on the full sample of ANES respondents, the same analyses are completed for three subsets of the respondents (Democrat, Republican, and Independent). Respondents’ stated party identification is used to create these subsets. The Democrat subset includes ‘Strong Democrats’ and ‘Not very strong Democrats’; the Republican subset consists of ‘Strong Republicans’ and ‘Not very strong Republicans’; and the Independent subset consists of ‘Independent-Democrats’, ‘Independents’, and ‘Independent-Republicans’. Classifying weak partisans as partisans is common in the literature on affective polarization (Broockman, Kalla, and Westwood 2020). Subsetting the data by partisanship helps to isolate the relationship between variations in the extent to which respondents exhibit a loss mindset and their voting behavior within partisan groups. This allows the circumvention of potential issues of reverse causality, since any choice-supportive bias can be assumed to bias results in the same direction within a partisan group. Hence, subsample-results consistent with Hypothesis 1 would strengthen confidence in the direction of the mechanism underlying the correlational link between perceptions of loss and voting behavior.

Furthermore, to establish support for the effect of socio-economic change on electoral outcomes, this study uses county-level demographic and electoral data in addition to the individual-level survey data. It combines demographic time-series data obtained from the US Census Bureau with county-level presidential election data to investigate the effect of actual changes in demographic variables2 on the change in Republican vote share between 2012 and 2016. Potential endogeneity problems do not limit any correlations uncovered using this method, as it is highly improbable that a county’s aggregate vote in presidential elections directly affects the above demographic variables. Hence, finding a significant and robust relationship between the measure of local demographic decline devised below and change in Republican vote share can be taken as prima facie evidence of the causal direction of any correlations uncovered using the survey data.

Table 1 summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of each source of data. Due to their respective drawbacks, neither type of data is sufficient to investigate the hypotheses advanced in this paper. As will be shown below, however, combining the findings from analyses of both sources provides concrete inductive evidence in favor of the theory advanced in this paper. Regardless, to bolster confidence in the validity of the empirical results presented herein, one would ideally investigate how actual socio-economic change translates to professed assessments of change and then trace how changes in these assessments alter voting behavior over time or use experimental interventions to induce exogenous variation in voters’ assessment of change. Future research should address this gap.

RESULTS

Individual-Level Loss Factor Analysis

In keeping with the above methodological caveats, a combination of individual-level survey data and county-level demographic data was used to investigate Hypothesis 1, which posited that those with more negative assessments of change are more likely to have voted for Trump, the anti-establishment populist candidate. Turning to the individual-level data first, exploratory factor analysis based on a battery

| Table 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Data Sources |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Individual-level survey data    | Perceptions of change | Potential endogeneity |
| County-level demographic data   | Exogenous variation | Ecological fallacy  |

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of questions from the ANES pre-election wave regarding individuals’ assessment of socio-economic changes was employed to uncover the factor that underlies views of change. The analysis revealed that a single psychological factor seems to underpin these views. Using this factor, each respondent was assigned a single ‘loss score.’ The loss score captures the extent to which respondents view recent changes as positive or negative. Panel A of Figure 2 visualizes the distribution of this loss score across respondents.

Investigating the relationship between respondents’ demographic attributes and their loss score reveals which groups have the most negative perceptions of recent change. As Table 2 shows, age and gender are not significantly correlated with perceptions of loss. In contrast, self-identifying as white and religious is highly correlated with negative perceptions of change. On average, respondents with higher levels of income and education have significantly more positive perceptions of change. These results echo previous findings.
Table 2: Demographic Attributes and Standardized Loss Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>$-0.331 (0.085)^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>$0.025 (0.031)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>$-0.001 (0.001)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>$-0.505 (0.034)^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>log(Income)</td>
<td>$0.105 (0.017)^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>$0.182 (0.022)^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>$-0.046 (0.034)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>$-0.303 (0.033)^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>11462.636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>11519.103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>$-5722.318$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviance</td>
<td>3550.844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. obs.</td>
<td>3921</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001; Based on linear regression analyses. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 3: Relationship Between Loss Indicator and Trump Vote Probability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 (Unadjusted)</th>
<th>Model 2 (Adjusted)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>$0.466 (0.007)^{***}$</td>
<td>$0.124 (0.035)^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanatory Variable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss-Indicator</td>
<td>$-0.301 (0.007)^{***}$</td>
<td>$-0.259 (0.007)^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>$0.084 (0.014)^{***}$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>$-0.001 (0.000)$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>$0.281 (0.016)^{***}$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income (log)</td>
<td>$0.000 (0.000)$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>$-0.008 (0.010)$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>$0.074 (0.015)^{***}$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>3256.790</td>
<td>2524.108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>3274.735</td>
<td>2583.166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>$-1625.395$</td>
<td>$-1252.054$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviance</td>
<td>429.954</td>
<td>328.530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. obs.</td>
<td>2927</td>
<td>2713</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01; Based on logit regression analyses. Standard errors in parentheses.
according to which white, low-income, relatively uneducated, and religious demographics have the most negative perceptions of recent change.

To test Hypothesis 1, the relationship between this loss score and voting behavior was investigated using logistic regression models. The results of these analyses (displayed in full in Table 3 and summarized in terms of odds ratios in Panels C and D of Figure 2) confirm a highly statistically and substantively significant relationship between the negativity of assessments of change and the probability of voting for Trump. Converting the logit coefficients from the unadjusted model displayed in Table 3 to predicted probabilities, one can see that a one-standard-deviation increase in the loss score (indicating a more positive assessment of change) from the mean is associated with a fall in predicted Trump vote share from 44.8% to 13.3% (p < 0.001). An effect of similar magnitude can be inferred from the adjusted model, although the interpretation of the coefficient (-0.259***) is not as intuitive as in the unadjusted model. Still, both models show a highly statistically (and substantively) significant relationship between the negativity of respondents' assessments of change and their likeliness to have voted for Trump in 2016.

Furthermore, as calculating the Nagelkerke pseudo-R² (Hemmert et al. 2016) shows, the models' explanatory power is considerable given their parsimony: not controlling for covariates, the loss indicator explains 50.6% of the variation in respondents’ 2016 presidential vote. This provides further evidence for the political salience of voters' retrospective assessment of change and, hence, for Hypothesis 1. However, as previously mentioned, these results are still limited by potential endogeneity because respondents' assessment of change may be endogenous to their electoral behavior. In other words, a voter may have adjusted her assessments in response to her party preference instead of having chosen Trump because of a loss mindset. To provide further evidence for the importance of loss for electoral behavior, one must find a way to circumvent this endogeneity problem.

County-Level Clusters Analysis

As mentioned in section 3, the existence of a correlation between individual-level subjective assessments of change is not conclusive evidence for the causal mechanism that underlies Hypothesis 1. Since subjective assessments are, by definition, not structurally predetermined, it may be the case that voting for Trump causes a higher loss score rather than the other way round. In contrast, the relationship between local socio-economic changes and presidential election voting behavior does not suffer from potential reverse causality and endogeneity. Hence, a robust relationship between county-level socio-economic decline (or local socio-economic loss) and change in Republican vote share would increase confidence in the direction of the individual-level behavioral causal mechanism posited above. To achieve this, the following methodology was employed. First, county-level demographic time-series data for the years between 2012 and 2016 was obtained from the US Census Bureau and combined with data on presidential returns from the 2012 and 2016 elections. The benefit of using time-series data is that it permits the tracing of the effect of socio-economic change on change in voting behavior at the county level. Hence, the change of certain socio-economic variables (change in total population, % of the population living in poverty, and mean income levels) between 2012 and 2016 was calculated. Using these variables and emulating the methodological approach taken at the individual level, a K-means cluster analysis was performed. The analysis revealed three distinct groups: (1) Stable Counties, whose socio-economic situation did not change significantly between 2012 and 2016, (2) Loss Counties, who were worse off in 2016 than in 2012, and (3) Gain Counties, for which the converse is true. These clusters were then used to estimate the effect of local change on voting behavior.

Table 4: County Clusters and Change in Republican Vote Share 2012-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept (Reference)</td>
<td>-2.794 (1.502)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss Counties</td>
<td>5.035 (1.760)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain Counties</td>
<td>-5.498 (1.747)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R²</td>
<td>0.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. obs.</td>
<td>3111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSE</td>
<td>0.212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001; Linear regression analysis, based on OLS. Robust standard errors in parentheses.
decline on the change in Republican vote share between 2012 and 2016.

As Table 4 shows, on average, Republican vote share was 5.0 percentage points higher in Loss Counties and 5.5 percentage points lower in Gain Counties compared to the neutral reference category. Both effects are statistically significant at \( p < 0.05 \). In addition to the cluster analysis, factor analysis was carried out and assigned a loss-indicator score to each county. Table 5 shows a clear correlation between local socio-economic decline as captured by the county-level loss score and changes in Republican vote share. A reduction in the loss score by one standard deviation is associated with a 4.7-percentage point increase in Republican vote share \( (p < 0.001) \). While the methodology employed at the county level is constrained by the limited availability of time-series demographic data at the necessary level of granularity, the findings presented here increase confidence in the causal direction of the relationship uncovered using the individual-level survey data.

In summary, individual-level survey and county-level demographic data provide strong inductive support for Hypothesis 1. However, the association between perceptions of socio-economic decline and voting for specific candidates is well established in the existing economic voting literature \( (\text{Lewis-Beck and Nadeau, 2011}) \) and is, hence, somewhat trivial. To establish further support for the prospect theoretical foundation of electoral behavior, the second set of hypotheses concerning the asymmetries in the domain of gains and losses — which provide a theoretically rigorous explanation for the risk-seeking electoral behavior that theories of economic voting cannot account for — is much more substantively relevant. It is these hypotheses that the paper now turns to.

### Individual-Level Cluster Analysis (Full Sample)

To investigate Hypotheses 2.1 (concerning the overall magnitude of effects of gains and losses) and 2.2 (concerning differences between marginal and extreme gains and losses), K-means cluster analysis based on a question battery covering respondents’ retrospective assessment of socio-economic change was employed to identify groupings with distinct patterns of assessments of change within the individual-level ANES survey data. Specifically, the battery covered views on (1) changes in the economy since 2008, (2) respondents’ household financial situation in the last year, (3) changes in the economy in the last year, (4) whether the country is generally on the right track\(^5\), (5) changes in unemployment in the last year, and (6) changes in social mobility in the last 20 years. The Average Silhouette Method was used to determine the optimal number of clusters for the cluster analysis \( (\text{Rousseeuw 1987}) \).

As Panel A of Figure 3 shows, the optimal number of clusters was determined to be four, closely followed by the five- and three-cluster solutions. Due to the benefit of having a middle category that can serve as the neutral reference category, the five-cluster solution was chosen as the basis for subsequent analyses. The cluster analysis results can be seen in Panel B, which visualizes the five clusters in terms of the first two principal components that explain the majority of the variance within the survey data. Considering that negative values on the x- and y-axes indicate negativity of assessments of recent changes, one can rank the groups according to the extent to which they exhibit a loss mindset. Cluster 3 \( (n = 1051) \) exhibits the most negative retrospective assessment of change and will henceforth be referred to as the Heavy Loss group. Cluster 4 \( (\text{Marginal Loss, } n = 513) \), 5 \( (\text{Reference, } n = 545) \) 2 \( (\text{Marginal Gain, } n = 1189) \) and 1 \( (\text{Heavy Gain, } n = 972) \) view recent changes increasingly more positively. To support this classification, Panel C of Table 3 displays the weighted loss score \( (\text{used previously to test Hypothesis 1}) \) for each of the five groups in terms of standard deviations from the mean. Clearly, the Heavy Loss cluster displays the most negative assessment of change \((-1.18 \text{ SDs})\), followed by the Marginal Loss \((-0.58 \text{ SDs})\), the Reference \((0.16 \text{ SDs})\), the Marginal Gains \( (0.27 \text{ SDs}) \), and the Heavy Gains \( (1.06 \text{ SDs}) \) clusters. The validity of the groups’ classification is further confirmed by the mean
responses to some of the questions used as the basis for the cluster analysis (see Figure 4). In terms of demographics, the clusters do not differ significantly in terms of age, gender, or marital status. However, the loss clusters are significantly more religious, have a lower mean income, and are significantly less educated (p < 0.01) than the gain clusters.

Turning our attention to the voting behavior of the respective groups reveals striking differences in the proportion of respondents who voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 US presidential election between the identified loss groups. As Panel D of Figure 3 shows, 83.6% of the Heavy Loss, 70.6% of the Moderate Loss, 43.5% of the Intermediate Reference, 38.5% of the Moderate Gain, and only 4.5% of the Heavy Gain groups voted for Trump. These figures provide further support for Hypothesis 1, as having negative assessments of change is clearly associated with voting for a non-status quo candidate. The statistical significance of this association is confirmed using logistic models to regress Trump’s vote
share on cluster membership. As Table 6 shows, the negative correlation between membership in the loss clusters and the probability of voting for Trump is highly statistically and substantively significant (logit coefficients in the adjusted model of 1.843*** and 1.295*** for the extreme and marginal loss groups, respectively) and robust to the inclusion of a standard battery of demographic controls. Membership in the Heavy Gain group is associated with a significant decrease in the probability of voting for Trump (-2.882***). Most strikingly, there is no consistently significant difference between the Marginal Gain and the reference group in terms of predicted Trump vote probability. This provides preliminary support for Hypothesis 2.1.

The magnitudes of the effects uncovered in the above models allow us to investigate Hypotheses 2.1 and 2.2 more closely. The former predicted that the effect of marginal losses on voting behavior would be larger than that of marginal gains. This is because individuals have a strong aversion against accepting losses and a tendency to over-weigh small losses, which renders those who equate the continuation of the status quo with accepting an imminent loss willing to accept risky gambles (such as voting for the volatile populist candidate). The models presented in Table 6 lend support to this hypothesis. In both the unadjusted and the adjusted models, the magnitude of the correlation between membership in the Marginal Loss and probability of voting for Trump is significantly larger than that of membership in the Marginal Gain group (1.138***/1.295*** compared to -0.208/-0.291*). The latter association is minuscule enough not to be statistically significant at p < 0.05 in either model. These results support Hypothesis 2.1: the effect of a marginal loss mindset on voting behavior is substantively and significantly larger than that of a marginal gain mindset.

Considering the small magnitude of the effect of being in the Moderate Gain group on Trump vote probability, the high statistical (p < 0.001) and substantive significance of the effect of extreme gains is all the more striking. As Figure 4, Panel D predicted, membership in the Heavy Gains groups is associated with a large decrease in the probability of voting for Trump (logit coefficients of -2.788***/-2.882***). This result allows us to investigate Hypothesis 2.2, which predicted that the marginal effect of extreme assessments of losses/gains on voting behavior compared to that of moderate evaluations would be less pronounced in the domain of gains than that of losses because individuals discount large losses in their calculations and because small losses already weigh relatively heavily in decision-making processes (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). As a result, the difference between the magnitude of the effects of slight losses and large losses is expected to be bigger than the difference between slight gains and large gains. The results support this hypothesis. As Figure 5 visualizes, the marginal increase in the effect on Trump vote share when moving from moderate gains/losses to extreme gains/losses is significantly larger in the domain of gains (logit coefficients of -0.291* vs. -2.882*** ) than in the domain of losses (1.295*** vs. 1.843***). This shows that highly positive perceptions of change are more politically salient relative to moderate perceptions compared to highly negative perceptions, supporting Hypothesis 2.2.

Individual-Level Cluster Analysis (Subsamples)
— Subsetting the Data by Partisanship

To further address issues of potential choice-supportive bias and, hence, reverse causality, the individual-level cluster analyses laid out in the previous section were completed for three partisan subsamples (Independent, Democrat, and Republican). The results provide further support for key Hypothesis 1. Throughout the subsamples, there is a strong and robust relationship between perceptions of loss and voting for Donald Trump, as is illustrated in Figure 6.

42.2% of Independents in the Reference group voted for Trump in 2016, compared to 74.0% and 82.8% in the Marginal Loss and Heavy Loss groups, respectively (see Figure 8 in the Appendix for all Trump vote shares by subsamples). The vote share among the Marginal Gain group is not significantly different from the intermediate group. Strikingly, only 6.6% of Independent respondents in the Heavy Gain group voted for Trump. These findings are consistent with all three hypotheses. In particular, there is a strong and robust relationship between perceptions of loss and voting for Trump (Hypothesis 1), marginal losses have a bigger effect than marginal gains (Hypothesis 2.1), and the difference in the magnitude of marginal and extreme perceptions is lower in the domain of losses than in the domain of gains (Hypothesis 2.2).

There is similarly strong support for Hypothesis 1 within the Republican subsample, although the high overall vote share for Trump and associated ceiling effects requires a more cautious interpretation of the results as they relate to Hypotheses 2.1 and 2.2. However, the loss clusters do display a higher preponderance of Trump voters than the reference

Table 6: Loss Clusters and Trump Vote Probability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 5 (Unadjusted)</th>
<th>Model 6 (Adjusted)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept (Reference)</td>
<td>−0.262 (0.114)**</td>
<td>−2.831 (0.363)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clusters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Loss</td>
<td>1.892 (0.154)***</td>
<td>1.843 (0.183)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Loss</td>
<td>1.138 (0.160)***</td>
<td>1.295 (0.200)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Gain</td>
<td>−0.208 (0.136)</td>
<td>−0.291 (0.162)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Gain</td>
<td>−2.788 (0.212)***</td>
<td>−2.882 (0.240)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.547 (0.114)***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−0.004 (0.003)</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2.236 (0.141)***</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Income ($1000)</td>
<td>0.066 (0.062)</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>1.122 (0.121)***</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>2880.681</td>
<td>2256.556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>−1420.386</td>
<td>−1080.843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Num. obs.</td>
<td>2927</td>
<td>2713</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001; Based on logit regression analyses. Standard errors in parentheses.
group by more than ten percentage points, despite a high share of 84.8% of the Reference group having voted for Trump; remarkably, just 47.7% of Republicans in the Heavy Gain group voted for Trump.

Among Democrats, 3.1% in the Reference group, 0.8% in the (Marginal Gain) group, 2.8% in the Heavy Gain, and 5.5% in the Marginal Loss group voted for Trump, compared to a striking 28.6% among the Heavy Loss group. These findings provide further evidence in support of Hypothesis 1.

Subsetting the Data by Gender, Race, and Income Bracket

The theoretical rationale for subsetting the data by gender, race, and income is rooted in the literature on...
horizontal inequality (HI) and laid out in full in Section 2.2.4. As is shown below, the results of these subsample analyses further increase confidence in the robustness of the relationship between perceptions of loss and voting for Trump.

As can be seen in Panels A and B of Figure 7, the results are consistent with all three key hypotheses for both male and female respondents. Similarly, among respondents who self-identify as white (Panel C), those with negative perceptions of loss are more likely to have voted for Trump (Hypothesis 1), marginal losses weigh more heavily than marginal gains (Hypothesis 2.1), and heavy gains weigh more heavily than heavy losses (Hypothesis 2.2), relative to marginal perceptions. The evidence is less unambiguous for non-white respondents (see Panels C and D), although the generally low vote share (19.1%) warrants caution not to over-interpret the magnitude of the effects. Nonetheless, there is strong support for Hypothesis 1, as 46.9% of non-whites in the Heavy Loss group voted for Trump, compared to 14.8% in the Marginal Loss group and only 8.5% in the Reference group. The evidence is consistent with all three hypotheses for both the top and bottom halves of the income distribution (Panels E and F). These analyses further increase confidence in the key findings of the paper, although they retain their individual-level focus and do not address group-based perceptions of loss. Future work should aim to close this gap.

**DISCUSSION**

There are four critical limitations to the above findings. First, while the results presented provide inductive evidence to support the theory advanced herein, the aforementioned data constraints necessitate further investigation to confidently establish the direction of the causal mechanism that links assessments of change and voting behavior. Hence, future research should trace how changes in people’s assessment affect their political behavior using time-series data and investigate whether these changes are exogenous or endogenous to voting behavior. One way to investigate this is to use experimental methods to effect exogenous variation in voters’ assessments of change and then trace the downstream effects on political behavior.

The second limitation also stems from data constraints. Specifically, while it is argued that economic, cultural, and political factors contribute to creating a loss mindset, the empirical results presented are primarily based on socio-economic data and respondents’ assessment of socio-economic change. While this data only allows us to test the ‘economic arm’ of the causal mechanism, recent research (see Hochschild 2016; Norris and Inglehart 2019) shows that cultural feelings of loss are often even more politically salient than feeling left behind economically. Hence, one would expect the link between assessments of cultural change and voting behavior to be even more pronounced than this paper’s findings suggest. Further research is needed to investigate this claim.

Similarly, this paper is unable to address how perceptions of loss and gain operate at the group level rather than the level of the individual. Stratifying the full sample into subsamples by gender and race shows that variations in perceptions of loss affect voting behavior within groups in line with the predictions of prospect theory. However, as the literature on horizontal inequality shows, between-group inequality is often an even more potent driver of political action. Future research should investigate how prospect theory can help illuminate the psychological processes that make group-level changes in status so highly politically salient.

Lastly, the peculiarity of the case study this paper uses to support its theoretical claims limits the generalizability of the findings, as the 2016 US election is not a typical instance of populist success. While Trump used anti-establishment rhetoric to garner support, he simultaneously benefited from an establishment institution par excellence: the Republican Party. Trump’s dual advantage of pitching himself against the establishment while also benefiting from the Republican Party’s established structures of support limits the generalizability of the findings presented herein and necessitates further investigation.

**CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Building on prospect theory, this paper posited that integrating existing cultural, economic, and systemic explanations into a framework based on perceptions of loss parsimoniously illuminates some of the reasons for the recent rise in support for populist politics. Specifically, it argued that the psychological asymmetries between losses and gains highlighted by Kahneman and Tversky (1979) help explain why those who associate the continuation of the status quo with the acceptance of an imminent loss are driven to supporting volatile populists such as Donald Trump over establishment-candidates such as Hillary Clinton. To test this theory, three key hypotheses were derived. First, it was hypothesized that voters with more negative assessments of change are more likely to vote for anti-establishment, populist candidates. Second, the magnitude of the effect of marginally negative assessments of change on electoral behavior is larger than that of marginally positive assessments. Lastly, the difference in effect between marginal and extreme assessments of change is less pronounced in the domain of losses than in the domain of gains. Using a combination of county-level demographic data and individual-level survey data, evidence in support of all three hypotheses was found.

Despite the limitations discussed in the previous section of this paper, these findings have critical implications for the study of populism and electoral behavior more broadly. First and foremost, relaxing Alesina and Passarelli’s (2019) assumption that the status quo against which prospects are assessed as gains or losses is necessarily neutral helps account for risk-seeking electoral behavior where voters have a loss
Figure 7: Coefficient Plots for Demographic Subsamples

A Male

B Female

C White

D Non-White

E Income Low

F Income High
mindset. While the economic voting literature acknowledges the asymmetrical effect of gains and losses, the risk-aversion it presumes renders these theories unable to explain the rise of volatile anti-establishmentism that prioritizes discontinuity over security. The risk-seeking behavior that prospect theory predicts for those whose reference point is shifted towards negativity addresses this shortcoming.

Furthermore, the theory explains why it was so important for Trump to frame the 2016 election as a choice between losses. Ironically, the agency that contributed to this framing originated not only from the Trump campaign (Homolar and Scholz 2019) but also from Hillary Clinton and the alarmist rhetoric she used to warn against a Trump presidency. Clinton’s strategic choices in 2016 highlight the difficulties that moderate candidates face when campaigning against an anti-establishment, populist candidate, such as Donald Trump. While the moderate candidate can portray themselves as a safe bet, the associated narrow range of potential outcomes they represent may be a distinct disadvantage if the election is framed as a choice between losses. To make matters worse, due to the psychological salience of negativity, framing the election as a choice between gains is exceedingly difficult to achieve. The positive rhetoric required to do so risks the candidate appearing naïve and out of touch with voters’ concerns.

This dilemma underlines the importance of conducive structural preconditions for moderate candidates seeking to defeat populists who use alarmist rhetoric to create a loss mindset among the electorate. Voters who have recently experienced improvements in their living standards, feel that their cultural concerns are being heard, and that their voice matters in the national political arena are likely to be less susceptible to loss rhetoric. Hence, if the political establishment wants to arrest the spread of populism, it should seek to deliver meaningful and positive change.

**REFERENCES**


Heldman, Caroline, Meredith Conroy, and Alissa Ackerman. 2018. Sex and Gender in the 2016 Presidential Election. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, an Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC.


**APPENDICES**

Figure 8: Trump Vote Share for Partisan Subsamples

![Figure 8: Trump Vote Share for Partisan Subsamples](image-url)
Table 7: Cluster-Membership and Trump Vote Share by Party ID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Democrat</th>
<th>Democrat</th>
<th>Republican</th>
<th>Republican</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept (Reference)</td>
<td>-0.313***</td>
<td>-1.984***</td>
<td>-3.452***</td>
<td>-3.649***</td>
<td>1.719***</td>
<td>0.852</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.131)</td>
<td>(0.582)</td>
<td>(0.343)</td>
<td>(1.046)</td>
<td>(0.269)</td>
<td>(0.938)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clusters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Loss</td>
<td>1.882***</td>
<td>1.875***</td>
<td>2.539***</td>
<td>2.510***</td>
<td>1.610***</td>
<td>1.629***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.229)</td>
<td>(0.254)</td>
<td>(0.378)</td>
<td>(0.446)</td>
<td>(0.417)</td>
<td>(0.451)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal loss</td>
<td>1.359***</td>
<td>1.514***</td>
<td>0.608</td>
<td>0.673</td>
<td>2.137***</td>
<td>1.803**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.268)</td>
<td>(0.316)</td>
<td>(0.517)</td>
<td>(0.632)</td>
<td>(0.591)</td>
<td>(0.610)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal gain</td>
<td>0.438*</td>
<td>0.471*</td>
<td>-1.418**</td>
<td>-1.281*</td>
<td>0.409</td>
<td>0.371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.259)</td>
<td>(0.285)</td>
<td>(0.700)</td>
<td>(0.730)</td>
<td>(0.328)</td>
<td>(0.364)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Gain</td>
<td>-2.335***</td>
<td>-2.480***</td>
<td>-0.091</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>-1.811***</td>
<td>-1.911***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.345)</td>
<td>(0.415)</td>
<td>(0.544)</td>
<td>(0.583)</td>
<td>(0.410)</td>
<td>(0.453)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Controls</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-0.158</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.330</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.199)</td>
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<td>(0.330)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.278)</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>-0.014</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
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<td>-0.007</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.009)</td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
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<td>(0.243)</td>
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<td>(0.417)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.306)</td>
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<tr>
<td>log(Income)</td>
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<td>-0.341**</td>
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<td>-0.340**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.107)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.165)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.159)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.185</td>
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<td>-0.304</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.143)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.220)</td>
<td>(0.202)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.248</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.525</td>
<td>0.610**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.213)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.335)</td>
<td>(0.294)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>0.722***</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.231***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.602*</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.208)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.363)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.311)</td>
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</table>

AIC       837.282  730.702  459.297  352.121  484.697  423.909
BIC       860.761  786.127  484.595  411.916  508.963  481.282
Log Likelihood -413.641 -353.351 -224.649 -164.061 -237.348 -199.955
Deviance   805.472  664.376  448.122  322.809  474.120  399.522
Num. obs.  809     749     1164    1078    947     881

*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001; Based on logit regression analyses. Standard errors in parentheses.
Figure 9: Trump Vote Share for Demographic Subsamples

A Male

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Heavy Loss</th>
<th>2 Marginal Loss</th>
<th>3 Reference</th>
<th>4 Marginal Gain</th>
<th>5 Heavy Gain</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trump vote share</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
<td>72.8%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>42.6%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
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</table>

B Female

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>2 Marginal Loss</th>
<th>3 Reference</th>
<th>4 Marginal Gain</th>
<th>5 Heavy Gain</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trump vote share</td>
<td>79.4%</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
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</table>

C White

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Heavy Loss</th>
<th>2 Marginal Loss</th>
<th>3 Reference</th>
<th>4 Marginal Gain</th>
<th>5 Heavy Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trump vote share</td>
<td>89.5%</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
<td>61.2%</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
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D Non-White

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Heavy Loss</th>
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<th>3 Reference</th>
<th>4 Marginal Gain</th>
<th>5 Heavy Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trump vote share</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
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</table>

E Income Low

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Heavy Loss</th>
<th>2 Marginal Loss</th>
<th>3 Reference</th>
<th>4 Marginal Gain</th>
<th>5 Heavy Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trump vote share</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
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</table>

F Income High

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>3 Reference</th>
<th>4 Marginal Gain</th>
<th>5 Heavy Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trump vote share</td>
<td>87.0%</td>
<td>83.5%</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## Table 8: Cluster-Membership and Trump Vote Share by Race, Income, and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Non-White</th>
<th>Low Income</th>
<th>High Income</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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<td>Intercept (Reference)</td>
<td>-.228**(0.428)</td>
<td>4.235**(.729)</td>
<td>-3.365***(.526)</td>
<td>-1.481*.0866)</td>
<td>-3.750***(.544)</td>
<td>-2.355***(.460)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clusters</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Loss</td>
<td>1.672***(.216)</td>
<td>2.480***(.341)</td>
<td>1.858***(.201)</td>
<td>1.564***(.277)</td>
<td>2.543***(.246)</td>
<td>1.753***(.195)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal loss</td>
<td>1.553***(.256)</td>
<td>0.837*(.422)</td>
<td>1.346***(.241)</td>
<td>1.134***(.271)</td>
<td>1.824***(.261)</td>
<td>1.384***(.230)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal gain</td>
<td>-.333* (.180)</td>
<td>0.111*(.442)</td>
<td>-0.554*(.290)</td>
<td>-1.297***(.241)</td>
<td>0.016 (.225)</td>
<td>-0.430*(.241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Gain</td>
<td>-3.308***(.284)</td>
<td>-0.558*(.448)</td>
<td>-0.223***(.317)</td>
<td>-3.766***(.369)</td>
<td>-2.700***(.316)</td>
<td>-2.485***(.312)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.617***(.134)</td>
<td>0.454*(.235)</td>
<td>0.418**(.168)</td>
<td>0.721***(.168)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.005(.004)</td>
<td>0.000(.007)</td>
<td>0.001(.004)</td>
<td>-0.003(.005)</td>
<td>-0.005(.005)</td>
<td>-0.003(.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.110 (.074)</td>
<td>-0.060(.122)</td>
<td>-0.000(.107)</td>
<td>-0.156(.172)</td>
<td>0.076(.094)</td>
<td>0.082(.085)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>log(Income)</td>
<td>-0.327***(.096)</td>
<td>0.290*(.159)</td>
<td>0.032(.112)</td>
<td>-0.214*(.121)</td>
<td>0.181(.117)</td>
<td>-0.459***(.112)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.418**(.141)</td>
<td>0.854***(.249)</td>
<td>0.520**(.168)</td>
<td>0.485**(.187)</td>
<td>0.566**(.181)</td>
<td>0.506**(.165)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1.227***(.137)</td>
<td>0.628**(.276)</td>
<td>0.875***(.178)</td>
<td>1.352***(.179)</td>
<td>1.062***(.168)</td>
<td>1.280***(.178)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>2.227***(.192)</td>
<td>2.251***(.220)</td>
<td>2.388***(.212)</td>
<td>2.236***(.195)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>1615.864</td>
<td>558.484</td>
<td>1029.973</td>
<td>1052.029</td>
<td>1044.791</td>
<td>1158.672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>1677.435</td>
<td>608.856</td>
<td>1092.097</td>
<td>1114.994</td>
<td>1101.362</td>
<td>1216.729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviance</td>
<td>1546.008</td>
<td>514.631</td>
<td>994.480</td>
<td>984.016</td>
<td>957.824</td>
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<td>Num. obs.</td>
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<td>720</td>
<td>1309</td>
<td>1404</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>1448</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001; Based on logit regression analyses. Standard errors in parentheses.
NOTES

1 Acknowledgments: While completing this dissertation, I have received a great deal of support, encouragement, and advice from my professors and mentors at LSE. First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Sara Hobolt, whose substantive expertise was invaluable and whose enthusiasm for the topic motivated me to find ways to solve the methodological difficulties I experienced along the way. In addition, special thanks go to Dr. Joe Greenwood-Hau who has been a key source of support, encouragement, and friendship. I would also like to thank my teachers and mentors at the LSE Government Department. Dr. Florian Foos, Dr. Sarah Brierley, Dr. Joseph Leigh, and Dr. David Woodruff — your commitment to helping young researchers like myself develop the skills necessary to become Political Scientists made writing this dissertation possible. Last but not least, thank you to my family and friends: Oma, Mama, Papa, Gerhart, Anna, Joe, Ilse, Luisa, Höller, Ingrid, Annemarie, Sharon — thank you for your continued support.

2 These include unemployment, whether the country is generally on the right track, and whether there is a higher degree of social mobility now than 20 years ago.

3 These include the change in total population, median household income, and share of population living in poverty. Ideally, one would include other variables capturing additional aspects of relative economic and cultural deprivation. Unfortunately, due to data constraints, doing so extends beyond the scope of this study. Future research should aim to close this gap.

4 Respondents’ assessments of the following were used as the basis for these analyses: whether the country is generally on the right track; respondent’s household financial situation now compared to a year ago; the state of the economy now compared to a year ago; unemployment now compared to a year ago; and the level of social mobility now compared to 20 years ago.

5 It should be noted that this is the only variable included in the ANES dataset that captures respondents’ assessment of cultural rather than socio-economic change. The fact that this variable is highly correlated with the overall loss score lends credence to the general tenor of this paper that both economic and cultural factors matter.

6 The full regression results are included in the Appendix (see Table 7).

7 The full results are included in Table 8 and Figure 9 in the Appendix.