Authoritarianism, not social class, is the dividing line between supporting and opposing Donald Trump.

In the nine months since New York billionaire Donald Trump launched his presidential campaign, many pundits and commentators have attributed his snowballing success to his popularity with white working class voters who also lacked a college education. Using new survey data, **Jonathan Weiler** *and* **Matthew MacWilliams** *find that this characterization of Trump voter isn't accurate; rather than class or education, authoritarianism is the biggest driver of support for Trump.*

With New York's primary results now counted and the probability of a general election contest between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton increasing, it is time to reexamine the simplistic argument that, driven by economic populism, white working class Americans are a monolithic voting bloc who support of Donald Trump. This stereotyping of lower income and education whites as social and cultural conservatives ripe for Trump's rhetoric fits the conventional media meme, but is too simplistic.

Class is not the dividing line between Trump support and opposition. Authoritarianism is.

How do we know? We examined voters' feelings toward Trump by their education, income, *and* authoritarianism and found that it is authoritarianism, not class that appears to explain their views.

Our findings come from a national survey of 1800 voters. Authoritarian-minded voters were identified based on their answers to four parenting questions that tap the degree to which people prioritize order and social hierarchy. Voters' views of Trump were assessed using a standard feeling thermometer in which a zero represents a very cold feeling and a 100 a very warm or favorable feeling toward him.

We found, as most polls have, that Donald Trump is far from popular. Most voters dislike Trump and feel very negatively toward him. Fully 50 percent gave Trump a score between 0-10 on our feeling thermometer. By contrast, only about five percent rated him at 90 or above. Overall, he averaged just a 28 thermometer score, well behind Hillary Clinton who, at 45, is far from popular. While voter's dislike of Trump was not surprising, what we found next was, and it directly challenges conventional wisdom.

No matter what their education or income, American authoritarians view Trump much more favorably than non-authoritarians. Indeed, white authoritarians with a high school education or less give Trump a 50 feeling thermometer score while non-authoritarians, with the same educational background, give him just a 14. The same pattern emerges when college graduates' feelings toward Trump were examined. Authoritarian college graduates give Trump a 52 feeling thermometer score. By contrast, non-authoritarian college graduates give him a score of only 21.

The same basic story holds when we looked at income. Among nonauthoritarian white voters making less than $40,000 a year, Trump garnered an average feeling thermometer rating of 17. By contrast, high authoritarian, low-income voters rated him a 37. And among those who make $100,000 a year or more, low authoritarians gave him an average score of 18 while high-income, high authoritarian voters gave him a 40. In other words, well-off but authoritarian-inclined respondents view Trump much more favorably than less well off but low authoritarian voters. In sum, voters' authoritarianism structures their feelings toward Trump no matter what their income or educational attainment.

For the sake of comparison, we looked at Hillary Clinton's ratings and found another surprise. When looked at through the lens of authoritarianism, Clinton's feeling thermometer scores are the reverse of Trump's. Low authoritarian respondents with a high school education or less gave her an average rating of 44 while high scoring authoritarians in that category gave her a 32. Among college educated voters, non-authoritarians rated Clinton a 50 on average while authoritarians with a college education gave her a 33. As with support for Trump, feelings toward Clinton are better explained by authoritarianism than they are by education level or income. All of these results, it's worth pointing out, are statistically significant.

Why does this matter?

There is a strong tendency in American politics and political science, extending back a generation or more, to lump all white working class voters together and assume that they are uniformly predisposed to social conservatism and opposed to cultural change. This stereotyping of working class white voters is, at least when assessing feeling toward Trump, simply wrong. The white-working class trope obscures the deeper realities of American political

polarization – a growing gulf in our politics that is driven not by differences in social-economic status but, instead, by deeply ingrained worldviews, perhaps anchored in personality differences.

White working class voters who disavow the authoritarian worldview detest Trump. But college educated voters who are authoritarians have much more positive feelings toward him. Social class is not the dividing line between support and opposition to Trump. Authoritarianism is. And it is authoritarian voters who are the core constituency to whom Trump appeals.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP – American Politics and Policy, nor the London School of Economics.

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