

## **Piecing Together the American Voting Puzzle: How Voters' Personalities and Judgments of Issue Importance Mattered in the 2016 Presidential Election**

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*In the wake of the 2016 election, which surprised pundits and voters on both the left and the right, there has been renewed interest in understanding what predicts American voters' choices. In this article, we investigate the roles of personality and issue importance in how people voted in the 2016 U.S. election. In this longitudinal study of 403 MTurk workers who voted in the election, we assessed the relations between personality (openness, social dominance orientation, and national identity importance) and issue importance (group rights and social justice, economic rights, and individual and national rights), and voting for Clinton or Trump. Our results indicate that both individual differences and issue importance as measured in July 2016 predicted votes in November. We also found that the links between personality and voting were mediated by issue importance. Implications for political psychology and the study of personality, campaign issues, and voting behavior are discussed.*

Ongoing media discussions of the outcome of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, as well as recent scholarship on U.S. electoral politics, has focused on political polarization that is posited to result from differing cultural values about social issues such as LGBTQ rights and abortion. Some argue that these issues divide the public into two groups—sometimes labeled traditionalists and progressives, sometimes conservatives and liberals—marked by fundamentally

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different values, or positions on core political issues. Others emphasize lifestyle differences between the two groups. For example, Erikson (1998) showed that the differences in vote are associated with lifestyle differences based on marital status, church attendance, and gun ownership. In fact, these two groups of people (traditionalists and progressives) are sometimes viewed as differing so much that their views are not merely different, but incomprehensible to each other (Carmines & Layman, 1997a, 1997b; Davis & Robinson, 1996; DiMaggio, Evans & Bryson, 1996; Edsall, 1997; Hunter, 1991; Jelen, 1997; Layman, 2001; Knuckey, 2005). In contrast, some scholars have suggested underlying individual differences in personality characteristics, such as tolerance, account for the polarized public (e.g., Sabato, 2002; Napier & Jost, 2008). Napier and Jost (2008), for example, found that authoritarian personality is associated with moral and ethnic intolerance, as well as right-wing political orientation. Even though tolerance has been identified as one such individual difference, there has been no systematic research examining whether personality characteristics are associated with issue differences dividing voters. In the current study, we are interested in the question of whether personality played a role in different people's emphasis on different issues' importance in making a voting choice in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, as well as in their actual votes.

### **Personality, Political Issues, and Voting**

The political psychology literature is rife with evidence of different issue preferences among the supporters of Democratic and Republican Parties (e.g., Ansolabehere, Rodden & Snyder, 2008). However, we do not know if there are underlying individual differences, such as personality characteristics, attributes and traits associated either with issue preferences or the final Presidential choice by voters. Research in personality, social, and political psychology has shown that personality is linked with party identification (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008; McAdams, Hanek, & Dabado, 2013) and political attitudes on the right and the left (Onraet, Van Hiel, Roets, & Cornelis, 2011; Osborne & Sibley, 2012; Napier & Jost, 2008; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). The personality traits that have been examined most frequently in relation to political attitudes and behavior are openness to experience (McCrae, 1996; Curtin, Stewart & Duncan, 2010; Curtin, Stewart & Cole, 2015), social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), right-wing authoritarianism (RWA; Crowson, 2009), and nationalism (Crowson, 2009; Mukherjee, Molina & Adams, 2012). However, there is a gap in our knowledge with regard to the relations among these personality characteristics, issue preferences, and voting behavior; we aim to address that gap.

## Openness to Experience

In examining potential individual differences in personality that may be associated with political attitudes or voting for liberals, openness to experience is the most obvious candidate (McCrae, 1996). For instance, psychologists have found that people who self-identify as liberal score higher on openness than conservatives (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008). Additionally, researchers have found that openness is related to left-wing or socially transformative political engagement and activism (Curtin, Stewart, & Duncan, 2010; Curtin, Stewart, & Cole, 2015). Furthermore, in a cross-national sample of voters from New Zealand and the United States, openness to experience was negatively associated with conservative voting and conservative sociopolitical attitudes (Osborne & Sibley, 2012). In the 2016 Presidential campaign, Clinton's statements about many issues (e.g., on gun control, immigration, women's rights) were associated with the kinds of liberal positions openness predicts, while Trump's were associated with conservative positions on the same issues, and were articulated as enabling not transformation and change, but a return to a past that was better than either the present or a feared future. While many studies have shown that liberal political attitudes and behaviors are predicted by openness to experience, it is unclear from the literature if voting behavior is simply a direct extension of this individual difference or if this relation is mediated by engagement with particular liberal issues/causes, which then motivates a liberal voting choice.

## Social Dominance Orientation

While openness to experience stands out as a widely used and accepted individual difference predictor of liberal or progressive voting and attitudes, the literature includes more personality traits that predict right wing or conservative voting and attitudes. One of the most common variables that is used as a predictor of conservative attitudes and voting is SDO (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Among social and personality psychologists, SDO is conceptualized as a general acceptance or preference for hierarchical versus egalitarian relations among social groups (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Psychologists have also found that this trait is linked to other individual differences associated with attitudes and behaviors, such as RWA, nationalism, and right-wing political identification (Ho et al., 2012; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). The type of thinking reflected by SDO seems especially relevant to this election, in which Trump's rhetoric sought to legitimize and preserve American hierarchical structure and hegemonic power relations, both within the country and abroad. Indeed, emergent research has already shown that SDO was associated with greater intention to vote for Trump (Choma & Hanoch, 2016). Therefore, we chose SDO

as a key personality characteristic to include in considering the link between issue importance and voting behavior for conservative voters.

### **National Identity Importance**

During elections, national identity is invoked by candidates, sometimes in patriotic, and sometimes in nationalistic, terms. Even though patriotism and nationalism both involve positive images of the nation, they have been empirically shown to be different (Blank & Schmidt, 2003). While the former is about a positive affect towards the country, the latter involves notions of superiority of the country and dominance over others (Bar-Tal & Staub, 1997). In the 2016 U.S. elections, somewhat different rhetoric characterized the language deployed by the two candidates in referring to national identity. While Donald Trump drew on anti-immigrant sentiments and a drive for American superiority in his trademark slogan “Make America Great Again,” Hillary Clinton more often invoked “love of country,” and “American values” in an attempt to define the authentic American as tolerant and welcoming to immigrants who want to be integrated. Nevertheless, we do not know how much importance the supporters of each candidate attached to these appeals to patriotic feeling or nationalistic goals. Previous studies have shown that nationalism is associated with support for the enforcement of tough policies against undocumented immigrants, intolerance toward ethnic minorities, and support for U.S. military interventions and military aggression, whereas patriotism is not (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Crowson, 2009; Mukherjee, Molina & Adams, 2012). It is not entirely clear whether claiming the importance of national identity in one’s self-definition is associated with both kinds of expressions (defined here as patriotism and nationalism), and therefore whether it will be associated with voting for either candidate or one in particular. However, since there is evidence that SDO and right-RWA are associated with nationalism, we suspect that claiming the importance of national identity will predict viewing issues of national rights as important, and voting for Trump.

In light of the reviewed literature, we hypothesize that the personality traits of openness to experience, SDO and national identity importance (NII) will predict voting behavior in the 2016 Presidential election. In particular, we expect openness to experience to predict voting for Clinton, and SDO and NII to predict voting for Trump.

### **Issue Preferences and Voting**

Candidates explain their positions on issues to win votes, and it is assumed that political office-holders who are out of step with the electorate will be voted out; in short, it appears that issues matter to the electorate as to politicians. Nevertheless, research in political science has demonstrated that the majority of American voters

are not consistent in their issue preferences when they are measured one at a time (Converse, 1964; Florina & Peterson, 2001; Kinder, 1998). Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder (2008) argued that the problem is measurement error rather than a lack of stability in issue preferences, or of relationship between issue preferences and voting. They showed that when multiple items were combined to assess clusters of issues, issue clusters (in contrast to single items) were both stable and predictive of voting behavior in Congressional elections.

Using similar logic, we used factor analysis to identify three sets of items assessing issues rated as important by participants (group rights and social justice issues, economic issues, and individual and national rights issues; details presented in the Results). Each set of issues may be assumed to reflect issues that our sample viewed as important as they made their choice in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. We review what is known about each set of issues that our factor analysis identified.

### **Group Rights and Social Justice Issues**

For a long time, the scholarship on U.S. electoral politics, particularly in sociology and political science, has considered group rights (e.g., rights of women, racial-ethnic and sexual minorities, disabled people, etc.) and social justice issues (e.g., inequality, climate change, abortion rights, etc.) as a secondary and minor concern in explaining voters' choices and election outcomes, compared with economic and foreign policy issues (Wurgler & Brooks, 2014). However, there has been growing interest in the relevance of group rights and social justice issues, particularly after the two successive victories of Barack Obama in recent Presidential elections. The burgeoning scholarship on "culture wars" views these same issues as the source of a deep-seated divide in American public opinion (Abramowitz, 2013; Hunter, 1991).

### **Economic Issues**

According to one theory, "Voters, regardless of the democracy in which they live, assess national economic conditions and reward or punish the politicians responsible for those conditions," (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000, p. 212). However, research shows that the electoral importance of economic issues (e.g., taxes, economic growth and national debt) has declined, as the importance of group rights and social justice issues and individual and national rights issues have increased in the last three decades (see Redding, Barwis, & Summers, 2010 for a review). At the same time, there is evidence of a strong relationship between electoral outcomes and economic issues in the United States and other Western democracies, such as France, Denmark, and Britain (see Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000 for a review). The debate in the literature is concerned with whether individuals vote

out of concern for their own pocketbook or out of consideration for the national economy (see Nannestad & Paldam, 1994; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier for reviews). American voters in particular, considered a range of economic issues important at both the individual (e.g., taxes) and the national level (e.g., economic growth). Consistent with the previous literature, our definition of economic issues includes both individual and national level topics, including taxes, economic growth, and national debt.

### **Individual and National Rights Issues**

Individual rights include gun rights, gun control, and religious freedom, while national rights include the right of nations to define both immigration and foreign policy. As with economic issues, both the personal and the national appear to matter. Knuckney (2005) called the driving force underlying attention to individual rights issues a “moral traditionalism” that opposes tolerance. The link between moral traditionalism and defending nationalism was described by Bellah (1974), who noted connections between religious identification and national belonging in the U.S. Similarly, McCartney (2004) argued that Bush’s foreign policies (his Doctrine and the War on Terror) evoked American Exceptionalism by relying on invocations of American religious and moral distinctiveness, which is viewed on the international stage as Americans imposing their ability to assert *their* “rights” and will, regardless of the concerns and sovereignty of other nations. It is consistent with these arguments that a focus on individuals’ rights to freedom from government regulation in the areas of guns and religion were empirically connected in our data with national rights to limit immigration and define foreign policies.

In line with Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder, (2008), we hypothesize that issue preferences will predict voting behavior in the 2016 U.S. election, with group rights and social justice issues predicting voting for Clinton, and individual and national rights issues predicting voting for Trump. There is little basis for prediction about the role of economic issues in voter choice.

### **Personality, Issue Importance, and the Vote**

Finally, we are interested in knowing whether people with certain personality characteristics view certain issues as important during the elections and whether issue importance mediates the link between those characteristics and vote choices, given the literature on the centrality of cultural values in political life today (Carmines & Layman, 1997a, 1997b; Davis & Robinson, 1996; DiMaggio, Evans & Bryson, 1996; Edsall, 1997; Jelen, 1997; Layman, 2001; Knuckney, 2005). The most current literature suggests that economic issues may not matter as much to the voters in their final decision as the other two issue sets. In any case, we

anticipate that group rights and social justice issues, and individual and national rights issues will mediate the relationships between personality characteristics (openness, SDO, and NII) and vote choice. We are not certain that economic issues will mediate these relationships.

## Hypotheses

To summarize all of our predictions:

**Hypothesis 1:** Consistent with previous research about the relation of personality characteristics and liberal vs. conservative positions, we predict that personality will predict voting behavior directly, with openness to experience predicting voting for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, and SDO and NII predicting voting for Donald Trump.

**Hypothesis 2:** In line with Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder (2008), we hypothesize that issue preferences will predict voting behavior. Given our empirically defined issue sets, we expect that interest in group rights and social justice issues will predict voting for Hillary Clinton, and focus on individual and national rights will predict voting for Donald Trump. We do not have a specific prediction for economic issue preference.

**Hypothesis 3:** Issue preferences will mediate the relationships between personality and voting behavior, with the exception of economic issues.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

We surveyed Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) workers at four time-points throughout the 2016 U.S. Presidential campaign period. The first wave of data collection (W1) took place a few weeks before the Republican and Democratic conventions (July 2–12, 2016). To be eligible to take the survey, participants must have registered to vote in the United States, agreed to participate in all four waves, and completed an informed consent protocol. There were 789 initial participants who completed the survey, and took no less than 10 minutes to finish W1. The W1 survey included various personality measures, identity measures, and measures specific to the Presidential election. Since W1 took place before the conventions, not only did we have a view of potential voters' ideas about the election at an early point in the process, but we collected data on all of the candidates that were still in the running, including the eventual Democratic and Republican nominees Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

Wave 2 (W2) data were collected from September 6–13, 2016. With this wave, we recorded participants' opinions and feelings about the election after

the nominees had been decided and shortly before the candidates were given the opportunity to discuss their goals for the Presidency.

For Wave 3 (W3), we surveyed participants after the election, between November 15 and December 1, 2016, in order to assess their actual vote. To participate in W3, participants must have participated in both W1 and W2.

Finally, we surveyed participants after the inauguration from January 25 to February 11, 2017. We did not include data from Waves 2 or 4 in this article, and thus we will not discuss them further here. All waves described above were determined to be exempt from IRB oversight by the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences.

Of the 789 initial participants who completed surveys in W1, 154 participants did not continue to W2; an additional 71 did not continue to W3; thus, the rate of continuing through the first three waves was 72% of the original sample. In addition, six individuals in W1, 26 in W2, and 19 in W3 did not complete one or more of the personality, voting or issues measures (total  $N$  of 51), so were dropped from our analyses. Additionally, four individuals either did not complete the demographic measures of age ( $n = 1$ ) or sexual orientation ( $n = 2$ ), or reported identities that could not be sensibly placed into our binary demographics measure for gender ( $n = 1$ , nonbinary/gender nonconforming).

In Wave 3, 55 people reported that they did not vote, and 51 voted for someone other than Clinton or Trump. This left a final sample of 403 voters who had chosen either Clinton or Trump for our analyses. When the resulting sample was compared to the initial sample members, who were not in the final sample for any reason, on 12 variables included in W1 (the three personality variables, the three issue scales, vote choice, and five demographic variables), gender, NII, and individual and national rights issue importance were significantly different, with those who dropped out more likely to be men, lower in NII and in individual and national rights issue importance.

Demographic data were collected during W1. Slightly more than half (55%) of participants reported that they were women and 45% indicated that they were men. Most participants reported that they were Caucasian/White (79%), while 10% reported being African American/Black, 6% reported being Asian/Asian American, 4% reported being Latinx/Hispanic, .5% reported that they were Native American, and 2% reported being Biracial/Multiracial. Most participants reported that they were straight (88%). Seven percent indicated that they were bisexual, 4% reported that they were gay/lesbian and 1% reported that they were none of the above. Thirty-four percent of participants reported that they describe themselves as working class, 23% described themselves as lower middle class, 37% described themselves as middle class, and 7% described themselves as upper middle class or upper class. Participants' reported ages ranged from 18–71 years old ( $M = 39$ ,  $SD = 11$ ). More than half of participants reported that they were politically liberal



(61%). The remaining participants indicated that they were moderate (19%) or conservative (20%).

## Measures

*Openness to experience.* Participants completed the openness subscale of the Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) during W1 (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003). This measure consists of two items, “open to new experiences, complex” and “conventional, uncreative” (reverse scored). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which these traits applied to them on a 7-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The average score on openness to experience was 5.19, above the midpoint of the scale. Cronbach’s alpha = .58 for the two items, slightly higher than Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann’s (2003) reported alpha of .45; while this is relatively low, it has been documented that standard reliability estimates like alpha often underestimate the value with two item measures (Eisinga, Grotenhuis, & Pelzer, 2013).

*Social dominance orientation.* We measured SDO using the eight-item SDO measure (Ho et al., 2015) in W1. We used the scale as a whole, given the high correlation ( $r = .84$ ) between the antiegalitarianism and dominance subscales and the lack of any hypothesis differentiating them. Participants rated how much they favor or oppose each of the eight statements on a 7-point Likert scale from Strongly Oppose to Strongly Favor. Sample items include “An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on bottom,” and “Group equality should not be our primary goal.” Means on the SDO measure were 2.34, below the midpoint on the scale. Reliability analyses produced Cronbach’s alpha of .93 between the eight items.

*National identity importance.* We measured NII in W1 using Bikmen’s adaptation of the Collective Self-esteem Scale (Bikmen, 2015; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). The measure included four items that were rated on a 7-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (e.g., “Being an American is an important reflection of who I am”). Means for NII were 4.86, above the midpoint of the scale. Reliability analyses on the four items produced a Cronbach’s alpha of .93.

*Issue importance.* Participants were asked in W1-W3 to report the four most important issues out of 23 issues (e.g., “Women’s Rights,” “National Debt,” and “Gun Control”) they used to choose which political candidate to support. In Wave 3, in addition to choosing their four most important issues, participants rated how much each one of the 23 issues affected their candidate choice on a 5-point Likert scale from “A great deal” to “None at all.” Items were adapted from questions from the 2012 version of The American National Election Study (ANES; The

American National Election Study, 2012). As will be described in the Preliminary Results, the Wave 3 ratings were analyzed to identify the three sets of issues used in subsequent analyses.

*Voting.* In W1 and W2, we measured voting intentions with one item adapted from the 2012 ANES (The American National Election Study, 2012). We asked participants “Who do you expect to vote for in a contest between Hillary Clinton for the Democrats and Donald Trump for the Republicans.” Participants could choose one of six options including “Definitely Clinton,” “Probably Clinton,” “Probably Trump,” “Definitely Trump,” “Write-in Candidate (Please specify),” and “I would not vote if it was between these two candidates.”

In W3, we measured voting behavior with one item adapted from the 2012 ANES (The American National Election Study, 2012). The item read “For whom did you vote for President?” and participants chose between the responses “Hillary Clinton,” “Donald Trump,” “Gary Johnson,” “Jill Stein,” and “Other/Write-in.” Of those who reported voting for Clinton or Trump, 69% reported having voted for Hillary Clinton and 31% reported having voted for Donald Trump. This tendency toward liberal/Democratic voting is consistent with previous research using MTurk samples and will be discussed later. It is useful to note that intentions were quite stable, and therefore mostly translated into actual votes. Specifically, of the 277 who indicated in W3 that they voted for Clinton, 243 (88%) had indicated in W1 that would probably or definitely be their vote, while 255 (92%) had indicated that in W2. Similarly, in W1, 115 of the 126 eventual Trump voters had indicated that was their inclination (91%), and in W2, 110 (87%) had done so.

*Controls.* Five demographic variables were used as controls in our analyses. These were gender (coded as 1 = female, 2 = male), race (coded as 1 = underrepresented minority, URM, 2 = not underrepresented minority), social class (coded from 1 = poor or working class to 4 = upper middle class or upper class), sexuality (coded as 1 = sexual minority, 2 = heterosexual) and age.

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

*Exploratory factor analysis.* First, to test whether our participants’ ratings for the separate issues reflected an underlying factor structure, we ran an exploratory factor analysis. We used the issue ratings from W3 in the factor analysis, simply because participants were asked to rate the importance of all issues from 0 (not at all important) to 5 (very important) in W3, as opposed to only ranking the top four issues in W1 and W2. To perform the factor analysis, we used a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) extraction method with varimax rotation (Abdi &

**Table 1.** Factor Loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation of Issue Importance Scales

Issues	Group rights and social justice issues	Economic issues	Individual and national rights issues
Women's rights	<b>.86</b>	.03	-.01
Lesbian and gay rights	<b>.83</b>	-.16	.16
Racism	<b>.81</b>	-.04	.03
Transgender rights	<b>.80</b>	-.10	.24
Environment and climate change	<b>.77</b>	-.03	-.13
Income inequality	<b>.75</b>	.14	-.21
Disability rights	<b>.70</b>	.22	.19
Abortion	<b>.69</b>	.004	.25
Education	.56	.45	.02
Health care	.40	.39	.12
Economic growth	-.05	<b>.73</b>	.11
Taxes	-.06	<b>.70</b>	.19
National debt	-.08	<b>.66</b>	.33
Crime	.10	.62	.42
Military strength	-.18	.58	.54
Terrorism and homeland security	-.13	.58	.58
Criminal justice reform	.43	.56	.15
Social security	.46	.53	.05
Gun RIGHTS	-.04	.15	<b>.79</b>
Immigration	.09	.24	<b>.69</b>
Gun control	.25	.18	<b>.55</b>
Religious freedom	.37	.20	<b>.46</b>

Note:  $n = 403$ .

Williams, 2010). The scree plot suggested a three-factor solution as best. We considered items to be part of a factor if they had loadings above .4, but did not cross-load onto any other factor. See Table 1 for factor loadings by component. Fifteen of the 23 items loaded on only one of the three factors. The remaining eight items all loaded on two of the factors, so were not included in the scales.

The first factor, which we labeled *group rights and social justice* included items focused on group rights (such as women's rights, lesbian and gay rights, transgender rights, and disability rights); and social justice (such as income inequality, environment & climate change, racism, and abortion). To confirm that these items reflect an underlying construct, we ran a confirmatory reliability analysis which yielded an alpha of .91 for the factor, indicating excellent reliability. The mean for the *group rights and social justice* scale was 3.05 with a standard deviation of 1.20 and a range of 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important).

The second factor, which we labeled *economic issues*, included items regarding economic growth, taxes, and national debt. To confirm that these items represented a reliable construct, we performed a confirmatory reliability analysis, which yielded an alpha of .75, indicating good reliability. The mean for the *economic issues* scale was 3.48 with a standard deviation of 1.05 and a range of 1–5.

The third factor, which we labeled *individual and national rights issues*, included items traditionally associated with individual rights (such as gun control, gun rights, and religious freedom), and items associated with the rights of nations (such as immigration). To confirm that these items represented a reliable construct, we performed a confirmatory reliability analysis, which yielded an alpha of .67, indicating acceptable reliability. The mean for the *individual and national rights* scale was 3.11 with a standard deviation of 1.03 and a scale range of 1–5.

We note that the first scale (*group rights and social justice issues*) is often associated with liberal politics, the second (*economic issues*) does not appear to be strongly related to the left-right dimension, and the third (*individual and national rights issues*) is often associated with conservative politics. It is important to recall that individuals rated the importance of the issue, not the ideological leaning of their support; for that reason, both liberals and conservatives could rate any of the issues as playing an important role in their voting decision.

*Issue scales over time (within-subjects analyses).* Scales for each wave were created for each individual; they reflected the number of items (from 0 to 4) ranked as one of their top four most important in determining their vote for President for each of the three factors outlined above. After creating these scales, we examined how stable they were over time, using repeated measures ANOVA. In these analyses, we controlled for age, race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and personality (openness, SDO, and NII) as covariates.

*Group rights and social justice issues.* To test whether the scale for *group rights and social justice issue* importance was stable across the three waves, we conducted a repeated measures ANOVA. There was no significant effect of change over time,  $F(2, 788) = 1.154, p = .216$ . There were significant between-subjects effects, such that women,  $F(1, 394) = 14.24, p < .001$ , sexual minorities,  $F(1, 394) = 17.22, p < .001$  and those low in SDO,  $F(1, 394) = 124.00, p < .001$ , and NII,  $F(1, 394) = 37.72, p < .001$ , rated these issues as more important than their counterparts on average across time. Based on all of these results, we felt confident that these issues were consistently important over the course of the election cycle we studied, and would be a good candidate as a mediator in our model, as long as potentially influential covariates were included.

*Economic issues.* To test whether this factor's importance remained stable across the three waves, we conducted a repeated measures ANOVA. There was also no significant effect of change over time,  $F(2, 788) = .36, p = .696$ . Examination of the between-subjects effects showed higher endorsement of these issues as important among men,  $F(1, 394) = 20.28, p < .001$ , and upper class people,  $F(1, 394) = 11.16, p = .024$ , as well as individuals high in SDO,  $F(1, 394) = 56.70, p < .001$ , and NII,  $F(1, 394) = 6.81, p = .009$ . Based on all of these results,

we felt confident that this factor remained relatively stable over the course of the election cycle and would be a good candidate as a mediator in our model, as long as potentially influential covariates are included.

*Individual and national rights issues.* To test whether *individual and national rights issue* importance remained stable across the three waves, we conducted a repeated measures ANOVA. There was no significant effect of change over time,  $F(2, 788) = .333, p = .717$ . When we examined between-subjects effects, we only found higher endorsement of individual and national rights issues among straight individuals,  $F(1, 394) = 7.35, p = .007$ , individuals high in SDO,  $F(1, 394) = 7.51, p = .006$ , and individuals high in NII,  $F(1, 394) = 4.90, p = .027$ . Since this factor remained stable over time, we felt confident that it would be a good candidate as a mediator in our analyses, as long as potentially influential covariates were included.

Because the recent literature indicated that *economic issues* might be of decreased importance to voters (Redding, Barwis & Summers, 2010), we examined the relative importance of each set of issues to each other. In fact, in our data, *group rights and social justice issues* were rated significantly more highly in W1 than both *economic issues*,  $\Delta m = .41, t = 5.27, p < .001$ , and *individual and national rights issues*,  $\Delta m = .50, t = 7.68, p < .001$ ; and *individual and national rights issues* were rated least highly, though not quite significantly lower than economic,  $\Delta m = -.09, t = -1.62, p = .107$ , with *economic issues* falling in between.

*Correlations among predictors.* To check that the relations between the newly constructed issue importance scales and other variables of interest made sense, we ran a series of correlations (see Table 2). The correlations between the issue importance scales were low to moderate and significant (averaging .23), with *group rights and social justice issues* significantly negatively correlated with *economic issues* and *individual and national rights*. *Economic issues* were significantly negatively correlated with *individual and national rights*. Because these relationships were moderate and there is no established network of empirical relations on which to base theorizing, we included all in the mediation models, thereby controlling for the impact of their intercorrelation in predicting the final vote.

The three personality variables were also intercorrelated, but at a low level (averaging .17). As expected, openness was negatively correlated with SDO and NII; and SDO and NII were positively correlated. These correlations were all relatively low, so we felt confident that both our different theoretical expectations about each variable and the pattern of correlation justified treating them as independent predictors.

The demographic variables (gender, race, class, sexuality, and age) showed sensible relationships to issues and personality variables. In particular, men were

Table 2. Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender (M)	1											
2. Race (W)	.11*	1										
3. Class	-.06	.07	1									
4. Sexuality	.16**	.09	.05	1								
5. Age	-.15*	.11*	.04	.15**	1							
6. Openness to Experience	-.00	-.21**	.03	-.09	-.01	1						
7. Social Dominance Orientation	.16**	.15**	.06	-.01	.03	-.18**	1					
8. National Identity Importance	-.03	-.02	.09	.19**	.18**	-.10*	.24**	1				
9. Group Rights and Social Justice Issues	-.18**	-.10*	-.12*	-.24**	-.10*	.16**	-.45**	-.36**	1			
10. Economic Issues	.18**	.09†	.19**	.13**	.06	-.08	.30**	.12**	-.41**	1		
11. Individual & National Rights Issues	-.07*	.06	-.01	-.10*	.02	-.09†	.19**	.15**	-.10*	-.18**	1	
12. Final Vote (Trump)	.17**	.19**	-.03	.11*	.07	-.14**	.55**	.31**	-.49**	.20**	.18**	1

Note. \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ , †  $p \leq 0.1$ ,  $n = 403$ .

higher than women in SDO and lower in *group rights and social justice issue* importance. White participants were lower than racial-ethnic minorities in openness to experience, higher in SDO, and lower in *group rights and social justice issue* importance. Working class participants were higher than their middle and upper-class counterparts in *group rights and social justice issue* importance and lower in *economic issue* importance. Straight participants were higher than their sexual minority counterparts in NII, and *economic issue* importance, but lower in *group rights and social justice issue* importance. Finally, NII was higher among older participants and *group rights and social justice issue* importance was lower. See Table 2.

Based on our hypotheses, and supported by the evidence from these simple correlations, and the within-subject analyses, we set up our regression and mediation analyses such that all analyses controlled for age, gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. Since we were concerned with the link between personality and vote, mediated through issue importance, we used the issue importance and personality variables from W1 to predict vote choice measures in W3. W1 data collection was early in the election season and still four months before the vote; the issue importance measures were after the personality measures within the survey, which made it possible to use issue importance measures as mediators between personality and vote choice. Since we had the issue importance ratings in W3, we used the factor structure found in W3 to create indicators based on the W1 (binary) issue data for the following analyses.

## Testing Hypotheses

### *Hypothesis 1: Personality and Voting Choices*

To assess the relationship of personality variables measured in W1 with the final vote reported in W3 by our sample of 403 participants, we ran three logistic regression analyses with demographic variables entered in the first step (as controls), and our personality variables in the second step. As expected, openness significantly and negatively predicted voting for Trump over Clinton ( $\beta = -.18$ , odds ratio = .84,  $p < .05$ ). Note that because of the binary nature of the vote choice variable, this means openness predicted voting for Clinton, as expected. Equally, in separate logistic regressions, as anticipated, SDO positively predicted voting for Trump over Clinton ( $\beta = .97$ , odds ratio = 2.65,  $p < .001$ ), as did NII ( $\beta = .59$ , odds ratio = 1.81,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, all three of our personality variables predicted final vote choices for Clinton (openness) or for Trump (SDO and NII), after controlling for demographic variables. Overall, these findings support our first hypothesis.

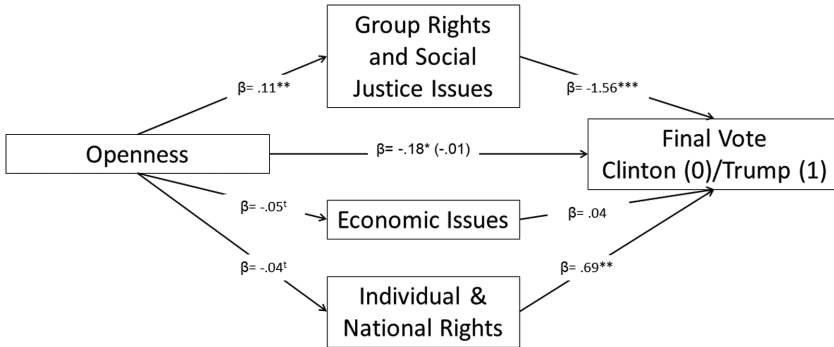
**Hypothesis 2: Issues and Vote Choices**

To test hypothesis 2, concerning the effect of our issue importance factors (also measured in W1) on the final vote, we ran three logistic regression analyses with demographic variables entered in the first step (as controls), and our issues variables in the second step. As expected, *group rights and social justice issues* significantly and negatively predicted voting for Trump over Clinton ( $\beta = -1.58$ , odds ratio = .21,  $p < .001$ ). In a separate logistic regression, as expected, *individual and national rights issues* positively predicted voting for Trump over Clinton ( $\beta = .72$ , odds ratio = 2.05,  $p < .001$ ). We did not have a specific prediction for *economic issues*, but found that participants that endorsed these issues as important were significantly more likely to have voted for Trump over Clinton ( $\beta = .60$ , odds ratio = 1.83,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, when analyzed separately, all three of our issue variables predicted final vote choices for Clinton (*group rights and social justice issues*) or for Trump (*economic and individual and national rights issues*), after controlling for demographic variables. Overall, these findings support our second hypothesis.

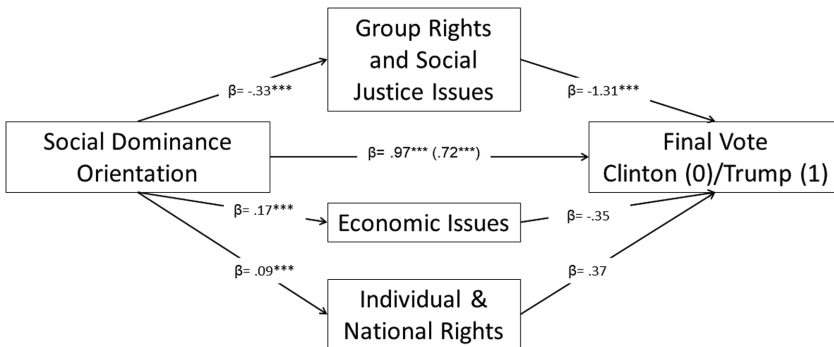
**Hypothesis 3: Mediation of Personality and Vote Choice by Issue Importance**

Following the findings that our personality variables and our issue importance variables were both related to vote choices with demographic controls included, we ran simultaneous mediation analyses that allowed us to test hypothesis 3, concerning the role of the issue importance variables as mediators between the personality variables and final vote. Using model 4 of the Hayes PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2009; Hayes, 2013), we entered each personality variable as an independent variable ( $x$ ), the three issue importance variables as simultaneous mediators ( $m$ ), and voting behavior (Trump vs. Clinton) as the dependent variable ( $y$ ) in each analysis, and tested direct ( $c, c'$ ) and indirect ( $ab$ ) effects by producing confidence intervals from 10,000 bootstrap samples for the indirect effects. Thus, we ran three separate mediation models, one for each personality predictor. All analyses had gender, race, class, age, and sexual orientation entered as covariates. Since the dependent variable (vote for Clinton vs. Trump) was binary for all mediation analyses, the mediation analyses were mixed and used OLS regression for all analyses with continuous dependent variables (e.g., the mediators) and logistic regression for all analyses with vote as the dependent variable. For a visual representation of the mediation analyses for each of the three individual difference variables, see Figures 1–3. Since we were particularly interested in the role of issue importance variables as mediators between the personality variables and final vote, we discuss the results for each personality variable in turn. First, however, we will discuss the total and direct effects of each personality predictor on vote, for each of the three mediation analyses.





**Fig. 1.** The effect of openness on vote, mediated by issues. Analysis controls for race (URM vs. Non-URM), gender (female vs. male), class (continuous), age, and sexual orientation (sexual minority vs. straight).  $n = 403$ . Significance: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ , <sup>t</sup> $p < .10$ .



**Fig. 2.** The effect of social dominance orientation on vote, mediated by issues. Analysis controls for race (URM vs. Non-URM), gender (female vs. male), class (continuous), age, and sexual orientation (sexual minority vs. straight).  $n = 403$ . Significance: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ , <sup>t</sup> $p < .10$ .

*Total, direct, and total indirect effects.* The total effect of openness on vote was significant ( $\beta = -.18, z = -2.02, p < .05$ ), with a direct effect of openness on final vote choice that was no longer statistically significant when all of the indirect effects of the issues variables were included in the model ( $\beta = -.01, z = -.05, p = .96$ ). The total effect of SDO on vote was significant ( $\beta = .97, z = 9.02, p < .001$ ), with a direct effect of SDO on final vote choice that was statistically significant when all of the indirect effects of the issues variables were included in the model ( $\beta = .72, z = 6.08, p < .001$ ). Finally, the total effect of NII on vote was significant ( $\beta = .59, z = 6.12, p < .001$ ), with a direct effect of NII on final vote choice that remained statistically significant when all of the indirect effects

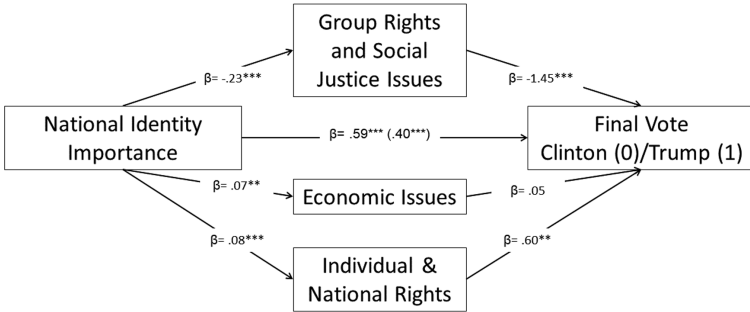


Fig. 3. The effect of national identity importance on vote, mediated by issues. Analysis controls for race (URM vs. Non-URM), gender (female vs. male), class (continuous), age, and sexual orientation (sexual minority vs. straight).  $n = 403$ . Significance: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ , † $p < .10$ .

of the issues variables were included in the model ( $\beta = .40, z = 3.67, p < .001$ ). These results indicate that the mediators only fully mediate the effect of openness on vote, with SDO and NII both partially mediated by our issues variables.

The question of interest for hypothesis 3, however, was not whether the mediators *fully* accounted for the variance in vote as a function of personality, but whether the mediators explain a significant proportion of the variance in vote that is a function of the personality variables. Therefore, to test hypothesis 3 we examined the *indirect* effects of our personality variables on vote through each of our issue importance variables. First, we will discuss the combined or total indirect effects.

In terms of the combined indirect effects through our issue importance variables, we found that there was a significant combined indirect effect in all cases. For openness, our mediators accounted for a significant proportion of the shared variance between openness and vote, combined indirect effect =  $-.21$ , CI (10,000 bootstrap samples) [ $-.35, -.07$ ]. For SDO, our mediators accounted for a significant proportion of the shared variance between SDO and vote, combined indirect effect =  $.40$ , CI (10,000 bootstrap samples) [ $.23, .58$ ]. For NII, our mediators accounted for a significant proportion of the shared variance between NII and vote, combined indirect effect =  $.38$ , CI (10,000 bootstrap samples) [ $.25, .53$ ]. These results provide initial support for our third hypothesis. However, it may be most helpful to examine the indirect effects through each of our specific mediators, separately.

*Mediating the openness-vote relationship with issue importance.* The indirect effect of openness on vote through *group rights and social justice issue* importance was significant,  $\beta_{ab} = -.18$ , CI (10,000 bootstrap samples) [ $-.31, -.06$ ]. Thus, group rights and social justice issues importance mediated the link between

openness and voting behavior, such that openness predicted greater importance of these issues, which in turn predicted less likelihood to vote for Trump. The indirect effect of openness on vote through economic issue importance was not significant,  $\beta_{ab} = -.002$ , CI (10,000 bootstrap samples)  $[-.04, .02]$ . Therefore, *economic issues importance* did not mediate the link between openness and voting behavior. The indirect effect of openness on vote through *individual and national rights issue* importance was not significant,  $\beta_{ab} = -.03$ , CI (10,000 bootstrap samples)  $[-.09, .004]$ . Thus, *individual and national rights issues* importance did not mediate the relationship between openness and vote. In summary, *group rights and social justice issues* acted as a mediator of the openness-vote relationship, but the other two issue importance variables did not.

*Mediating the SDO-vote relationship with issue importance.* In Figure 3 we see that the indirect effect of SDO on vote through *group rights and social justice* issue importance was significant,  $\beta_{ab} = .43$ , CI (10,000 bootstrap samples)  $[.27, .59]$ . Thus, *group rights and social justice issues* importance mediated the link between SDO and voting behavior, such that SDO predicted lower importance of these issues, which effectively predicted greater likelihood to vote for Trump. The indirect effect of SDO on vote through *economic issue* importance was not significant,  $\beta_{ab} = -.06$ , CI (10,000 bootstrap samples)  $[-.17, .02]$ . Thus, economic issues importance did not mediate the link between SDO and voting behavior. Finally, the indirect effect of SDO on vote through *national and individual rights issue* importance was not significant,  $\beta_{ab} = .03$ , CI (10,000 bootstrap samples)  $[-.006, .09]$ . Thus, *individual and national rights issues* importance did not mediate the link between SDO and voting behavior. In summary, *group rights and social justice issues* mediated the relationship between SDO and vote, but the other two issue variables did not.

*Mediating the NII-vote relationship with issue importance.* *Group rights and social justice issues* importance mediated the link between NII and voting behavior, such that NII predicted lower importance of these issues, thereby predicting greater likelihood to vote for Trump,  $\beta_{ab} = .33$ , CI (10,000 bootstrap samples)  $[.21, .48]$ . The indirect effect of NII on vote through *economic issues* importance was not significant,  $\beta_{ab} = .003$ , CI (10,000 bootstrap samples)  $[-.03, .04]$ . Thus, *economic issues* importance did not mediate the link between NII and voting behavior. Finally, the indirect effect of NII on vote through *individual and national rights issue* importance was significant,  $\beta_{ab} = .05$ , CI (10,000 bootstrap samples)  $[.01, .10]$ . Thus, *individual and national rights issues* importance mediated the link between NII and voting behavior, such that higher NII led to greater importance of these issues, which led to greater likelihood to vote for Trump. To summarize, both *group rights and social justice issues* and *individual and national rights issues* mediated the relationship of NII and voting, but economic issues did not.

Across these three analyses we find that all three relationships between personality and vote were at least partially mediated by issue importance. For openness and SDO, only *group rights and social justice* operated as a mediator. For NII and vote, both *group rights and social justice issues* and *individual and national rights* issues were mediators.

Overall, these findings support our third hypothesis. We had no specific prediction for *economic issues*, and in fact did not find that it mediated between personality and vote in any analysis. However, we did find that the other issue importance variables did mediate the link between personality and vote for at least one of our personality variables, and in one case all three (*group rights and social justice issues*).

### Discussion

Our aim in this study was to assess the potential roles of personality and issue concerns as factors that played a role in American voters' decisions to vote for Clinton vs. Trump in 2016. In our longitudinal study, we assessed personality and issue importance in July 2016 before the party conventions selected candidates for the election, and vote choices in November. We found that three personality variables often related to political attitudes—openness to experience, SDO, and NII—were related to ultimate vote choice in expected ways. Specifically, openness to experience predicted voting for Clinton, while SDO and NII predicted voting for Trump over this 6-month period. These findings are important because the roles of openness, SDO, and NII in predicting actual voting behavior have not been demonstrated before, and in general, personality traits of voters has not been viewed as being particularly consequential in predicting voting.

Although candidates and parties clearly view issues as important factors in elections, there has been considerable debate in the literature as to their importance in predicting vote outcomes. In fact, we also found that viewing specific *types* of issues as important in July was related to vote choice in November. Issues clustered into three types: *group rights and social justice issues*, which are those often associated with left-wing/liberal candidates and voters; *economic issues* at both the policy and the individual's experience level; and *individual and national rights*, which are those often associated with right-wing/conservative candidates and voters. The first and third have both been identified as part of the polarized culture of American electoral politics, while economic issues have been viewed as more broadly salient to both poles, and perhaps of declining overall importance (see Redding et al., 2010 for a review). Although in our study *economic issues* did not mediate the link between vote choice and personality, there was some evidence of their importance. Not only did they fall in the middle of the importance ratings of our three scales, but they did predict vote choice directly in a separate regression analyses. Similarly, although *individual and national rights issues* did not mediate

the relationship between SDO and vote, they did for NII and significantly predicted vote in a separate logistic regression analysis.

These three sets of issue types are not exhaustive, of course, and in past or future elections they might not capture the most relevant and important issues for that time. However, consistent with Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder's (2008) suggestion, we believe that the strategy of assessing issue types has been verified as a sound approach to assessing the importance of issue types in elections. Interestingly, we found that that least one of the issue types that we assessed was important to voters in making their vote choice, under most conditions. Viewing issues of *group rights and social justice* as important was related to voting for Clinton, while viewing *individual and national rights issues* as important was related to voting for Trump. It remains to be seen whether these issues generally cluster together into these three types, whether the three types we found are generally identified, and whether all three will generally relate to voting behavior in future elections. This is an important priority for future research.

Finally, we considered the possibility that voters' views of the importance of issue types might mediate the relationships between personality and voting. This is important since there is no necessary direct connection between these characteristics and vote choices. We proposed that personality orientations might indirectly predict vote choices because people with different personalities might tend to care about particular issues more and less, and caring about those issues might be the key predictor of who they vote for in the election. Openness to experience, because it is tied to broad interest in others' experience, and a generally positive disposition toward novelty, difference and change, was expected to be positively related to *group rights and social justice issues*. SDO, because it is tied to confidence in the status quo and a commitment to maintain current hierarchical relationships, was expected to be logically associated with Republican policy recommendations reflected in opposition to *group rights and social justice issues* and in support of *individual and national rights issues* (although there was no evidence of the latter in this study). The importance of a person's identification with the nation (NII) was expected to be closely tied to viewing *individual and national rights issues*—both protected by the Constitution and legal structure (reflected in the scale)—as important. We expected that viewing these social issue clusters as important might in turn be critical predictors of vote choice.

We found this mediational prediction confirmed most clearly in the case of *group rights and social justice issues*, which mediated the link between all three personality traits and vote choice. In particular, those who are open to new experiences, or low in SDO, or think their national identity is less important were more likely to think *group rights and social justice issues* were important; and thus, they were more likely to vote for Clinton than Trump.

## **Contributions of Our Study**

We believe our study is a contribution both because of the identification of the predictive value of both voters' personality predispositions and the importance they attach to issue sets (rather than single issues) for their voting behavior. Because we employed a longitudinal sample of adults who did in fact vote in the 2016 election, we believe these results must be taken seriously as suggesting that both personality dispositions and issues are important factors in election decision-making. Moreover, we have shown that some of the impact of personality on voting behavior is mediated through attribution of importance to particular sets or types of issues.

Methodologically we believe our study is a contribution because it employs longitudinal data throughout six months of the pre- and post-election period, because we identified sets of issues that define types at least within these data, and because we included data on voters' (self-reported) behavior very close in time to the actual vote.

## **Limitations of Our Study**

Because we relied on an MTurk sample, we must live with the limitations of MTurk samples generally. MTurk has been demonstrated to produce relatively diverse samples of U.S. adults that are, however, not precisely representative of American voters (see, e.g., Levay, Freese, & Druckman, 2016). They are generally younger, more likely to be students, to have lower incomes, as well as to be unmarried, and less racially diverse. They are also more likely to be liberals and Democrats, though political differences disappear in the presence of demographic controls (which we used). For these reasons, we do not believe we can assume that our results generalize to American voters broadly.

In addition, although we found the factor analysis of issue types illuminating in this study, we are aware that this factor structure may be particular to the items available, this sample, or this election. It will be important to examine the structure of issue importance in other samples and over time.

## **Implications for Future Research**

Our results point to the value of researchers using great care in sampling important issues in the minds of the electorate, and identifying underlying structures or types within those issues. The three types of issues we identified seem like promising ones for future research but we only assessed 23 issues, and certainly did not cover all of those discussed even in the 2016 election. Moreover, seven issues did not load on any of the three issue factors, and therefore were dropped from consideration. These included some (such as health care and education) that

were rated as important on average, and are often contested in candidates' policy discussions. It is important to examine more fully how issues cluster and whether there are enduring issue types or idiosyncratic ones, or a combination of both, in particular U.S. elections.

We have demonstrated that three personality variables that have previously shown relationships to political attitudes and opinions also predict both caring about particular issues and voting behavior in the 2016 Presidential election. We believe that it is important for personality, social, and political psychologists to continue to examine the relevance of enduring dispositions in this domain, perhaps especially as mediated through issue importance.

Finally, it is important to relate the emerging but underdeveloped psychological literature on voting to the literatures on political activism and political attitudes. There are important leads in those literatures (e.g., on the importance of age cohorts, and early adult experience) that have been relatively under-explored in the literature on voting. The 2016 U.S. Presidential election demonstrated—again—that electoral politics can result in unexpected and surprising outcomes; psychologists have a role to play in understanding how and why those outcomes occur.

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