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“The Fragile Trump Coalition”

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Editor's introduction

In this essay, political scientists Betsy Sinclair, Steven S. Smith and Patrick D. Tucker report on the development of the Trump coalition over the primary and general election campaign season of 2016 and into the first year of his presidency. They find evidence that class, populism, and ethnocentrism played a role in support for Trump during the primary season. They also find that during his first year in office Trump's performance was disapproved primarily by people who supported the establishment Republican candidates during the primary season. Fractures in the policy views of Republicans and varying attitudes about Trump's personal qualities pose challenges to Trump and his party.

The Fragile Trump Coalition

The success of the Trump 2016 candidacy surprised most people. While he won the electoral college vote by a 304--227, Clinton won the popular vote, 48.2-46.1 percent, a gap of about 2.9 million votes. Clinton won 243 endorsements from daily newspapers, while Donald Trump won a mere 20, and within the top 100 largest newspapers in the country, Trump won only 2 endorsements while Clinton won 57 including those from historically conservative publications such as the Arizona Republican, the San Diego Union-Tribune and the Dallas Morning News. Opposition to his candidacy included 31 Republican members of the House of Representatives and two living Republican former presidents, George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush. Most Democrats and many Republicans feared that Trump's background and personality made him unsuitable to serving as president. Yet, he was elected. Trump's election was not only surprising but also signals the construction of an unusual Republican coalition. Even late in 2017 when not much more than a third of Americans approved of his performance in office, Trump retained the approval of a large majority of Republicans.

The Trump coalition looks very fragile at this writing in late 2017. Presidents with such low ratings struggle to get reelected. Jimmy Carter reached a low of 28 percent approval in 1979 and George H.W. Bush fell to 29 percent in 1992 before losing their reelection bids in the following election. To date, Trump has fallen to 35 percent approval in Gallup's polls, but rested well below 40 percent during most of 2017. His subsequent slide in the polls did not surprise as many people. What is exceptional

about Trump is that he started low and stayed there. Trump began his presidency with only 45 percent approval, having acquired little public approval during the transition between the election and inauguration, as nearly all president-elects do. By mid-February, he lost five points, fell below 40 percent approval in the early summer, and stayed there for the rest of his first year in office.

In this essay, we use The American Panel Survey (TAPS) to dig deeper to uncover the layers of support for President Trump. Plainly, Trump quickly lost the approval of at least some Americans in 2017 who voted for him in 2016. They may vote for him again, but their support is likely to be essential to reforming a winning coalition in 2020. We seek answers to several questions. How can we characterize Trump's supporters? Were primary voters influenced by different factors than voters in the November 2016 general election? What are the challenges for the Republican party with a Trump presidency?

1. The Narrow Victory and Slippage of Trump

The candidacy of Donald Trump for the Republican nomination for president began in June 2015 with an announcement from Trump Tower in New York. His candidacy was distinctive, if not entirely unique, in several ways. Trump had not run for public office before, he promised to self-fund his campaign, he had declared himself a candidate for the Reform Party's presidential nomination in 1999, announced that he was a Democrat in 2004, and affiliated with the Republicans for the first time in 2009. He toyed with the idea of running for the 2012 Republican nomination but dropped the effort in mid-2011. In his 2015 announcement, he emphasized the themes of offshoring jobs and trade deals that ran counter to longstanding Republican orthodoxy, but he also highlighted the issues of immigration, national debt, and Islamic terrorism. His promise to build a wall across the border with Mexico originated in that speech.

The electoral coalition that emerged to support Donald Trump's presidential candidacy surprised many observers of American politics. He was considered too unprepared for a presidential campaign and the presidency, out of the mainstream of Republican opinion on key issues, and too unconventional in style and rhetoric to fit his party. Yet, he won in a manner similar to other successful Republican nominees. He started the primary season as a frontrunner and then, with a few stumbles, expanded his base of support within the party, acquired double the number of delegates of his closest competitor by mid-March, and then steadily added the delegates required to win the nomination.

Trump became an early leader while emphasizing positions on trade and immigration issues that were not shared by most Republican elites at the start of the campaign. In doing so, his campaign took the party away from the usual pattern in which differences in issue emphasis, but not differences in issue position, differentiate candidates competing for a party's nomination. Trump was not an instant hit but not too far from it. By August 7, his Real Clear Politics average showed him at double the support of the second place candidate, Jeb Bush (24 percent to 12 percent), with Scott

Walker, Mike Huckabee, Ben Carson, Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, John Kasich, and others trailing. With the exception of Carson for a week or so in November 2015, no other candidate matched Trump's national support among Republicans for the duration of 2015 and the 2016 primary season. We plot nationally-representative survey opinion data for Trump and the other candidates in Figure 1. The winnowing of candidates by April 2016 left Cruz and Kasich in the race, but Cruz peaked 6 or 7 percentage points behind Trump in late March and Kasich remained behind Cruz. Looking at this figure, it appears Trump's popular support increased in a linear fashion over the course of the campaign, with no clear challenger emerging from the Republican field.

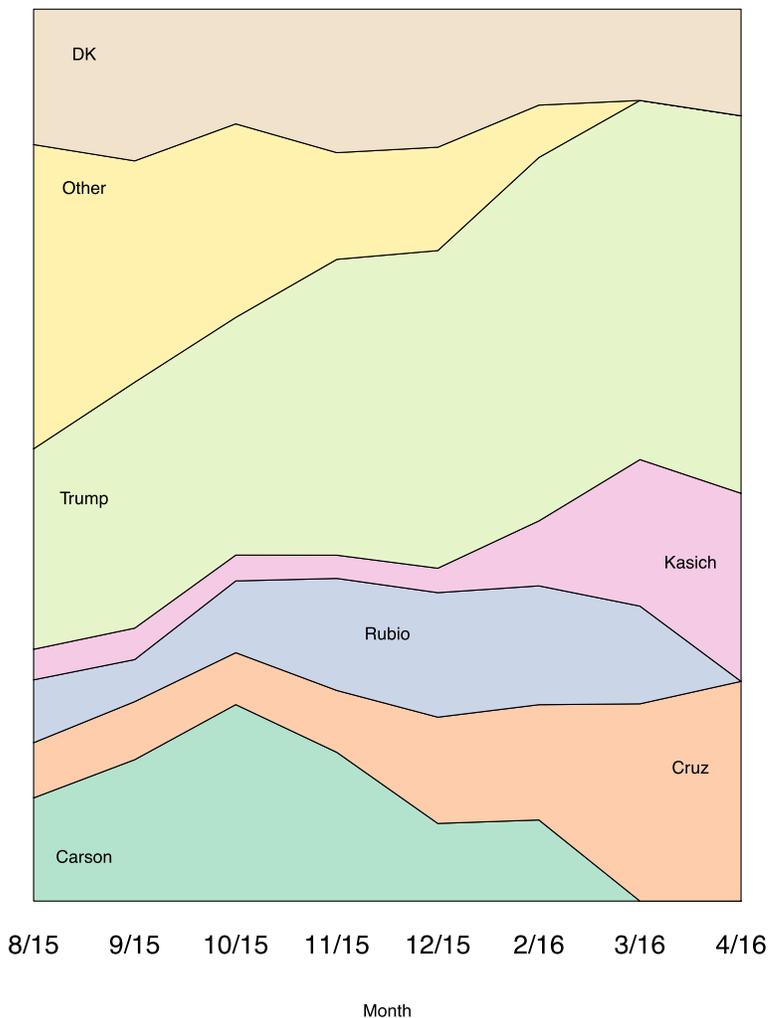


Figure 1
Candidate Support Among Republican Primary Voters, 2015-2016.
Source: The American Panel Survey.

Trump’s support came from Republicans who initially supported many of the other 15 Republicans who entered the race. In Figure 2, we show a “river plot” of the Republican primary and caucus voters. The horizontal lines in the figure represent those individuals who reported supporting the same candidate from month to month. Other lines, the tributaries, depict those panelists who switched to a given candidate. Ben Carson picked up support during the fall months of 2015 and then lost strength, with his support going to Cruz and Rubio more than to Trump. Rubio gradually expanded his support until his weak performances in February, when his support went to Cruz and Kasich more than to Trump. Trump, notably, gradually acquired more support during the pre-primary months, drawing on a trickle of support from many places, including from the candidates in the bottom half of the polls (labeled “other”).

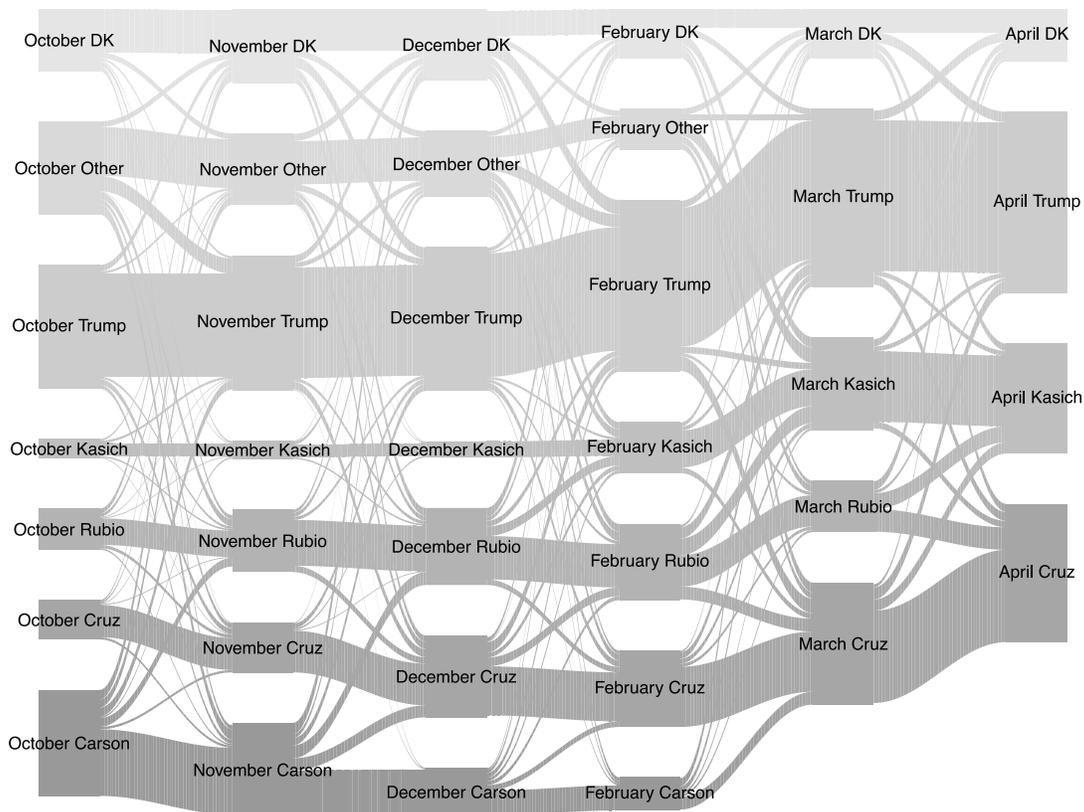


Figure 2
 Riverplot of Support for Candidates Among Republican Primary Voters, 2015-2016.
 Source: The American Panel Survey. Note: Width of river proportionate to support.

The Republicans’ “winner-take-all” rules helped Trump accumulate the delegates necessary to win the nomination. Under a winner-take-all system, which Republicans encouraged states to adopt for the 2016 nomination process, a candidate with the most votes wins all of a state’s delegates. Only about 25 percent of Republican delegates in

2016 were chosen by proportional systems; most of the remainder were chosen by winner-take-all or some hybrid system. This advantaged a frontrunner like Trump, particularly with so many other candidates splitting the vote in the early primaries.

As Trump won his party's nominations in the spring of 2016, there was uncertainty about Trump's ability to gain the support of Republicans who were unhappy with his candidacy. Prominent Republicans, including Mitt Romney, the 2012 Republican presidential candidate, had made the case that Trump was not qualified to be president. In May, Trump had the support of barely a majority of Republicans, with the remainder endorsing Cruz, the conservative wing favorite, or Kasich, the favorite among establishment Republican elites and more moderate Republicans. Cruz took until late September to endorse Trump; Kasich never did.

Clinton led Trump in the national polls throughout the summer and early fall. Most national polls gave Clinton a nearly five percent lead during most of the campaign and she ended with a lead in the range of three-to-five points in most polls. The continuity in Clinton's lead may have produced some complacency in the Clinton camp, but nearly everyone recognized that there was considerable uncertainty about the outcome because of the large number of undecided respondents in national surveys. Most pollsters found about twice as many undecided voters in the fall as were found in the previous two presidential campaigns. The reason was that both candidates were quite unpopular, with a majority of Americans giving each of them a "somewhat unfavorable" or "strongly unfavorable" rating when asked whether they "have a favorable or unfavorable impression" of each candidate in an August ABC News survey.

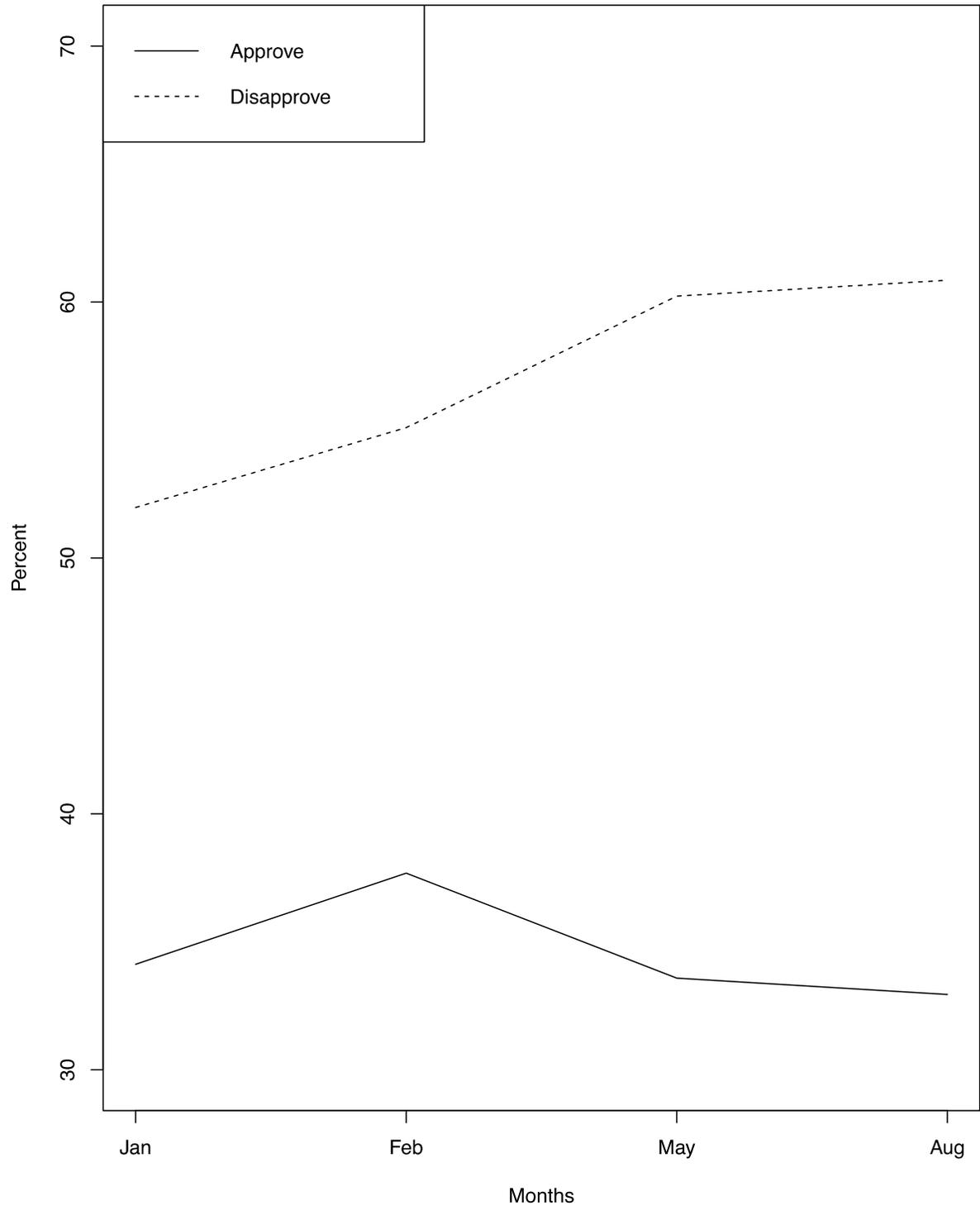
It was clear that the outcome would turn on late-deciding voters who were not happy with their choices. For Trump, this meant trying to bring Republican voters who supported Cruz, Kasich, and other candidates back into the fold. Holding him back was his own behavior, which some considered unpresidential, women who claimed that they had been subject to groping and other inappropriate behavior on Trump's part, and the early October disclosure of a video that showed Trump boasting in vulgar terms about trying to have sex with women during a 2005 conversation caught on a hot microphone.

Trump caught a break. Eleven days before the election, the F.B.I. director, James Comey, sent a publicly-released letter to Congress that reported that he was reopening the investigation into Clinton's mishandling of email during her service as secretary of state. Nothing came of this investigation, but the story dominated the news until election day and, according to the best evidence, helped Trump win a large share of the undecided voters. According to our data, about half of late undecided voters thought neither candidate was qualified to be president. Nevertheless, voters who reported being undecided in October broke for Trump by a 2-to-1 margin. Trump did surprisingly well in some working class counties of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Wisconsin, where a total of 107,000 votes across the three states was the margin of his electoral vote victory. Trump won the electoral vote over Clinton, 304-227, but Clinton won the popular vote, 48.2-46.1 percent, a gap of about 2.9 million votes.

Trump would not have won if he had not succeeded in winning the votes of traditional Republicans and a disproportionate share of the late-deciding voters. This made his general election support much like the electoral coalitions won by Republicans in other recent presidential elections. In both 2012 and 2016, our TAPS analysis shows, the Republican candidate performed less well among women, young people, and less-well educated voters than among male, older, and highly educated voters. However, with the addition of some working class voters to the Republican side, high income did not predict support for the Republican candidate as well in 2016 as in 2012.

During the transition from the November election to the January inauguration, Trump faced a number of challenges that undercut his popularity. His plans for handling his business interests when in office, a phone call with the Taiwanese leader, Russian cyberattacks, a slow pace for naming a cabinet, controversial tweets and public statements, and other events produced a steady flow of news that led some observers to question his fitness for office. At the time of his inauguration, according to Gallup, Trump was the least popular newly elected president in the last half century.

In February, according to *The American Panel Survey*, 38 percent of Americans approved of Trump's job performance (Figure 3), but the situation was much worse by the next summer. The failed efforts to enact legislation to replace the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), the struggle to ban travel from some Muslim countries, more news about Russian intervention in the 2016 campaign and about connections between officials in the Trump campaign and Russia, the firing of the F.B.I. director, and more controversial tweeting took a toll. After winning the presidency with just over 46 percent of the popular vote, Trump's approval rating dropped to 33 percent in August 2017. Additionally, those who neither approved nor disapproved in the spring were more likely to report disapproval as the summer reached its end.



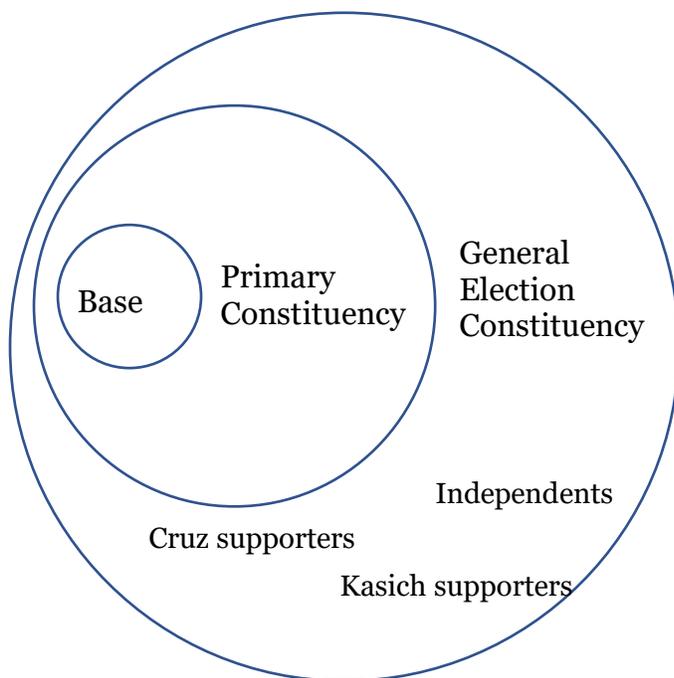
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Figure 3

Percent of Americans Who Approve and Disapprove of President Trump's Job Performance, January-August 2017.

Source: The American Panel Survey.

2. Layers of Trump Support

Who supports President Trump? The Trump coalition evolved through the pre-primary, primary, general election, and post-election seasons. The stepwise process of building and then losing support suggests the presence of multiple layers to Trump's changeable coalition. The Trump "base," as it is often called in popular discussion, supported him as the primaries started, while his "primary" constituency included his base plus Republican primary voters who supported Trump by the end of the primary season over the remaining major contenders, Cruz and Kasich. His general election constituency included his base and primary constituency, but also extended to Republicans and Independents who supported him in the general election. These layers are illustrated in Figure 4.



Insert Figure

Figure 4

Layers of Support for Trump's Presidential Bid.

In Table 1, we report the policy views on some key issues and attitudes about Trump for the five groups. For the most part, Trump's core supporters from the primary season stayed loyal throughout his first seven months in office. They registered

high levels of approval in August and, for the most part, their perceptions of his qualities remained positive. People who supported Trump early in the primary season and late in the primary season are similar. While late arrivals may have slightly less positive views of the president, these discrepancies are strictly marginal. These voters also provide overwhelming support to some of the president's key campaign promises: both sets show large majorities in supporting the repeal of Obamacare and guaranteeing the protection of American jobs in international trade deals. Similarly, they are overwhelmingly opposed to providing undocumented immigrants a path to citizenship. Late primary arrivals displayed slightly more conservative preferences on abortion and taxing the wealthy (as indicated by the drop in the percent agreeing with those policy positions).

Trump also has been successful in capturing and maintaining the approval of most Cruz supporters. Among those who supported Cruz at the end of the primaries and voted for Trump in November, Trump had approval ratings in August that were comparable to those of his earliest supporters. Cruz supporters were more conservative than other Trump voters. Cruz supporters provide less support for a right to abortion, increasing taxes on the wealthy, and regulating greenhouse gases than early Trump supporters. However, Cruz supporters gave Trump lower marks for his honesty and knowledge of the issues than did Trump's primary supporters.

Kasich supporters are another matter. Although these Republicans voted for Trump in the 2016 general, nearly half of them did not approve of his performance in August 2017. Likewise, they have incredibly poor opinions of him. Only about one-quarter of the Kasich supporters believe that the terms "moral" or "honest" describe the president "extremely" or "very" well. Moreover, Kasich backers are less supportive of the Trump policy agenda. A majority believe that protection of jobs is a necessity in trade negotiations, but this figure is nearly 20 percent less than it is for Trump's core supporters. Furthermore, the percent believing undocumented immigrants should have a pathway to citizenship is more than double that of every other group of supporters.

	General Election Constituency				
	Primary Constituency				
	Base				
	Early Primary Trump Supporters	Late Primary Trump Supporters	Cruz Supporters Voting for Trump in November	Kasich Supporters Voting for Trump in November	Others Voting for Trump in November
Percent Trump approval, August 2017	84.8	84.8	82.3	53.5	63.2
Policy Views (Percent Who Agree)					
Right to abortion	51.6	45.6	30.1	31.0	52.9
US should guarantee job protection in trade deals	86.8	86.1	72.4	68.9	81.5
Illegal immigrants have pathway to citizenship	17.9	19.6	16.8	39.4	30.9
Increasing taxes on wealthy	43.7	37.4	25.7	37.7	53.3
Regulate greenhouse gases	29.9	26.0	14.3	35.2	39.0
Repealing Obamacare	85.3	88.7	89.4	83.1	71.3
Big interests run government	60.3	60.1	54.6	44.6	70.4
Perceptions of Trump (Percent Identifying “Extremely well” or “Very well”)					
Strong leader	73.9	73.0	69.9	40.9	45.2
Honest	64.5	63.1	51.3	29.6	32.4
Knowledgeable	71.2	71.6	58.4	34.3	44.8
Is moral	55.2	52.7	46.9	26.8	24.4

Insert Table
Table 1

Layers of Support for Trump: Differences in Policy Views and Perceptions of Trump, August 2017.

Source: The American Panel Survey.

3. Is Trump's Base Authoritarian, Populist, and Racist?

During the pre-primary months of 2015 and through the primaries, commentators, pollsters, and scholars made a variety of claims about the sources of Trump's support. The major claims were that Trump's core support came from working class whites with at least somewhat authoritarian, populist, and even racist attitudes. These claims warrant brief discussion.

Working Class Whites. The dominant theme of most popular accounts of early Trump support was his support among working class whites, particularly among men. A syndrome of lost manufacturing jobs and downward mobility, pessimism about the future of their children, rising income inequality, and declining health and life expectancy made the Trump message appealing. Survey data during the primary and general election campaigns and the surge in turnout in certain counties appear to confirm this theme. Working class whites gave Trump a wave of support from outside the usual Republican primary electorate and, because of their policy views and social values, created strategic problems for traditional Republican candidates. Elements of this narrative were age and education: Trump's appeal was strongest to middle aged Americans with less than a college education who filled the ranks of the working class. These themes were not new to social scientists, but they became the central to popular commentary in 2015 and 2016.

Authoritarianism. Some observers inferred that Trump's style—quite demagogic and intolerant, in the view of many—probably appealed to individuals of a certain personality type, those who are attracted to authoritarian leadership. Political scientist Karen Stenner explains that an authoritarian personality characterizes a person "who cannot treat with natural ease or generosity those who are not his own kindred or kind, who is inclined to believe only 'right-thinking' people should be free to air their opinions, and who tends to see others' moral choices as everybody's business – indeed, the business of the state." In this view, Trump was appealing to a type of individual who desires strong leaders, divides the world into us versus them, demands deference to widely accepted norms of behavior, and responds aggressively to outsiders who are perceived as threats. In one report of a national survey, location on an authoritarianism scale had a significant discriminating effect among Republicans in their support for Trump. This was a kind of "right-wing" authoritarianism that emphasized adherence to conservative social values.

Populism. Many observers emphasized Trump's populism, a conservative populism. The populist theme—"the little guy versus big business and big government"—underpinned Trump's emphasis on changing trade and immigration policies. With Trump's emphasis on tax cuts, government regulation, and social values, this was a conservative brand of populism that some observers struggled to define. Nevertheless,

the trade and immigration themes of the Trump platform pitted Trump against long-standing Republican policy positions and appealed to non-traditional Republicans.

Ethnocentrism. Other observers emphasized Trump's appeal to ethnic and racial resentments among whites. In fact, the Clinton campaign openly referred to Trump's campaign of prejudice and paranoia, which probably was intended to cover Trump's views on undocumented immigrants, refugees, Muslims, Hispanics, and perhaps others, in addition to attitudes about African Americans. Trump's candidacy, in this account, exploited ethnic and racial sensitivities to develop his initial base of support.

Of course, Trump was unique for his ability to dominate the media, as the media emphasized repeatedly during the primary season. While Trump self-funded much of this nomination campaign, it was noted, he benefited from free media coverage of his events and comments, along with frequent appearances on television programs and spent relatively small sums on campaign organization and paid advertising. This was unique among frontrunners in modern presidential campaigns. Media domination surely gave Trump the means to reinforce his campaign themes and advertise his personal qualities at little cost.

Trump's media advantage may have played an important role in minimizing the momentum that other candidates acquired by their performance, particularly in the first half of the primary season. Momentum, or the bandwagon effect, refers to a process in which winning primaries and caucuses changes perceptions of the candidates. Winning, particularly when it involves performing better than expected in primaries and caucuses, stimulates more donations, more spending, and more media attention, and, in turn, generates more support. Moreover, voters are affected in cognitive and emotional ways that lead them to support winners in a way that goes beyond turning to their most favored candidate on policy or ideological grounds. As a rule, momentum is not associated with a front runner for whom expectations of winning are already strong, but it might emerge for other candidates who are seeking to build support to challenge the front runner.

Were the claims about the distinctive character of Trump's support correct? The first part of an answer must be that Trump's support evolved over time. Naturally, the characteristics of his supporters may have changed as more Republicans supported him during the primaries and to the general election. To answer this question, we consider the characteristics of his supporters from shortly after he announced his candidacy to the end of the primary campaign. We use survey data from *The American Panel Study* to determine the net effect of income, authoritarianism, populism, and racial attitudes on voting for Trump in the primaries—that is, on Trump support among Americans who report that they voted in Republican primaries and caucuses in 2016. Income is divided into quintiles to see if working class incomes, usually associated with the second quintile, distinguish Trump supporters from other Republicans. Authoritarianism and populism are measured using batteries of questions that political scientists have used many times to capture these distinctive attitudes. Ethnic or racial bias is measured as a

response to questions about how much a group was liked or disliked, a kind of measure that is often called “explicit bias” and tends to understate bias.

We use a statistical technique that estimates the strength of the effect of each factor while accounting for the effects of the other factors (in this case, logistic regression with fixed effects for wave and standard errors clustered on the panelist). The results are shown in Table 2. A positive sign indicates that the variable is related to favoring Trump; a negative indicates that the variable is related to voting for another candidate. Asterisks indicate a relationship that is sufficiently strong to be beyond what we might expect by chance.

Insert Table

Table 2

Estimates Effects of Class, Race, Authoritarianism, and Populism on Republicans' Support for Trump During the 2016 Primary Season.

Source: The American Panel Survey. Note: Logit estimates; standard errors in parentheses. p < .05. Weighted by CPS for white voters in each year.*

1 st Income Quintile	-0.41 (0.33)	-0.19 (0.43)
2 nd Income Quintile	-0.34 (0.31)	-0.15 (0.37)
3 rd Income Quintile	-0.28 (0.29)	-0.00 (0.35)
4 th Income Quintile	-0.69* (0.31)	-1.05* (0.36)
College Graduate	-0.76* (0.20)	-0.63* (0.23)
7-Point PID	-0.03 (0.07)	0.04 (0.08)
Female	-0.35 (0.21)	-0.05 (0.26)
Liberalism		0.19 (0.16)
Populism		1.15* (0.25)
Right Wing Authoritarianism		-0.31 (0.18)
Black Affect		-0.02 (0.06)
Hispanic Affect		-0.08 (0.06)
Muslim Affect		-0.21* (0.06)
Constant	-0.38 (0.52)	-1.85* (0.59)
Observations	4,051	2,715
Clusters	550	343
Wave FE	YES	YES

The table shows several features of Trump support during the primaries. Within the Republican primary electorate, we find little evidence of an income effect as described by most popular accounts. Each estimated income coefficient is negative, suggesting that over the course of the primary season, lower income individuals were not more likely to support Trump than the wealthiest Republicans. In fact, the only significant difference is found with respect to the 4th and 5th quintiles. Cross-sectional examination of income and support for Trump over the course of the campaign confirms this finding. For the majority of the primary campaign, Trump pulled relatively evenly from the 1st through 3rd and 5th income quintiles. Among those Republicans earning between \$80,000 and \$125,000, however, Trump performed consistently poorly. This finding is not to say that Trump's support among the white working class is without merit. To be sure, in the general election, we found strong evidence that he made electoral gains with voters from lower economic groups. Whereas Obama held a 53 percentage point advantage over Romney among the lowest quintile, Trump was able to reduce that gap to only 21 percentage points. Furthermore, our data from 2012 indicate Obama won the 2nd income quintile with 60 percent support. In 2016, Trump won this group with an 8 percentage point margin over Clinton.

We find little evidence that gender played an important role in the primary. Men and women did not significantly differ in their support for Trump. We do find strong evidence that education was negatively correlated with voting for the eventual nominee. Those with a college degree were much less likely to indicate voting for Trump. Finally, negative attitudes towards blacks and Hispanics were not related to support for Trump, but negative attitudes towards Muslims were. The more positive one felt about Muslims, the less likely they were to support Trump. Although not shown, we found that this relationship between Trump support and antipathy towards Muslims grew stronger as the campaign progressed.

Finally, within the primary electorate, populism—the little guy versus big government and big business—appears to be the strongest distinguishing factor. Our populism measure is taken from Republican primary voters aggregated responses to a series of questions that capture sentiment towards the role elites and the common people play in government. Higher scores indicate higher levels of agreement with statements such as “elected politicians sell out to big business”, “the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves”, and “our presidents should do what the people want even when the laws prohibit him from doing it.” Thus, primary voters who were more likely to demonstrate fears of big business corrupting the government and support presidents taking extrajudicial steps to follow the will of the people, were much more likely to support Trump. We were unable to find a connection between right wing authoritarianism and support for the eventual nominee within the primary. Those voters who displayed higher scores on the authoritarian scale tended to support Ted Cruz in the highest numbers. While authoritarianism did not play an overwhelming role in the primaries for Trump, the association between the variable and support for the Republican nominee was quite strong in the general election. We tried other measures of authoritarianism but found no relationship to Trump support. These

threads in primary support for Trump apparently did not appeal to Kasich supporters and the more wealthy, highly educated Republicans as much as to others.

Nevertheless, nearly all Republicans supported Trump in his general election contest with Clinton. As we have noted, it was not obvious that this would happen, but events unfolded late in the campaign that secured the votes of nearly all Republicans who supported their party's candidates in 2008 and 2012.

4. Which Trump Voters Disapprove of His Performance in Office?

One reasonable hypothesis about Trump's drop in the polls is that Trump's general election coalition included people who disliked him (but liked Clinton less) and these people were the first to register their disapproval when asked by pollsters in Trump's first year in office. These reluctant Trump voters should be the kind of Republicans who resisted supporting Trump near the end of the primary season in 2016.

For people who voted for Trump in the general election, we estimate the effect of several factors on the likelihood that a Trump supporter will indicate disapproval in August 2017. A positive sign indicates that the observed variable predicts switching to disapprove of Trump while a negative sign suggests the observed trait is associated with maintaining approval of the president. As Table 3 shows, Trump voters who were most likely to move to disapprove were young people, people who supported Kasich in the late primaries, and people with at least some college education. Older, less well educated, and original Trump supporters continued to approve of Trump's job performance in August. Cruz supporters, who were more conservative than Kasich and Trump supporters, retained high approval ratings for Trump. Thus, it appears that Kasich's supporters—who, on average, are younger and better educated than Trump and Cruz supporters—have been the most dissatisfied with Trump.

Insert Table

Table 3

Correlates of Change in Trump Job Approval, February to August 2017.

Source: The American Panel Survey. Note: Logit estimates; standard errors in parentheses; *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05. Weighted by CPS for white voters in each year.

Female	-0.39 (0.40)
Age	-0.39* (0.19)
Income	-0.22 (0.13)
College Graduate	1.92* (0.70)
7-Point PID	0.02 (0.14)
Midwest	0.50 (0.66)
South	0.11 (0.62)
West	0.05 (0.68)
Cruz	-0.04 (0.48)
Kasich	0.95* (0.46)
Constant	-1.92 (1.36)
Observations	435

5. The Challenges for Trump and the Republicans

Trump's early and late primary supporters constitute about half of the Republican electorate and, at most, 20 percent of the American electorate. Add the Cruz supporters, most of whom continue to approve of his job performance, and he has a majority of Republicans, but it remains far less than half of Americans. It seems far less likely now than it did in November 2016 that Kasich supporters will be willing to vote for Trump again. If Trump runs for reelection in 2020, this scenario seems to guarantee

serious challenges to Trump's renomination as the Republican candidate and a serious challenge from the Democrats.

Still, it is possible that Trump's coalition of Republicans will hold. His base of support appears to be loyal. They provide high marks on job performance and identify the president as a man of high character. Likewise, Trump has been able to consolidate the supporters of his closest rival in the primary, Ted Cruz, with much success. Furthermore, on key Trump proposals such as repealing Obamacare and tax cuts, there is broad consensus among the base and other Republicans.

Nonetheless, among Republican voters, there are potential problems for the president in maintaining his electoral coalition. Perhaps most strikingly, a large segment of his voters provide gravely low evaluations of the president on character issues such as honesty and morality. If the president wishes to overcome this negative image among voters he cannot afford to lose, he must hope for at least one of two scenarios. First, he must persuade establishment Republicans and Independents that his personality is less distasteful than they currently perceive it. Overcoming such a public image could prove quite difficult. Second, and perhaps more realistic for his reelection prospects, the president must hope that whomever is nominated by the Democratic party has as equally low or even lower reputation in the eyes of the key voters as he does. Donald Trump may have been fortunate that in the 2016 election he faced an opponent whom these voters deemed to be similarly unreliable. Should a Democratic candidate emerge that is more appealing to Independents and establishment Republicans, the president would have reason to fear. Literature on polarization suggests that the latter group is unlikely to vote for a Democrat, but they may be less motivated to turnout for Trump against a Democrat who is not Hillary Clinton.

What strategy should Trump pursue to maintain these Independent and establishment voters? Our view is that only the most delicate strategy would make them all happy. For example, consider that Independent Trump voters maintain high populist feelings regarding trade and the belief that the government should be more protectionist in foreign trade. Emphasis on these points would only serve to further isolate Kasich voters. Independent voters also appear to be more in favor of abortion rights, suggesting Trump might do well to de-emphasize social issues. Such an approach not only risks losing pro-life Kasich voters, but also Cruz supporters who appear to be the most anti-abortion members of the coalition. Thus, Trump is in a difficult situation for 2020 due to a poor image among voters he needs and policy conflict within his coalition.

To be viable in 2020, Trump must engage his coalition and re-ignite their populist tendencies. This means that beyond the emphasis on trade, Trump is likely to continue to advocate an "America first" narrative. While deeply troubling for some, these components of a nativist populism seem to have increased participation as well as support. These narratives increase Trump's probability of re-election, but they make it more challenging for the Republican party to engage in bipartisan governance.

