

**Waiting for Trump:
The Move to the Right of White Working-Class Men, 1968-2016**

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How did Donald Trump win the presidency? The many explanations for his unexpected victory can usefully be classified by the dimension of time. FBI Director Comey's 11th hour letter to Congress, Hillary Clinton's failure to target Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, and Russia's promotion of fake news are potential explanations for the final vote of a closely divided electorate. A second type of explanation looks at long-run trends rather than campaign events to address why the electorate was closely divided in the first place, particularly given Donald Trump's out-of-the-mainstream candidacy.

With exit polls showing the demographic core of Trump's electorate was white working-class men, analysts have been debating the relative power of two longer-term phenomena: economic displacement and cultural backlash (e.g., Beauchamp 2016; Cohn 2016). Economic displacement describes the declining wages and diminished job opportunities for men and women who lack a bachelor's degree. Cultural backlash refers to the fallout from feelings of dispossession, a deep-seated sense among some white voters that immigration, racial policies, feminism, and political correctness have changed the country in ways that erode their traditional values and diminish their status. This fear over the country's direction helped make nationalist and populist responses to the impact of globalization appealing and generated support for Trump.

Using contemporary and historical survey data, exit polls, and economic statistics, we show that while both themes were particularly visible in 2016, each has been present for decades. These same data suggest that between economic and cultural explanations of the white working-class vote, cultural resentment was likely the stronger political motivator in 2016.

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We develop this argument as follows. In Section 1, we put the white working-class vote for Trump in historical context by examining trends in party identification and presidential voting among white voters of different educational levels. We show that whites with less than a college education, our proxy for class, began migrating towards the Republican Party more than 30 years ago. In Section 2, we examine the argument that this long-run trend was driven by economic displacement. We find no clear evidence that macroeconomic outcomes and party control of the presidency either slowed or accelerated the shift of white working-class voters to the Republican Party. In Section 3, we examine the argument that long-run trends were driven by cultural backlash. We show that there is a substantial and longstanding educational divide on attitudes towards race and immigration policy among white males, particularly within the Democratic Party. In Section 4, we summarize our results and comment on their implications for the political parties.

The White Working-Class Vote

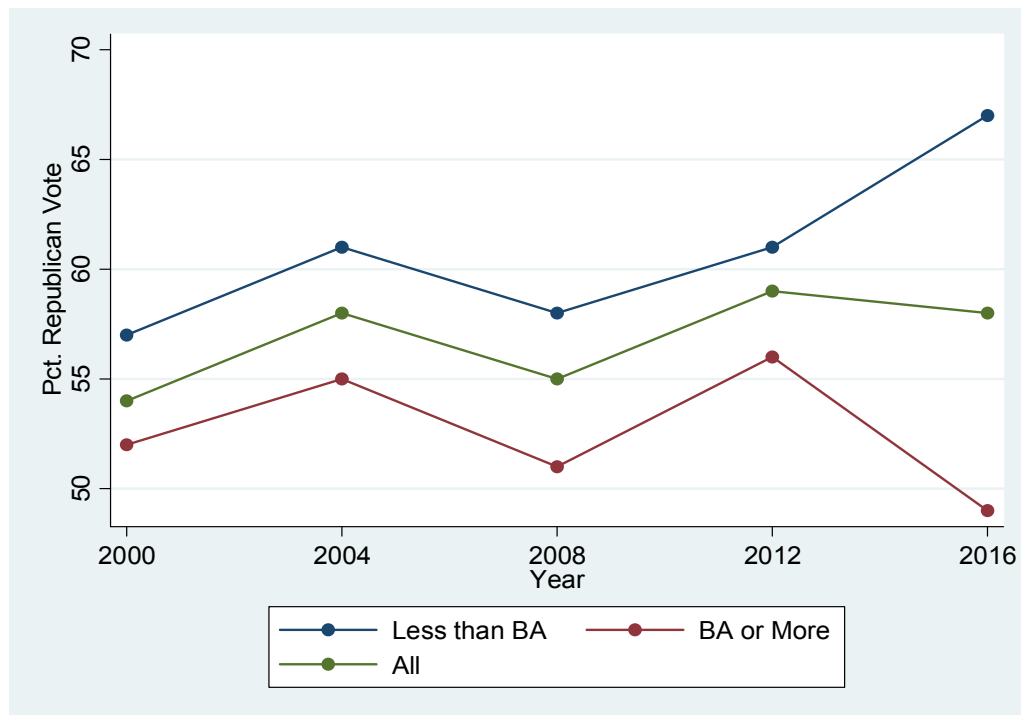
As widely reported following the November 8 election, white voters without a bachelors' degree—referred to hereafter as white working-class voters—were central to Donald Trump's victory. However, their role in his election was one of degree, not one of kind. As shown in Figure 1, a majority of white voters in all recent presidential elections has favored the Republican candidate. Among these voters, support for Republican candidates has been stronger among white working-class voters than among white voters with a bachelor's degree or more—hereafter BA+. The educational divergence was particularly marked in 2016 as Trump's 67 percent share of the white working-class vote was the highest Republican share of this group since the Nixon landslide of 1972, while his 49 percent share of the white BA+ vote was the lowest since 1996.² This “education” gap in support for the Republican candidate was the largest among white working-class males (henceforth WWCM), the group we focus on here (Malone 2016).

While the magnitude of the educational divide among white voters in 2016 was remarkable, when placed in historical context it is not a new phenomenon. Whites without a bachelor's degree have been gradually shifting from the Democratic to the Republican Party since the 1960s, as the parties have evolved along class and racial lines. In the South, partisan differences over civil rights in the 1960s engendered a realignment of party power in which Democratic dominance eroded and Republicans gained support among southern whites. By 2016, Republicans dominated southern politics and Democratic voting in the region was heavily dependent on African Americans. Outside the South, whites without a bachelor's degree have also moved towards the Republican Party; Nixon's appeal to midwestern Catholics and Reagan's patriotic rhetoric were two major catalysts for these movements.

To examine these trends, we look at both party identification and presidential voting patterns, comparing WWCM and white males with at least a BA. Among white working-class males, the shift toward Republican Party identification began with Ronald Reagan's landslide re-election in 1984, and continued into the early 2000s. By 2004, about half of all white males without a BA self-identified as Republicans, a rise of 17 percent from the late seventies. Partisanship among college-educated white males was much more stable over this period.

² Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/11/08/us/politics/election-exit-polls.html>

Figure 1
Percent of White Voters (men and women)
voting for Republican Presidential Candidate



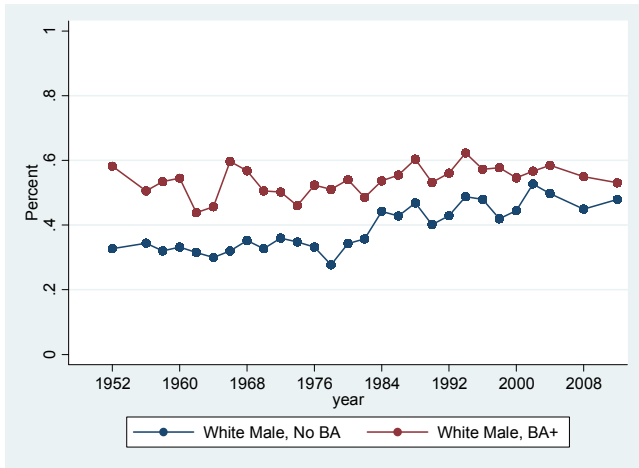
Each data point represents the percent of white voters voting for the Republican presidential candidate (as a proportion of all votes cast by the sub group). Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/11/08/us/politics/election-exit-polls.html>

Presidential voting among WWCM shifted towards the Republican Party earlier and more sharply than Republican partisan identification. From an average of 50 percent between 1952 and 1968, the Republican presidential candidate’s share of the two-party vote among this group skyrocketed to over 70 percent in Richard Nixon’s 1972 landslide re-election, and then averaged 58 percent in the presidential elections since then, dropping below 50 percent only in the 1992 election when Ross Perot ran a strong third-party race. Over the last four presidential elections, an average of 60 percent of WWCM has voted for the Republican candidate.

The consistent majorities for Republican presidential candidates among WWCM in the 1970s and 1980s—despite the roughly equal split between Democratic and Republican identifiers in this group—reflected higher partisan defection rates among blue collar Democrats, with the largest gaps between party identification and actual defections in presidential voting occurring in the 1972 Nixon and 1984 Reagan landslides.

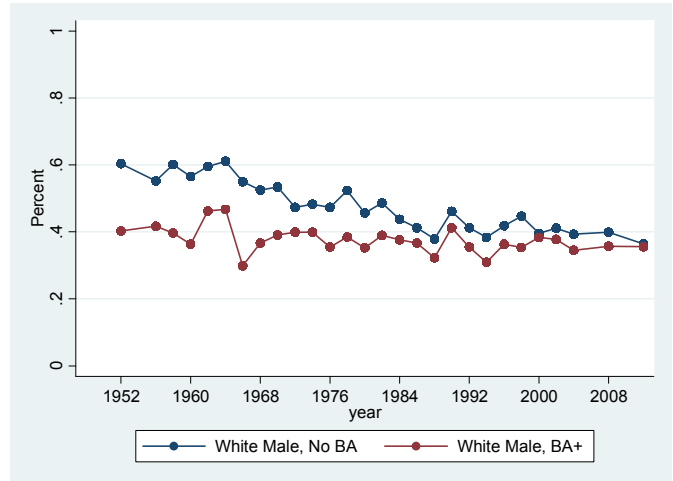
Given this historical context, perhaps Donald Trump’s 72 percent vote share among white men without a bachelor’s degree should not have been so surprising. About half of this demographic group has identified as Republican for more than a decade and has voted strongly Republican in every election save one since the 1970s.

Figure 2A
Pct. Republican Party Identification, White Males



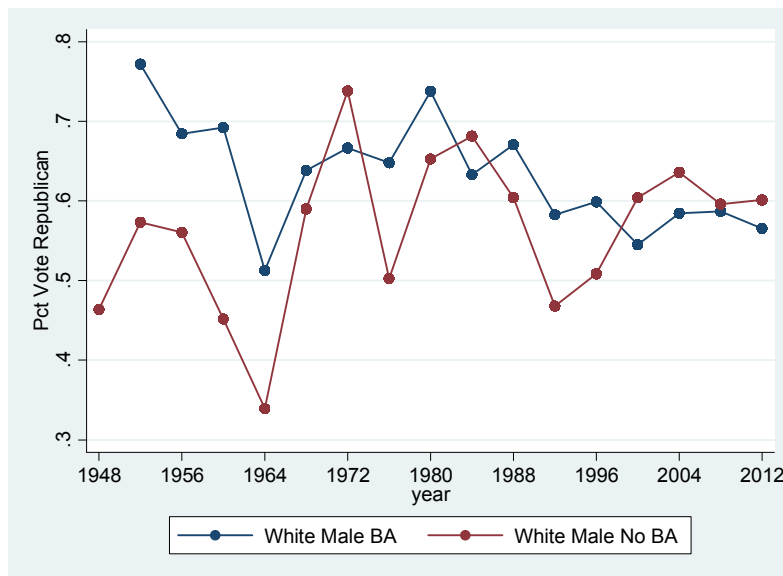
Data points reflect total percent of each sub-group responding they identify with the Republican party. Includes respondents who are Independent, but lean to either party. Source: ANES.

Figure 2B
Pct. Democratic Party Identification, White Males



Data points reflect total percent of each sub-group responding they identify with the Republican party. Includes respondents who are Independent, but lean to either party. Source: ANES.

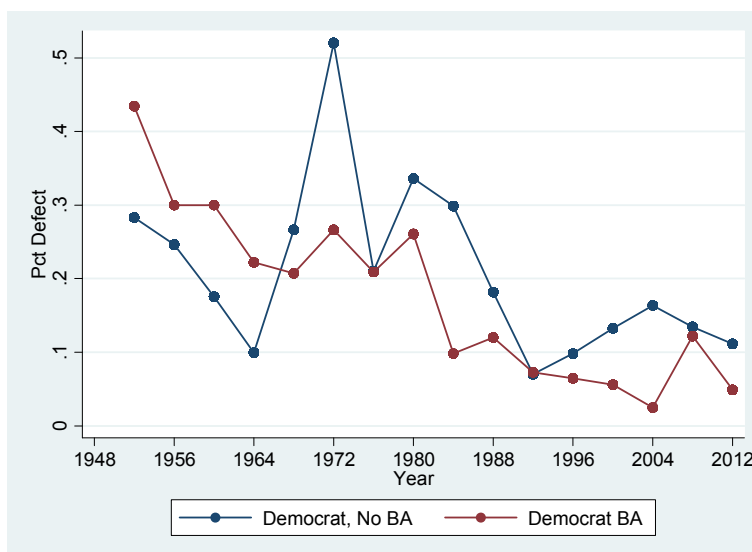
Figure 3
Percent Republican Two-Party Vote Share, WWCM



Data points reflect the two-party support among white males. Source: ANES.

Speculatively, one might argue that Trump differed from preceding Republican candidates by explicitly marrying the themes of economic displacement and cultural backlash. Reagan, for example, spoke of American greatness and lashed out at the politically correct of his era. But economic nationalism—Build American, Buy American—was not at the core of his rhetoric. Nor

Figure 4
Percent of Democrats Voting for Republican Candidate



Data points reflect percent of Democratic identifiers who voted for the Republican presidential candidate, by education group. Source: ANES.

did he violate and rebuke norms of elite discourse or women and ethnic minorities in Trump’s fashion.

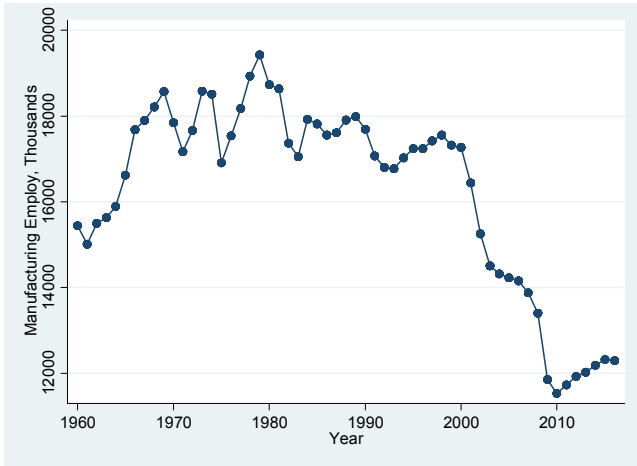
Economic Displacement

Having presented basic data on the long-term pro-Republican shift in party identification and voting patterns among white working-class males, we next look at the evidence that Trump’s rise in WWCM support relative to recent Republican candidates was catalyzed by economic displacement. We look for a connection between rising or declining economic circumstances and party occupancy of the White House. Specifically, did the WWCM move toward the Republicans because times were better under GOP presidents and worse under Democrats?

The data do not provide consistent support for this expectation. Indeed, in the decade preceding Ronald Reagan’s 1980 election, the latter half under Democratic control, a falling U.S. dollar had stimulated U.S. exports and created a demand bubble for U.S. blue collar labor.³ The downside of this development was consumer inflation averaging eight percent per year in the 1970s. By the time Reagan took office, Paul Volcker, the chairman of the Federal Reserve, had a mandate to use tight money policies to break inflation: during Reagan’s first two years in office, Volcker’s policies produced a deep recession and the unemployment rate among workers with a high school education rose from five to ten percent.

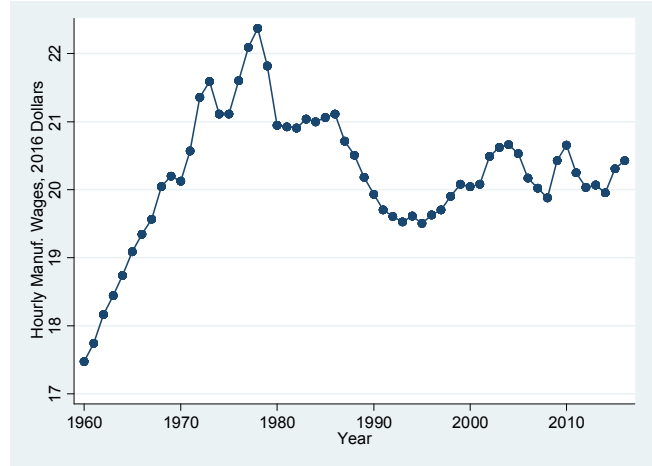
³ This history is detailed in Levy, *The New Dollars and Dreams* (1999). Blue collar labor demand was also stimulated by two OPEC oil embargos that boosted U.S. energy production and a worldwide food shortage in the early 1970s that boosted U.S. agricultural production.

Figure 5
Manufacturing Employment, in Thousands



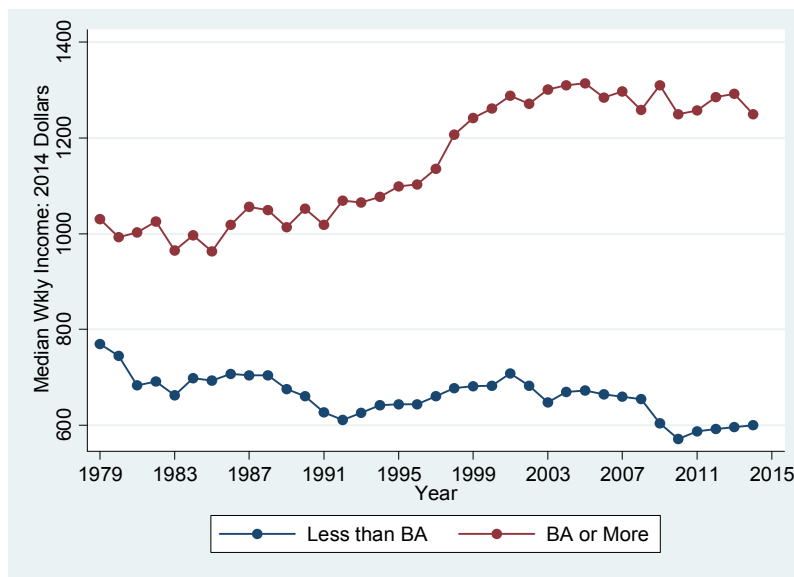
Source: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

Figure 6
Manufacturing Hourly Wages, 2016 Dollars



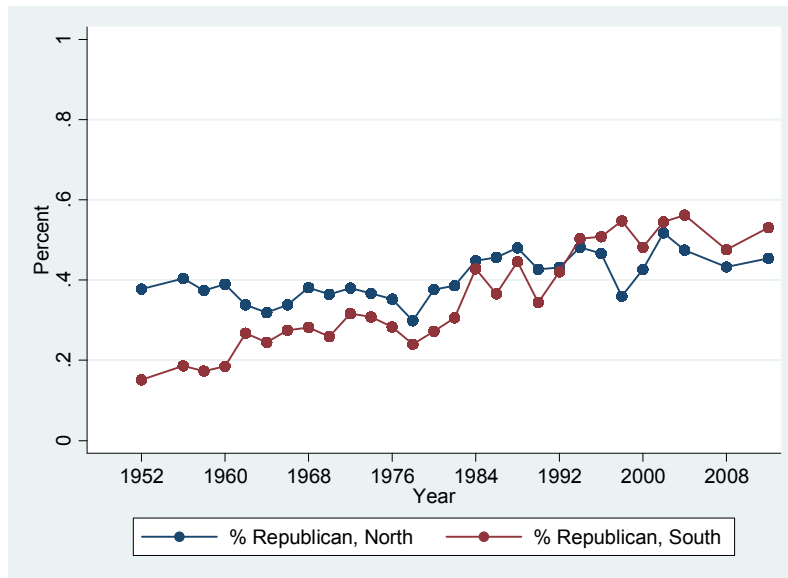
Source: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

Figure 7
Median Weekly Earnings 35-44 Year Old White Males
(includes zero earners)



Wages are adjusted to 2014 dollars. Source: Current Population Survey, Monthly Outgoing Rotation Group.

Figure 8
Percent Republican Party Identification:
WWCM, Less than BA, by Region



Percent Republican identification, by region, among WWCM with less than a Bachelor's degree. Source: ANES.

The 1981–82 recession hit unionized labor in durable manufacturing industries particularly hard, creating the Midwest rustbelt.⁴ While manufacturing employment staged a partial recovery in 1983 (Figure 5), output was reviving outside traditional manufacturing centers in lower-wage, nonunionized plants, resulting in stagnant and then declining manufacturing wages over the rest of the decade (Figure 6).

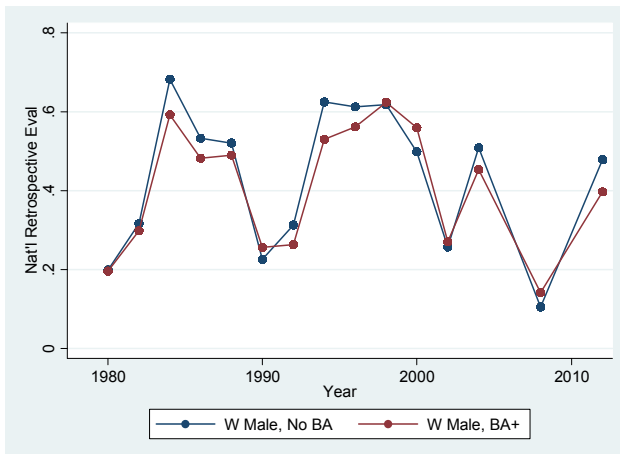
The fall in real manufacturing wages was part of a continuous decline in white working-class male wages that began in 1980 and has continued up to the present—with one short exception of modest increases during the late 1990s dot-com bubble years when Bill Clinton was president. However, white working-class wage gains in this period were much smaller than the gains for those with a bachelor's degree or more (Figure 7).⁵ In sum, the economic distress of white working-class men has been a continuous phenomenon since the end of the 1970s, with the only brief interruption occurring under a Democratic president.

The apparent contradiction between the dismal trend in real income gains under Republican presidents and increasing WWCM support for Republican candidates is a major puzzle. One answer could be regional variation, that is, perhaps the partisan shift among WWCM after the late seventies was solely a story of change in the South. However, the data rule out this explanation. The compositional change in party identification among white working-class males in the North was almost as large as the shift in the South during the eighties (see Figure 8). The more recent

⁴ Beyond the recession itself, high interest rates increased the dollar's value in international markets and made U.S. exports more expensive.

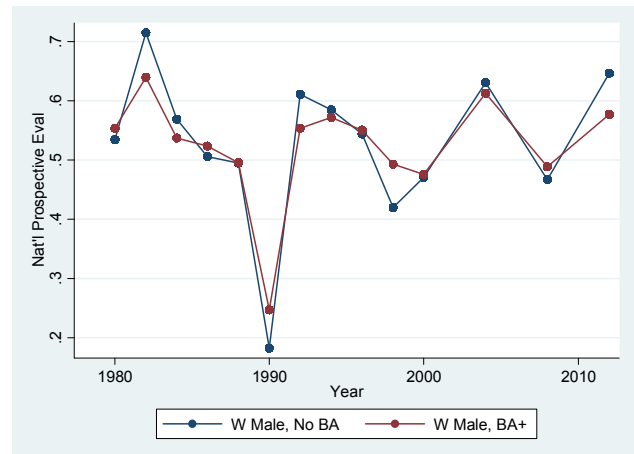
⁵ Medians are calculated including zero earners to capture declining male labor force participation during this period.

Figure 9A
National Retrospective Economic Evaluations



Average retrospective evaluations of the national economy, by education group. Higher values represent more positive economic evaluations. Source: ANES

Figure 9B
National Prospective Economic Evaluations



Average prospective evaluations of the national economy, by education group. Higher values represent more positive economic evaluations. Source: ANES

gap between the two groups reflects continued change in the South *after* 1990, when Republican identification in the North leveled off.

A different potential explanation for the puzzle of growing WWCM support for Republicans despite hard times under their reign is that changes in political outlook are based on micro-level *perceptions* of one’s personal financial situation and the state of the national economy, rather than objective measures of macroeconomic performance.

There is a large scholarly literature on this topic. That incumbents suffer in bad economic times is well-established (e.g., Key 1966; Kramer 1971; Fiorina 1981; Lewis-Beck 1986; Lenz 2012). However, there remain different views about whether this regularity in voting behavior reflects subjective feelings about one’s personal circumstances or broader assessments about the trajectory of the economy as a whole (e.g., Kinder and Kiewiet 1979; Kinder and Kiewiet 1981; Kramer 1983). Here we compare both the personal and sociotropic economic perceptions of WWCM with their college-educated counterparts.

Since 1962 the ANES has asked respondents how their personal financial situation has changed over the past year, and how they expect it will change over the coming year—both items with three response categories (“better,” “same,” or “worse”). Beginning in 1980 the ANES added questions about the national economy in the same format. There are thus retrospective and prospective questions for the personal domain and for the national economy. (In the charts below we have rescaled responses so that worse is 0, the same is 0.5 and better is

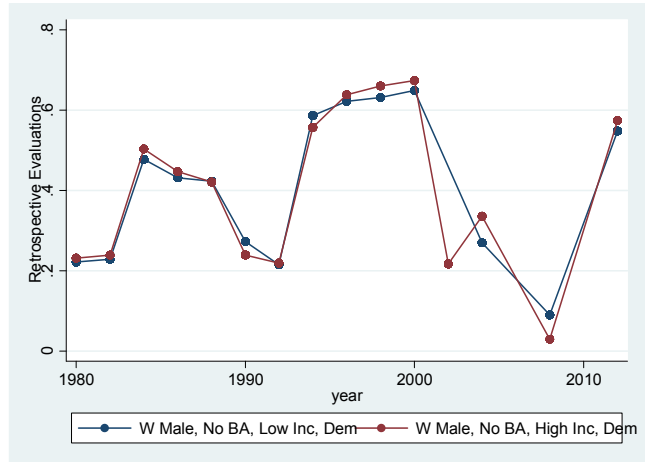
Contrary to the expectation of distinctively negative reports among white working-class males after the 1970s, on three out of four of these economic items, the means of WWCM’s economic evaluations have been substantially similar to the means of white males with a college degree over the entire time series. On ratings of the national economy, the means of WWCMs’ retrospective and prospective evaluations have been marginally lower, but still very close to the average of white males with a college degree since these questions were introduced in 1980. More-

Figure 10A
Reps: Nat'l Retrospective Economic Evaluations



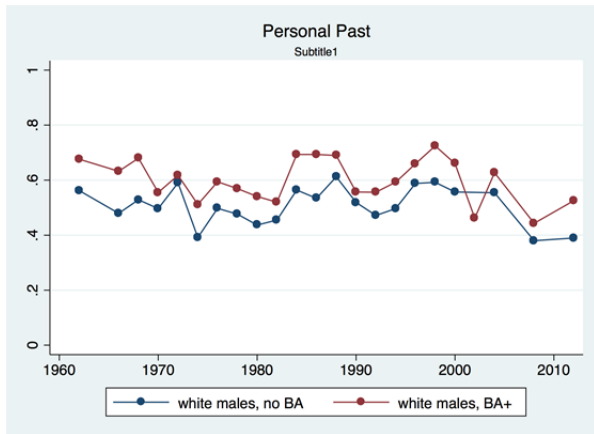
Average retrospective evaluations of the national economy, by education group, Republicans only. Higher values represent more positive economic evaluations. Source: ANES

Figure 10B
 Dems: Nat'l Retrospective Economic Evaluations



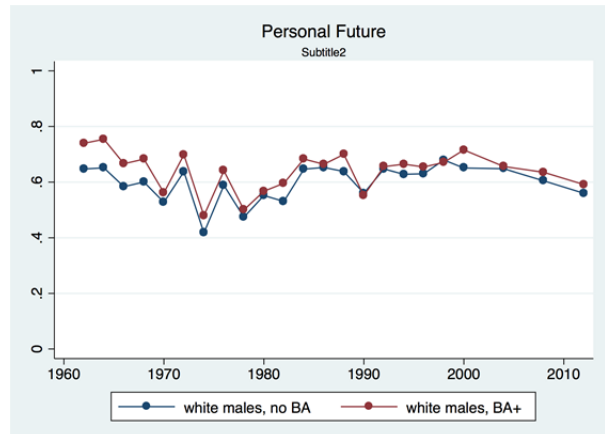
Average retrospective evaluations of the national economy, by education group, Democrats only. Higher values represent more positive economic evaluations. Source: ANES

Figure 11A
Personal Retrospective Economic Evaluations



Average retrospective evaluations of personal financial situation, by education group. Higher values represent more positive economic evaluations. Source: ANES

Figure 11B
Personal Prospective Economic Evaluations



Average retrospective evaluations of personal financial situation, by education group. Higher values represent more positive economic evaluations. Source: ANES

over, changes in these two groups' ratings of the national economy have closely tracked each other over time.

In addition, the strong positive correlation between subjective evaluations of the national economy and actual macroeconomic conditions is almost identical among white working-class males and white males with college degrees within partisan groups (Figure 11). Furthermore, partisan bias in national economic evaluations, the tendency for favorable evaluations to be more

prevalent when one's party controls the White House, is also almost identical across our comparison economic groups. Perceived differences emerge between party identification, but not income group.

On the personal financial situation items, the mean of WWCMs' retrospective judgments have been substantively lower than among non-WWCMs over the entire time series. However, this difference between classes has only fluctuated modestly within a narrow range since 1964. There is no sign in this item of a meaningful worsening in WWCMs' perceptions of their economic fortunes relative to white males with a BA+ after the late 1970s: roughly the same proportions of WWCMs rate their recent financial situation as "worse," "same," and "better" in each decade. The exceptions that stand out are the 2008 and 2012 surveys covering the Great Recession and weak economic recovery, when WWCMs mean ratings were the lowest in over 30 years. These latter two data points arguably are evidence that economics was the catalyst for Trump's white working-class support.

However, when we compare respondents' expectations for their personal financial situation over the next 12 months, the mean scores of the two groups are substantially similar over the entire time series. In fact, the difference in means gets *smaller* after 1970, even though the relative real income growth of the two groups diverges after the late 1970s, with WWCMs lagging. Note also that aggregate responses on this item show very little variation over time after 1990, even though we know that a greater share of working-class Americans suffered declines in real incomes during subsequent recessions.

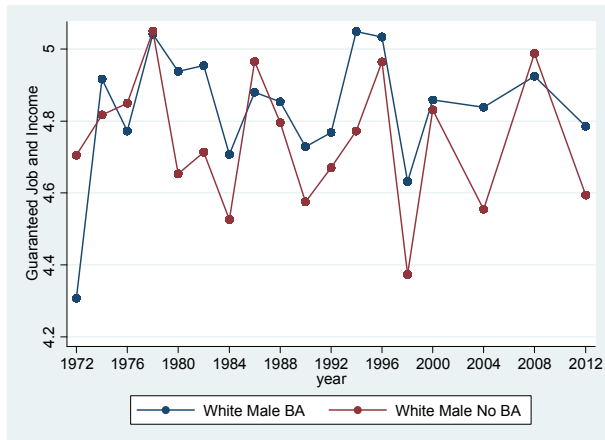
Whatever explains the gap between economic reality and the more positive responses to the survey items, WWCM feelings about the economy have not differed much from those of their more educated counterparts. Going by these particular measures at least, there were not a longstanding set of attitudes *distinctive* to WWCM that could be activated by a populist candidate like Trump. The one exception is lower ratings of personal finances over the past year among WWCM, but responses to this item do not worsen relative to whites with a BA+ after the 1970s, as their divergence in real economic fortunes would suggest.

Another possibility is that WWCM moved toward the Republicans because of preferences regarding the role of government as the GOP moved to the right. We use two policy questions from the ANES to examine these policy attitudes: the first asks whether the government should provide more services, even if it means increased spending versus providing fewer services in order to reduce spending; the second asks whether the government should guarantee jobs and income or let people get ahead on their own. Both items are coded on a 1 to 7 scale, with higher values representing more conservative positions.

On guaranteed jobs and income, WWCM are *to the left* of those with a BA+ in most years, and do not show any trend toward greater conservatism over time (Figure 12A). In contrast, on the government spending and services item, the mean of WWCM self-placements swings from its most liberal to its most conservative position from 2004 to 2012 (Figure 13A). So though this item also fails to show a longer-term trend toward more conservative attitudes on government spending, it does provide a second piece of suggestive evidence that more recent developments in economic conditions and policy preferences help explain Trump's success among WWCM (though it is difficult to say whether Trump's positions on government services and spending are liberal or conservative, despite his preference for cutting taxes).

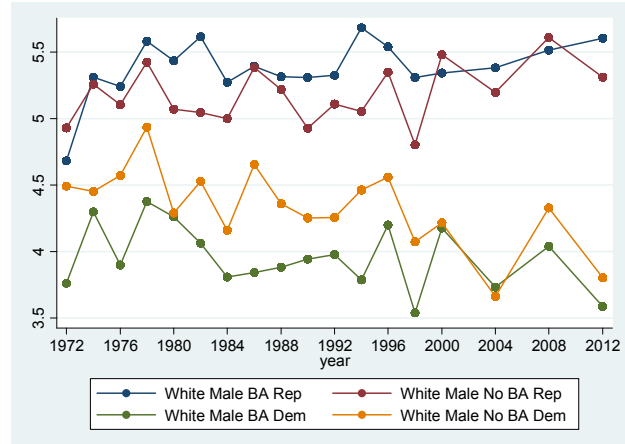
By party, Republicans with more education are more conservative on these policy items. Among Democrats, the reverse is true: WWCM are more conservative than those with a BA+, particularly on the guaranteed government jobs and income item. These intraparty divides are

Figure 12A
Govt Guaranteed Jobs and Income



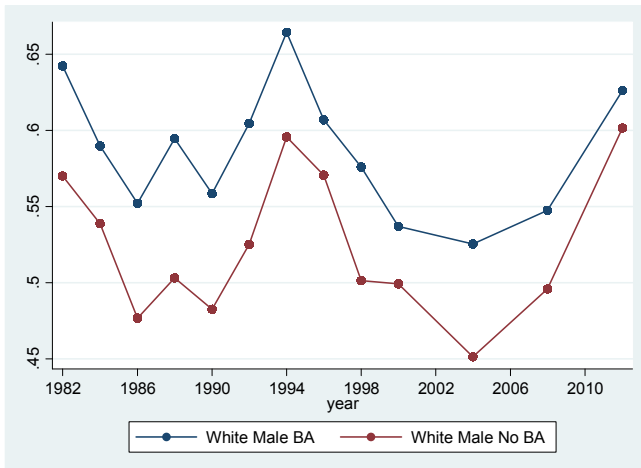
Respondent attitudes towards whether government should guarantee jobs and incomes. Higher values represent more conservative scores. Source ANES.

Figure 12B
Govt Guaranteed Jobs and Income, by Party



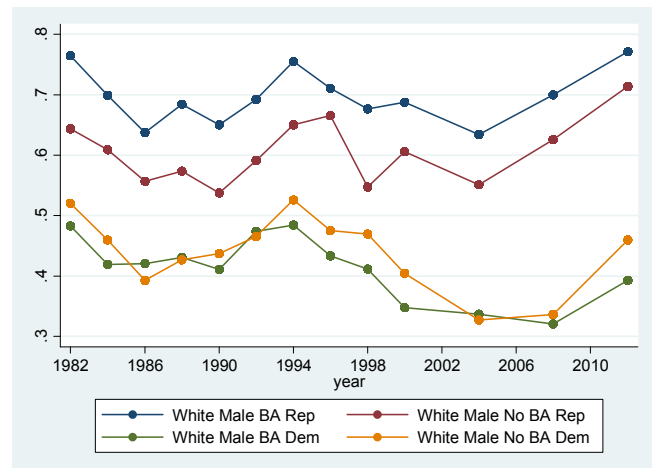
Respondent attitudes towards whether government should guarantee jobs and incomes, by party. Higher values represent more conservative scores. Source ANES.

Figure 13A
Govt Services and Spending



Respondent attitudes towards whether government should increase services/spending. Higher values represent more conservative scores. Source ANES.

Figure 13B
Govt Services and Spending, by party



Respondent attitudes towards whether government should increase services/spending, by party. Higher values represent more conservative scores. Source ANES.

consistent with Zaller (1992) in that individuals with more education are more likely to know and adopt the policy positions of their preferred political party (i.e., to know “what goes with what”), as well as with the finding that self-interest drives policy preferences only under very specific circumstances (Citrin and Green 1990)—hence white working-class Democrats reporting more *conservative* attitudes than their co-partisans with a BA+.

Over the time-series of both items, WWCM are consistently more willing to spend than their more educated counterparts, providing a potentially more receptive ear for Trump’s populist message on federal spending (e.g., pledging no cuts to social security).

Research on attitudes toward government spending suggest that the positions of working-class whites are more favorable to spending on benefits that are distributed generally and more hostile to targeted benefits, toward the “undeserving,” frequently defined in racialized terms (Gilens 1999). However, most recently Tesler (2016) shows that a much broader range of government policies became “racialized” during the Obama presidency, which might help to explain the sharp conservative swing in WWCM attitudes on government services and spending between 2004 and 2012 (discussed further below). In any case, it is worth noting that Trump’s hybrid rhetoric on government spending might have been attractive to WWCM Democrats with less liberal spending.

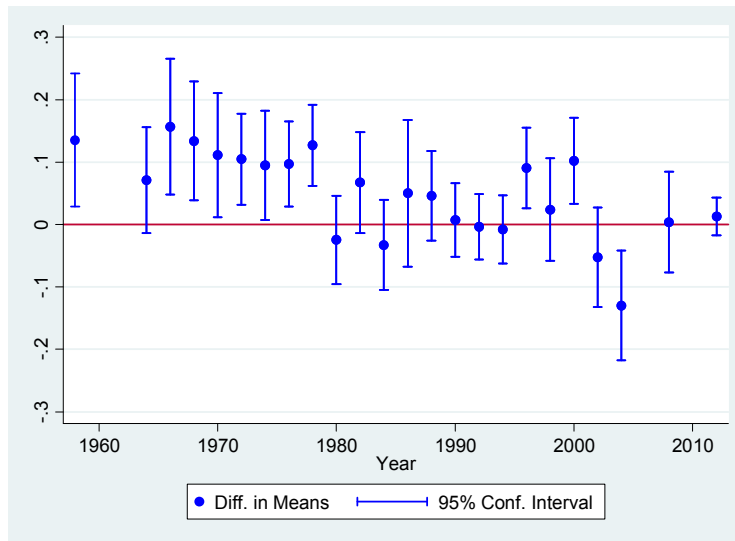
Given that WWCM seemed a ready source of support for the Republicans, it is worth pointing out what differed in Trump’s economic appeal to this group. Not only did he focus on the need to increase manufacturing jobs, but he framed this as bringing these jobs back from abroad. Unlike his Republican predecessors he targeted free trade and trade with China in particular. Recent work by David Autor and his colleagues indicates that countries with higher labor market exposure to import competition from China were more likely to support Trump than less exposed areas (Autor, et al. 2017). It is reasonable to speculate that the ground had been prepared for WWCM defections from the Democrats earlier, not primarily for economic reasons, but the 2016 campaign, coming after a steep recession, a surge in Chinese imports, and decades of stagnant incomes and derivative social costs among WWCM made Trump’s anti-trade nationalist appeals resonate.

Cultural Backlash

It often is argued that economic insecurity leads to the scapegoating of outsiders and the blame game sweeps up the establishment, minorities, and foreigners. Economic explanations can incorporate racism, xenophobia, and populism as consequences of economic loss. Cultural backlash explanations have a broader purview, however, for they encompass the attitudes of people who were unaffected by economic downturns. In the 2016 American presidential election, Trump tapped into fear of what America was becoming—less white, less powerful, and less morally secure. He tapped into the anger of those who said they were tired of being mocked as unsophisticated and racist, angry at being left behind, and resentful of the largesse bestowed upon both the rich and the array of leftist identity groups. Underlying these diverse complaints was anger against social changes that elevated moral autonomy and self-expression over security and traditional values.

Trump and other populists attack cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism in the name of nationalism and cultural stability. On this account, the political realignment of the white working-class stems from a rejection of the transformations first witnessed in the 1960s: changes in racial policy, changes in the role of women and the conception of the family, demographic change due to immigration, and changes in how one is allowed to speak. Taken together, these changes bespeak a new world view or moral order among those feeling threatened by change, an order that emphasizes security, tighter local ties, religiosity, and unabashed patriotism (e.g., Inglehart and Norris 2016). When a candidate makes these concerns salient, people experiencing a sense of cultural threat may be mobilized to act to defend their “way of life.” Below we consider the sup-

Figure 14
Difference in Means, by Education Group: Trust Index



Data points reflect difference in means of the trust index, by education group. Higher values represent higher trust. Those with more a BA or more are coded 1, those with less than a BA coded 0. Source: ANES.

port over time among WWCM on several attitudinal dimensions figuring in the cultural backlash explanation.

Trust in Government

A persistent theme in the explanation of support for Donald Trump is populism, an animus against elites and established institutions. One manifestation of this outlook is hostility to established institutions that are viewed as undermining the rightful power of “the people.” Cynicism about the motives of government officials is one indicator of this antagonism toward elites. Since 1958, ANES has asked people whether they believed “government is run by a few big interests or for the benefit of all” (introduced in 1962), and “much of the time one can trust the government in Washington to do what is right.” Americans trust in government has fluctuated with the “nature of the times,” declining during economic bad times, protracted wars that don’t go well, and major scandals such as Watergate, and improving when the economy gets better. Perceptions of government performance on matters most people value is a critical driver of overall trust in government. In addition, there is a partisan component to trust; Republicans are more trusting when their party controls the presidency and the same holds true for Democrats. (e.g., Citrin 1974; Citrin and Green 1986; Levi and Stoker 2000; Hetherington and Rudolph 2015).

Variations in trust indicate a dominant “period effect,” with most groups moving in the same direction, albeit at different rates, in response to national events. On the two items we examine, white working-class males’ attitudes towards government are somewhat more negative than those of the more educated counterparts, but the trends move together over time. Prior to the mid-1970s, white males without a BA expressed negative affect towards government more fre-

quently than their more educated counterparts. In the wake of the Watergate Scandal in 1973–74, however, the gap between classes closes. Figure 14 reflects a simple difference in means by education group using a “trust index” (average of both ANES measures). White males with a formal education are more trustful until 1980, at which point the class difference fluctuates around zero until the mid-1990s. In addition, the strong correlation between trust in government and macro-economic conditions has been almost identical in the two groups.

For example, on the question of whether “government is run by a few big interests or for the benefit of all,” between 1962 and 1974 the share of white working-class males saying “a few big interests” was on average 14 percentage points higher than the share of white men with a BA+ (59 percent vs. 45 percent). However, since 1976 this difference has averaged six percentage points, and has been larger than 10 percentage points in only two years: 1988 and 2000. In the last two surveys, the cross-class gap has been roughly seven percentage points. Trends in cynicism about popular control and the differences between economic classes are similar among Democrats, Republicans, and self-identified Independents.

On the question asking how often the government can be trusted to “do the right thing,” a similar pattern emerges. Between 1976 and 2012, the share of white males without a BA saying the government does the right thing “some of the time” averaged 68 percent, compared to 64 percent among nonwhite men with a BA degree. In the two most recent surveys these shares have been almost identical. Within partisan groups, class differences are not noticeably different and mainly reflect the impact of which party controlled the presidency. Perhaps because mistrust of government is a diffuse orientation into which many discontents flow, the gap between the two classes of white males is far smaller than the difference in support for Trump.

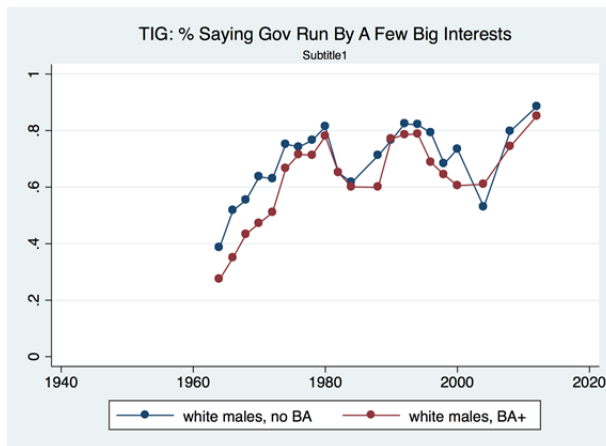
On items measuring a person’s sense of political efficacy, similar trends emerge. The ANES asks respondents as to their agreement with “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does,” and “Public officials don’t care much what people like me think.” WWCM are more likely to agree with either statement, but both groups respond with decreasing levels of efficacy. Breaking responses down by partisan group, there is little intraclass differences on these questions in either party.

Race and Immigration

Two revolutions in the mid-1960s transformed the structure of partisanship in American politics. The civil rights movement led to party realignment in the South and a clear racial divide in party identification and voting. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 eliminated the national origins quotas for admissions and made family reunification the primary basis for allocating visas. This has led to a wave of immigration, mainly composed of Hispanics, especially from Mexico, and Asians. These groups have become bastions of the Democratic Party and, as beneficiaries of affirmative action policies and ethnicity-based appeals often labeled “identity politics,” a potential focus of resentment for whites. Trump’s campaign included overt opposition to Mexican immigrants, calls to limit Muslim immigration to the United States and calls on African Americans to defect from policies that “ravaged” their neighborhoods. His critics argued that his “Make America Great Again,” was code for “Make America White Again” and provided legitimation for overt displays of antiminority sentiments among his white supporters.

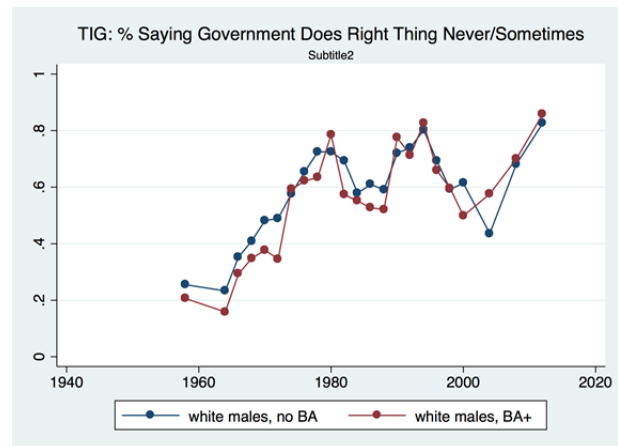
Studies consistently show that education is a strong predictor of racial tolerance and support for a more liberal immigration policy (Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo 1985; Kinder and Kam 2009;

Figure 15A
% Saying Govt Run by a Few Big Interests



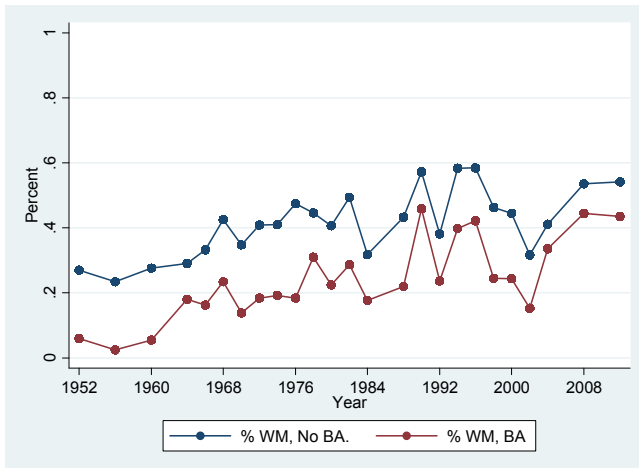
Percent saying they believe government is run by a few big interests. Higher values convey less trust. Source: ANES.

Figure 15B
% Saying Govt Does Right Thing Never/Sometimes



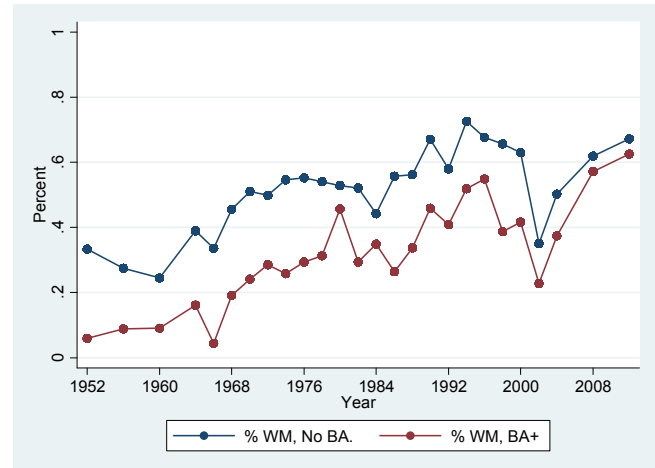
Percent saying they don't trust the government to do the right thing. Higher values convey less trust. Source: ANES.

Figure 16A
People Like Me Don't Have Much Say in Govt



Percent saying people like them don't have much say. Higher values convey less efficacy. Source: ANES.

Figure 16B
Gov't Doesn't Care about People Like Me



Percent saying government doesn't care about people like them. Higher values convey less efficacy. Source: ANES.

Citrin and Sears 2014). Our own comparison of the beliefs of WWCM and their educated counterparts confirm these findings. On every ANES question dealing with race, from the beginning of the time series a meaningfully larger share of white men without a college degree expressed negative affect towards black and other nonwhite Americans than white males with a college degree.

For example, responses to the statement “if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites”—one of the four items in the ANES “racial resentment” battery—are emblematic of the patterns across all of the ANES questions on race. The share of white males

without a BA who somewhat or strongly agreed with this statement averaged 67 percent between 1986 and 2012, compared to an average of 45 percent of white males with a BA+ (Figure 17).

Party differences in racial policy preferences and attitudes toward immigration are also well-established, but the size of the class cleavage in racial attitudes among Democrats over the entire ANES is striking. For example, over the span of the question on the ANES, the share of white male Democrats without a BA agreeing that blacks could be as successful as whites if they “only tried harder” averaged 63 percent, compared to 27 percent of white male Democrats with a college degree. While the share of both groups agreeing with this statement has declined over time, the difference remained substantial in the 2012 survey: fully half of all white male Democrats without a BA agreed, while only one in four white male Democrats with a BA+ agreed. Among Republicans, differences in racial attitudes by class have been a fraction of the difference among Democrats, as the majority of all Republicans expresses “racial resentment” on these ANES items. Among Democrats, class and party pull in opposite directions on racial issues, whereas for Republicans some combination of ideology and prejudice have consistent effects. This large cleavage on race within the Democratic partisans has potentially left the Party vulnerable to a Trump-like presidential candidate for decades.

To examine racial attitudes systematically, we combine the ANES’ four racial resentment items into a standard index (Figure 19). Using this composite measure, the results are the same: Republicans express the most racial resentment, with only modest differences by education, while among Democrats there is a dramatic gap between the racial attitudes of white men without a BA and with a college degree. A key point here is that the class difference in racial attitudes among white male Democrats is not a story limited to the South.⁶ The educational gap among Democrats is similar in both the North and South across the entire time series (Figure 20). As Democratic Party leaders increasingly adopted civil rights policies that took aim at discrimination and favored affirmative action and other policies benefiting minorities, their educated partisans were much more likely to follow their lead than working-class whites (Zaller 1992).

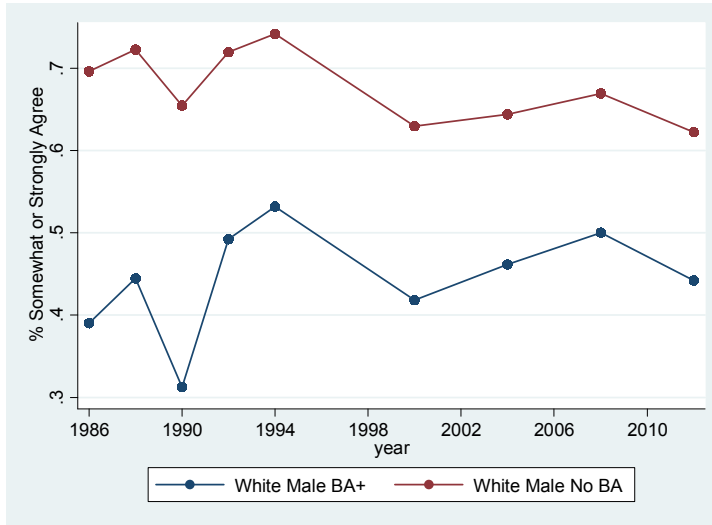
Cultural resentment in the 2016 election often manifested itself in immigration policy, a centerpiece of Trump’s campaign, as well as broader sentiment towards Hispanics.⁷ Here, as a general measure of affect toward Hispanics, we use the ANES “feeling thermometers,” which ask respondents to indicate how “warmly” they feel about a group on a 0 to 100 scale. Higher values represent more positive affect. Figure 21, below, tracks feeling thermometer ratings toward Hispanics broken down by party and education level. Among Republicans, affect toward Hispanics generally increases in the 1990s and early 2000s, before dropping sharply in 2008 and 2012. There is, however, a fairly large intraparty divide on this measure between WWCM Republicans and those with a BA+. Among Democrats, the mean thermometer rating for Hispanics also increased between 1980 and the present, with an education gap of roughly the same size as among Republicans.

A more direct measure of opinion about immigration is the standard “levels” question, which asks whether one favors increasing, decreasing or leaving the level of legal immigration to the United States “the same.” The educational divide is stark: since the ANES first asked this ques-

⁶ One might note that just after the success of achieving voting rights in the South, there was no corresponding success in the push for open housing in Chicago and Cicero.

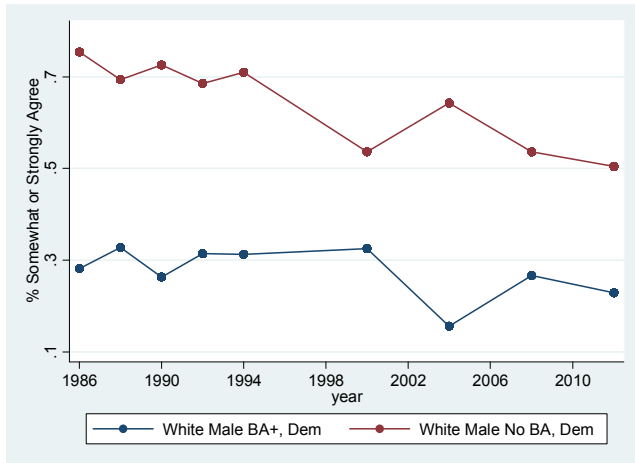
⁷ Immigration policy engages attitudes toward Hispanics, as Trump’s campaign recognized (Brader, Valentino, and Sujay 2008; Abrajano and Hajnal 2017; Citrin and Sears 2014).

Figure 17
Racial Resentment: If Only Blacks Tried Harder



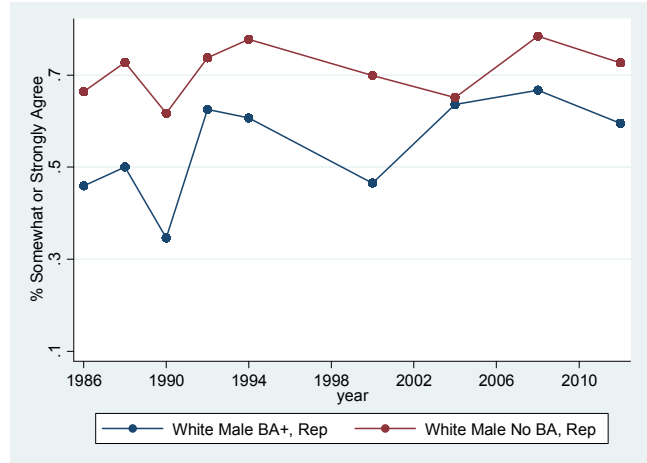
Percent agreeing that if “blacks tried harder” they would be as well off as whites. Higher values represent more racial resentment. Source ANES.

Figure 18A
If Only Blacks Tried Harder, Dem Only



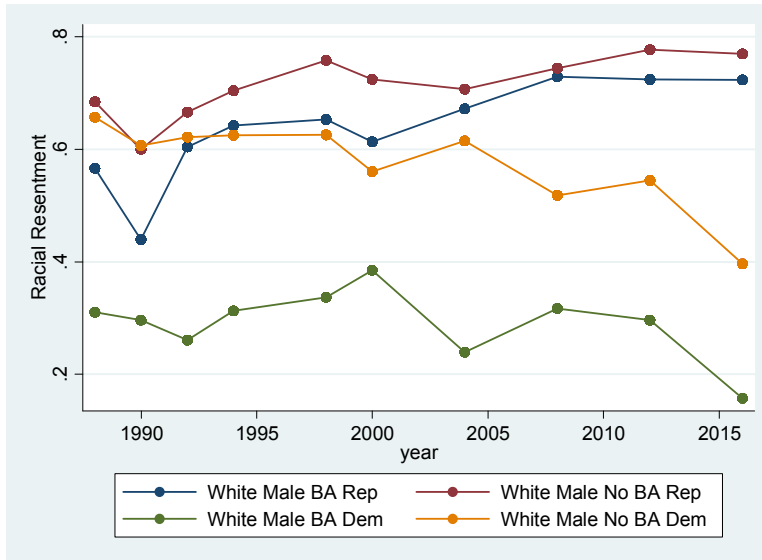
Percent agreeing that if “blacks tried harder” they would be as well off as whites. Democratic respondents, only. Higher values represent more racial resentment. Source ANES.

Figure 18B
If Only Blacks Tried Harder, Rep Only



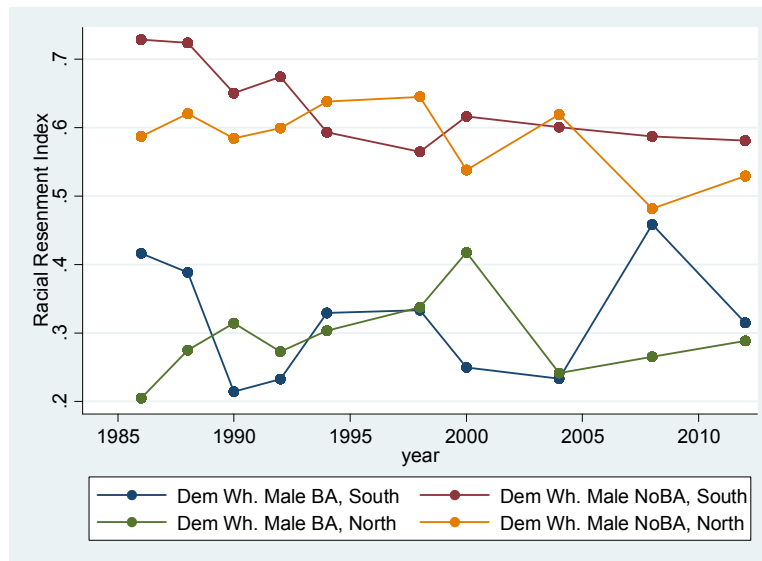
Percent agreeing that if “blacks tried harder” they would be as well off as whites. Republican respondents, only. Higher values represent more racial resentment. Source ANES.

Figure 19
Racial Resentment Index



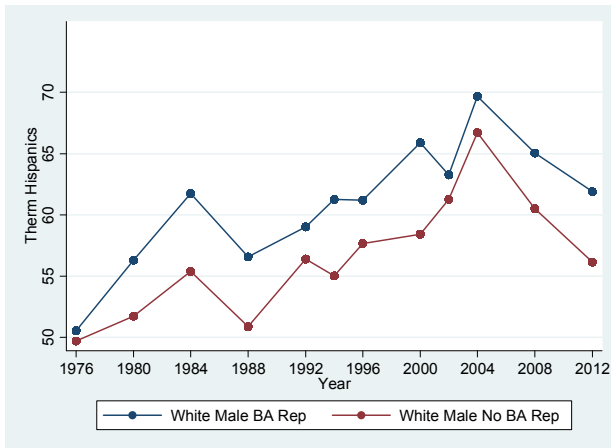
Index contains average response over the ANES' four racial resentment questions. Higher values represent more racial resentment. Source: ANES.

Figure 20
Racial Resentment Index, Dem Only



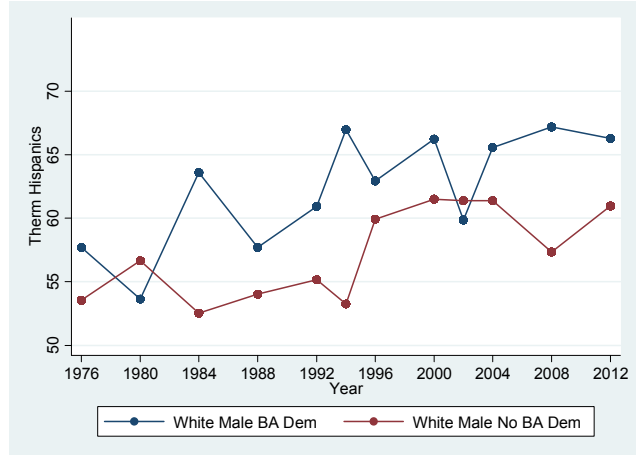
Index contains average response over the ANES' four racial resentment questions. Higher values represent more racial resentment. Source: ANES.

Figure 21A
Feeling Therm. towards Hispanics, Rep Only



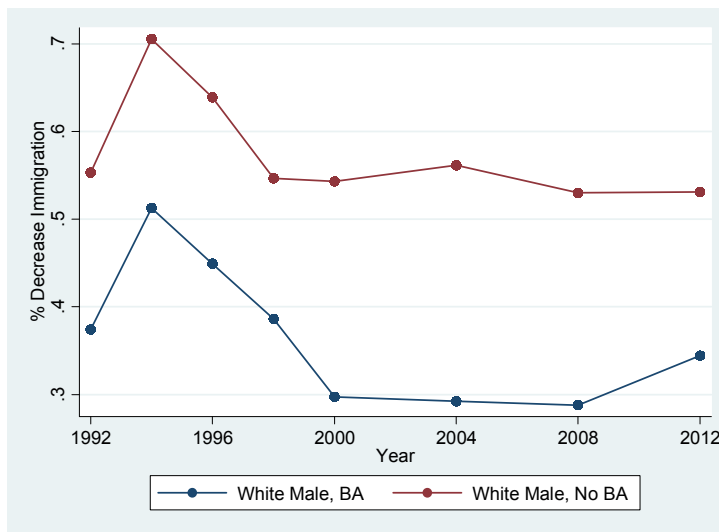
Feeling thermometer towards Hispanics. Republicans only. Higher values represent more positive affect.

Figure 21B
Feeling Therm. towards Hispanics, Dem Only



Feeling thermometer towards Hispanics. Democrats only. Higher values represent more positive affect.

Figure 22
Percent Saying Immigration Should Decrease

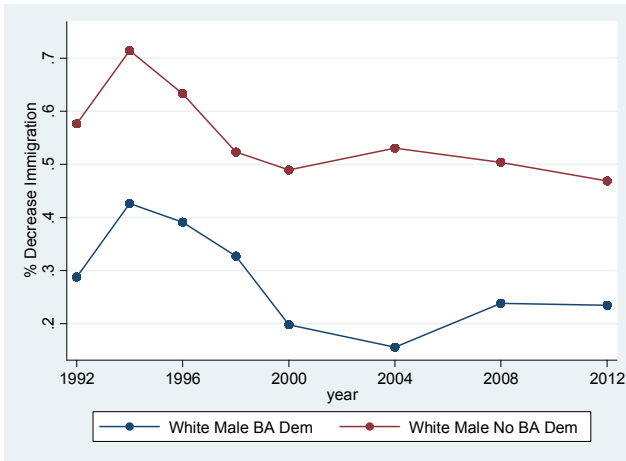


Percent saying immigration should decrease. Source ANES.

tion in 1992, an average of 60 percent of WWCW said the number of immigrants should be decreased, compared to an average of 45 percent of white males with at least a BA degree.

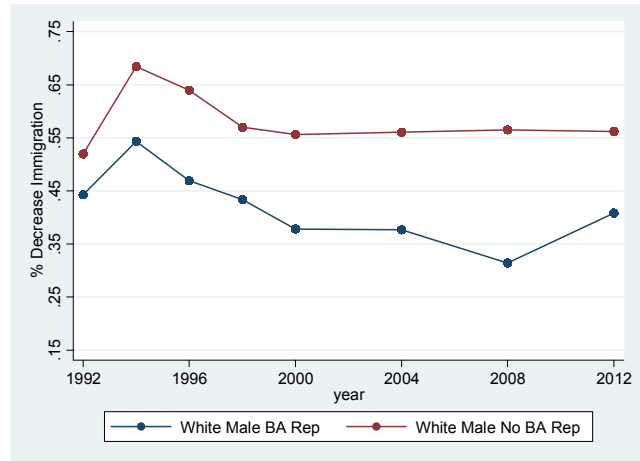
Within party, the substantial class divide among Democrats is again striking, with the share of WWCW Democrats saying immigration should be decreased (48 percent) roughly double that of Democrats with a BA+ (23 percent) in the 2012 survey. Between 2000 and 2012 the average

Figure 23A
Percent Saying Immigration Should Decrease,
Dem only



Percent saying immigration should decrease. Democrats only. Source ANES.

Figure 23B
Percent Saying Immigration Should Decrease,
Rep only



Percent saying immigration should decrease. Democrats only. Source ANES.

education gap on immigration was 20 percentage points among Republicans but 30 percentage points among Democrats.

The very substantial and long-standing educational divide on racial attitudes among white male Democrats, coupled with Trump’s historic share of the WWCM vote, suggests the longstanding cleavage in the Democratic Party was vulnerable to a campaign expressing open and sharp ethno-cultural resentment. This factor, combined with Obama’s presidency that strongly and uniquely “primed” race (Tesler 2016), may have created the ideal environment for a Trump-like candidate.

Conclusion

This paper does not attempt to provide a comprehensive account of Donald Trump’s surprising victory in the 2016 presidential election. Rather, it focuses on one undoubted phenomenon: the strength of his support among WWCM. This is particularly unique as WWCM were the core of the Democrat’s New Deal coalition and now seemingly anchor the new Trump coalition.

We consider two general themes for this shift in support: economic displacement and cultural backlash. Head-to-head contests between economic loss and cultural backlash in analyses of 2016 usually give the nod to cultural backlash, a blend of nationalism, racism, anti-immigrant sentiment and authoritarianism (e.g., Inglehart and Norris 2016). Indeed, it is plausible that Obama’s personal popularity and his accession to power during a Republican-initiated recession dampened the impact of racial grievances and anti-immigrant sentiment on WWCM voters. A campaign like Trump’s that integrated economic grievances with cultural resentments made the former more salient, linking job loss with globalization and free trade. In a contest for emotional support in 2016, feelings of “us” (nationalism) versus “them” (globalization) nationalists won out.

From the perspective of parties building coalitions, the Trump ascendancy clearly is a threat to the dominant Republican establishment. Yet this did not lead to defections toward the Demo-

crats in 2016 and the minority party now must decide whether and how to regain the support of white voters, particularly WWCM who remain a large, if declining segment of the electorate. What is clear is that in 2016 both parties were shaken by insurgencies, which in the Republican case triumphed. How these campaign-related factors interact with shifting coalitions to unsettle party unity in Congress may shape not just the progress of the Trump agenda, but the foundations of the American party system.

Coda

This paper has outlined the shift in political views among the white working class that prepared the ground for Donald Trump's success. The analysis traced the movement toward Republican identification and conservative views among this group, focusing on two motivational forces—economic dislocation and cultural dispossession. As we completed this paper, the 2016 ANES study became available for analysis, so we add this brief coda to look at the determinants of voting for Trump across the white working class as compared to whites with at least a BA.

The analysis is a regression analysis of the probability of a vote for Trump, with the same set of predictors used to compare this outcome among whites with no BA and those with a BA, respectively. The explanatory variables are gender and age, along with attitudinal measure of ideological self-identification, party identification, and measures of immigration preferences, racial resentment, economic pessimism, and affective feelings about Hispanics. All variables are coded in the “conservative” direction so that a positive coefficient for immigration attitudes, for example, indicates that a more negative view of both legal and illegal immigrants boosts support for Trump.

Models 1 and 2 exclude party identification to minimize endogeneity whereas models 3 and 4 include that variable as an additional predictor. While party identification unsurprisingly strongly predicts a Trump vote, its inclusion in the model doesn't affect the overall pattern of results.

Two main findings emerge. First, among the working-class (No BA) whites both economic pessimism and cultural resentment, as measured by racial attitudes and opposition to immigration, are significant predictors of self-reported voting for Trump, with the cultural attitudes having stronger effects. Among the more educated group, however, only cultural attitudes are significant and there is no such effect for economic pessimism. Thus, despite the uneven relationship over time between aggregate economic downturns and the working-class shift to the right, economic dissatisfaction in 2016 was an element in Trump's victory.

Second, despite widespread commentary that Trump's campaign rhetoric primed negative feelings about Hispanics, anti-Hispanic sentiments as measured by the feeling thermometer asking people how warmly they feel about a group was a significant factor not among the working-class whites but among the better-educated. This is in some ways surprising given that the mean level of anti-Hispanic and anti-immigrant sentiment was lower among this group. A speculative interpretation is that for the less-educated respondents anti-Hispanic sentiment was already captured by feelings about immigration in general, but this is a surmise requiring further exploration.

Table 1: Probability of Trump Vote, white respondents only, ANES 2016

	Model (1) no BA	Model (2) BA+	Model (3) no BA	Model (4) BA+
Ideology scale (7-pt)	0.82*** (0.05)	0.88*** (0.06)	0.25*** (0.06)	0.31*** (0.07)
Gender	-0.01 (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.032* (0.02)
Age	-0.03*** (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Party ID (7-pt)			0.63*** (0.05)	0.64*** (0.05)
Immigration attitudes index	0.50*** (0.09)	0.47*** (0.08)	0.35*** (0.08)	0.35*** (0.08)
Economic attitudes index	0.31*** (0.10)	0.14 (0.09)	0.24*** (0.08)	0.07 (0.09)
Racial resentment index	0.45*** (0.09)	0.41*** (0.08)	0.32*** (0.08)	0.28*** (0.07)
Hispanic feeling thermometer	-0.099 (0.06)	0.21*** (0.06)	-0.04 (0.05)	0.15*** (0.06)
Constant	-0.47*** (0.05)	-0.59*** (0.04)	-0.34*** (0.04)	-0.46*** (0.04)
Observations	772	863	772	863
R-squared	0.57	0.665	0.672	0.738

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Linear probability model (OLS), with robust standard errors in parentheses.

DV is Presidential vote choice coded 0=Clinton, 1=Trump.

All independent variables rescaled to 0-1, with higher values indicating higher political conservatism, stronger negative affect towards ethnic minorities, and greater economic distress/anxiety.

No BA indicates no Bachelor's degree, *BA+* indicates a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Immigration attitudes index: (1) how likely is it immigration will take away jobs, (2) what should the level of immigration be, (3) what should U.S. government policy be towards illegal immigrants, (4) immigrants are generally good for America's economy, (5) America's culture is generally harmed by immigrants, (6) immigrants increase crime rates in the U.S., and (7) feeling thermometer towards illegal immigrants, Cronbach's alpha = 0.86.

Economic attitudes index: (1) economic mobility compared to 20 years ago, (2) worried about current financial situation, (3) national economy past year, (4) personal financial situation past year, (5) expectations for national economy coming year, (6) expectations for personal financial situation coming year, Cronbach's alpha = 0.55.

Racial resentment index: black stereotype items (1) hardworking vs. lazy and (2) violent vs. peaceful, (3) blacks should work their way up without special favors, (4) history of slavery and discrimination make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of underclass, (5) blacks have gotten less than they deserve in recent years, (6) blacks must try harder to get ahead, Cronbach's alpha = 0.82

Hispanic feeling thermometer is reverse coded so higher values indicate greater *negative* affect towards Hispanics, as indicated above.

Finally, to test the relative strength of economic versus cultural variables, we can calculate the change in probability of voting for Donald Trump caused by a one standard deviation of an increase in the independent variable. By these estimates, cultural variables are stronger. For both educational groups, a one standard deviation in either the immigration index or the racial resentment index increases the probability of voting for Trump by .06–.07, a result that is consistent across educational groups. This is significantly greater than the impact of a similar change on the economic index.

To conclude, then, in 2016 a cultural backlash that has been building for decades boosted support for Trump among whites of all educational backgrounds. Among the less well-educated, the so-call white working class, these feelings of dispossession were enhanced by economic anxiety and pessimism, a combustible mixture that was a potent factor in electing President Trump.

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