On the measurement of social class and its role in shaping white vote choice in the 2016 U.S. presidential election

Joshua N. Zingher

Old Dominion University, USA

A B S T R A C T

In this paper, I assess how social class influenced white vote choice in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. I use 2016 ANES data to create a measure of class that is based on an individual's income, education, occupation, and wealth. I then use a structural equation model to show that an individual's social class both directly and indirectly shaped vote choice. I demonstrate that low class standing was a significant predictor of support for Trump in the general election. I also show that social class exerted an indirect effect. Lower class standing is associated with higher levels of racial resentment and authoritarianism, which were in turn strong predictors vote choice. I conclude that social class was one of the primary determinants of white vote choice.

There is an ongoing debate among political observers and academics about whether and how social class shaped white vote choice in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Was there a class divide? Was Trump successful in winning white 'working class' voters? Proponents of this claim point to the fact that the white vote was polarized along educational lines—whites without a college degree were much more likely to support Trump compared to whites with a degree. This is evidence of class-based voting, if we assume that education is synonymous with class. Opponents present a contrasting set of facts—whites were not polarized along income lines. Thus, if income is synonymous with class, claims about the prevalence of class-based voting fall apart. These disparate findings point to a foundational issue—our conceptions of class, at least in the American context, are under defined.

In this paper I address two questions: 1.) what is the best way to measure class? and, 2.) did class shape white vote choice in the 2016 U. S. presidential election? One of the debates in the American class voting literature is how to measure social class. Typically, analysts select one particular measure (income, education, occupation, etc.) as a proxy for class standing and then use it to divide the electorate into discrete categories (working class, professional class, etc.). I argue that using just one of these items does not fully capture the underlying concept. I also argue that attempting to divide the electorate into discrete classes might do more to obscure than inform. I address these issues by developing a continuous measure of social class that combines income, education, and occupation, in addition to spousal education and wealth. I then use this measure to assess the degree of class-based voting in the 2016 election. I show that higher class standing was negatively correlated with support for Donald Trump. I also show that class *indirectly* affected vote choice. Lower class standing is associated with higher levels of

racial resentment and authoritarianism, which in turn were both strongly associated with voting for Trump.

This article consists of five sections. In the first section, I discuss the concept of social class and explain how social class shapes two key dispositions: racial resentment and authoritarianism. I discuss the measurement of social class in section two. I address the measurement of racial resentment and authoritarianism in section three. In section four, I utilize a generalized structural equation model to test the interrelationships between social class, authoritarianism, racial resentment, and vote choice. I find that social class exerted a direct effect on vote choice, with lower class status being positively associated with support for Trump. I also find that class exerted an indirect effect on vote choice. This indirect effect stems from the fact that social class shapes both authoritarianism and racial resentment. I discuss the implications of class-based voting in the final section.

1. Class cleavages in American society

Social class is one of the key cleavages in American society. Broadly speaking, class is a measure of a person's rank in society. Class can be conceived of both objectively and subjectively. As Kraus et al. (2012, pg. 546) state, "an individual's social class is a context rooted in both the material substance of social life (wealth, education, occupation) and the individual's construal of his or her class rank and is a core aspect of how he or she thinks of the self and relates to the social world." Social class is a mixture of an individual's objective resources as well as their subjective perceptions about where they stand.

Americans are sharply divided along class lines. There are wide class-based disparities in family structure, parenting strategies, religiosity,

E-mail address: jzingher@odu.edu.

incarceration rates, and health outcomes (Lipset, 1959; Gallo and Matthews, 2003; Cherlin, 2014; Putnam, 2016; Fiske and Hazel Rose Markus, 2012). Class shapes all facets of social life. Politics are no exception. Class status is a powerful predictor of voting in elections, with members of the upper class being more likely to vote than members of the lower classes (Leighley and Nagler, 2013; Smets and Van Hamm, 2013).

There also has been a vigorous debate as to the extent members of the working-class vote in their best interests when they do turn out. Following the 2000 election, Thomas Frank advanced the argument that members of the white working class were voting against their economic self-interest by supporting Republican candidates. Frank argued that the focus on cultural issues (abortion, gay rights, etc.) led the socially conservative working class to support the Republican Party despite the fact that the Republican Party opposed labor unions and supported tax policies aimed at helping capital. Frank's book produced a number of responses including those from Bartels (2006) and Gelman (2009) that argued that the working class does not vote against their own interests and that low income is positively associated with voting for the Democratic Party. One of the key points in the back and forth debate between Bartels, Gelman et al., and Frank was whether education or income was a better measure of class (Frank, 2005).

These debates about how to measure class and its role in shaping vote choice are part of a broader debate about how class shapes attitudes more broadly. Here, there is a long intellectual tradition to draw on. In his seminal 1959 article, Seymour Lipset argued low class standing (as measured by education and occupation) was associated with greater hostility towards out-groups and the prevalence of authoritarian personality traits (also see Napier et al., 2008). Lipset stated these dispositions made the working class "more likely than other strata to prefer extremist movements which suggest easy and quick solutions to social problems (pg. 483)." Some recent cross-national studies support this thesis; populist and authoritarian movements typically derive the greatest amount of support from the working classes (Napier et al., 2008; Gidron and Hall, 2017). Others have challenged it. Houtman (2003), as well as Dekker and Ester (1989), Grabb (1979, pg. 44), Ivarsflaten (2008) and Parker and Barreto (2014) have challenged Lipset's thesis on the grounds that his findings fail to hold when income is used as an indicator of class, opposed to education.

I argue these conflicting patterns stem from measurement issues. Typically, analysts sort individuals into discrete class categories (e.g. working class vs. professional class) based on particular characteristics (college degree vs. no degree, blue collar vs. white collar) and then draw conclusions based on these groupings (Gilbert, 2018, pgs. 10–11). As the previous discussion indicates, focusing on just one component of class can lead to different conclusions. This is doubly true if we then use this single measure to bifurcate individuals into discrete classes (e.g. splitting the population into working class vs. professional class on the basis of having a college degree). It is likely that people with similar positions on the scale will share similar status and experiences, but determining where the boundaries between the classes fall is wrought with difficulty. At one period in time looking at a man's occupation might be a straightforward way to demarcate household-level class divisions, but it is less clear that this is true in contemporary society given the rise of both dual income and female headed households (Gilbert, 2018, pg. 12).

I contend splitting the population into discrete classes is not the right way to think about class standing, both conceptually and empirically. Rather, I conceptualize class as a continuum. Empirically, multiple items convey information about where individuals fall along this continuum. Using multiple items allows me to build a scale and where I can include all relevant available information about a persons social standing, opposed to arbitrarily choosing between income, education, or occupation. Moreover, building a scale allows me to incorporate information about an individual's spouse and their level of wealth, both of which affect socioeconomic status but are rarely incorporated. We can use this resultant scale to break the population down into discrete categories, if necessary, but this is not required. I do not attempt to come up with empirical definitions of working class or professional class. Rather, I conceptualize class as a continuous latent trait.

1.1. Class and racial resentment

Broadly conceived, the racial resentment scale is a measure of anti-black attitudes. According to Kam and Burge (2018, pg. 314), it rests on three pillars 1.) Anti-black affect 2.) a belief that African Americans have failed to conform to the Protestant work ethic; and 3.) a denial of continuing discrimination against African Americans. As many studies have noted, the party coalitions have sorted along the grounds of racial attitudes, with the Democrats attracting racial liberals and the Republicans attracting racial conservatives (Tesler, 2016; Zingher, 2018). As such, multiple analyses found that racial resentment was a particularly powerful determinant of vote choice in 2016, even relative to 2012 (Reny et al., 2019; Mutz, 2018; Schaffner et al., 2018; Sides et al., 2017). While it is clear that racial resentment has been an important determinant of vote choice for some time and was especially important in 2016, we have devoted less attention to understanding how racial resentment varies as a function of social class. Individuals' self-identities are constructed in ways that allow them to have a positive self-perception, regardless of where they stand in the social hierarchy. Lamont (2000) argued that for the white working class, creating a positive self-image involves drawing sharp boundaries between themselves and both the professional class, who rank higher, and the poor (disproportionately viewed as black) who are lower. Thus, lower status whites might be more apt to adopt negative views about blacks in an effort to protect their status (likewise, higher status whites might be more likely elevate themselves by adopting negative views of the working class).

This possibility directly relates the concept of racial resentment. Lamont claimed that white working-class identity was shaped around the idea of the 'disciplined self (also see Cherlin, 2014; Williams, 2017).' The working-class places moral emphasis on hard work, honesty, self-sufficiency in the face of difficult circumstances, and supporting one's family. Work ethic and responsibility are highly valued and key to self-identity and perceptions of success. These same traits—belief in the importance of work ethic and overcoming obstacles—are at the heart of the concept of racial resentment. Thus, there is likely a connection between emphasis on these particular values and hostility towards those who are perceived not to adhere to them. One consistent finding across the social sciences is that higher levels of social status and/or education are associated with lower levels of out-group hostility and xenophobia (Napier et al., 2008). Education is a component of class, which could explain some of why lower-class rank is associated with increased hostility towards out-groups.

1.2. Class and authoritarianism

Authoritarianism is a personality trait marked by three key traits: submission to proper authorities, conventionalism, and aggression towards 'difference (Perez and Hetherington, 2014, 399).' Individuals who exhibit high degrees of authoritarianism show less tolerance toward individuals or groups who violate time-honored values or threaten the established order (Perez and Hetherington, 2014, 399; Stenner, 2005). The authoritarian viewpoint is that the social order is fragile and under attack and that groups that challenge the social order should not be tolerated (Hetherington and Weiler, 2009, 4). Feldman (2003) argues that authoritarians value social conformity over personal autonomy and, as a result, they are less tolerant of difference. As such, authoritarians are less accepting of groups like gays and lesbians, who challenge traditional sexual mores. Authoritarians are also less likely to approve of actions like civil disobedience and other forms of public protest as they present a direct challenge to authority.

Numerous studies have shown that the relationship between authoritarianism and partisanship has strengthened over the last several decades as issues like gay rights, illegal immigration, and terrorism have

been pushed to the forefront, with Democrats increasingly attracting non-authoritarians and the Republicans increasingly attracting authoritarians (Hetherington and Weiler, 2009; Merolla and Zechmeister, 2009). This relationship was likely particularly strong in 2016, given the populist and often authoritarian nature of many of Trump's appeals. While this relationship has been recognized and debated (Oliver and Rahn, 2016 and Tucker et al., 2019 found that populist, rather than authoritarian attitudes explain vote choice in the 2016 Republican primary), there is also a long stand of literature that draws the connection between authoritarian attitudes and class status.[1]

Lipset (1959) hypothesized that low education, geographic isolation, solitary employment, financial insecurities, and disciplinarian family structures led members of the lower and working classes to display higher levels of authoritarianism relative to their middle-class counterparts (Napier et al., 2008). A considerable amount of research has investigated the link between educational attainment and authoritarian personal traits. Hetherington and Weiler (2009, pg. 59) demonstrated that authoritarian personality traits were negatively associated with level of education. They attribute this finding to the fact that higher levels of education are typically associated with greater tolerance for ambiguity and less propensity for thinking in terms of 'black and white' absolutes. There are likely other factors at work too. Lipset argued that working class individuals tend to have jobs where there is close observation by a supervisor and little room for creativity (e.g. assembly line). Strict obedience to authority is required in many working-class jobs, opposed to professional class jobs which often involve a good deal of autonomy.

1.3. Hypotheses

My claim is that social class was a key determinant of white vote choice in the 2016 election. I limit the sample to whites because there is a considerable amount of evidence from both 2016 and prior that suggests class shapes whites and non-white vote choice in profoundly different ways (Dawson, 1994; Leighley and Nagler, 2016). I argue that social class affected white vote choice both indirectly and directly. The indirect effect of social class travels through two variables—racial resentment and authoritarianism. Class standing is associated with both racial resentment and authoritarianism, both of which in turn shape vote choice. This leads to my first hypothesis:

H1. Among whites, lower class standing is associated with higher levels of racial resentment and authoritarianism, which is in turn associated with a greater likelihood of voting for Trump in the 2016 election.

I also contend that class directly shaped vote choice. Both Clinton and Trump made various types of class-based appeals. Trump used a lot of anti-elite, populist messages that were designed to resonate with the white working class. Trump's attacks on high status elites likely resonated more among those with low status, while Clinton's 'basket of deplorables' comment paired with her focus on breaking the glass ceiling were more geared towards appealing to those with higher class standings (Williams, 2017). This leads to my second hypothesis:

H2. Among whites, lower social class standing is associated with a greater likelihood of voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 election.

2. The measurement of social class

The empirical study of social class has revealed that there are two primary components of social class: an individual's objective level of material and social resources (i.e. income, education, etc.) and an individual's subjective perception regarding where they rank in the overall social hierarchy (Kraus et al., 2012, 547). Political science scholarship has tended to focus on the objective components of class, because individuals' perceptions about their class status is often a poor match with their objective statuses (manual workers calling themselves middle-class, etc.). In fact, the majority of ANES respondents identify as middle-class when asked. In this analysis, I focus on the objective, material components of class and use measurement model techniques to create a continuous measure.

There has been a long tradition in the social sciences of attempting to build indices that are based on the separate components of class (Hauser and Warren, 1997). Some of these indices have focused on occupational prestige (e.g. Duncan, 1961; Stevens and Featherman, 1981) while others have focused on socio-economic status. The reliance of indices stems from a key observation—the objective components of class (education, income, wealth, occupational prestige) are all correlated, but not perfectly. Table 1 displays the polychoric correlations between these variables from the 2016 ANES. The correlations between education (broken into 16 categories), spousal education (also 16 categories), income (broken into 28 categories), occupational category (I use the 7-point EGP classification—see the appendix for full details), and owning stock (a measure of wealth, coded yes/no) are generally around .3 to .5, meaning while the correlations are strong, they are by no means perfect (Kraus et al., 2012, 547).

Education, income, and occupation are all related, but all of these items convey unique information. Income and wealth are measures of different types of material resources. Education is an indication of cultural capital, mobility, and available career paths. Occupation category denotes social prestige. They are not interchangeable. Looking at each element of class in isolation will lead to different conclusions. For example, is a 60-year-old plumber who makes 90 k a year upper class while a 30-year-old professor who makes 60 k a year middle class? Here, income and education/occupation tell different stories. Likewise, a foreman and a laborer or a banking executive and a middle manager might share the same occupation category and hold the same level of education but make markedly different amounts of money. It is hard to place individuals neatly within categories. This is why there is so much disagreement in the literature about the best way to measure class and why findings are often contingent upon whether researchers use income, education, or occupation to define class and what they use as the cut points to separate the classes (e.g. college degree/no college degree). This is why I opt for a continuous measure. This approach combines all of the available information and does not rely on subjective criteria to demarcate the classes. Supplemental appendix table A2 contains some example cases.

I incorporate both occupational and educational/income data, as well as information about spousal education and stock ownership (a measure of wealth) to create a continuous measure of social class. In addition, this framework allows me to incorporate other types of items

---

[1] It is important to note here that the predictors of vote choice in party primaries are quite different than the predictors of vote choice in the general election. There is more variation between parties than within parties on a number of key traits, such as racial resentment and authoritarianism. Thus, it is not surprising that these variables (e.g. authoritarianism), which play a big role in explaining vote choice in the general but little role in the Republican primary.

Table 1
Polychoric correlations between the different components of social class (pairwise).

	Education	Spouse Edu	Income	Own stock	Occupation (EGP)
Education	1.00				
Spouse Edu.	0.52	1.00			
Income	0.38	0.36	1.00		
Own stock	0.41	0.38	0.53	1.00	
Occupation (EGP)	−0.55	−0.35	−0.35	−0.31	1.00

that may tap into class status such as an individual's spouse's level of education (if applicable). My aim is to leverage this unique information to create a continuous, composite measure. Social science theories dating back to Marx make specific predictions about the behavior of specific class strata. One of the weaknesses of the component by component approach to testing theories of class is that it is hard to make a definitive statement about the extent of class-based voting. The goal of creating a single measure of class is to 1.) better capture underlying concept, and 2.) use the estimates to draw conclusions about the prevalence of class-based voting.

To accomplish this, I use the 2016 American National Election Study timeseries data in conjunction with a hybrid item response model (IRT), which combines a graded response model (GRM) to analyze the ordinal responses (education, spousal education, income, and EGP-Employment category) and a nominal response model (NRM) for the nominal responses (own stock). Both of these models assume that items vary in terms of both difficulty (i.e. the slope) and discrimination (Ostini and Nering, 2006). Similar to factor analysis, the goal of IRT models is to assess where individuals fall along a latent dimension. IRT models can deal with missing data in ways that factor analysis cannot, which allow me to include questions about spousal education (where single people would otherwise be omitted) and income (which people often refuse to answer, see [Hauser and Warren, 1997]) without dropping cases. The results of the model suggest that each of items contain meaningful information about an individual's class status. The discrimination parameter is statistically significant for each item, which indicates that each item taps into the underlying dimension. Appendix Table A1 contains the estimated discrimination and difficulty parameters. The IRT model uses these estimates parameters to produce a score for each individual based on each individual's responses. I use each individual's score as a measure of their class position.

As mentioned in the previous sections, generations of scholars have argued that class status is associated with a wide range of social, personal, and political outcomes. One way to assess the validity of my estimates is to compare these scores with outcomes that are thought to vary by class. I present such an assessment in Table 2. Here, I break the ANES sample down into class quartiles and then assess how marital, health, and employment status varies. Table 2 demonstrates that marital status, self-evaluated health, and employment status all vary by social class. Compared to those in the top quarter, those in the bottom quarter on the class scale are much less likely to be married (33% vs. 73%), more likely to be divorced (25% vs. 9%), lack health insurance (16% vs. 1%), and be unemployed or on disability (19% vs. 3%). Those in bottom quartile gave more negative evaluations of their health status (mean 2.98 on a five-point scale) than those in the top quarter (2.11), were less likely to believe most people can be trusted (3.1 vs. 2.46 on a five-point scale) and reported they were less likely to read news reports than those in the top quarter. Those in the middle two quartiles generally range between these two extremes.

Continuing with the second half of Table 2, those in the bottom quartile were less likely to vote (self-reported 71% vs. 94%) but more likely to support Trump than those in the top quartile (65% vs. 38%). Those in the bottom quarter were also more supportive of building a wall on the Mexican border (mean 3.59 vs. 5.04 on a seven-point scale) and more negative about free trade (mean 4.11 vs. 3.12 on a seven-point scale), which makes sense given the negative effects of globalization fall primarily upon the working class. Not only do important social characteristics vary by class, but political attitudes and behaviors do too.

3. The measurement of racial resentment and authoritarianism

My argument is that social class was a key determinant of vote choice in 2016 because of its role in shaping racial resentment and authoritarianism. The ANES asks a battery of four questions designed to gauge racial resentment. These questions assess whether individuals believe that African Americans are disadvantaged as a result of structural factors

Table 2
How whites' political and social characteristics vary by social class quartile.

Bottom 25%	N	Mean	Std.	Min	Max
Unemployed	763	0.19	0.40	0.00	1.00
Divorced	763	0.25	0.43	0.00	1.00
Married	763	0.33	0.47	0.00	1.00
Self-Reported Health	763	2.98	1.09	1.00	5.00
Trust Most People	759	3.10	0.94	1.00	5.00
Uninsured	762	0.16	0.37	0.00	1.00
Read News	761	5.28	2.18	0.00	7.00
25%-50%	*N*	*Mean*	*Std.*	*Min*	*Max*
Unemployed	756	0.06	0.24	0.00	1.00
Divorced	756	0.20	0.40	0.00	1.00
Married	756	0.50	0.50	0.00	1.00
Self-Reported Health	755	2.52	1.01	1.00	5.00
Trust Most People	755	2.82	0.88	1.00	5.00
Uninsured	756	0.07	0.37	0.00	1.00
Read News	756	5.60	1.90	0.00	7.00
50%-75%	*N*	*Mean*	*Std.*	*Min*	*Max*
Unemployed	760	0.05	0.22	0.00	1.00
Divorced	760	0.15	0.36	0.00	1.00
Married	760	0.62	0.49	0.00	1.00
Self-Reported Health	760	2.36	0.91	1.00	5.00
Trust Most People	758	2.66	0.81	1.00	5.00
Uninsured	760	0.04	0.20	0.00	1.00
Read News	758	5.70	1.85	0.00	7.00
Top 25%	*N*	*Mean*	*Dev.*	*Min*	*Max*
Unemployed	759	0.03	0.17	0.00	1.00
Divorced	759	0.09	0.29	0.00	1.00
Married	759	0.73	0.44	0.00	1.00
Self-Reported Health	758	2.11	0.91	1.00	5.00
Trust Most People	759	2.46	0.70	1.00	5.00
Uninsured	759	0.01	0.11	0.00	1.00
Read News	759	6.10	1.54	0.00	7.00
Voted Trump	383	0.65	0.48	0.00	1.00
Voted	520	0.78	0.41	0.00	1.00
PID	755	4.17	1.99	1.00	7.00
Ideology	479	4.39	1.47	1.00	7.00
Build Wall	761	3.59	2.30	1.00	7.00
Free Trade	640	4.11	1.67	1.00	7.00
25%-50%	*N*	*Mean*	*Dev.*	*Min*	*Max*
Voted Trump	504	0.59	0.49	0.00	1.00
Voted	616	0.88	0.32	0.00	1.00
PID	756	4.38	2.13	1.00	7.00
Ideology	613	4.47	1.55	1.00	7.00
Build Wall	751	3.84	2.38	1.00	7.00
Free Trade	640	3.80	1.61	1.00	7.00
50%-75%	*N*	*Mean*	*Std.*	*Min*	*Max*
Voted Trump	534	0.53	0.50	0.00	1.00
Voted	628	0.92	0.27	0.00	1.00
PID	757	4.41	2.17	1.00	7.00
Ideology	671	4.40	1.63	1.00	7.00
Build Wall	758	4.18	2.37	1.00	7.00
Free Trade	649	3.54	1.61	1.00	7.00
Top 25%	*N*	*Mean*	*Std.*	*Min*	*Max*
Voted Trump	583	0.38	0.49	0.00	1.00
Voted	665	0.94	0.24	0.00	1.00
PID	758	3.91	2.24	1.00	7.00
Ideology	730	3.90	1.69	1.00	7.00
Build Wall	757	5.04	2.33	1.00	7.00
Free Trade	664	3.12	1.60	1.00	7.00

or whether these disparities are due to the fact that African Americans are unwilling to work hard and help themselves (Ditonto et al., 2013). I use individuals' responses to these four questions to build a scale measuring racial resentment. Here, I take an individual's average score across the four questions (all run 1 though 5, with 5 being high resentment, alpha = .84). I take a similar approach to measuring authoritarianism. Scholars have developed a measure of authoritarianism that is based off individuals' attitudes towards child rearing.

Those with authoritarian personality traits will favor more authoritarian parenting approaches. When it comes to children, authoritarians are more apt to value obedience over independence and value good manners over self-expression. The ANES contains four questions that gauge individuals' attitudes towards child rearing. I average individuals' responses to create a single measure (alpha = .64). This measure of authoritarianism has repeatedly been validated (at least when it comes to whites, see, Perez and Hetherington [2014]).

4. An analysis of the determinants of vote choice in the 2016 election

I posit that social class shapes both racial resentment and authoritarian predispositions and both of these traits in turn shape vote choice. This opens up the possibility that social class has a direct effect on vote choice and also an indirect effect that travels through racial resentment and authoritarianism. The nature of these relationships calls for a generalized structural equation model. In each regression, I include control variables for partisanship, ideology, age, gender, economic perceptions, and living in the South. I restrict my model to non-Hispanic whites, which removes the need to control for race/ethnicity. There are two ways that social class can shape vote choice: directly and indirectly through racial resentment and authoritarianism. Ultimately, this generalized structural equation model contains three equations, one OLS equation predicting racial resentment as a linear function of social class, one OLS equation predicting authoritarianism as a function of social class, and a third equation, specified as a logit model (to account for the binary dependent variable), predicting Trump vote choice (1/0) as a function of class, racial resentment, authoritarianism, and a battery of control variables. Supplemental appendix Figure A1 displays the path diagram. I use survey weights at each stage of the estimation process.

Table 3
SEM model predicting vote for trump in the general election as a function of social class, racial resentment, authoritarianism, and controls.[a]

VARIABLES	DV = Racial Res. Score	DV = AUT Score	DV = Trump Vote
Social Class	−0.21*	−0.30*	−0.32*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.13)
Racial Res. Score			1.13*
			(0.15)
AUT Score			0.46*
			(0.14)
Age	0.00*	0.00*	0.02*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Gender	0.03	−0.00	0.11
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.20)
Party ID	0.12*	0.04*	0.75*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.07)
Ideology	0.18*	0.14*	0.52*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.10)
South	0.12*	0.06	0.13
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.23)
Constant	−1.39*	−1.03*	−6.55*
	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.68)
Error Cov. Racial Res.- AUT	0.13*		
	(0.01)		
Observations	2125	2125	1708
R^2/Pseudo R2	.45	.35	.61

Robust standard errors in parentheses * p < .05.
[a] Roughly 300 individuals in this sample reported voting but likely did not, per the ANES vote validation. The effects of class on vote choice are actually stronger when I omit these individuals.

Table 3 displays the results.

Table 3 contains a number of interesting results. One thing that is apparent is that social class strongly influences both racial resentment and authoritarian predispositions.[2] A one-unit increase along the social class scale (which runs from −2.5 to 3) is associated with a 0.21-point decrease on the racial resentment scale and a 0.29-point decrease along the authoritarianism scale. Republican partisanship and identifying as a conservative are also significantly associated with higher levels of racial resentment and authoritarianism, although the effect of ideology (b = .18, b = 0.14) is larger than the effect of partisanship (b = 0.12, b = 0.04) in both cases.[3] The substantive conclusion here is that higher social standing is associated with lower levels of racial resentment and lower levels of authoritarianism, at least among whites.

The final equation tests how well social class, racial resentment, and authoritarianism predict vote choice. A vote for Trump is coded as a positive outcome. Votes for other candidates are coded as a zero. I omit non-voters. The results demonstrate that both racial resentment (b = 1.12) and authoritarianism (b = 0.46) exert a powerful and statistically significant effect on vote choice. The likelihood of voting for Trump increases as a function of racial resentment and authoritarianism. The coefficient for social class is in the expected direction (b = −.32) and statistically significant (p = .014). Unsurprisingly, partisanship (b = 0.75) and self-reported ideology (b = 0.52) exert strong effects on vote choice too, with conservatives and Republicans being statistically significantly more likely to vote for Trump. Fig. 1 displays the marginal effects.

Social class shapes vote choice through three paths. It has a direct effect and also indirect effects traveling through racial resentment and authoritarianism. Now I estimate the total effect. I assess this possibility by combining the indirect and direct of effects and coming up with an estimate of the total effect. Using STATA's NLCOM command I estimate that the indirect effect of social class on vote choice that runs through racial resentment is (b = −.24) and authoritarianism is (b = −14). Both of these estimated effects are significant at the 0.001 levels. I estimate that total effect of social class on vote choice is b = 0.7 (p = .000). The substantive size of this effect is on par with that of partisanship or ideology. These findings are in line with the expectations laid out in *H1* and *H2*—social class had a substantively meaningful direct and indirect effect on vote choice.

Higher social class is associated with a lower probability of voting for Trump. This is true of both Democratic and Republican partisans. In the sample, there were 1011 white Republican identifiers (5–7 on the seven-point partisanship scale). Of these, 877 voted for Trump and 134 voted for Clinton. The mean social class score of the Republicans who defected was 0.41, while the mean score of Republicans who remained loyal was 0.03. The same is true for Democrats. There were 828 white Democrats, 746 of whom voted for Clinton and 82 voted for Trump. Clinton voters had a mean social class score of 0.31, those who defected had a mean class score of −0.41.

5. Discussion and conclusions

So how do these results speak to the debate regarding how much of Trump's support came from the white working class? My answer to this question is that it depends on what group of people we define as 'working class.' Trump's campaign appealed most strongly to low-social status whites, but ultimately attracted broad support from whites across the class spectrum. Trump won 65 percent of the vote among whites in the bottom class-quartile, but turnout among this group was quite low.

---

[2] I replicated these analyses using separate measures of income, education, and occupation in place of the composite measure of social class (see in the appendix).
[3] I replicate this model using the 2012 ANES data in table A4 of the supplemental appendix.
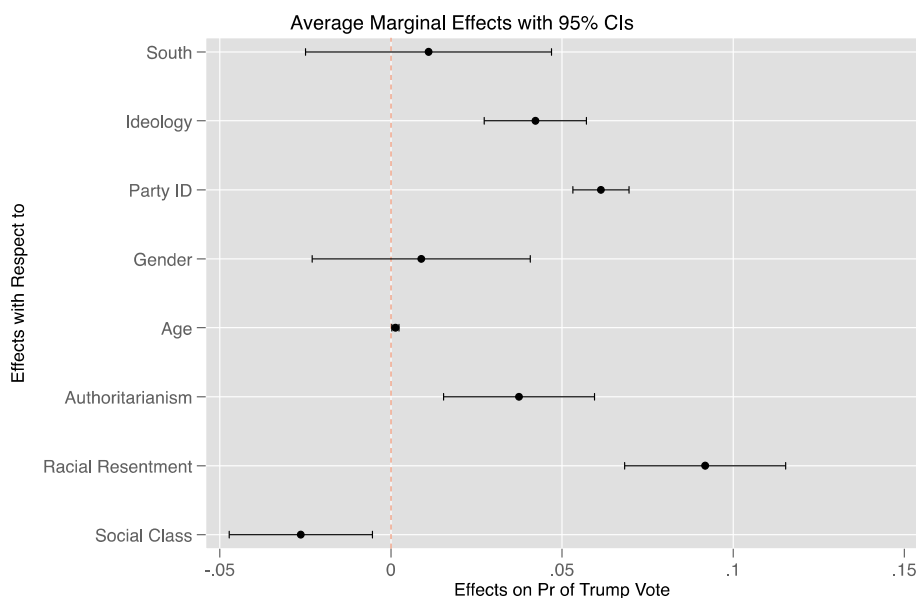
Fig. 1. The Average Marginal Direct Effect of Each Independent Variable on the Probability of Voting for Trump (corresponds with column 3 of Table 3).

He won 59 percent among the second lowest class quartile and 53 among the third, where turnout was higher. Trump won 37-percent of the votes among whites in the top quartile. Trump was certainly successful among lower status whites, but his success was by no means limited to this group. In fact, the majority of Trump's votes actually came from whites in the top half of the class distribution (when differences in turnout are taken into account). White voters (mean .13) were approximately a half a standard deviation higher on the class scale than white non-voters (mean −0.32). To paraphrase Dahl's famous quote "the voice of the masses sings with an upper class accent." This casts doubt on the claim that the majority of Trump voters were "working class," but does not cast doubt on the claim that class was a key determinant of vote choice—it was.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi. org/10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102119.

References

Bartels, Larry, 2006. What's the Matter with What's the Matter with Kansas. Q. J. Political Sci. 1, 201–226.

Cherlin, Andrew, 2014. Labor's Love Lost: the Rise and Fall of the Working-Class Family in America. Russell Sage Foundation, New York, NY.

Dawson, Michael, 1994. Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Dekker, Paul, Ester, Peter, 1989. Working-class Authoritarianism: a Re-examination of the lispset thesis. Eur. J. Political Res. 15, 395–415.

Ditonto, Tessa M., Lau, Richard R., Sears, David O., 2013. AMPing racial attitudes: comparing the power of explicit and implicit racism measures in 2008. Political Psychol. 34 (4), 487–510.

Duncan, O.D., 1961. A socioeconomic index for all occupations. In: Reiss, A.J. (Ed.), Occupations and Social Status. Free Press, New York, NY, pp. 109–138.

Feldman, Stanley, 2003. Enforcing social conformity: a theory of authoritarianism. Political Psychol. 24 (1), 41–74.

Fiske, Susan T., Markus, Hazel Rose (Eds.), 2012. Facing Social Class: How Societal Rank Influences Interaction. Russell Sage Foundation, New York, NY.

Frank, Thomas, 2005. What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America. Henry Holt and Co, New York, NY.

Gallo, Linda C., Matthews, Karen A., 2003. Understanding the association between socioeconomic status and physical health: do negative emotions play a role? Psychol. Bull. 129 (1), 10–51.

Gelman, Andrew, 2009. Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Gidron, Noam, Hall, Peter A., 2017. The politics of social status: economic and cultural roots of the populist right. Br. J. Sociol. 68 (S1), S57–S84.

Gilbert, Dennis, 2018. The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality, tenth ed. Sage Publications, Inc.

Grabb, Edward, 1979. Working-class Authoritarianism and tolerance of outgroups: a reassessment. Public Opin. Q. 43 (1), 36–47.

Hauser, Robert M., Warren, John Robert, 1997. Socioeconomic indexes for occupations: a review, update, and critique. Sociol. Methodol. 27 (1), 177–298.

Hetherington, Marc, Weiler, Jonathan, 2009. Authoritarianism & Polarization in American Politics. Oxford University Press, New York, NY.

Houtman, Dick, 2003. Lipset and "working class" authoritarianism. Am. Sociol. 34 (½), 85–103.

Ivarsflaten, Elisabeth, 2008. What unites right-wing populists in western Europe? Re-examining grievance mobilization models in seven successful countries. Comp. Pol Stud. 41 (1), 3–23.

Kam, Cindy, Cindy, Burge, C., 2018. Uncovering Reactions to the Racial Resentment Scale across the Racial Divide. J. Politics 80 (1), 314–320.

Kraus, Michael W., Piff, Paul K., Mendoza-Denton, Rodolfo, Rheinschmidt, Michelle L., Keltner, Dacher, 2012. Social class, solipsim, and contextualism: how the rich are different from the poor. Psychol. Rev. 119 (3), 546–572.

Lamont, Michele, 2000. The Dignity of Working Men. Russell Sage Foundation, New York, NY.

Leighley, Jan, Nagler, Jonathan, 2013. Who Votes Now? Demographics, Issues, Inequality, and Turnout in the United States. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Leighley, Jan E., Nagler, Jonathan, 2016. Latino electoral participation: variations on demographics and ethnicity. RSF: The Russell Sage Found. J. Soc. Sci. 2 (3), 148–164.

Lipset, Martin Seymour, 1959. Democracy and working-class Authoritarianism. Am. Sociol. Rev. 24 (4), 482–501.

Merolla, Jennifer L., Zechmeister, Elizabeth J., 2009. Democracy at Risk: How Terrorist Threats Affect the Public. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.

Mutz, Diana, 2018. Status threat, not economic hardship, explains the 2016 presidential vote. Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. 115 (19), E4330–E4339.

Napier, Jamie, L., Jost, John T., 2008. The "antidemocratic personality: revisited: A cross-national investigation of working-class Authoritarianism. J. Soc. Issues 64 (3), 595–617.

Oliver, J. Eric, Rahn, Wendy M., 2016. Rise of the trumpenvolk: populism in the 2016 election. ANNALS, AAPSS 667, 189–206.

Ostini, Remo, Nering, Michael L., 2006. Polytomous Item Response Theory Models. Sage Publications, Inc, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Parker, Christopher, Barreto, Matt, 2014. Change They Can't Believe in: the Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Perez, Ethan O., Hetherington, Marc J., 2014. Authoritarianism in black and white: testing the cross-racial validity of the child rearing scale. Political Anal. 22, 398–412.

Putnam, Robert, 2016. Our Kids: the American Dream in Crisis. Simon & Schuster, Inc, New York, NY.

Reny, Tyler, Collingwood, Loren, Ali, Valenzuela, 2019. Vote switching in the 2016 election: how racial and immigration attitudes, not economics, explain shifts in white voting. Public Opin. Q. 83 (1), 91–113.

Schaffner, Brian, MacWilliams, Matthew, Nteta, Tatishe, 2018. Explaining white polarization in the 2016 vote for president: the sobering role of racism and sexism. Political Sci. Q. 133 (1), 9–34.

Sides, John, Tesler, Michael, Lynn, Vavreck, 2017. The 2016 U.S. Election: how Trump lost and won. J. Democr. 28 (2), 34–44.

Smets, Kaat, Van Hamm, Carolien, 2013. The embarrassment of riches? A meta-analysis of individual-level research on voter turnout. Elect. Stud. 32, 344–359.

Stenner, Karen, 2005. The Authoritarian Dynamic. Cambridge University Press, New York, NY.

Stevens, Gillian, Featherman, David L., 1981. A revised socioeconomic index of occupational status. Soc. Sci. Res. 10 (4), 364–395.

Tesler, Michael, 2016. Post Racial or Most Racial? Race and Politics in the Obama Era. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.

Tucker, Patrick D., Torres, Michelle, Sinclair, Betsy, Smith, Steven S., 2019. Pathways to Trump: Republican Voters in 2016. Electoral Studies, p. 102035.

Williams, Joan C., 2017. White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America. Harvard Business Review Press, Boston, MA.

Zingher, Joshua N., 2018. Polarization, demographic change, and white flight from the democratic party. J. Politics 80 (3), 860–872.