Ingroup Lovers or Outgroup Haters?

The Social Roots of Trump Support and Partisan Identity

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Abstract: Partisans in American politics are increasingly biased against their political opponents on a personal level. This partisan rancor has been found to rival even racial prejudice in its intensity (Iyengar and Westwood 2015), and has only increased in the era of the Trump candidacy and presidency. But to what extent do extra-partisan social attitudes shape these political animosities? Who were Trump supporters before Trump came along? Can we form a picture of the Trump voter based on social attributes and attitudes alone? Recently, Mason and Wronski (2018) demonstrated that individuals who feel closer to party-aligned racial, religious, and ideological groups are more strongly attached to their party. Yet, little is known about the direction of causality in these relationships. And Trump has attracted at least some voters who are not traditional Republicans. In this paper, we explore how individuals' social attributes and attitudes towards social out-groups predict future Trump support and Republican Party approval. Using the Voter Study Group panel data (2011-2017) we find that particular social identities and feelings toward racial groups do generally predict future support for Trump, but Trump approval is more powerfully motivated by outgroup animosity, while Republican Party approval is more linked to ingroup affection.

\*\*\*\*PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS A VERY PRELIMINARY DRAFT\*\*\*\*\*

The study of political behavior has long involved questions about how social group identities influence our political lives. In the early stages, it was assumed that social group identities helped to inform voters about which party to choose (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1948; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960). In effect, group identities such as race and religion were assumed to be primary, and to inform partisan identities. The 2016 election, however, both highlighted and obscured the effects of social identities on voter choice. First, Trump attracted the votes of many white voters who had not previously voted Republican (Major, Blodorn, and Blascovich 2016), clarifying the link between party and race in an unprecedented manner. On the other hand, Noel (2016) points out that the Trump nomination itself reflected a deep divide within the Republican Party that has yet to be reconciled. While party and race are increasingly aligned (Mason 2018), the Trump campaign connected the two in a way that made even Republican Party leaders uncomfortable.

Here, we examine the relationship between Trump support and social group identity and attitudes in an era of heightened social and affective polarization. Do Trump supporters vote for him because they hate the Democratic Party’s social makeup? Or are Trump supporters merely out to change the status quo? What role do social identities and social prejudices play in predicting support for Trump in 2016?

Social Sorting

In recent decades, it has become generally well-established that certain social groups tend to be Democratic, while others tend to be Republican. Not only in public polls and electoral demographics, but also in political science, as partisan identities have converged with ideological (Levendusky 2009), religious (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2008; Layman 2001), racial (Giles and Hertz 1994; Mangum 2013) and other political identities (Campbell and Putnam, 2011). This is often referred to as sorting, usually known as an increasing correlation between party and ideology (Levendusky, 2009), though sorting can also be understood as a distinctly social phenomenon. Mason (2018) uses the term “social sorting” to define this trend, and finds that this type of sorting is significantly related to affective polarization, or the emotional and visceral dislike of partisan opponents. While these party-group associations are well-known at the aggregate level, it is not clear how these associations are understood by voters, and therefore how social sorting psychologically transforms into affective polarization or vote choice.

Ingroup Love or Outgroup Hate?

Brewer (1999) has distinguished between the “ingroup love” felt by ingroup members toward their own side and the “outgroup hate” felt by ingroup members toward the outgroup. Brewer (1999) makes the essential point that preferential treatment of ingroup members does not always coincide with hostility toward outgroup members. She explains that attachment to a social group can produce outgroup hostility under a few conditions: feelings of moral superiority, perceived conflict over resources, forced collaboration, a shared standard of relative worth, or political competition for power. Cross-cutting identities reduce the prospect of outgroup hostility.

In support of the latter argument, Roccas and Brewer (2002) find that cross-cutting identities do tend to increase tolerance toward outgroups. Applying this theory to politics, Mason (2018) has found that as religious, ideological, and racial identities move into alignment with partisan identities, partisans grow more prejudiced against their partisan opponents. Recently, Mason and Wronski (2018) demonstrated that individuals who are closer to these partisan-aligned groups, and cognitively understand the connection between their racial, religious, and ideological groups and the parties, are more strongly attached to their party. But how do the various social identities associated with the parties affect either ingroup affection or outgroup animosity? Is it possible for partisans to be motivated by preference for victory separately from simple hatred of “the other”? And, furthermore, would feelings toward Trump himself – often characterized by distinctly hostile outgroup attitudes – be any different than feelings toward the two parties?

In this paper, we explore both how individual social identities *and* attitudes towards party-linked out-groups structure support for Trump and the two parties. We suggest that, as partisanship becomes increasingly socially-defined, feelings toward parties and their associated social groups may simultaneously affect each other. However, it is possible that Trump himself, through his rhetoric or other means, has made the socio-partisan divide increasingly clear (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2017). His supporters should therefore be expected to be the most aware of – or responsive to – the social divide between parties. Trump supporters may be more motivated by outgroup animosity than the more traditional and institutionalized social groups – parties – who require some level of positive commitment rather than simple hostility.

Data and Methods

We turned to the Democracy Fund’s Voter Study Group survey, which collected multiple waves of data in partnership with the Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP) and YouGov.[[1]](#footnote-1) This data set includes several thousand respondents who were re-interviewed (online) across three survey waves: 2011, 2016, and 2017. Importantly, the first wave of respondents was not yet familiar with Trump as a political figure, and therefore can be used as a baseline against which to compare later waves. In other words, those who would become Trump supporters in later waves were (likely) not yet Trump supporters in 2011. This allows us to examine the extent to which pre-Trump attributes contribute to post-Trump approval.

Panel Data

We analyze panel survey data from the Democracy Fund’s Voter Study Group. Because we have multiple observations for every individual, we are able to investigate whether a given citizen’s change in affect toward politically-aligned social groups during earlier points in time is predictive of the degree to which that same citizen approves of Trump at a later point in time. Our interest is in detecting those voters who experienced a change in their feelings toward a variety or racial/religious groups before Trump’s presidency – and using those changes to predict those who approve the most of Trump in 2017. Our secondary aim is to compare these predictions against predictors of 2017 GOP approval (via Republican Party feeling thermometers). By examining the difference between precursors to Trump approval versus general Republican Party approval, the unique contribution of Trump support can be discerned.

Respondents were asked to indicate their feelings toward five Democratic-aligned social groups in each of the three waves: African-Americans, Hispanics, Muslims, Lesbian/Gay (LG) and Jewish people. Respondents also indicated their feelings toward two Republican-aligned social groups in each wave: Whites and Christian people.

Our primary analysis thus utilizes an OLS regression model with the following specification:

Trump Approval (or Party approval) *i* (2017) = *b*0 + *b*1∆Group*i* (2016-2011)

+ *b*2Group*i* (2011) + *b*3PID*i* (2011) + *b*4∆PID*i* (2016-2011)

+ *b*5Ideology*i* (2011) + *b*6∆Ideology*i* (2016-2011)

+ *b*7*i* (2011) + *i*

where *Group* captures the average feeling thermometer rating of the group examined in each model (Democratic-linked groups are African-American, Hispanic, Muslim, LG, and Jewish people; Republican-linked groups are White and Christian people). These thermometers are recoded to range from 0 to 1 instead of 0 to 100 for ease of interpretation. *PID* indicates respondent *i*’s party identification (seven-point scale, ranging from “Strong Democrat” (0) to “Strong Republican” (1)); *Ideology* indicates respondent *i*’s self-placement on the five-point ideology scale (ranging from “Very Liberal” (0) to “Very Conservative” (1)) ; and includes a bevy of socio-demographic variables measured in 2011 (i.e., political interest, race, religion, educational attainment, gender, age, and income).

Our model therefore aims to isolate the effect of *change* (∆) in affect toward groups aligned with each party on *Trump Support, Republican Party Approval, and Democratic Party Approval* by accounting for baseline (i.e., 2011) demographic and political differences between respondents, as well as differences in baseline affect toward the politically-aligned groups (distributions of the change in affect toward each group can be found in the appendix). Trump Support and GOP Approval are both coded to range from 0 to 1 to account for the different scales of the two variables (1-5 for Trump approval and 0-100 for Republican thermometer).

We present results of OLS regressions predicting 2017 Trump approval and GOP approval for each of the seven social groups listed above.

**Blacks**

In Figure 1, we examine the effect of changes in affect toward Blacks on Trump and GOP approval. The first variable in both models is change in reported feelings toward Blacks between 2011 and 2016. For those whose feelings toward Blacks grew warmer during this 5-year period, their feelings toward Trump in 2017 declined. This is controlling for baseline 2011 affect toward Blacks, for which a similar result is notable. Higher 2011 affect toward Blacks is related to lower Trump approval in 2017. So, when feelings toward Blacks are cold and grow increasingly colder over time, approval for Trump increases. Interestingly, the same effect cannot be seen in predicting feelings for the GOP. Warm feelings for Blacks in 2011 has, if anything, a positive effect on feelings toward the GOP in 2017, and changes in that affect over time do not change feelings for the GOP.

Other interesting differences emerge from the two models. The effects of partisanship and ideology have similar effects on both Trump approval and GOP affect. Stronger Republican identity in 2011 leads to higher 2017 approval of Trump and warmer feelings toward Republicans. Those whose ideological identification grows more conservative between 2011 and 2016 also report similar Trump support and GOP affect in 2017. However, baseline conservatism in 2011 seems to be a stronger predictor of future Trump support than of future GOP affect.

For both Trump and Republicans, black respondents express less approval in 2017. The same is true of non-religious respondents. The only other notable difference in predictors of Trump and Republicans is political interest. Higher levels of reported political interest in 2011 correspond to higher Trump approval in 2017, but lower Republican approval in 2017.

**Figure 1. Black Affect and Trump vs. GOP Approval (zoom in on electronic version for clarity)** Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:Black FT coefplot.eps**Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:Black GOP FT coefplot.eps**

To briefly focus on the role of change in affect toward Blacks, predicted values of the two dependent variables were calculated, holding all other variables at their means or modes. Figure 2 presents these results. The difference between the two sub-figures is notable. While rising feelings of warmth toward Blacks generate distinctly negative effects on Trump 2017 approval, the effect on Republican approval is minimal. Trump’s approval is distinctly related to changing attitudes toward Black Americans. By examining these effects in the panel, we can identify within-subject changes over time. Trump’s approval in 2017 is highest among those who grew to dislike Blacks in the years between 2011 and 2016.

**Figure 2. Predicted Trump and GOP Approval by Change in Affect Toward Blacks.**

Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:TA17_blackaffect.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:GOP17_blackaffect.eps

Those respondents whose feelings toward Blacks grew much colder between 2011 and 2016 reported approval of Trump in 2017 of around 50 percent. Those whose feelings toward Blacks grew much warmer report Trump approval in 2017 of about 30 percent. This significant change is all the more notable because it holds baseline 2011 affect toward Blacks constant. The effect is only from changes in affect toward Blacks over time. In comparison, these changes have no effect on feelings toward the Republican Party.

**Hispanics**

In Figure 3, identical models to those presented in Figure 1 are run, but affect toward Blacks is replaced by affect toward Hispanics. All other variables are unchanged. In a similar finding, affect toward Hispanics and change in affect toward Hispanics is related to Trump support and Republican support in opposite directions. Those whose feelings toward Hispanics were warm in 2011, and grew warmer between 2011 and 2016 expressed less approval of Trump in 2017. The same feelings toward Hispanics led to warmer feelings toward Republicans in 2017. Even when controlling for self-identified party and ideology, affection toward Hispanics generates disapproval of Trump and approval of Republicans. In these models, a post-graduate education and black race reduces future Trump support, but only a post-graduate education reduces Republican affect. The same relationship with political interest as found in Figure 1 is replicated here. Those with higher interest in politics in 2011 ended up being more supportive of Trump and less supportive of Republicans in 2017.

**Figure 3. Hispanic Affect and Trump vs. GOP Approval (zoom in on electronic version for clarity)**

Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:Hisp FT coefplot.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:Hisp GOP FT coefplot.eps

A clearer focus on the effects of feelings toward Hispanics can be demonstrated using predicted values, holding all other variables at their means or modes. In Figure 4, a similar pattern appears. Those who grow less warm toward Hispanics during the 2011-2016 period are significantly more approving of Trump in 2017, and significantly less approving of the GOP in 2017, than those whose feelings of warmth toward Hispanics increase.

**Figure 4. Predicted Trump and GOP Approval by Change in Affect Toward Hispanics.**

Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:TA17_Hispaffect.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:GOP17_hispaffect.eps

**Muslims**

One of the more salient targets of both Trump and general Republican ire has been the Muslim-American community. However, the panel data in Figure 5 demonstrate that feelings toward Muslims are significantly more powerful in predicting Trump support than Republican support.

**Figure 5. Muslim Affect and Trump vs. GOP Approval (zoom in on electronic version for clarity)**

Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:Muslim FT coefplot.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:Muslim GOP FT coefplot.eps

In Figure 5, baseline 2011 affect toward Muslims has a large and significant effect on Trump support in 2017. The difference between holding the coldest and the warmest feelings toward Muslims in 2011 is associated with a 31 percentage point decrease in 2017 support for Trump. As feelings change between 2011 and 2016, moving from the most negative to the most positive feelings toward Muslims further decreases support for Trump by another 28 percentage points. These effects are three times as large as the effects associated with affect toward Blacks and Hispanics.

However, when predicting 2017 feelings toward Republicans, feelings toward Muslims are far less consequential. Baseline feelings toward Muslims in 2011 do not significantly predict feelings toward Republicans. Increasing feelings of warmth toward Muslims between 2011 and 2016 do predict a decrease in warmth toward Republicans, but to a much smaller degree (6 percentage point decline) than is seen with regard to Trump approval.

To more directly observe the effect of these feelings toward Muslims, Figure 6 presents the predicted values of Trump and Republican support in 2017. The differences are dramatically visible.

**Figure 6. Predicted Trump and GOP Approval by Change in Affect Toward Muslims.**

**Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:TA17_Muslimaffect.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:GOP17_muslimaffect.eps**

For those whose feelings toward Muslims moved from very warm to very cold between 2011 and 2016, approval of Trump in 2017 is predicted to be around 70 percent. The same change in feelings toward Muslims generates a predicted feeling of warmth toward Republicans of only about 50 degrees (neutral). On the other end of the spectrum, for those whose feelings toward Muslims move from very negative to very positive, approval of Trump in 2017 is predicted to be around 15 percent, while feelings toward Republicans are predicted to be around 35 degrees (holding 2011 feelings toward Muslims constant). Feelings toward Muslims as a group seem to be uniquely related to evaluations of Trump, rather than the Republican Party as a whole.

**Gay and Lesbian People**

In Figure 7, baseline and changing affect toward gay and lesbian people is used to predict Trump approval and GOP affect in 2017. The difference between very cold and very warm affect toward LG people in 2011 is about a 21 percentage point reduction in Trump approval in 2017. So affect toward LG individuals before Trump became a political figure is a significant predictor of future Trump approval. Furthermore, as attitudes toward gays and lesbians grow warmer during the 5 year period from 2011 to 2016, approval of Trump in 2017 erodes further, with the maximum shift from coldest to warmest predicting a 13 percentage point drop in approval.

However, the same effects are not visible in predicting feelings toward Republicans. While warm 2011 feelings toward LG people slightly reduces feelings of warmth toward the Republican Party in 2017, any change that occurs within individuals over time does nothing to change attitudes toward Republicans.

**Figure 7. LGBT Affect and Trump vs. GOP Approval (zoom in on electronic version for clarity)**

**Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:LGBT FT coefplot.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:LGBT GOP FT coefplot.eps**

A closer look at the effect of feelings toward gay and lesbian people on approval of Trump and the GOP can be found in Figure 8, which presents predicted values of 2017 Trump and GOP approval.

**Figure 8. Predicted Trump and GOP Approval by Change in Affect Toward Gay and Lesbian People.**

**Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:TA17_LGBTaffect.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:TA17_LGBTaffectGOP.eps**

According to Figure 8, respondents whose feelings toward LG people grew much colder between 2011 and 2016, approval of Trump in 2017 is about 55 percent. For those whose feelings toward gays and lesbians grew much warmer, approval of Trump is around 30 percent. In comparison, there is no significant difference in GOP affect whether feelings toward LG people grew warmer or colder (holding 2011 affect toward this group constant).

**Jewish People**

Affect toward Jewish people is an interesting and somewhat unclear indicator of partisan preference. While the Trump campaign and presidency has not denounced white supremacist (and therefore anti-Semitic) groups who support them, the Republican Party is also very supportive of the existence of the state of Israel, drawing support from pro-Israel American Jewish people. At the same time, Jewish voters have been predominantly Democrats for decades. The panel data, then present a useful look into the role of affect toward Jewish people and Trump or Republican support.

Figure 9 presents the results of the OLS model. Feelings of warmth toward Jewish people in 2011 are marginally predictive of Trump approval, with warmer affect for Jews in 2011 predicting higher support for Trump in 2017. This effect is small, with a coefficient of 0.06. Baseline support for Jews is a better predictor of GOP affect, with a coefficient of 0.17, nearly three times the size of the effect for Trump. Furthermore, those respondents whose feelings toward Jews grow warmer between 2011 and 2016 appear to feel even higher levels of warmth toward the Republican Party, but this change has no effect on levels of support for Trump.

**Figure 9. Jewish Affect and Trump vs. GOP Approval (zoom in on electronic version for clarity)**

**Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:Jewish FT coefplot.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:Jewish GOP FT coefplot.eps**

These results suggest that support for Jewish people is decidedly mixed in predicting support for Trump and Republicans[[2]](#footnote-2).

In order to examine the effects of changing affect alone, Figure 10 presents the predicted values of support for Trump and the GOP at varying levels of changing affect toward Jewish People.

**Figure 10. Predicted Trump and GOP Approval by Change in Affect Toward Jewish People.**

Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:TA17_Jewishaffect.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:GOP17_jewishaffect.eps

In this figure, holding constant 2011 affect toward Jewish people, the change in affect alone between 2011 and 2016 has no effect on Trump approval in 2017. For Republicans, however, even holding baseline affect constant, the effect of increasing feelings of warmth toward Jewish people are to move Republican feelings from 30 degrees to 55 degrees at the most extreme levels of change. Of course, most of the variance in the affective change variable occurs between -0.5 and 0.5. At these levels, feelings toward the GOP would increase from 35 degrees to 47 degrees, still a significant change.

**Whites**

While the prior groups examined tend to be associated with the Democratic Party, the final two groups are those that tend to be associated with the Republican Party. These are Whites and Christians.

We begin by examining changes in attitudes toward Whites in Figure 11. Interestingly, attitudes toward White people seems to be more powerful at predicting feelings toward Republicans than toward Trump, although both are significant and positive effects. For Trump, 2011 feelings toward Whites predict 17 percentage points higher approval in 2017. The maximum increase in affect toward Whites between 2011 and 2016 predicts a further 14 percentage point increase in approval of Trump in 2017. However, for Republican Party affect in 2017, the warmest (2011) feelings toward Whites increase affect toward Republicans in 2017 by about 37 degrees. As these feelings toward Whites grow warmer by 2016, feelings toward Republicans grow even warmer by another 25 degrees[[3]](#footnote-3).

**Figure 11. White Affect and Trump vs. GOP Approval (zoom in on electronic version for clarity)**Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:White FT coefplot.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:White GOP FT coefplot.eps

These effects of White affect are nearly twice as powerful in predicting feelings toward Republicans than toward Trump himself.

To demonstrate the isolated effects of change in affect toward Whites, figure 12 presents predicted values of Trump and GOP support based on change in White affect.

**Figure 12. Predicted Trump and GOP Approval by Change in Affect Toward Whites.**

Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:TA17_Whiteaffect.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:TA17_WhiteaffectGOP.eps

The results presented in Figure 12 make clear that the effect of changing feelings about White people are more stark in regards to the Republican Party. Holding 2011 affect constant, the most negative change in feelings toward Whites predicts Trump approval of about 30 percent, and Republican feelings of about 20 degrees. However, the most dramatic increase in warm feelings toward Whites predicts Trump approval of about 55 percent, and feelings toward Republicans of about 70 degrees. It appears, then, that Trump’s unique attraction is animosity toward partisan racial outgroups, more than support for the partisan racial ingroup.

**Christians**

The final group examined here is Christians. To the extent that Christianity (at least among Whites) is generally associated with the Republican Party, we should expect warmer feelings toward Christians to be associated with more support of Trump and the Republican Party. In Figure 13, this is what we find. The warmest baseline feelings toward Christians in 2011 predict an increase in Trump 2017 approval by 29 percentage points, and an increase in warmth toward Republicans by 37 degrees. Similarly, the maximum increase in feelings of warmth toward Christians between 2011 and 2016 predicts an increase in 2017 Trump approval by 20 percentage points, and an increase in GOP affect by 26 degrees. Though the results are slightly stronger for feelings toward the Republican Party, both Trump and Republicans are assisted by warm and warming feelings toward Christians in the years before 2017.

**Figure 13. Christian Affect and Trump vs. GOP Approval (zoom in on electronic version for clarity** Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:Christian FT coefplot.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:Christian GOP FT coefplot.eps

In order to examine the effect of changing affect toward Christians, predicted values of Trump and Republican support are presented in Figure 14, holding all other variables in the model constant.

**Figure 12. Predicted Trump and GOP Approval by Change in Affect Toward Christians**

**Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:TA17_Xianaffect.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:GOP17_christianaffect.eps**

Even holding constant 2011 baseline affect toward Christians, the results in Figure 12 demonstrate that when affect toward Christians grows warmer, feelings toward Trump and Republicans improve as well. Those whose feelings grew extremely negative toward Christians were predicted to approve of Trump in 2017 at about 20 percent of the full range of approval, while feelings toward the Republican Party were predicted to be around 20 degrees. However, the most positive changes in affect toward Christians predict Trump approval above 60 percentage points and Republican affect around 70 degrees of warmth. As feelings toward Christians grow warmer, respondents grow substantially more positively inclined toward both Trump and the Republican Party.

**Discussion**

It is important to note that in models not shown here, feelings toward these groups largely predict Democratic Party affect as well. These results are positive and significant for changes in affect toward Blacks, Hispanics, Jewish people, Muslims, and lesbian and gay people. However, changing feelings toward Whites and Christians do not predict Democratic Party affect.

Overall, then, these analyses offer substantial evidence that changes in affect toward politically-relevant social groups between 2011 and 2016 were consequential for Trump Support in 2017, even after accounting for key inter-personal differences (e.g., in party identification, ideology, and political interest) in 2011. Citizens who, for example, developed greater warmth for groups that associate with the Democratic Party (e.g., Muslims and LG individuals) tended to view Trump less favorably. However, the analyses also suggest that not all groups are of equal consequence for shaping affective polarization—while change in affect toward Christians was strongly associated with Trump support, for example, change in affect toward Jewish people was not significantly predictive of Trump support. Nevertheless, these data and results provide considerable support for the argument that affect toward social groups shapes how people view each of the political parties in the United States, and in particular Donald Trump, whose candidacy and presidency brought these intergroup conflicts into the open.

**Conclusion**

*“The desire for a strong leader who can identify domestic enemies and who promises to do something about them without worrying over much about legalities – those germs, mutated to fit the particular local subcultures, are latent in every democratic electorate, waiting for sufficiently widespread human suffering to provide conditions for the explosive spread.”*

* Achen and Bartels (2016)

In two sets of data, we have demonstrated that feelings toward social groups can affect feelings about parties and candidates, and that these effects are not identical for Trump himself and the Republican Party as a whole. We consider these effects of social affect to be normatively worrisome for a few reasons.

First, the influence of social group affect on partisan and presidential affect, indicates a type of partisan competition rooted in racial and religious differences. Achen and Bartels (2016) have demonstrated that the “folk theory” of democracy, in which parties compete for voters based on rational policy positions, is a far cry from reality. Indeed, they argue that American democracy is strongly, if not mainly, influenced by social group loyalties. As racial and religious animosities increasingly generate partisan and candidate animosity, we are overlaying partisan contests with a national legacy of racial and religious conflict. These types of social conflicts are not known for their sensible compromise and measured debate. The more these passionate and unruly battles are allowed to characterize democratic governance, the less democratic American government will be.

Second, as Achen and Bartels (2016) state above, when partisanship is tightly wound with other identities, it becomes easier to identify “domestic enemies.” The spread of animosity between social and partisan identities means that more social groups in society can be seen as adversaries, rather than as fellow citizens. These divisions, once made and reinforced, have the power to undermine the concept of one cohesive public, for which democracy is supposed to work. As partisan affective polarization deepens, it has the potential to take on a life of its own, dividing ever larger numbers of Americans against each other in the name of partisan victory.

Finally, the differences between predictors of Trump support and Republican Party approval are worrisome. Animosity toward Republican social outgroups seems to be more powerful at driving support for Trump than support for the Republican Party itself. It appears that while support for Republicans is powerfully driven by increased feelings of warmth for partisan ingroup members, support for Trump is driven by increasingly cold feelings toward partisan outgroup members. These results suggest that Trump himself is driving a more conflict-oriented type of political interaction. Even before Trump was a political figure, we can locate his future supporters among those who dislike non-White and non-Christian Americans.

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Appendix:

Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:Black change hist.eps

Macintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:muslim change hist.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:Hisp change hist.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:LG change hist.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:Jewish change hist.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:white change hist.epsMacintosh HD:Users:lillianamason:Dropbox:conferences:Midwest 2019:Affective Polarization RT:christian change hist.eps

1. More details regarding survey methodology can be found here: https://www.voterstudygroup.org/publications/2017-voter-survey/methodology-for-2017-voter-survey [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We also note that in analyses not presented here, baseline affect and changing affect toward Jewish people significantly predicts support for Democrats as well. Warm and warming feelings toward Jewish people predicts warmer affect toward the Democratic Party in 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In models not shown here, feelings toward Whites do not have any significant effect on Democratic Party affect in 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)