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Battle for the Soul of the Working Class:  
Trajectories and Dynamics of Class Politics in the United States and France

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**Abstract**

Donald Trump's unexpected lead in the ongoing US presidential primaries has come as a shock to observers on the Right and Left alike. Bernie Sanders has also done unexpectedly well, casting doubt on the long-held assumption that a self-styled Socialist campaign is impossible in the United States. In this paper, I will attempt to gain a better understanding of these trends through a comparative-historical study of the United States and France; the latter recently elected François Hollande of the Parti Socialiste, but has also seen the steady rise of the far-right Front National now led by Marine Le Pen. Based on this comparison, I will argue that even though France has a stronger history of organizing politics along class lines, in both countries the left-wing candidate has struggled to balance radical rhetoric with the interests of upper-class liberals. This, in turn, has allowed right-wing populists to appeal more directly to the anger of working-class whites marginalized by long-term structural changes in the labor market.

To many political observers, Bernie Sanders's unexpected rise during the summer of 2015 signals a sea change in American politics. By defining himself as a Socialist, Sanders proudly labeled his campaign with a term which many on the Right regularly use as a political insult. And in spite of initial predictions that running under that name would be "quixotic at best" (Roberts 2015b), he has outdone all other Democratic competitors save for Hillary Clinton. He has also challenged another key aphorism of American political life: that class politics, the self-conscious organization of political parties and movements around the interests of economic and social classes, is all but impossible in the exceptional circumstances of the United States. Even though he has not called for the sweeping nationalization of private industry, he has made an ambitious step in the direction of social democracy, and many of his policies would not look terribly out of place in the platform of a European middle-left party (Roberts 2015a). Indeed, even though Sanders is better described as a Social Democrat than a hardline Socialist, this is still a major step to the left for the US.

Donald Trump, on the other hand, has been branded by opponents as the quintessential voice of American Capitalism. An ostentatious multi-billionaire with no qualms about discussing his net worth, he has never held office but claimed from day one that his business experience will allow him to run the country efficiently (Ronayne 2015). This claim is not without its supporters in a country where faith in established politicians and bureaucrats has fallen so low. His speeches, however, do not suggest any kind of detached elitism, at least not the kind that plagued Romney in 2012. Trump has earned a solid reputation for disregarding the norms of political correctness, asserting in one notorious case that undocumented immigrants are "rapists" and "killers" (Scott 2015) and

proposing that Muslims be temporarily barred from entering the United States (McCarthy et al. 2015). In spite of controversial remarks like these, he nevertheless shot to the top of the polls over the summer, and as of this writing holds a firm lead in the Republican presidential primaries. While clearer perhaps in retrospect, this should not be taken for granted. Trump's sudden and spectacular rise was not merely an upset against established conservative elites like Jeb Bush, who did well in the pre-caucus "money primary" but quickly lost ground in the polls. It also represents a break with the emerging Republican "far right" composed of Tea Partiers and evangelical Christians, who mix a firm belief in small government with traditional religious social-conservatism. A candidate who says what he thinks and believes what he says, Trump has capitalized not only on his status as a Washington outsider but also on his straightforward and politically incorrect tone. What's more, his anger seems to resonate with working-class white conservatives suspicious that their American Dream is being stolen. But how does Bernie Sanders's "Socialist" (read: Social Democratic) campaign, or Donald Trump's brand of all-American populism, actually compare to the right and left of European politics?

For a clearer perspective on this issue, I look across the Atlantic to France. Needless to say, the two countries have very deep differences. While the United States was born of immigration and has long struggled with issues of race, France as a nation was shaped by the imposition of metropolitan and republican values. And while Socialism has long been considered a fringe idea in the US, in France the Parti Socialiste has been the main Left party for the better part of a century. The two countries' political institutions, including their procedures for electing a president, also differ considerably. Yet a broader look at the last few decades of French presidential politics suggests that the

relatively sudden emergence of Trump and Sanders in the United States resembles a longer-term electoral trend in France. On the Left, François Hollande of the Parti Socialiste managed to win the 2012 election on a platform which, though moderate, still made class appeals along Social Democratic lines (Hewlett 2012). This was by no means an easy feat, as since the 1980s (in many ways, since it came into existence) the Parti Socialiste has been divided by internal fractures over cultural issues and the balance between radicalism and reform. These fractures have opened the way for Jean-Marie Le Pen of the Front National, and later his daughter Marine, to stir up working-class anger and discontent by blaming immigrants for stealing jobs, spreading crime, and threatening French culture (Hewlett 2012). These similarities, when considered alongside the deeper structural differences between France and the United States, offer a promising opportunity for comparison.

In this paper, I will examine the current dynamics and historical trajectories of class politics in these two countries. I will begin by laying out a theoretical framework for defining and understanding class politics, followed by an overview of my methods. From there, I will move into a comparative-historical analysis of France and the United States, tracing the development of class politics in both countries, the ways in which recent presidential candidates have appealed to class, and the extent to which they have gained lower-class support. Based on this comparison, I will argue that although France has a much richer history of explicitly class-based politics than the United States, in both contexts Socialist parties are constrained by the conflicting demands of their working-class and reformist-liberal constituencies, allowing right-wing populists to capture the support of white working-class conservatives with rhetoric based on anti-immigrant

anger. In my conclusion, I will assess the implications which these findings present for the study of class politics in western democracies.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Social class, let alone class politics, is something of a nebulous concept. Weakliem and Adams (2011) offer a useful framework for navigating it by dividing accounts of class politics along two dimensions. The first concerns whether working-class identity is a spontaneous product of economic conditions, or a constructed product of mobilization by parties and other political actors. The second concerns whether Socialism is (or should be) directed primarily by the laborers themselves, or with the aid of all classes, including elites. By measuring along these two axes, one can divide class accounts into broad categories which emphasize Differences, Consciousness, Coalitions, and Hegemony (see Figure 1). For greater clarity, in this paper I will associate these perspectives with Alford, Marx, Weber, and Gramsci, respectively.

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**Figure 1: Four perspectives of class-politics analysis (Weakliem and Adams 2011)**

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The “Consciousness” perspective forms the background for “classical” class theory, and includes (but is not limited to) the Marxist and Leninist approaches. In the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Alford theorized that one can determine the “class” nature of a movement by measuring the “difference” between its working-class and other-class support; e.g. if 50% of workers and 20% of managers support a Left movement, its class nature can be determined by the (50-20=) 30% difference (Weakliem and Adams 2011)

narrowest but most illustrative version of this perspective, class interests exist primarily in terms of one's relationship to the System of Production, and as Capitalist society develops it will steadily converge toward a full dichotomy in which virtually all individuals are either wage laborers or owners of capital. Marx ([1847] 1978) predicts that as this two-dimensional division progresses, wage laborers will eventually unite to form a unified "class for itself" which is conscious of its own interests not only as they relate to individual workers, but also as they relate to the working class as a whole. Many Marxist scholars derive from this passage the concept of a "class in itself," which has objective interests but lacks subjective self-awareness, though Edward Andrew (1983) points out that the term "class in itself" and the usual meaning given to it do not actually appear in Marx's work. Whatever its origins, however, the debate over the subjective and objective interests of the working class, and with it the notion of an obstructive "false consciousness," still lurks behind the scenes in both Marxist and non-Marxist literature.

More recent scholars have tended to lean further toward the perspective which Weakliem and Adams identify as Hegemony. In contrast to Marx's theory, this approach treats the fragmented, shifting, and intersecting subjectivity of the working class not as a "false consciousness," but as the actual set of diverse identities which form in a modern society. In this sense it echoes Weber ([1921] 2010), who conceives of class not as Proletariat and Bourgeoisie, or even as upper, middle, and lower, but as a wide range of loyalties and identities which are more likely to cluster around a single profession or factory. To this, the Hegemony perspective also adds the Gramscian notion that class is as much a social-cultural concept as an economic one, meaning that class movements (or, more accurately, populist movements) may be organized around forms of identity which

extend beyond income and employment (Weakliem and Adams 2011). This holds true for whites as well as minorities. Evans (1993) finds that that while British lower-class voters tend to react to feelings of powerlessness with increased support for redistribution, and middle class voters react with a desire to roll back the welfare state, in both groups powerlessness is associated with socially conservative and socially authoritarian views. This is one of the strong points of the Gramscian (or Hegemony) perspective. Rather than treating the flow of low-income voters to right-wing extremism as a result of preferences and worldviews that are confused, ill-informed, or outright false, it recognizes that there are other cultural fault lines and markers of identity which can guide individuals more strongly than unified proletarian abstractions, especially in the presence of active right-wing political parties. For this reason, I believe it is better-suited than the Marxian notion of “class consciousness” for examining class and populist movements in today’s western democracies.

The Gramscian perspective is also useful because individuals’ actual income, profession, and relationship to the means of production do not always predict where they will place themselves on the social pyramid. Although he admits that people’s self-evaluations of class are a notoriously poor indicator of their actual class position, Josh Curtis (2013) nevertheless argues that such self-assessed measures are valuable precisely because of what they tell us about subjective identity. It has long been theorized, for example, that in developed economies people of all backgrounds are more likely to identify as “middle-class.” Curtis finds that as per-capita GDP increases people are also more likely to identify with the lower class, and that as inequality increases people are more likely to identify with either the upper class or the lower class (Curtis 2013).

According to his dataset of developed countries, only about a third of Americans identify with the middle class, less than his model predicts based on per-capita GDP but more than it predicts based on income inequality. In any case, this figure contradicts the wider assumption that middle-class identity is exceptionally prevalent in the US.

In this paper, I examine class politics primarily as it relates to the appeals made by political parties and presidential candidates. The Marxian and Gramscian models of class politics both assume that political parties play a role in creating class identities, reaching out to many different groups with appeals to shared benefits and interests (Weakliem and Adams 2011). Within the United States, Hill and Leighley (1996) find that the strength and liberalism of the local Democratic Party correlates with poor and working-class voter turnout during presidential election years, suggesting that the party mobilizes these voters for support. In countries with multiple major parties the situation is more complex. Predictably, Hicks and Swank (1992) find that Left-party governments, as well as Right and Center governments facing pressure from major Left opposition parties, are more likely to implement progressive welfare systems. But Left governments facing strong opposition are easily reined in, and when all else is held equal, Center parties are more active implementers of welfare than Left parties. Hicks and Swank (1992) attribute this outcome to Center parties' need to placate Left-wing movements or win over their voters, itself a sign of party mobilization around class, but also note that in many European countries the centrist party implementing welfare was guided by Christian-democratic and liberal-democratic values. This marks the distinguishing feature between the Marxian and Gramscian models; while both anticipate that parties will appeal to fragmented economic interests, the latter also pays attention to the mobilization of "classes" along

other lines of identity (Weakliem and Adams 2011). This feature makes it particularly appropriate for studying class politics in western democracies, especially France and the United States.

## **Methods**

In order to understand the dynamics of class politics in greater detail, I decided to analyze the United States and France in a comparative-historical study. More specifically, I employ what Goldstone (2003) categorizes as Congruence Testing: I investigate two cases of interest which should in theory yield different results, and search for unexpected similarities. I selected France and the United States because they offer enough common ground to form a basis for comparison, but are also different enough that one might expect different class outcomes. Both are western industrial democracies, highly developed but transitioning from a factory economy to a knowledge economy, and both are destinations for immigrants from the Global South. Their histories of class politics, on the other hand, are very different; the Parti Socialiste has been the leading party on the French Left for the better part of a century, while the various American Socialist parties rarely captured more than a small fringe of the vote even during their peak. Yet in spite of this, the French presidential election of 2012 saw a Social-Democrat running against a far-right populist, offering an intriguing parallel with Sanders and Trump in the United States. Presidential politics also offers a promising level of comparison, as both France and the United States have a fairly strong popularly elected executive, though the details of electoral law have produced different party systems in both countries. Hill and Leighley (1996) also find that at least in the US, the Democratic Party mobilizes lower-class voters more actively during presidential election years. For this reason, I focus on

selected presidential candidates rather than looking at party appeals in state and local elections.

While in a large-N statistical study it might be questionable to select limited aspects of only two cases, this is appropriate for the approach that I am using. As Skocpol (1978) points out, "...comparative-historical analysis works best when applied to a set of a few cases that share certain basic features. Cases need to be carefully selected and the criteria for grouping them together made explicit." As my goal is not to develop a new and universally generalizable model of class politics, but to see how well existing models apply in practice, sacrificing the breadth of the study in exchange for greater depth is a necessary and acceptable trade-off.

Due to the practical difficulties in amassing nationally representative surveys on the United States and France or obtaining interviews with national politicians in each, I rely primarily on existing literature. There is already an abundance of scholarly work on long-term political trends in the United States and France, which will allow me to gain a deeper understanding about political trends in both countries, though as far as I am aware this is the first paper to examine the two countries' class politics in a comparative light. I plan to supplement scholarly literature with information from news articles, as some of the events I cover are sufficiently recent that as of this writing no other academic studies have mentioned them. Although the use of non-scholarly news articles may suggest some loss in the credibility of information, Helbling (2014) and other authors in the social movement field have found that press reports of political candidates' stances on major issues are generally accurate. Nevertheless, I made an effort to screen news publishers for credibility, and did not reference articles with obvious bias on the part of the author.

Throughout the paper, and especially in my section on ongoing trends in the United States, I supplement these academic and journalistic sources with tables of polling data. With a few exceptions, most of these data come from polls conducted by Quinnipiac University (Malloy 2015, Malloy 2016a, Malloy 2016b, Schwarz 2016). Quinnipiac University's polling center is widely cited by major journalistic sources as a reliable and unbiased source of information; in the 2010 midterm Senate elections it was the most accurate of the major polling organizations in operation (Tanenbaum 2010). I also chose this source because it published detailed polls which analyzed candidates' support and favorability in light of ideology, race, gender, and several other variables, and because it released updated results for its national poll on a monthly basis, allowing me to keep up with electoral trends as the long 2016 presidential campaign unfolded.

## **France**

Even by West European standards, France is distinguished by a rich and turbulent history of class politics. The French Revolution was first and foremost a class event, carried out in a reaction against the wealth and privilege of the aristocracy and promising equality and brotherhood for all. Upon closer examination, however, the history of class politics in France is more complicated than it first appears. While France has an active far-left movement, including not only the Parti Socialiste but also the Parti Communiste Francais and an assortment of other radical movements, the history of these groups is often characterized by division rather than unity. Shaken by these divisions, the PS has steadily transitioned from a far-left party to a center-left one, periodically making appeals to class struggle and radical reform but pursuing more moderate policies in practice. On the Right, meanwhile, two generations of Le Pens have steadily transformed the Front

National from a fringe group into a major political force—and have, in the process, captured a sizeable number of white working-class voters from the PCF. At the same time, rising popular unrest over immigration has lent strength to the nationalist appeals of the French Right, leaving the Left caught between its liberal and working-class constituencies.

Like many West European countries, France has a more pluralistic assortment of parties than the United States, with minor parties on the far left, far right, and center holding seats in parliament and consistently securing over 5% of the vote in presidential elections. France's unique two-tier presidential election system, however, limits the ability of minor parties to secure the executive branch. The first round of voting is pluralistic, with all parties large and small running their candidates simultaneously, but the two candidates with the highest vote totals then move on to a second round decided by an absolute majority (Cole 2011). In theory, the first round allows any party to reach the national runoff, provided it can gather enough votes. But because only the top two finishers reach the second stage, both the Left and the Right have an incentive to form voting coalitions around the most viable candidates. The consequences of failing to do so were aptly demonstrated in 2002, when the Left vote was split so heavily that the final round resulted in a runoff between the center-right Jacques Chirac and the far-right Jean-Marie Le Pen.<sup>2</sup> Since 1978, the final round has usually been divided between the Parti Socialiste (PS) and the dominant center-right party of the time.<sup>3</sup> Both of these parties

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<sup>2</sup> Not to be confused with the current leader of the Front National, Marine Le Pen, who is Jean-Marie's daughter.

<sup>3</sup> From 1981 to 2002, the French center-right was divided between several minor parties, but Jacques Chirac's RPR (*Rassemblement pour la République*, Rally for the Republic) consistently gained the most votes. In 2002 these parties merged into the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP), the party of president Chirac and later president Sarkozy. In May 2015, the UMP was renamed *Les Républicains* (LR).

have experienced fractures, mergers, and in the latter case name changes, but their relative ideological positions have remained fairly steady since the 1970s (Williams 2011). And both remain particularly attentive to the interests of minor parties, seeking to either gain their endorsement in coalitions or to pull away their voters by echoing their rhetoric.

### *Historical Trajectory*

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ideology and culture have driven and divided class movements in France. The French Revolution, long considered a watershed for lower-class organization against the aristocracy, was also a reaction against the Church—a reaction which forged a sense of citizenship rooted in individualism, secularism, and the virtues of republican government (Raymond 2009). Over the century that followed, French secularism developed into a sort of national religion, drilled into students' minds as the characteristic that distinguished France from its new rival Germany. Hard Secularism did not mean tolerance of all faiths, as the Dreyfus Affair and the shock waves of anti-Semitism that followed it amply demonstrate (Pike 2014). Nor was it welcomed by a ready-made national polity; successive regimes worked hard to homogenize France in a process that can only be called “self-colonization” (Kenan 2015). The latter term is no exaggeration; by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Parisian elites and French scholars alike considered French rural peasants not only a poorer class, but also a culturally inferior race.

By the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the homogenization of the working class well underway, class-based politics grew nearer to the Marxist ideal of working-class consciousness. Today's Parti Socialiste traces its roots back to the “French Section of the

Workers' International" or SFIO, established in 1905 at the orders of the Second International itself (Cole 2011). Even in this period, however, Proletarian slogans concealed deep internal fractures. The six parties merged at the International's orders had until then followed diverse traditions ranging from radical anarchism to moderate reformism, and in 1920 the more radical Parti Communiste Francaise (PCF) split away, leaving both parties in a struggle to cast their own faction as the true voice of the working class (Cole 2011). By the 1930s, both parties planned their respective May Day parades on separate routes to prevent brawls from breaking out between their members (Pike 2014). In spite of its revolutionary slogans, the early Parti Socialiste was from the very beginning a Gramscian coalition which brought together differing Leftist traditions and shielded deep cultural fractures. Only in 1936, faced with rising pressure from the French Right and the Spanish Civil War, would the two sides overcome their differences and unite. The resulting Front Populaire managed to sweep the 1936 elections by 57 percent to 43 (Pike 2014), but this victory was short-lived. The very next year, it fell apart.

Opposing the short-lived Front Populaire was the Front National, though this union of parties shared little with today's FN beyond its name. The French far-right movements of the interwar years were deeply religious, calling for the restoration of the monarchy and the creation of a state guided by principles of Catholicism and corporatism (Pike 2014). They were viciously anti-Semitic, and showered Mussolini and Franco with praise, but were distrustful of Hitler and Germany in general (Pike 2014). On Nationalism, however, the interwar Right begins to resemble its descendant today. In an interview with the Right-leaning *Journal de Toulouse*, Marshal Pétain, the celebrated general of Verdun, bemoaned France's fading national identity:

The crisis here with us is not a material crisis. We have lost faith in our destiny, that sums it up. We are like sailors without a pilot, without a rudder. That is what we need to struggle against. That is where we need to find a mystique. Call it what you want: a national mystique, or more simply a mystique of memory. Without that, there is no solution. Here we are, only after millions of others before us have worked and suffered for us to be what we are. They have the right to demand of us that we at least persevere in their struggle (*Le Journal de Toulouse* 1936).

Taken out of context, Pétain's remarks would not look out of place in a Front National rally or publication today. Even though the specific enemies have changed, this core complaint remains the same: that by embracing liberal values, be they secularism or multiculturalism, France has lost sight of its national identity. Returning to the Gramscian perspective, it is a complaint that extends beyond material interest to unite a persistent cross-class movement on the basis of deeper cultural and national sentiment.

World War Two, and the German occupation that followed, exiled ethnocentrism, nationalism, and anti-Semitism to the distant margins of political life (Williams 2011). General de Gaulle, who was appointed President 1958 and held power for ten years, provided a further interruption. Though de Gaulle was solidly aligned with the Center-Right, to the point that Gaullist became a synonym for conservative, his core policy of *dirigisme* was based on exceptionally active state participation in the economy (Prasad 2005). Unlike traditional egalitarian Socialism, however, *dirigisme* was invoked not in the name of improving equity but in the name of developing the national economy. De Gaulle's tax code was highly regressive, and his pension system was most beneficial to the middle and upper-middle classes. But because most revenue came through an invisible sales tax, while pension contributions were listed on paychecks, low-income voters still expressed high support for De Gaulle's economic policy (Prasad 2005). As a result, the French welfare system largely survived the Neoliberal era.

Cooperation and competition with other Leftist parties, meanwhile, placed diverse demands on the Parti Socialiste. On the one hand, the PS continued to highlight its radical origins in pre-election rhetoric, striving to claim its credentials as an outsider movement rather than an established political group (Cole 2011). Yet in order to rule the country pragmatically, and appeal to more moderate voters, it began leaning toward center-left policies in practice. These tensions came to the forefront of French Left politics during and after François Mitterrand's election as President in 1981. In his effort to secure the presidency, Mitterrand tried to frame his Parti Socialiste as a viable choice but still drew on radical rhetoric to pull over PCF voters. Once elected, however, he shunned revolutionary change in favor of gradual economic reforms, and abandoned even these in 1984 (Cole 2011). While Mitterrand remained in office until 1996, his about-face alienated his party's radical wing and caused the PCF to withdraw yet again from the Left coalition.

As the French Left shook in the 1980s and 1990s, Jean-Marie Le Pen moved in to take advantage of the instability (Cole 2003). Many of the early supporters who flocked to his party were working-class members of the PS or PCF, who, frustrated with the Left, had instead turned to voice their discontent on the Right. The flow of voters from one end of the spectrum to another was also driven by the PCF's own reversal from a radically xenophobic party to a radically multicultural one. While in 1980 its local council in Vitry hijacked a bulldozer and used it to level an immigrant hostel, by 1992 the PCF was instead drawing criticism for its outspoken defense of the hijab (Raymond 2009). After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, bringing with it the last shreds of legitimacy that hardline Communism had enjoyed during the late Cold War, millions more disgruntled

white workers turned to the far right in search of authoritarian answers (Williams 2011). The new enemies were not Capitalists and bankers, but criminals, immigrants, and the European Union, three threats the Front National promised to repel.

Of these three, immigration deserves special mention here. France has long been a destination for immigrants from other parts of Europe; in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, these were joined by a northward flow from France's former colonies in North Africa. In spite of the violent civil war in Algeria, these early immigrants were predominantly secular, and were received at least passively by French politicians (Kenan 2015). But by the 1980s, many French already treated immigrants as a scapegoat for France's high unemployment and other social ills. Until that time, immigration had never been a heavily politicized issue, occasionally drawing moderate comments from major politicians but seldom emerging as a major issue in elections (Williams 2011). But Jean-Marie Le Pen placed xenophobia at the core of his party, tapping on a deep well of working-class unrest before any of the other major parties could move to exploit it (Williams 2011). In doing so, he benefited from France's nationalist legacy, creating a movement that uses republican-nationalist framing more than any other European far-right party (Helbling 2014). He also benefited from a steady rise in Islamophobia, as the French population—and, indeed, much of Western and Central Europe—grew increasingly suspicious of Middle Eastern immigrants' Muslim faith, associating it with a predilection for intolerance and terrorism. By the time of the 2007 presidential election, immigration had clearly moved to the center of the political debate, both as an economic issue and a cultural one.

Presented with this challenging new issue, and the prospect of competition with a much stronger radical right, the French Left has struggled to reach a coherent position. In

its rushed reforms of the early 1980s, the Mitterrand administration set out to mitigate the previous government's aggressive deportation policy, but by 1983 it had reversed course on these commitments as well (Raymond 2009). The same drama played out in 1988, as the Parti Socialiste returned to power in Parliament but renewed the expedited deportation they had railed against in the previous term. Cultural issues proved even more troubling. In early debates over whether girls should be permitted to wear the hijab in school, the PS was split between those who saw the hijab as one's freedom of expression and those who saw it as a tool for oppressing women (Raymond 2009). Unlike Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK, which at least in name experimented with multiculturalism, in France the center-left remained committed to a hard-secular citizenship based on adoption of a French national identity (Kenan 2015). For some time they even tried to repeat Napoleon's taming of the Catholic Church by creating an "Islam de France" based on republican virtues of equality and commitment to the state (Raymond 2009). Yet the 2004 prohibition of religious symbols in schools, and the 2010 ban on wearing the burqa in public, left individual PS officials divided and uncertain on the question of how to balance republicanism with minority rights. This division and uncertainty highlights the relevance of the Gramscian model of class politics: although they were united around a Leftist cause, PS officials and voters were divided on how to respond when the French population became increasingly polarized around a cultural issue.

In 2002, with the Left coalition divided, Jean-Marie Le Pen secured just enough votes to narrowly bypass the PS candidate Lionel Jospin and reach second place in the first round (Mondon 2013). A memorable electoral upset, this left voters presented with a choice between a center-right candidate and a far-right one, and sparked outrage on the

Left. In the end, voters reluctantly but overwhelmingly decided to side with the lesser of two evils, and the UMP incumbent Chirac won by an 82% landslide. On the left, the events of 2002 created new pressures to vote in coalitions around the Parti Socialiste candidate in order to avoid another first-round debacle. Combined with the flight of FN swing-voters who until then thought they were throwing away their ballots in harmless protest, this left Jean-Marie Le Pen with poor results in 2007's first round (Mondon 2013). Yet when Jean-Marie's youngest daughter, Marine Le Pen, succeeded her father for control of the party in 2011, she greeted these challenges with a newfound optimism. In the 2012 presidential elections she won almost six and a half million votes for 17.9% of the nationwide total, better in both absolute and proportional terms than her father had done in 2002 (Mondon 2013). While this was not enough to reach the final runoffs, as PS voters had yet again set aside their internal divisions to avoid a repeat of 2002, it was enough to confirm that the poor showing in 2007 was not the end of the Front National.

#### *Dynamics of the 2012 Election*

François Hollande's victory in the 2012 election must be understood in the context of the global economic crisis, and in particular the European instability which followed it. In Europe, financial instability surrounding the Euro created a series of aftershocks well after 2008, and when voters went to the polls in April 2012 political and economic pundits were already speculating that France could follow the same path as Greece and Spain (Hewlett 2012). Hollande's success in the final round of voting was also aided by the plummeting popularity of the UMP incumbent, Nicolas Sarkozy, whose extravagant lifestyle and cozy relationship with the upper class had made him deeply unpopular among French of all backgrounds (Hewlett 2012). By contrast, Hollande was

friendly, mild-mannered, and free from scandal, though his reputation on the latter point has since been tarnished. All these factors helped him to secure victory in the election of 2012, the first time in almost twenty years that a Socialist had held the presidency.

Across much of the European Union, fears of financial instability were answered by harsh and unpopular austerity measures, but Hollande's 2012 campaign promised Keynesian reforms and redistribution. Incomes over €1 million were to be taxed at 75%, with a minimum 45% tax on incomes over €150,000, and similar increases in the taxes on capital gains and corporations (Hewlett 2012). Although these promises were a far cry from even Mitterrand's modest reforms, he supported them with strong leftist rhetoric which calls to mind the Parti Socialiste's radical past and would not be entirely out of place at a Sanders rally in the US:

But before talking about my plan, I'll tell you one thing. In this battle in which I am engaged, I will tell you who my opponent, my true opponent, is. It has no name, no face, no party, it has never presented its candidacy, it will never be elected, yet it governs. This opponent is the world of finance. Before our eyes, in the last twenty years, finance has taken control of the economy, the society, and even our lives (Hollande 2012).

Despite these strong words, Hollande was not such a strong enemy of finance in practice. His sharp tax increases were accompanied by relatively little stimulus spending, and in fact he used the revenue to reduce France's deficit in compliance with EU regulations (Hewlett 2012). For his truly large spending projects, which were mostly aimed at replacing France's nuclear plants with other sources of renewable energy, he relied primarily on loans from the European Union, following in the footsteps of Sarkozy's supportive stance on French EU integration. This stance is particularly significant when one considers the contentious debate about the European Union in French politics. As with NAFTA and the TPP in the United States, many French voters assert that EU

integration promotes outsourcing and undermines the security of French working-class jobs. Marine Le Pen proclaimed that if she won the 2012 election, she would hold an immediate referendum on withdrawal from the Schengen Zone and the Eurozone, a position which is popular in the French voting public (Hewlett 2012). Like Mitterrand before him, Hollande seems to be struggling to balance radical rhetoric before the election with more pragmatic policies once in office (Cole 2011). Despite his claims that moderate appeals “poisoned” his victory (Hewlett 2012), Hollande is as much the cause as the victim.

The Parti Socialiste’s struggle to reach a coherent stance on immigration (Raymond 2009) was another obstacle for Hollande’s campaign. His 2012 platform included some progressive measures, among them the PS’s long-standing proposal to allow non-citizen voting in local elections (Hewlett 2012). Yet it also included a promise to uphold the controversial ban on the full veil and plans to set a limit on the number of foreign workers allowed to enter the country every year (Samuel 2012). These proposals hardened in the period after the first round but before the second, as Hollande made a last-ditch effort to draw in some of the right-wing workers who had voted for Le Pen. Ultimately, Hollande pursued a centrist route in order to avoid alienating either the liberal left or the anti-immigrant working class, and in the end he began leaning more towards the latter group than the former.

By waffling on immigration, Hollande opened room on the liberal left for more radical candidates. These included Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who “put support for immigrants at the very heart of his programme” with proposals that included the regularization of undocumented immigrants and easier citizenship for those with

documentation (Hewlett 2012). His Front de gauche (Front of the Left) combined this with a strong populist tone on class and economic issues, functioning almost as a “mirror image” of the Front National. Mélenchon’s core economic reforms, for instance, were even more radical than Hollande’s, and included far higher taxes for the wealthy, a law to raise the minimum wage, and the abolition of the European Stability Pact. Much like Bernie Sanders in the US, Mélenchon directly linked the plight of the working class with upper-class exploitation, and broke with the Gaullist tradition of unequal taxation and welfare (Prasad 2005). Even so, many of his supporters ultimately backed down and voted for the Parti Socialiste instead, driven primarily by fears that if Hollande failed to reach the second round there would be another repeat of 2002 (Hewlett 2012).

Nevertheless, the fact that Mélenchon’s Front de gauche won 11% of the vote in the first round by flanking left of the Parti Socialiste may give some sense of how close to the center Hollande stands.

Hollande was still able to garner significant working-class support during the 2012 election, and in the first round of voting he beat Sarkozy by a large margin among laborers (Corbett 2012). He also won among white-collar employees and middle management, who, in the changing structure of the French economy, make up over a quarter of the electorate and face many of the same economic challenges as the working class (Hewlett 2012). Shopkeepers and industrialists, by contrast, preferred Sarkozy, who for better or worse had gained a reputation for favoring the rich both in policy and personal life (Mondon 2013). At a glance, then, it would seem that voting was divided along class lines, with the working classes uniting behind a Socialist against the neoliberal-bourgeois UMP. These numbers, however, must be kept in perspective. While

28% of the blue-collar laborers voted for Hollande, 29% voted for Marine Le Pen—a disproportionate ratio, considering that in the first round Le Pen won less than two-thirds as many votes as Hollande overall (Hewlett 2012). The question now becomes one of how a far-right candidate managed to outdo a Socialist among the working class.

Some of Marine Le Pen's success stems from the campaign of *dédiabolisation*, or “de-demonization,” which she began upon replacing her father in 2011 (Hewlett 2012). This move to downplay the Front Nationale's fascist reputation involved distancing herself from her father's brash, unscripted comments, including his recent statement that the Holocaust was merely “a detail” of the Second World War (Horobin 2015). Her outright rejection of anti-Semitism represents one major change from the French Right of the 1930s, and underscores the mark which the Holocaust and the German occupation left on French politics. Of course, this is not to say that the new Front National is much less radical than it was before. Jean-Marie remains active within the party despite having passed over its leadership to his daughter, and his controversial statements continue to hamper Marine's efforts (Williams 2011). The Front National's more radical supporters have also proven hard to rein in, and often make cultural and racial arguments explicit where Le Pen had only implied them (Hewlett 2012; Nossiter 2015). But the young Le Pen's efforts at *dédiabolisation* represent a major strategy to win voters from the center-right UMP and expand the Front National's base of support. In a 2011 poll, more respondents than ever before reported that they considered the Front National a “party like the other parties,” with the credibility and legitimacy normally reserved for the PS and UMP (Pierre-Brossolette 2011). Naturally, this strategy has brought its share of drawbacks as well, alienating the radically ethnocentric fringe that initially formed its

core. But Marine Le Pen still won 6.5 million votes in the first round of the 2012 presidential election, a number which was almost certainly fed by the return of far-right voters who had supported Sarkozy in 2007 (Mondon 2013). Marine Le Pen is still widely perceived as a right-wing threat, or at least a wolf in sheep's clothing, but compared to her father she has pulled the FN into the mainstream.

That said, Marine Le Pen has retained her father's xenophobic rhetoric on immigration. Her proposed withdrawal from the Schengen Zone (Hewlett 2012) is as much about limiting free trade as it is about re-establishing direct control over immigration, especially Muslim immigration, into France. Much of the Front National's Islamophobic rhetoric concerns the perceived failure of Middle-Eastern immigrants to assimilate into the French way of life (Mondon 2014). Much of this hostility traces its roots back to the "hard-secularism" of French citizenship; among those of other Western European countries, French newspapers have been exceptionally likely to use nationalistic framing on issues of immigration, much of it rooted in values of republicanism (Helbling 2014). Marine Le Pen has been quick to exploit this unrest, declaring in a September rally that "Migrants are now wandering in our neighborhoods, around the train stations or in the slums, the cause for France of immense security and public hygiene problems... We are now becoming accustomed to terrorism" (Nossiter 2015). The following month, she was put on trial for inciting hate speech by comparing Muslim prayers in the streets to the German occupation of France during the Second World War. Marine Le Pen may have distanced herself from her father's anti-Semitism, but general xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment remains at the heart of the FN's appeal.

The Front National has also framed immigration as an economic issue; as early as the 1970s, its posters juxtaposed the number of immigrants with the number of French unemployed (Nossiter 2015). Likewise, when Marine's father oversaw the FN's growth in the 1980s and 1990s, he drew much of his support from disgruntled ex-PCF voters who could no longer find anti-immigrant answers in Left parties (Williams 2011). As a core element of her 2012 platform, Marine Le Pen built on this legacy by vowing to reduce immigration by 95% and cut access to benefits for those already in the country (Hewlett 2012). Le Pen's plans to close refugee camps operated by pro-immigration NGOs (Vinocur 2015) and assertions that government spending should "serve the French first" (The Economist, 2015) draw attention to the fractured nature of the "working class." While unemployed native French workers and marginalized immigrants share the same general problem of economic precariousness, both cultural identities and perceptions of competition have often left them not only divided but mutually opposed. This economic framing of immigration most clearly demonstrates Adams and Weakliem's Gramscian model of class politics: by presenting Muslims as a threat to French jobs and French culture, Marine Le Pen is able to exploit a cultural and racial divide between the "native" French working class and immigrant minorities who also face economic marginalization.

Marine Le Pen's above-average support among blue-collar workers also stems from her redistributionist economic policies. In a campaign for the regional presidency of the northern Pas-de-Calais region, where high unemployment among industrial workers has become a major source of unrest, she expressed her support for welfare:

"The basic problem is that the state no longer protects you. I am committed to making the region take the place of the state ... a protective region that

also takes care of the neediest ... In this region people are brave, hard working. If there was work they would take the work... But there is no work.” (quoted in Vincour 2015).

Le Pen’s other campaign promises for the region include expanding job-training programs, opening more health centers, and passing laws that will require government contracts to favor local businesses over foreign ones (Vincour 2015). These comments represent a stark contrast with Trump’s brand of free-market populism, in which excessive government protection is cast as the cause of unemployment. Yet they also react against France’s traditional right-wing Gaullist *dirigisme*, which for decades sacrificed the well-being of the working classes in order to promote economic growth at the top of the income pyramid (Prasad 2005).

By mixing cultural and economic arguments against immigration, Marine Le Pen has managed to build two main geographic bases of support. Traditionally, the Front National has been strongest along the Mediterranean coast, where immigration is predominantly a cultural issue. But in the 2012 election she also did well across the east and northeast, where the concerns of the post-industrial working class are felt the hardest. This mixed appeal can be seen in each constituency’s support for redistribution: only 37% of Front National voters in the North believe that “taxes paid by the wealthy are too high,” compared to 60% of those in the South (Hubert 2013). In theory, this difference in opinions might represent a fracture line within the Front National’s base, but as long as Marine Le Pen maintains her focus on immigration it is likely that the two geographic groups will remain united. If anything, the FN’s ability to maintain a relatively diverse base is evidence of its success in reaching beyond Marxian rhetoric and building a “class campaign” which brings together working-class unrest and anti-immigrant sentiment.

That said, while Marine Le Pen's support may climb beyond 20% in the 2017 election, it is unlikely that she will win the second round even if she does reach it. More worrying, at least from a Left or Center perspective, is the effect which Le Pen's radical-right campaign had on the more centrist UMP. While Sarkozy's shift to the Right was well underway during his time in office, and at least on economic issues began the moment he took over from Chirac, in the 2012 campaign he made conscious efforts to appeal to FN voters (Hewlett 2012). These included a harsher stance on crime, one of the FN's principal areas of focus, and consideration of proposals to scale back the EU integration that Sarkozy had previously promoted. More ominously, they also included deliberate echoes of Le Pen's anti-immigration rhetoric. Adopting the same language of "crisis" that the Far Right had used even before Jean-Marie Le Pen's rise, Sarkozy conjured up images of a stark dichotomy between those who assimilated into the French way of life and those who clung to their old values, blaming the latter for crime, unemployment, and cultural oppression (Mondon 2013). By mimicking the language of what was still largely considered to be an anti-democratic movement outside the respectable mainstream, Sarkozy granted valuable legitimacy to the Front National's anti-immigrant policies, and pushed France's political discourse further to the right (Mondon 2013). This push reached a new height after the November 13<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks in Paris, which sparked an outpouring of nationalism vaguely reminiscent of what followed the 9/11 attacks in the United States. Marine Le Pen was quick to exploit this surge of emotion for personal gain, blaming the attacks on Hollande's "crazy, undiscerning immigration policy" (Chrisafis 2015). And indeed, much of the popular outrage that

followed the attacks has played into the FN's hands. Nationalism and islamophobia, once slowly spreading on the fringe, seem to have burst into mainstream politics.

### **The United States**

Unlike France, the United States has a history of keeping any appeals to class below the surface. While the US has its share of far-left parties, none hold seats in Congress, let alone the presidency; the Socialist-party candidate Eugene Debs repeatedly ran for president in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but never captured more than 6 percent of the vote. The Electoral College is winner-take-all at the state level, which has historically made it difficult for "third parties" to effectively compete for the presidency. In practice, the United States follows a two-party system, divided between the Democrats on the left and the Republicans on the right. This results in "minimum winning coalitions," in which single parties are able to achieve legislative majorities – however ineffective or short-lived – without having to form coalitions with minor parties (Hicks and Swank 1992). The need for one party to secure an absolute majority further tightens the two-party system. If the French left learned the dangers of splitting the vote in 2002, the American left learned it in 2000, when Ralph Nader pulled enough voters away from the Democratic candidate to tip the election in George W. Bush's favor.

Because opportunities for new class-based or issue-based parties to enter the political sphere are limited, radical voices must emerge from within one of the two mainstream parties. Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump have taken this lesson to heart, and even though both have identified as Independents in the past (Roberts 2015b; Allen 2015) they are now running as a Democrat and a Republican respectively. Furthermore, while France's first round of elections allows any voter to vote for any candidate, in most

US states only registered members of a given party are allowed to vote in that party's primary. Combined with relatively low participation among moderate voters, this means that candidates in the primaries must frame their appeals to the most ideologically extreme members of their own party (Jacobson 2012). This, in turn, makes it even harder for presidential candidates to organize a base of support which transcends social liberalism and conservatism in favor of a united focus on lower-class interests.

### *Historical Trajectory*

Between the 1970s and the present day, both income inequality and political polarization have skyrocketed in the United States (DeSilver 2013), but there is little evidence to suggest that the trends are causally linked. The level of ideological difference between the top 20% and the bottom 40% of earners has fluctuated since 1972, falling in the middle of the '80s and spiking in the late '90s, but when seen as an overall trend, it shows little sign of consistent increase or decrease from the 1970s to the present day. Likewise, while the rich have become slightly more conservative, the proportion of liberals within the top income quintile has remained steady (Dettrey and Campbell 2013). As I will describe below, it seems that the main driver of partisan polarization is ideological polarization, with Conservative Democrats switching to the Republican Party and vice versa for Liberal Republicans. To some extent this is a result of the partisan realignment of the South in the 1970s, which turned ideology from an internally divisive issue within each party into an internally uniting one (Dettrey and Campbell 2013). Ideological sorting may even counteract income-based political polarization, as poor Conservatives and wealthy Liberals place ideology before class.

Jonathan Knuckey (2015) confirms this interpretation, finding that among white voters living outside of the South, class issues have been increasingly moderated by ideology. While low-income liberals have remained a solidly Democratic constituency from the 1970s to the present, low-income moderates and conservatives have become less likely to identify as Democrats, as have moderates and conservatives in the middle class (Knuckey 2015). The effect at the upper-class level is also interesting. While wealthy conservatives, never a large part of the Democratic base, have continued to drain from the party, the likelihood of upper-class and middle-class liberals to identify as Democrats has soared (Knuckey 2015). These findings are consistent with the nationwide study by Dettrey and Campbell (2013), who found that in the '70s, '80s, and early '90s low-income voters actually became more conservative and less liberal, though this trend reversed in 1996. Over the same four decades the number of upper-class and middle-class individuals identifying as liberal has also steadily increased, allowing the Democratic Party to maintain a solid majority in the rest of the country even as it cedes the South to Republican control (Knuckey 2015). The Democratic Party has indeed become more polarized, but this process has been driven by social liberalism, not social class.

US labor unions have also steadily lost their class character, and have instead been incorporated into politics as interest groups. Unlike their Canadian counterparts, which still function as a "class representative," American unions have faced plummeting membership and now have a weaker political voice (Eidlin 2015). Consequently, debates over the quality of work have been transformed from a matter of class conflict into a concern for individual workers to sort out with management. In the prominent 1972 government report entitled *Work in America*, for example, labor unions are mentioned on

only 2 out of 284 pages—and the purpose of that small passage is to accuse them of making workers’ lives more difficult (Eidlin 2015). Thus, even this interest-group role has not given labor unions a secure political voice; as class issues fade from the debate and wealthier constituencies become more important, the Democratic Party has become less willing to stand up for issues of labor. Nevertheless, labor unions remain a solidly Democratic constituency, and donate much more money to Democratic candidates than Republicans (OpenSecrets 2015). On issues of immigration, many labor unions have even put aside their past protectionist stance (Milkman 2011), calling for solidarity with immigrant labor.

More important, perhaps, are the political interests that have replaced labor unions at the heart of the Democratic constituency. While Dettrey and Campbell (2013) find that the likelihood of individuals in the upper income quintile to identify with the Democratic Party has not changed considerably over the last three decades, Knuckey (2015) attributes this to the departure of wealthy conservatives from the party and the influx of wealthy and middle-class liberals. As a result, the Democratic Party is faced not only with a declining emphasis on social class, but an influential constituency of upper-class liberals. This upper-class liberal constituency is sufficiently strong that during the 2008 election, Barack Obama actually won by a narrow margin among voters with incomes over \$200,000 (Eidlin 2015a). The Democratic Party now relies on donations of over \$1,500 for more than half its campaign money, not terribly unlike Republicans (Edsall 2015a). The effects of this dependence were made clear in January 2015, when President Obama proposed a plan to tax upper-class college-saving accounts and allocate the revenue to programs aimed at low-income families—only to abandon the plan within a week under

pressure from Democratic Congressmen with large upper-class-liberal constituencies (Edsall 2015b). Upper-class support can strengthen a movement, but also constrains its options.

That said, upper-class Democrats will not necessarily oppose redistribution by default. As the Gramscian framework predicts, “classes” can often be motivated as much by cultural identities as by economic ones, and one can readily add ideology into the mix. In a study of how conceptions of morality differ by political orientation, Haidt (2012) finds that Americans identifying as liberal tend to place a relatively higher value on the virtues of Care and Fairness, which are easily invoked to gain sympathy for the poor and downtrodden. American conservatives tend to attach less importance to these virtues, instead emphasizing Loyalty, Sanctity, and Authority, though the gap between Liberals and Conservatives’ support for different kinds of morality is not as great as one might expect (Haidt 2012). These moral-ideological values have the potential to complement and at times suppress material class interest, leading wealthy Democrats to sympathize with the poor but also allowing Republicans to mobilize support for social conservatism and anti-immigrant policies.

#### *Dynamics of the 2016 Election*

Though running as a Democrat, and describing himself as a Socialist, Bernie Sanders is best described as a Social Democrat, and one not far from the European middle-left model. He claims that the US economy is structured in a way that systematically disadvantages those at the bottom, even when “the bottom” is widely defined as the lower 99% of incomes, and asserts that his policies will address income inequality as the root of American economic problems. According to Curtis (2013) and

Evans (1993), lower-class powerlessness should be associated with support for redistributive policies, so Sanders's tirade against income inequality and calls for a more equitable economy should in theory draw support from the marginalized lower classes. To give a typical example of his campaign's rhetoric, the issues section of his campaign website is overlooked by a banner which reads:

The American people must make a fundamental decision. Do we continue the 40-year decline of our middle class and the growing gap between the very rich and everyone else, or do we fight for a progressive economic agenda that creates jobs, raises wages, protects the environment and provides health care for all? Are we prepared to take on the enormous economic and political power of the billionaire class, or do we continue to slide into economic and political oligarchy? These are the most important questions of our time, and how we answer them will determine the future of our country (Sanders 2015a).

In this passage, Sanders not only points out typical lower-income concerns such as poverty, unemployment, and the decline of the middle class, but also explicitly frames these concerns as matters of social inequality, contrasting the plight of ordinary Americans with the growing wealth of those at the top. In doing so he creates a narrative of exploitation, in which the wealthy benefit from the poor treatment of working-class Americans. In the framework of Weakliem and Adams (2011), this calls to mind the Weberian or even the Marxian approach, seeking to unite the "bottom 99 percent" against the "top one percent" or even the much narrower "billionaire class." It emphasizes a material class interest by which the majority of the population can gain from leveling the playing field with the very highest earners.

Given his references to income inequality, and his Social Democratic platform, one would expect Sanders's policy to be popular among low-income voters and to fade as one moves into higher income brackets. A November poll conducted by Langer

Research, however, shows the opposite; if anything, Sanders seems to be viewed more favorably among those with high incomes (Figure 2). The gap has closed between August and November, but when the full dataset is read more closely, it seems that much of this change can be attributed to greater publicity about his campaign, as early in August many low-income voters reported that they simply had not heard enough about the candidate to make a judgment either way. Another proxy variable for social class is educational attainment, which in the United States' growing knowledge economy limits how far one can climb on the social ladder. The results for this measurement are somewhat ambiguous; when voters of all party backgrounds were asked whether their opinion of a candidate is favorable, Sanders seems to do better among those with college degrees (Figure 3), but when Democrats and Democrat-leaning are asked to choose the one candidate they would vote for in the primaries, Clinton does better among those with college degrees (Figure 4). Contrary to expectations of class-versus-class organization, and in line with the predictions of the Gramscian perspective on class politics, Sanders not only lacked uniformly strong support among the "working class" but is viewed more favorably among voters with higher household income and educational attainment.

**Figure 2:** Favorability of Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton by Income (data from Holyk 2015)

Sanders	Favorable toward Clinton		Favorable toward	
	November	August	November	August
over \$100,000	45	41	48	42
\$50-100,000	40	36	39	38
under \$50,000	53	52	40	22

**Figure 3:** Favorability of Sanders and Clinton by Education (data from Malloy 2016b)

Sanders	Hillary Clinton		Bernie	
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Favorable	Unfavorable
College Degree	48	49	56	37
No College Degree	35	59	46	37

**Figure 4:** Preferred Candidate by education among Democrats and Democrat-leaningers (data from Malloy 2016b)

	Hillary Clinton	Bernie Sanders
College Degree	55	34
No College Degree	47	41

While Bernie Sanders is, as of this time, still struggling to catch up with Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump has secured a strong, steady lead in the presidential primaries. Already famous as a real estate mogul and the host of the reality TV program *The Apprentice*, he has few reservations about discussing his net worth in public. In his early campaign he sought to capitalize on his elite status, and more generally his status as a political outsider, by asserting that he would use his skills as a businessman to run the country efficiently (Ronayne 2015). Yet in spite of his personal status as one of the richest people in the country, Trump is nevertheless running a decidedly populist campaign. Read with a careful eye, his campaign website is sprinkled with references to the plight of middle-class and working-class Americans, and many of the problems he mentions would not be out of place on Bernie Sanders's website: corporate tax loopholes, the shrinking middle class, the danger of shipping jobs overseas while so many

Americans are out of work (Trump 2015). A key difference, however, lies in where the blame lies. Though he does criticize corporations which relocate overseas to evade US taxes, he pins more of the blame on the US government for making taxes and regulations too burdensome and on China for “cheating” with unfair trade practices. In doing so, he suggests that workers and business owners have a shared interest in a healthy economy, eschewing class competition in favor of class unity. This in itself is not entirely unusual. When choosing their stances on economic issues, voters’ subjective perceptions of what helps the economy at large frequently take precedence over their material interests as individuals or members of a class (Dettrey and Campbell 2013). Deflecting the blame to external threats also offers a convenient opportunity to appeal to nationalism. Trump used the same approach when testing the waters for a presidential campaign in 1988, though at that time the targets were Japan and the Persian Gulf states (Allen 2015). If the “super-rich” and the “billionaire class” represent convenient straw-man enemies for Sanders, foreigners of all kinds seem to be Trump’s favorite scapegoat.

The question of whether Trump has won the blue-collar vote, however, yields mixed results. During the early days of the presidential race in early July, Trump enjoyed more or less equal support among Americans in low-, middle-, and high-income categories (Washington Post 2015). Turning again to education as a proxy for social mobility, Figure 5 shows that Republicans without a college degree are more likely to choose Trump as their preferred nominee, a trend which has held true since the race began (Washington Post 2015) and which remains true when one expands the scope of analysis to all Americans. Kasich, by contrast, is more popular among those with a college degree, and Cruz’s support is fairly even between both categories. This measure,

however, is somewhat skewed by Trump's high disapproval among Hispanics and African-Americans, who suffer from disproportionately low income and educational attainment due to structural inequalities in US society. This provides a reasonable basis to believe that Trump's favorability among whites without a college degree is even higher than his average favorability among all people without a college degree, which would further support my findings. Unfortunately, I cannot test this theory with the data sets I have, as these do not allow me to control for one variable while examining another.

**Figure 5:** Preferred Candidate by Education among Republicans and Republican-leaningers (data from Malloy 2016b)

March 2016	% Prefer Trump	% Prefer Cruz	% Prefer Kasich
College Degree	34	26	28
No College Degree	46	29	12

The most fascinating findings, however, emerge when one measures class in terms of one's perceptions of economic precariousness and marginalization. Like educational attainment, concerns about social mobility can be used to assess an individual's ability to adapt to the transition from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy. And while economic precariousness does not necessarily match one's income, it does call to mind Curtis (2013)'s recognition that self-assessed class categorizations can capture important dynamics of subjectivity better than objective, material measures. Figure 6 shows that compared with the other two Republican front-runners, Trump supporters are the most likely to feel that they are falling behind economically. Furthermore, this seems to translate into a disillusionment with the established political and economic system. These are all easily recognizable features of populist class politics: politically disenfranchised, economically marginalized voters expressing a wide-reaching desire for radical change.

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**Figure 6:** Percentage of a candidate's supporters feeling marginalized (Data from Schwarz 2016)

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“I feel as though I'm falling further and further behind economically”

	Trump supporters	Cruz supporters	Kasich supporters
Agree	78	62	44
Disagree	22	37	56

“The old way of doing things no longer works and we need radical change”

	Trump supporters	Cruz supporters	Kasich supporters
Agree	83	56	48
Disagree	13	41	51

“Public officials don't care much what people like me think”

	Trump supporters	Cruz supporters	Kasich supporters
Agree	90	79	75
Disagree	10	18	25

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Naturally, this invites the question of whether the same is true on the Left; Sanders has certainly built a large part of his campaign on the idea that the current economic order has failed us, and that economic inequality is a major problem that has to be addressed. And indeed, the equivalent data in Figure 7 show that Sanders's supporters are considerably more likely than Clinton's to report that they feel economically precarious and dissatisfied with the established order. But as soon as these are held alongside the distribution of views in the other party, the image changes considerably. On all three measures of dissatisfaction, Sanders's supporters are not terribly different from the average Republican (the margin of error being 2.7 percentage points). When considered alongside Trump's supporters (Figure 6), they are in fact less dissatisfied and less radical. This runs in direct contrast to the more familiar Marxian model of class politics, which predicts that economically precarious workers eager for revolutionary change will flock to the left-leaning socialist while prosperous elites comfortable with the

political order will unite behind the right-wing multi-billionaire. Yet it is entirely consistent with the more nuanced Gramscian model.

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**Figure 7:** Percentage of a candidate’s supporters feeling marginalized (Data from Schwarz 2016)

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	Sanders supporters	Clinton supporters	(Republicans)
“I feel as though I’m falling further and further behind economically”			
Agree	61	38	67
Disagree	39	62	32
“The old way of doing things no longer works and we need radical change”			
	Sanders supporters	Clinton supporters	(Republicans)
Agree	76	45	71
Disagree	23	53	27
“Public officials don’t care much what people like me think”			
	Sanders supporters	Clinton supporters	(Republicans)
Agree	75	61	84
Disagree	25	37	14

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To explain this outcome in a Gramscian way, one must not look at these movements as the spontaneous awakening of mass movements whose only grievances are economic. Instead, one must analyze their intersection with other motives and political views. One potentially promising intersecting factor is ideology. As Dettrey and Campbell (2013) and Knuckey (2015) argue, for the last forty years or so the American party system has seen a re-alignment along ideological lines, with Conservatives of all classes moving to the Republican Party as Liberals of all classes move to the Democratic Party. Individuals who are “consistently liberal” or “consistently conservative” also tend to be more politically active and more resistant to compromise (Dimock et al. 2014), suggesting that they would be more likely to support radical candidates like Sanders and Trump.

Donald Trump's base, however, does not fully fit this explanation. Given his reputation for radical and controversial statements on nearly every issue, such as the aforementioned assertion about Mexican "rapists," one would expect his supporters to be heavily concentrated toward the far right. And indeed, in August 2015 when the campaign was still in its early days, the vast majority of Liberal Democrats reported being "very unfavorable" toward Trump while Conservative Republicans were the most supportive (Washington Post 2015). More recently in March 2016, 87% of Democrats reported that they would definitely not vote for Trump in the presidential election, higher than the percentage of Republicans categorically refusing to vote for Clinton (Malloy 2016b). Yet when one limits the sample to Trump's Republican supporters, a somewhat more complex picture emerges. In a distribution that remained fairly consistent from November 2015 to March 2016, Ted Cruz is most popular among more conservative Republicans, while Kasich is most popular among liberal and moderate Republicans (see Figure 8). Donald Trump, however, receives roughly equal support across the spectrum of Republican ideology, with little difference between the proportions of Very Conservative, Somewhat Conservative, and Moderate or Liberal Republicans who chose him as their preferred front-runner. This suggests that he is not focusing his appeals toward the more conservative fringe of the party, as Cruz and the Tea Party have, but that his message transcends the typical spectrum of Conservative ideology.

**Figure 8:** Favorite Candidate by Ideology among Republicans and Republican-leaners (Data from Malloy 2015, Malloy 2016b)

<u>March 2016</u>	% Prefer Trump	% Prefer Cruz	% Prefer Kasich
Very Conservative	42	47	6
Somewhat Conservative	45	23	15
Moderate or Liberal	40	17	28
<u>November 2015</u>	% Prefer Trump	% Prefer Cruz	% Prefer Kasich
Very Conservative	25	29	--
Somewhat Conservative	25	14	2
Moderate or Liberal	31	3	3

It would be slightly disingenuous to call Donald Trump an ideological mediator capable of working across party lines, but his appeal is not rooted solely in far-right ideological extremism either. The crowds drawn to his rallies include large numbers of moderates, independents, and even former Democrats, as well as individuals of all ages who had not yet voted in a presidential primary election (McManus 2016). Unlike the Front National (Cole 2003), Trump has not been able to pull over large numbers of far-left radicals who once identified as active Communists, but he has benefited from the wider trend in which conservatives have gradually left the Democratic Party (Knuckey 2015). The number of newly mobilized primary voters in his ranks, however, is particularly surprising when one considers that people who do not regularly vote in primaries usually tend to be more moderate and apathetic than their more active counterparts (Dimock et al. 2014). It also mirrors, from the other side of the party's divide, Hill and Leighley (1996)'s finding that in districts where the Democratic Party is strong it pursues a strategy of mobilizing lower-class voters to take part in presidential elections. And it underscores Trump's Gramscian form of class politics, as he relies less on the more familiar Republican arguments about abortion, Christian values, and nuanced

supply-side economics, building a coalition that is united more by general dissatisfaction and anti-immigrant hostility than by conservative ideology in itself.

Bernie Sanders, by contrast, appears to have drawn more actively on wider liberal ideology. Sanders is more popular among Democrats identifying as Very Liberal and less popular among those identifying as moderate or conservative (Figure 9), a pattern which is not apparent in Trump's base. This approach allows him to unite wealthy liberals and educated youth, who were among those at the core of his base from the beginning of his campaign, with more marginalized groups. This is not to say that college students and the young are free from economic precariousness; tuition debt is a major burden for many graduates, and Sanders's promises of tuition-free college directly appeal to this concern. Yet young individuals with college degrees still stand a better chance of adapting to the knowledge economy than unemployed factory workers. Sanders's approach relies to some extent on trends in Haidt (2012)'s liberal morality, emphasizing the values of care and fairness toward downtrodden victims in a way that appeals to the feelings of liberals who are better-off themselves. Yet it also has its own limitations. Dividing Democrats and Democrat-leaners by ideological consistency (Appendix 1), we see that the demographic groups among which Sanders was popular from the start—whites, college graduates, and the upper middle class—stand near the top of the list, with more than 6 in 10 respondents ranked as “Consistently Liberal” or “Mostly Liberal.” But less privileged and more precarious demographics, such as African-Americans, Hispanics, low-earners, and the less educated, are among the least likely to identify as “Consistent Liberals.” This, along with poor name recognition, was one of the issues that constrained Sanders's

support among minorities early in his campaign and led journalists to speculate about his apparent unpopularity among African-American voters (Cohn 2015).

**Figure 9:** Favorite candidate by Ideology, among Democrats and Democrat-leaners (Data from Malloy 2015, Malloy 2016b)

<u>March 2016</u>	% Prefer Clinton	% Prefer Sanders
Very Liberal	37	60
Somewhat Liberal	57	33
Moderate or Conservative	51	33
<u>November 2015</u>	% Prefer Clinton	% Prefer Sanders
Very Liberal	48	47
Somewhat Liberal	60	33
Moderate or Conservative	62	24

If ideology alone is not sufficient to explain the divergence between Trump and Sanders's campaigns, then what is? One explanation may relate to the candidates' stances on immigration and minority rights. Unlike Trump, Bernie Sanders has tried to frame immigration as a matter of solidarity rather than exploitation. On the immigration section of his issues website, he begins with a personal story about his efforts to build bonds between migrant workers and organized labor in southern Florida. From there, he moves on to call for policies that can improve immigrants' well-being, emphasizing "...the historic role of the United States as a protector of vulnerable people fleeing persecution" (Sanders 2015b). As with the case of income inequality, he attributes the plight of immigrant workers to corporate exploitation, telling his audience that "...guest workers are routinely cheated out of wages, held virtually captive by employers who seize their documents, forced to live in inhumane conditions and denied medical treatment for on-the-job injuries" (Sanders 2015b). Unlike Trump, and even unlike many labor unions, he does not level any accusations that immigrants are stealing jobs from American workers. If anything, he blames any loss of jobs on American corporate employers who exploit

immigrant labor for profit, stressing his claim that immigrants and US-born workers share a common foe.

On the issue of immigrant agency, his stance appears to have undergone some subtle adjustment. When I read the aforementioned page for an earlier draft of this paper, I noted that its tone seemed to drift closer to paternalism than solidarity, presenting immigrant workers as passive victims rather than fellow workers engaged in active resistance. This echoed Haidt's (2012) framework of liberal morality with appeals to the values of Care and Fairness. Since then, however, the page has been updated to address this problem. Its opening paragraph now stresses the shared nature of the immigrant experience: "I am proud to be the son of an immigrant. My father came to this country from Poland without a nickel in his pocket. Their story, my story, our story is a story of America: hard-working families coming to the United States to create a brighter future for their children" (Sanders 2015b). Further down the page, his visit to an immigrant farmers' union in Immokalee is reframed as a "tremendous grassroots effort," and he calls for "[a] political revolution that mobilizes millions of Americans inclusive of Latinos and immigrants." These small changes in tone represent a wider effort to address Sanders's apparent deficit of support among blacks and Hispanics, and in combination with deeper trends like increasing awareness of the candidate they have steadily closed his gap with Clinton among these groups (Figure 10). While Sanders may have faced serious accusations of neglecting race issues early in his campaign, his response to these accusations appears to have paid off.

**Figure 10:** Favorability of candidates by Race among all respondents (data from Malloy 2015, Malloy 2016a)

<u>February 2016<sup>4</sup></u>				
	Hillary Clinton		Bernie Sanders	
Demographic	%Favorable	%Unfavorable	%Favorable	%Unfavorable
Whites	28 (-7)	68 (+8)	46 (+5)	43 (+7)
Blacks	84 (0)	13 (-1)	78 (+21)	6 (-5)
Hispanics	56 (-8)	33 (+6)	58 (-2)	12 (-4)

  

<u>November 2015</u>				
	Hillary Clinton		Bernie Sanders	
Demographic	%Favorable	%Unfavorable	%Favorable	%Unfavorable
Whites	35	60	41	36
Blacks	84	14	57	11
Hispanics	64	27	60	16

Donald Trump, by contrast, favors accusation over solidarity. His campaign website sets aside an issue page for “immigration reform,” which consists almost entirely of calls for greater limits on immigration (Trump 2015). These include not only harsher penalties and reduced amnesty for undocumented immigrants, but also substantially greater employment and residency restrictions for those with valid visas. Many of his policies are backed up with allusions to crime and lawlessness, and some are eerily reminiscent of his infamous statement that undocumented immigrants are rapists (Scott 2015). Yet by and large, the dominant frame which appears in the page is economic, with repeated claims that undocumented immigrants pose a threat to American workers. In a direct appeal to working-class interests, it asserts that “[t]he influx of foreign workers holds down salaries, keeps unemployment high, and makes it difficult for poor and working class Americans—including immigrants themselves and their children—to earn a middle class wage” (Trump 2015). Its opening section goes further by calling the

<sup>4</sup> The more recent Quinnipiac dataset for March 2016 replaced the options “Black” and “Hispanic” with “Non-White;” to avoid confounding effects, I used the February data, which retained the original options.

Schumer-Rubio immigration bill “a giveaway to the corporate patrons who run both parties” and asserting that “[r]eal immigration reform puts the needs of working people first – not wealthy globetrotting donors” (Trump 2015). Epithets like these would not be out of place in Sanders’s rallies and speeches. The page even includes sympathetic references to the high unemployment rates faced by women, blacks, and Hispanic youth, problems which Trump attributes to the presence of low-wage immigrant labor. This type of appeal calls to mind the arguments which US labor unions have historically raised in order to keep their members’ jobs secure (Milkman 2011). Like Marine Le Pen, Trump articulates an immigration policy which blends cultural and security concerns with economic ones.

These feelings on immigration are echoed by Trump’s supporters, sometimes even in more open terms. According to a survey conducted in July, more than eight in ten of Trump’s early supporters agreed that “immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs, housing, and health care,” (Lapinsky, Clinton, and Roush 2015), a surprisingly large majority considering the strength of that statement. Among Republican supporters not aligned with Trump, the figure was closer to six in ten, substantially lower but still alarmingly high. Notably, the anti-immigrant sentiment measured by this question is expressed not in cultural or even criminal terms, but solely in terms of competition for jobs, housing, and government funds. Reporting in terms of overall favorability clarifies the story (Figure 11). Trump has stronger support among whites than any other demographic, while African-Americans are far less favorable of Trump on average, in spite of his website’s attribution of black youth unemployment to immigrant competition (Trump 2015) and past theories about black-Hispanic competition

for urban resources (cited in Cohn 2015). Hispanics are also overwhelmingly unfavorable toward Trump, suggesting that his references to “illegal immigrants” are still interpreted in racial terms, though they have improved substantially since last November when only 9% viewed him favorably (Malloy 2015).

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**Figure 11:** Percentage of demographics with Favorable or Unfavorable views of Trump (Malloy 2016a)

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This sharp divergence in immigration policy accounts for much of the difference in the character of Trump and Sanders’s campaigns. As Figures 9 and 10 show, when looking only at matters of economic precariousness and political disenfranchisement, the two campaigns appear similar, and if anything Trump looks like the more radical of the two. Yet on questions relating to multiculturalism, a very different picture emerges. Trump’s supporters overwhelmingly believe that their values, and by extension America’s values, are under threat (Figure 12). This is a sentiment which mirrors long-standing claims by the Front National that multiculturalism has failed and France is in danger of losing its national identity. Sanders’s supporters are at best divided on this issue, generally but not overwhelmingly disagreeing.

**Figure 12:** Candidates' supporters' feelings on multiculturalism (Data from Schwarz 2016)

"America has lost its identity"			
	Trump supporters	Sanders supporters	(national average)
Agree	85	45	57
Disagree	14	53	43
"I feel as though my beliefs and values are under attack in America these days"			
	Trump supporters	Sanders supporters	(national average)
Agree	91	45	62
Disagree	9	55	37
"The government has gone too far in assisting minority groups"			
	Trump supporters	Sanders supporters	(national average)
Agree	80	19	45
Disagree	16	79	53

But it is the last question, that of assistance to minority groups, which illustrates the deepest divide between the two sides and best demonstrates the Gramscian model of class politics in action. At the risk of generalization between ideal-types, Sanders can be said to have built his constituency on a three-legged coalition of blue-collar white Democrats, marginalized racial minorities, and liberal, college-educated youth. By presenting minority groups as victims alongside, and within, the working class, he can unite this broad coalition around social and cultural sympathies that transcend class-as-income. Trump, by contrast, can be seen to draw much of his support from people who feel economically marginalized but believe that competition from immigrants is part of the problem. It would be almost unthinkable for Bernie Sanders to make the same claim, as this would create a major schism within his base, driving away liberals who are economically comfortable but feel sympathy for oppressed minorities in American and abroad. Yet Sanders's current strategy is something of a double-edged sword: as long as

he pursues it, he can consolidate his minority support, but will have a hard time extending his appeal to people who fervently believe that his proposed solutions are part of the problem.

### **Conclusion**

France and the United States differ greatly not only in their current political institutions, but also in their political and cultural histories, with a rich assortment of explicitly class-based leftist movements in the former but a tendency toward two-party ideological conflict in the latter. I find that the relatively sudden emergence of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders as major candidates in the United States can be better understood by comparing it to a similar but more gradual trend in France. In both countries, the “proletarian class” has failed to unite behind Socialist or Social-Democratic candidates like Bernie Sanders and François Hollande, who despite their radical rhetoric still rely on educated liberals for much of their support. At the same time, we are seeing the emergence of a new form of right-wing populism, led by Donald Trump in the United States and two generations of Le Pens in France. These candidates have garnered considerable support among low-income and less-educated whites by exploiting anxiety over economic instability but re-directing this anxiety against immigrant labor and cultural alienation. Drawing on what Weakliem and Adams (2011) identify as the Hegemonic or Gramscian frame, I interpret this as evidence that white-working-class fears of immigration (however exaggerated) are not simply a matter of false consciousness or insufficient awareness. Rather, they represent an important line along which class politics are waged. Just as left-wing social democrats are relying on multiculturalism to unite their lower-class and upper-class constituencies on a common

liberal front, right-wing populists like Trump and Le Pen are using fears over immigration and cultural identity to pull working-class voters away from socialist campaigns.

Even though Donald Trump currently leads in the Republican party primary, this should not be taken as a sign that he may soon win the presidency. As of March 2016, “54% of American voters say they ‘would definitely not’ vote for Trump” (Malloy 2016b), which will prove a major obstacle when he runs in the general election. Interestingly, only 27% of voters in the same poll stated that they “would definitely not” vote for Sanders, compared to 43% for Clinton – suggesting that socialism is not as unpalatable a concept as it once was in the United States. There is also the precedent set by France’s 2002 election, where Jean-Marie Le Pen reached the top two in the first round of voting but was decisively defeated in the second round as even left-leaning voters reluctantly rallied around the lesser of two evils and re-elected the unpopular Chirac. That said, one should not make the mistake of thinking that once November comes and goes, all the surprises and upsets of this past year will fade away like another bad dream. Donald Trump’s brand of right-wing populism, which appeals to real dissatisfaction about economic precariousness but responds with angry finger-pointing about taxation and immigration, has found a wide and resilient following, demonstrating the strength of a Gramscian class politics which appeals to real unrest against perceived opponents. Unless the core issues behind these grievances are addressed within the next four years, which appears increasingly unlikely given long-term economic trends and transitions in the US and the increasingly deadlocked nature of Congress, this rhetoric will return with a vengeance in the race for 2020. Once again, France provides a

precedent, though a less reassuring one for critics of Trump: while Jean-Marie Le Pen did not win any of the presidential elections in which he competed, he turned the Front National from a fringe movement into a steadily growing party with one-fifth of the electorate as its base, and opened the way for Marine Le Pen to turn it into a mainstream party. Just as Sanders hoped to bring the neglected topic of income inequality into American political discourse, Trump may have succeeded in eroding the norms of political correctness and encouraging marginalized white workers to express hostility toward immigrants, Muslims, and other minorities.

That said, my findings are by no means sufficient to answer all questions about this turbulent new chapter in American presidential politics. In order to allow more accurate study of this phenomenon, there is a need for more detailed polls which, for example, examine a candidate's class support while controlling for race and ideology. Results from these could test my speculation earlier in this article that Trump's support among households earning below \$50,000 is the average of very low minority support but relatively high white support. Studies like these should take advantage of the current political context, as it may be easier to interview or poll supporters of candidates while the campaigns are still ongoing. Future research should also expand this comparative focus to other countries, in order to determine whether fragmented class politics and right-wing populism in the United States and France are part of a wider trend in other developed western democracies and in the global economic periphery.

Finally, my claim that race, national origin, and ideology are important components of class politics should not be mistaken for a claim that ethnic and racial categories are static. Changes in civil society, economic competition, public interaction,

and innumerable other variables can change the importance accorded to ethnicity, which is itself a historically malleable social construct. Fifty years ago, native-born French did not consider North Africans a threat, and today's Parisians do not consider rural French villagers a separate and inferior race. Even in the United States, there are promising signs that labor unions and immigrants are increasingly putting aside their history of mutual distrust and working together in the workplace and the public sphere (Milkman 2011). But if one ultimately wishes to overcome racial and ethnic divides, this is all the more reason to understand their deep role in class conflict. Decades of mutual suspicion cannot be swept away with a few strongly worded appeals for solidarity, especially in a country where the last three generations have been taught to associate capitalism with freedom and abundance and socialism with bread lines and secret police. Any major paradigm shifts that do take place are just as likely to be guided by long-term social forces above and beyond what even the most energetic presidential campaign can stir up. After all, the specter of Communism has been haunting Europe for over a century and a half now, and the single-minded proletarian class-for-itself is still nowhere to be seen.

**Appendix 1:** Proportions of Registered Democrats who identify as “Consistently Liberal,” “Mostly Liberal,” “Moderate,” or “Conservative Democrat” (chart from Cohn 2015).

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