From Tea Party to Trump Party

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Abstract: Although the role of the Tea Party and Tea Party activists in the Republican Party over the last 10 years has been widely acknowledged, there has been little or no large-scale study of Tea party activists. Relying on a two-year panel study (2015-2017) of almost 900 supporters of FreedomWorks (the largest Tea Party organization), we focus on the transformational role Trump has played in redirecting Tea Party supporters' attitudes, priorities and activities. We find a major shift in priority from deficit to immigration, and a large shift towards favorability towards Trump, even among those with the most negative view of him in during the nomination period. In this way the Tea Party has indeed become the Trump Party; but we also find that Trump support has not replaced Tea Party support but is associated with increased positivity over the period of the panel.

1   Introduction

Since its inception in 2009, the Tea Party has shown significant success in shaping electoral outcomes for Republican candidates. In particular, in 2010 and 2012 the Tea Party was successful in defeating both establishment candidates and incumbents, and in serving as an important engine for Republican general election victories. Nonetheless, in the first presidential contest after the Tea Party's inception they came up short, as a very establishment candidate Mitt Romney won the 2012 Republican nomination. In large part this was due to the weaknesses of the candidates with greatest appeal to Tea Party supporters: Rick Perry and Herman Cain.

The 2016 Republican primaries looked to be more promising for Tea Party supporters. 'The first three Republicans to [officially] join the 2016 presidential campaign Sens. Ted Cruz, Rand Paul and Marco Rubio. . .have one big thing in common: Each rose to power with support from the Tea Party movement' (Hook 2015). With the lackluster performance of establishment favorite Jeb Bush, the Tea Party had reason to be optimistic.

Tea Party optimism appeared well-founded until Donald Trump declared his candidacy on June 29, 2015. Within three weeks he had taken the lead, which he never relinquished. Donald Trump was, of course, neither establishment nor Tea Party. His outsider status and commitment to shaking things up would seemingly resonate well with the Tea Party, but Trump's desire to spend heavily on infrastructure, his disregard for deficits, together with his support for tariffs made him quite different from the typical Tea Party candidate.

Since its beginning, the Tea Party has been an identifiable and relatively cohesive faction in the Republican Party, as has been particularly evident in primary elections in which it took on and defeated multiple establishment Republicans. Journalists and scholars found it convenient to identify candidates as being either Tea party or establishment (although in a few cases there was

overlap). As a challenging faction, its goal is best exemplified in the title of Tea Party leader Matt Kibbe's book, *Hostile Takeover*. As the 2016 Republican nomination contest got underway, Ted Cruz seemed the likely Tea Party favorite, but then Donald Trump declared. And   Jenny Beth Martin, the president of Tea Party Patriots, struck back at the 2016 CPAC conference, saying of Trump, "He doesn't love you, me, and he doesn't love the Tea Party. Donald Trump has no business thinking he's Tea Party and every Tea Party person who truly loves the Constitution should take that into account when you're casting your vote."

And such skepticism was not unwarranted. The Tea Party had represented the conservative wing of the Republican Party since its inception. The 2010 ANES study shows the role of conservatism in both differentiating Tea Party Republicans from other Republicans and in impacting Tea Party support in the broader public. While 90 percent of Tea Party Republicans called themselves "conservative," such was the case of only 62% of other Republicans, and even more significant, in a multivariate logistic regression analysis, Abramowitz found conservative ideology to have the strongest effect on Tea Party support among white Americans—more important than Republican identification, racial resentment, church attendance or dislike for Obama (Abramowitz 206-207 2012). And there were questions even about his partisan leanings since he had been Democrat from 2001 thr 2009, and only registered as a Republican in 2012 (Polifacts 2015).

The question was first how successful Trump would be in overcoming his comparative disadvantage in ideology and issues in attracting and holding Tea Party support at the nomination stage. And, after he was nominated, at the general election stage of the campaign. The latter was a significant concern given the rancorous nature of the Republican nomination process, Cruz's failure to offer the expected Trump endorsement at the Republican convention, and Trump's divergence from traditional Tea Party positions on a variety of issues including the deficit and free

trade as well as ideology. After all, Tea Party adherents had failed to warm up to Romney in 2012 even after he became the Republican nominee, and they failed to adopt his policies, even though they supported him over Obama (Rapoport 2013). Would the same be true of Trump?

Furthermore, even after he took office, Trump continued to pursue his own agenda, which diverged significantly from traditional Tea Party and conservative positions. In this paper, our focus is on the period beginning with early nomination contests and extending through early into his term as president. We examineTea Party reactions to Trump and to his policies. Did Trump's support decline among Tea Party supporters and activists? Or did their attitudes change rather quickly to more closely mirror those of the President?

Tea Party activists and potential activists from 2016 are a particularly important group through which to observe Trump's success in taking over the Republican Party, since, with their intense activity and ideological commitment, they should present the greatest challenge for Trump's persuasion. After all they had turned on Republican President George W. Bush over his bailouts at the end of his term, and in spite of their activity in support of Romeny they never becme positive towards him. But did they succumb to Trump? In essence, did the Tea Party become the Trump party? This question motivates the analysis in this paper.

The paper is divided into three sections. First, we introduce the 2015 and 2017 FreedomWorks surveys and the panel on which the paper is based. Next, we evaluate the survey results through four lenses: candidate choice and favorability and their determinants; individual level change in Trump evaluations from 2015 to 2017; shifting issue priorities among Tea Party supporters in response to Trump's stated priorities and policies; and how evaluations of Trump contributed to changes in Tea Party evaluations over the two years of the panel.

1.1 Trump, the Tea Party, and FreedomWorks

Although Trump had a clear lead among all Republicans in nomination preference from late July 2015 on, support was far weaker among Tea Party supporters. According to a CNN/ORC survey of Republicans in late January 2016, Trump led Cruz about 2:1 – 41 percent vs. 19 percent among all Republicans, but among Tea Party Republicans, it was far closer – 37 percent vs. 34 percent (Agiesta 2016). This also reflects the difference we found in a YouGov survey of Republican identifiers, conducted between January 21st and February 8th, in which Trump led Cruz among Tea Party Republicans 34 percent—28 percent. Yet among the 34 percent of Tea Party supporters who called themselves strong Tea Party supporters, Cruz led by a 41 percent to 25 percent margin. Although there was substantial Tea Party support for Trump, it was less than among Republicans at large, and it declined as the strength of Tea Party identification increased.

What about the more intensely involved set of Tea Party activists? Tea Party activists are an important subgroup of Tea Party supporters. Bailey et al. (2012) find that number Tea Party activists in a district has a significant impact on how members of Congress voted on issues that are salient to the Tea Party. In fact, the number of Tea Party activists has a significant effect even when district mean evaluations of the Tea Party do not, and this holds with an extensive set of controls including prior DWNOMINATE score for the member of Congress from the district, presidential vote, Tea Party group endorsements, and selected demographics (Bailey et al. 2012). Bailey et al. (2012) rely on the count of Tea Party memberships across six Tea Party groups compiled by Brughart and Zeskind (2010).

Reflective of the pattern outlined above, we find even less support for Trump among FreedomWorks activists than among even strong Tea Party supporters in the electorate. Cruz leads Trump among this group by a better than 3:1 margin (55 percent to 15 percent).

2 Methodology

Given their importance, it is surprising that there has been so little systematic analysis of Tea Party activists. The problem has been primarily one of access. In this paper we rely on a panel survey of FreedomWorks email subscribers which we carried out over 2015-2017.

Our initial survey of FreedomWorks activists was conducted in 2015-2016. At the time of the survey, FreedomWorks was by far the most dominant Tea Party group, as almost half (45 percent) of all 556,551 Tea Party group members belonged to FreedomWorks (Burghart and Zeskind 2015: 16). Even from the beginning, FreedomWorks had the largest structure of support, even before its membership exploded (Burghart 2015).

Those on the FreedomWorks email list constitute the universe from which we draw our respondents. This group constitutes a reasonable sample of Tea Party activists since 85 percent of them report either being actual members of a Tea Party group or being actively involved in some Tea Party activity between January 2014 and the date of the survey. We will refer to our sample as FreedomWorks activists.

FreedomWorks is impressive not only in its size, but in its influence on election outcomes. Karpowitz, Monson, Paterson and Pope (2011) find that an endorsement from FreedomWorks in 2010 was worth an increase in Republican vote of about 2.1 percent, while endorsements by Tea Party Express and other Tea Party groups had no significant effect. This finding is reinforced by that of Bailey et al. (2011) who find a vote increase of about 2.4 percent associated with FreedomWorks endorsement but no effect of other Tea Party groups. Bailey et al. (2012) also find that the endorsement of FreedomWorks (but not the other Tea Party groups) is significantly related to support for Tea Party proposals among members of Congress in the 112th Congress.

2.1   Surveys

The 2015 survey was sent out after Trump became a candidate but before the Iowa caucuses. Surveys were distributed via a link embedded in a blast email from FreedomWorks . in The first blast email was sent in July 2015, with a reminder in January 2016. – We refer to this e-survey as the 2015 survey since more than three-quarters of responses came in prior to the January 2016 mailing. Our agreement was that we would not house the email list to protect FreedomWorks proprietary data, but that respondents would be given a unique identifying number allowing us to match up surveys from different waves.

Emails were sent to approximately 500,000 individuals. We received 9,473 completed surveys. On blast emails sent frequently by organizations such as FreedomWorks, the open rate tends to be small (around 10 percent). Assuming this to be the case, about 50,000 would be expected to open the invitation of whom approximately 20 percent actually completed the survey.

In March 2017, FreedomWorks sent another blast email to their list. Of the 9,473 respondents who completed the 2015 survey, about 40 percent had taken themselves off the list or had entered non-existent ID numbers, so effectively only 6,687 were eligible to take the 2017 survey. Of the 6,687 respondents who received the 2017 survey 868 completed it. It is this panel on which our paper is based.[i]
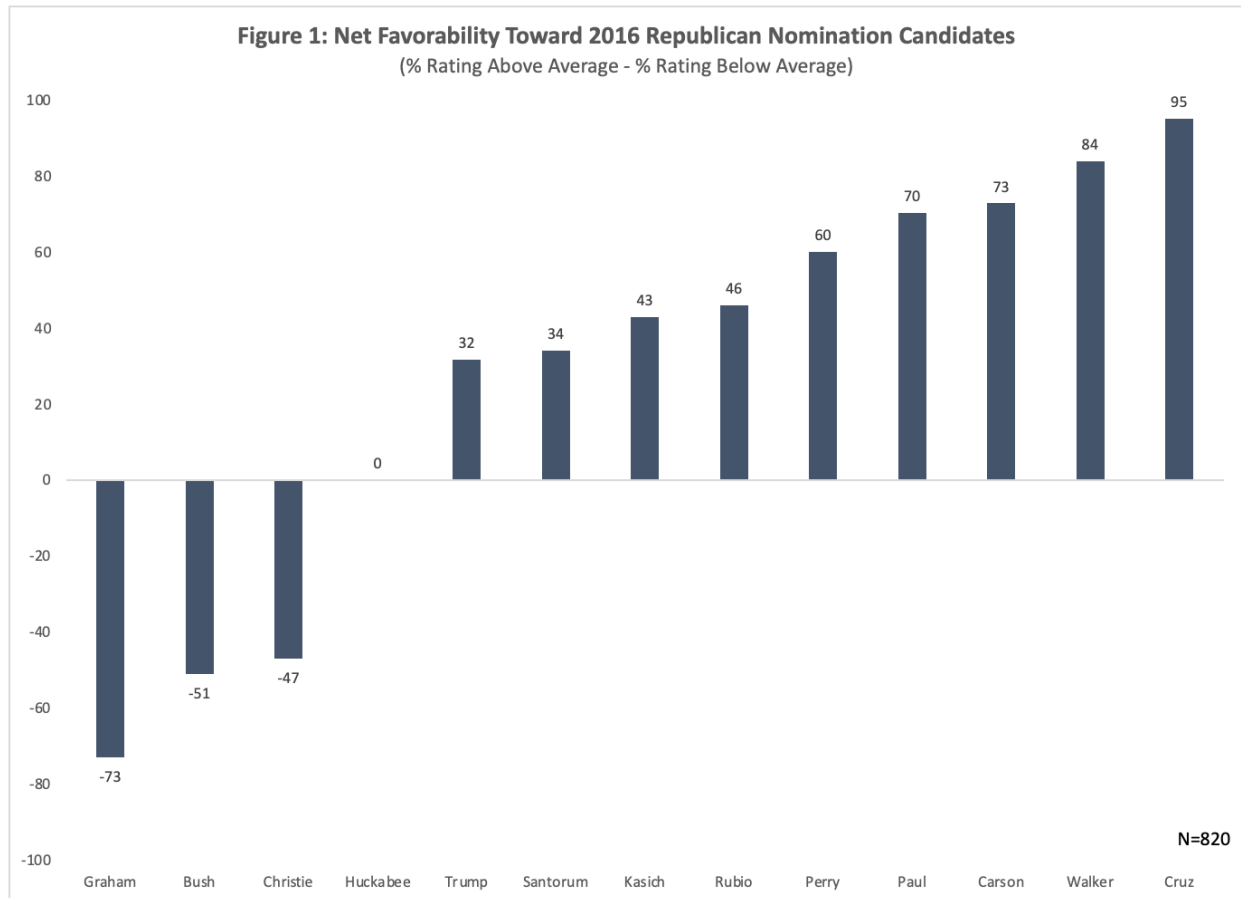
3   Results & Discussion
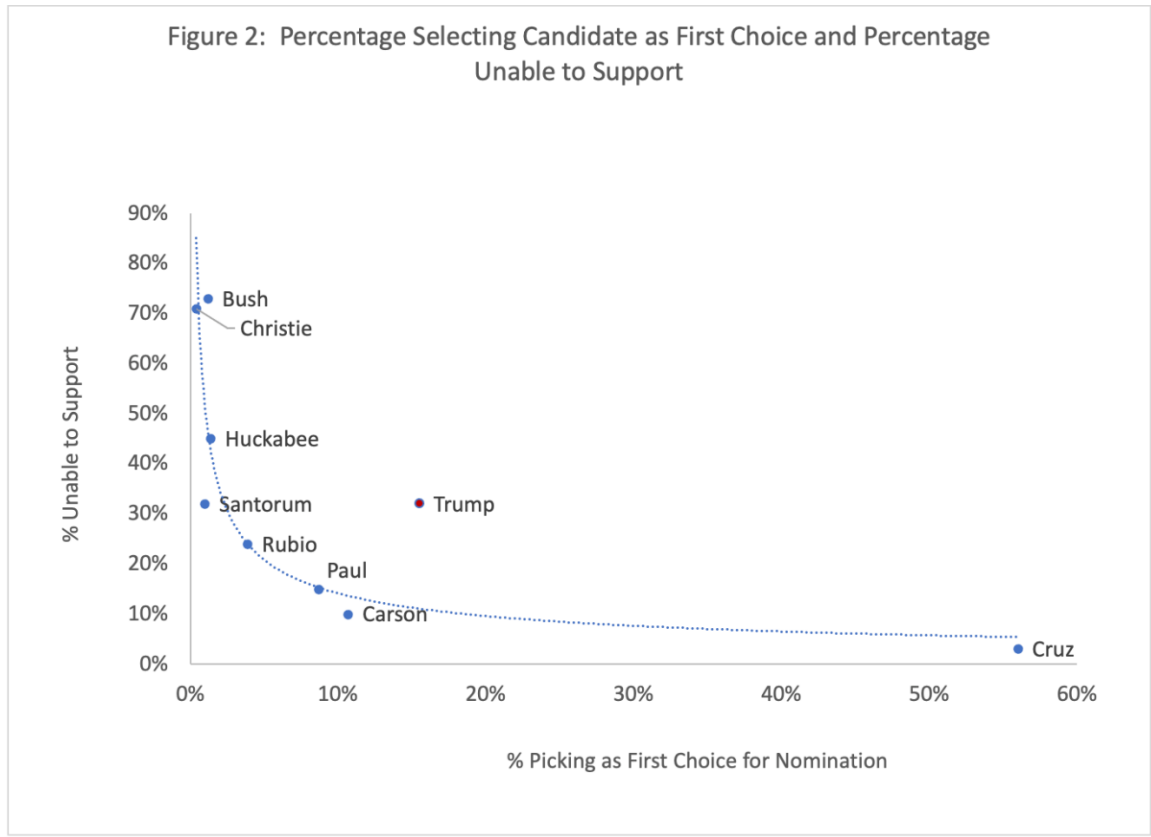
3.1   Candidate Choice & Favorability

We have seen that among our sample of FreedomWorks subscribers, Cruz was the overwhelming favorite over Trump in the pre-Iowa survey. But that simply tells us the preference ordering, not the level of affect for Donald Trump. Even those preferring Cruz or another candidate could still have been very favorable towards Trump. Just how positively or negatively was Trump viewed by FreedomWorks subscribers early in the race, before voting had actually begun?

Overall, Trump's ratings are relatively poor. In Figure 1, we show the seven-point favorability scale which ranged from poor (-3) to outstanding (+3).. For ease of interpretation we condense the seven-point scale into a three-point scale with the three above average categories combined ('outstanding,' 'well above average,' and 'slightly above average') and coded as +1, 'slightly below average,' 'well below average,' and 'poor' are combined and coded as -1, and 'average' coded as 0. The scale gives the net favorability/unfavorability for each candidate. Taking the mean for each of the thirteen candidates on the condensed three-point scale,Trump's mean rating places him ninth (and significantly below the top six rated candidates). Only Jeb Bush, Chris Christie, Lindsey Graham and Mike Huckabee rated below him. Using the full seven-point scale produces almost identical results.

Despite Trump's relatively low ratings among the sample as a whole, there was still a clear and significant constituency strongly attracted to him. As Figure 2 shows, when respondents were asked to select their top candidate for the nomination, although Cruz was the overwhelming favorite with 55 percent support, Trump's 15 percent support placed him second, ahead of the third and fourth strongest candidates: Ben Carson with 11 percent and Rand Paul with 9 percent support.[ii]

Figure 1: Net Favorability Toward 2016 Republican Nomination Candidates
(% Rating Above Average - % Rating Below Average)

N=820

However, positive intensity towards Trump was accompanied by significant negative intensity as well, and his high level of each makes him unique among nomination candidates. As well as asking respondents to indicate their top choice, we also asked respondents to indicate which candidates they could not support for the nomination. As we might expect, and as Figure 2 shows, there is a strong inverse relationship between the percentage picking someone as top choice and the percentage indicating they could not support him. For example, 55 percent selected Ted Cruz as their first choice, but only about 3 percent said they could never support him. On the other hand, candidates selected as a first choice by very few respondents have a very large number of respondents rejecting them outright. For example, Christie and Bush receive only scant first choice support (only 1 percent selected each as their preferred candidate) but high levels of rejection (70 percent said they could not support each of these candidates for the nomination).

Figure 2: Percentage Selecting Candidate as First Choice and Percentage Unable to Support

Trump, on the other hand, is unique in receiving both significant first-choice support (15 percent), and very high levels of rejection (32 percent). Compared with other candidates with even lower levels of support (e.g., Ben Carson and Rand Paul), Trump has two to three times as many respondents saying they are unable to support him. Only 15 percent were unable to support Paul and only 10 percent are unable to support Carson.

The bifurcated views of Trump are also evident when we look at the percentage rating each of the major candidates as outstanding versus those rating him as poor. Looking at the four most supported candidates, between 18 percent and 19 percent rate Trump, Carson, and Paul as outstanding, all far behind Cruz's 62 percent outstanding rating. However, while Cruz, Paul, and Carson each have less than 2 percent rating them poor, 12 percent rated Trump as poor, and 20 percent rated him in one of the two lowest categories, versus less than four percent for each of the other three.

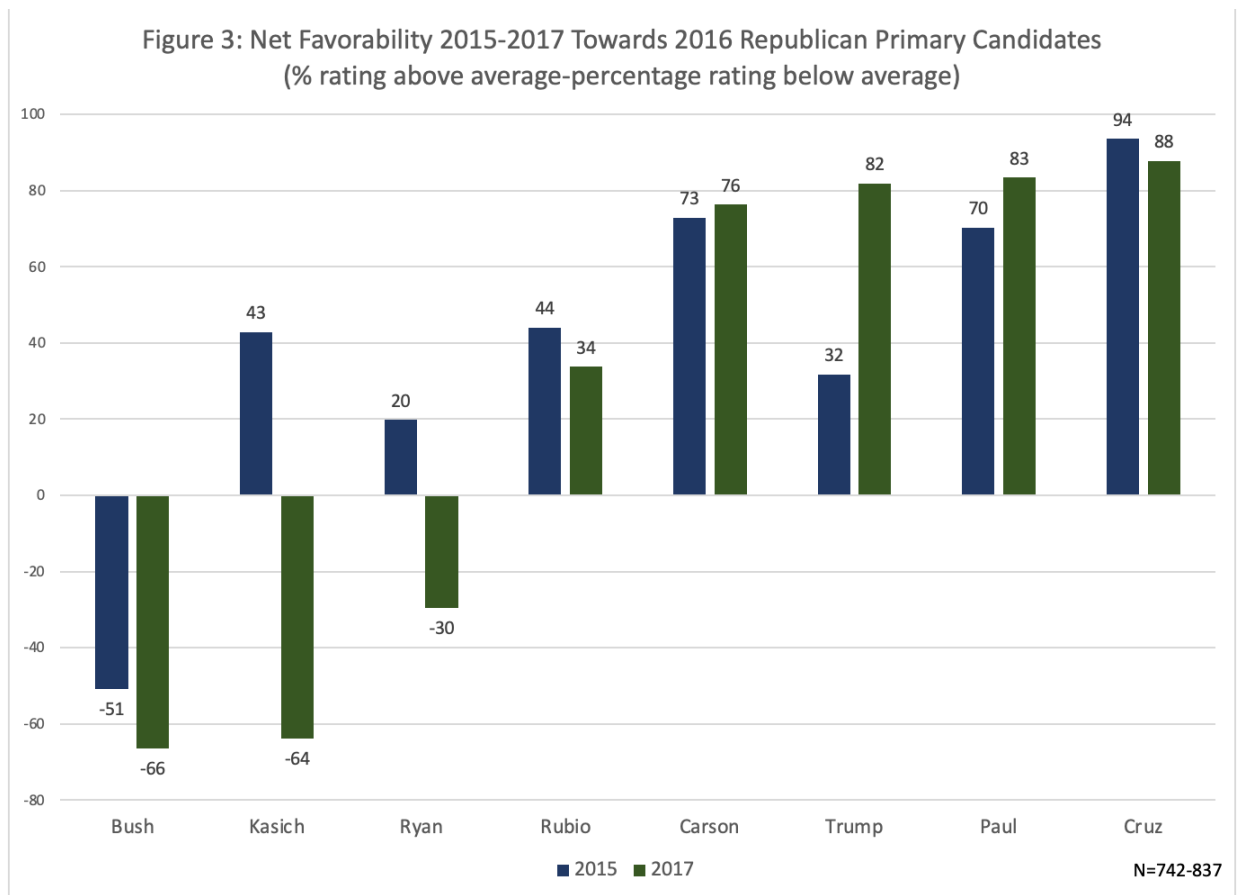## 3.2   Change in Primary Candidate Favorability

Although net favorability ratings placed Trump near the bottom of the 14 candidates for the nomination and many said they could not support him for the nomination, this survey came before he became the Republican nominee and then president. So, what happened between 2015 and 2017? Did our Tea Party activists overcome their doubts and embrace him once he became the nominee and once he won the election? Or did they turn on him as they had on George W. Bush in 2009 when he rejected Tea Party priorities with TARP?

The answer, emphatically, is 'yes'

In Figure 3, we show the 2015 and 2017 ratings of the eight Republican politicians about whom we asked in both years. For each candidate, the reported ratings are proportion favorable minus proportion unfavorable. We see that Trump not only shows by far the largest shift in the positive direction, but Trump's 2017 favorability ratings are nearly as high as those of Paul and Cruz, surpassing that of Carson, who rated far above him in 2015. Whereas 40 percent rated Trump average or below in 2015, only 12 percent did so in 2017 – not much different from the 9 percent for Cruz in 2017 and less than the 17 percent for Carson and the 13 percent for Paul, and far below the 40 percent for Rubio in 2017.

On the other hand, Ryan, Kasich, and Bush show significant declines in favorability during the same period. In 2017 more respondents actually rated Kasich and Ryan below average than rated them above average.

Of course, Trump's 2017 evaluations among those already favorable towards him in 2015 remain extremely high. But among those who viewed him negatively in 2015 (28 percent of the sample), his 2017 ratings are still very strong. Even among individuals who both rated him below average and also said they were unable to support him for the nomination in 2015 (just under 20 percent of the sample) , almost three-quarters (71 percent) rated him above average in 2017.

Figure 3: Net Favorability 2015-2017 Towards 2016 Republican Primary Candidates (% rating above average-percentage rating below average)

3.3 Individual Level Change in Trump Evaluations

We examine three possible explanations for increased Trump favorability: a change in respondents' issue positions as the Trump campaign progressed to victory and his positions and agenda became more appealing; a change in priorities assigned to specific issues; and a change in which factors had the strongest impact on Trump evaluations.

Between 2015 and 2017, did Trump priorities and Trump issue positions become more widely accepted among our FreedomWorks sample? Do we see a shift in respondents' positions from traditional Tea Party positions to Trump positions? And, did certain factors on which Trump was already more positively viewed become more important in evaluating him?

3.3.1 Trump Support vs. Cruz Support in 2015

Because Cruz was such a favorite of the Tea Party and our FreedomWorks sample, we use him as a proxy for a prototypical Tea Party candidate and compare bases of support for Trump to those for Cruz. Our predictors for 2015 evaluations include issues Trump emphasized throughout the primary campaign: immigration, law and order, and a populist domestic agenda promising to protect Social Security and Medicare. In addition, because immigration was such an important issue to Trump and the deficit much less so (with his promise to protect Social Security and create a massive infrastructure program) we also include a variable measuring the difference in priority assigned to immigration versus deficit reduction.[iii] Because Trump also advocated limited foreign involvement and only then when American interests were at stake, we include items regarding foreign involvement to protect American interests and foreign involvement to "support international law." Finally, we include attitudes more closely related to the Tea Party: ideology, evaluations of the Tea Party and evaluations of the Republican Party, as well as a range of demographics.

To the degree that Trump appealed to constituencies different from Cruz's, we should find the same variables having different effects on evaluations of each. For example, since immigration was so much more a part of Trump's campaign than Cruz's we should expect a stronger effect on Trump's evaluations than on Cruz's; in contrast, because Cruz was so strongly identified as a conservative, we should find ideology more strongly related to Cruz's evaluations than to Trump's.

Examining the results for Cruz evaluations in Column 1 of Table 1, we see a clear effect of core Tea Party issues. Evaluations of the Tea Party and conservative ideology, but also willingness to cut Social Security and Medicare in order to reduce the deficit are the only significant predictors of Cruz evaluations. Somewhat surprisingly, immigration does not have a

significant effect, nor do demographics or foreign policy attitudes. Cruz's embeddedness in the Tea Party, combined with ideology, overwhelms these other factors.

Looking at the same set of predictors for Trump evaluations (Column 2), the lack of overlap is evident. Immigration – both the position on number of immigrants allowed and the priority of immigration compared with deficit reduction – as well as foreign policy all had significant effects ($p < 0.05$) on Trump evaluations. On the other hand, none of the factors that strongly related to Cruz evaluation -- Tea Party evaluation and conservative ideology -- had significant effects on Trump evaluations. Somewhat surprisingly given Cruz's support for shutting down the government over repealing Obamacare, unwillingness to compromise has a significant effect on Trump evaluations but not on Cruz evaluations.

The one variable which significantly affected both Cruz and Trump evaluations is attitudes about cutting the deficit even if it means cuts to social programs like Medicare and Social Security. However, the effects go in opposite directions. Those favoring protecting social programs over reducing the deficit were significantly more likely to support Trump, while those more willing to cut social programs to balance the budget were more supportive of Cruz.

Although it is not surprising that Trump's 2015 evaluations were affected by attitudes about immigration and law and order issues, the strong effect (i.e., the second highest standardized beta) of a desire to protect social programs like Social Security and Medicare reveals Trump's populist appeal even within our sample. For example, a respondent who is strongly in support of cutting these programs to reduce the deficit rates Trump more than .6 units lower (on the 1 to 7scale) than someone strongly opposed to cutting these programs, but rates Cruz .4 units higher.

The distinctive quality of Trump's campaign is also reflected in the insignificant effects of ideology and Tea Party evaluation, which are both very strong predictors of Cruz support ($p<.001$). Compared with an ideological moderate respondent, an extreme conservative respondent shows

an increase in Cruz evaluation of .7 units on a 1 to 7 scale, while the same change in ideology

barely changes Trump's evaluation (only 0.04 on the same scale).

Table 1

Regressions of Ted Cruz and Donald Trump Evaluations on Selected Variables

	Cruz Evaluations (2015)		Trump Evaluations (2015)	
	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error
(Constant)	2.057***	0.424	4.365***	1.022
Cut Social Security/Medicare to Balance Budget	0.075***	0.021	-0.123*	0.05
Favor Compromise	-0.043	0.03	-0.173*	0.073
Decrease Immigration	0.016	0.032	0.246**	0.078
Immigration More Important than Deficit Reduction	0.017	0.011	0.074**	0.027
Terrorism More Important than Protecting Privacy	-0.053#	0.03	0.114	0.073
Evaluation of Tea Party	0.332***	0.035	0.122	0.084
Evaluation of Republican Party	0.036	0.025	0.161**	0.06
Male Gender	0.111	0.07	-0.196	0.169
Education Level	-0.013	0.022	0.013	0.052
Age	0.057*	0.026	0.151*	0.062
Ideology (Liberal to Conservative)	0.237***	0.049	0.014	0.119
Intervene to Protect US Interests	0.057	0.077	0.279	0.185
Intervene in Support of International Law	-0.011	0.066	-0.351*	0.159
N	558		558	
Adjusted R-square	0.279		0.107	

Note: *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; # p < 0.10

Trump's campaign issues were uniquely important to Trump's evaluations in the

FreedomWorks sample, but even with major campaign issues included in the model, there remains

significant unexplained variance in Trump evaluations. With all thirteen predictors the model

explains only about ten percent of the variance (Adjusted R-sq=0.107), while the same set of

variables explain almost three times the variance in Cruz evaluations (Adjusted R-sq=0.279).

Part of this lack of explanatory power in the 2015 Trump model could be a function of the

fact that three-quarters of responses came about a month after he had declared his candidacy, and

the issues we now associate with his candidacy may not have become salient until later in the

campaign. However, Trump and his agenda received a lot of exposure from the beginning

(Patterson 2016). In his announcement speech, Trump staked out his signature position on

immigration with his Mexican rapist remarks, and on Social Security with his claim that 'I am

going to save Social Security without any cuts. I know where to get the money from. Nobody else does.'[iv] Furthermore, as John Sides shows, the coverage of Donald Trump in the first month was well beyond that of other candidates and extraordinary by any measure, giving him tremendous exposure to the Republican base (Sides 2015).

Clearly, from the beginning Trump was not a typical Tea Party candidate in his bases of support and opposition. But as the campaign went on, and especially as the general election kicked into high gear did his evaluations become more closely tied to typical Republican and/or Tea Party fissues and groups? In order to assess this, we used the same independent variables from the 2015 model to predict Trump's 2017 evaluations. Did the 2015 predictors structure evaluations of Trump two years later better than they did in 2015?

Because the independent and dependent variables are measured almost two years apart, it would be surprising if 2015 variables are equally predictive of 2017 Trump evaluations as they were of 2015 evaluations. On the other hand, as Trump became the nominee and then president, issue attitudes that typically structure views toward Republicans and Tea Party candidates like Cruz, might well come to be more strongly related Trump evaluations. Additionally, the selection of Mike Pence, a Tea Party caucus member, as vice president should have enhanced Trump's links to the Tea Party.

Table 2

Regressions of Donald Trump Evaluations in 2015 and 2017 on Selected Variables

	Trump Evaluations (2015)		Trump Evaluations (2017)	
	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error
(Constant)	4.365***	1.022	3.712***	0.66
Cut Social Security/Medicare to Balance Budget	-0.123*	0.05	-0.08*	0.032
Favor Compromise	-0.173*	0.073	-0.051	0.047
Decrease Immigration	0.246**	0.078	0.172**	0.05
Immigration More Important than Deficit Reduction	0.074**	0.027	0.04*	0.018
Terrorism More Important than Deficit Reduction	0.114	0.073	0.146**	0.047
Evaluation of Tea Party	0.122	0.084	0.155**	0.054
Evaluation of Republican Party	0.161**	0.06	0.167***	0.038
Male Gender	-0.196	0.169	-0.116	0.109
Education Level	0.013	0.052	-0.033	0.034
Age	0.151*	0.062	0.168***	0.04
Ideology	0.014	0.119	0.204**	0.077
Intervene to Protect US Interests	0.279	0.185	0.226#	0.12
Intervene in Support of International Law	-0.351*	0.159	-0.200#	0.103
N	558		560	
Adjusted R-square	0.107		0.201	

Note: *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; # p < 0.10

3.3.2 Trump Support in 2017

In Table 2 we can see that most of the same 2015 variables that significantly affected 2015 Trump evaluations continued to do so in 2017 -- attitudes on immigration, deficit reduction versus social program protection, and foreign policy had significant effects. [v] Unsurprisingly, the coefficients associated with each of these attitudes diminish in magnitude, but all remain statistically significant.

The largest change is that 2015 ideology becomes highly significant (b=.204; p<.01) after showing virtually no effect on 2015 Trump evaluations (b=.014; p>.10). In addition, Tea Party evaluations also have a greater effect on 2017 Trump evaluations than they did on 2015 evaluations (b=.155; p<.01 vs. b=.122; p <.10) and evaluations of the Republican Party remain highly significant without decreasing in magnitude.
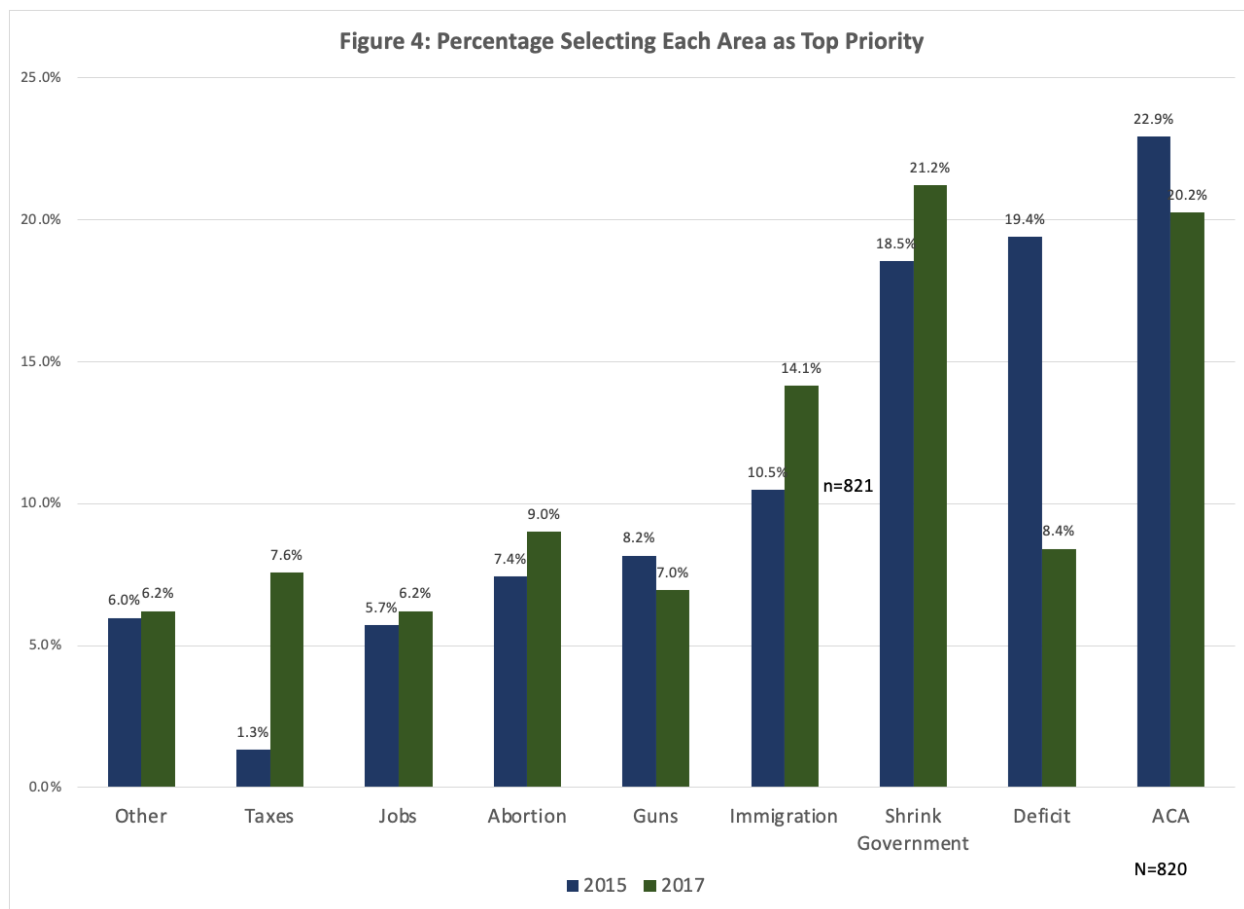
The adjusted R-square of the 2017 model is almost doubles that of 2015 (0.107 vs. 0.201). Evaluations of the Republican Party and the Tea Party, and ideology, even though measured two

years before measures of the dependent variable, are more entwined with attitudes towards Trump than had been the case in 2015.

Thus far we have focused on what factors were responsible for attitudes towards Trump in both 2015 and 2017, but as we look at changes in the sample beyond simply increased positive affect for Trump, the question becomes how did our sample change in the interim in other attitudes as well as activities? Did Tea Party activists become part of the Trump party between 2015 and 2017 by shifting in his direction on issues and priorities, and away from traditional Tea Party orthodoxy? Were these changes restricted to those who supported him early on or did it also affect those very negative towards Trump early on? These are the questions we will address in the next section.

3.4   Shifting Issue Priorities

If the Tea Party is becoming more Trump-like, we should find not only the shift in evaluations of Trump reported above but also increased support for Trump policy positions. This shift should be evident among both core Trump supporters and those who were opposed to Trump in 2015, since many of them became more favorable towards him. For that reason, we examine shifts in the sample as a whole and shifts among those who selected Trump as their top choice for the Republican nomination in 2015, whom we label 'Trump Supporters,' and among those who indicated they could not support Trump for the nomination whom we label 'Trump Rejecters.' We first look at shifts in issue priorities and then examine changes in specific attitudes from 2015 to 2017, focusing on these shifts in issue areas associated with the Trump.

Figure 4: Percentage Selecting Each Area as Top Priority

Area	2015	2017
Other	6.0%	6.2%
Taxes	1.3%	7.6%
Jobs	5.7%	6.2%
Abortion	7.4%	9.0%
Guns	8.2%	7.0%
Immigration	10.5%	14.1%
Shrink Government	18.5%	21.2%
Deficit	19.4%	8.4%
ACA	22.9%	20.2%

n=821
N=820

Overall, across the fourteen issues about which we asked, respondents were quite stable in their choice of top priority. In fact, only three of the fourteen issues showed increases/decreases greater than 2.7 percent. But two of those three are of particular interest since they are so closely related to Trump's priorities: immigration and the budget deficit. And as expected, these changes make our sample more reflective of Trump's priorities.

Issue Priorities

Most strikingly, between 2015 and 2017, the budget deficit became far less important to Tea Party activists, while immigration became much more important. While the former is a long-standing focus of the movement, the latter is not.

The Contract from America, which served as a Tea Party manifesto (Davis 2010), emphasized repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), shrinking the size of government and balancing the budget by reducing spending, but immigration is not even mentioned. The prioritization of deficit reduction among Tea Party activists extends back at least to 2011. Surveys of FreedomWorks supporters carried out in 2011, 2014 and 2015, show that respondents in each survey rated the budget deficit as either the top or second top priority, and in every case 20 percent or more rated it as their top priorityRapoport and Lienesch 2014.

However, between 2015 and 2017, Tea Party activists shifted significantly in which issue area they selected as their highest priority. Although traditional Tea Party issues, such as shrinking the size of government and repealing the ACA remained top priorities, the budget deficit, which had been the second highest priority in the 2015 wave dropped to fifth, behind immigration, abortion, repealing the ACA, and shrinking the size of the government. Fewer than half as many selected the deficit as their top priority issue in 2017 as had only two years earlier (8 percent in 2017 compared to 190 percent in 2015).[vi]

On the other hand, both taxes and immigration were selected as top priorities by a significantly higher percentage of respondents in 2017 than in 2015. This shift in the priority of immigration is particularly important given the emphasis Trump's campaign gave it. This is especially important since relative priority assigned to immigration versus the deficit was a significant predictor of Trump evaluations in 2015 (Table 2).[vii] Taxes are a somewhat different story, but show the rapidity with which Trump positions were adopted by FreedomWorks supporters. The survey was sent out on May 13th, less than three weeks after Trump proposed is

massive tax cut on April 26th.[1] Taxes, which had been the top priority of only 1.3 percent of respondents more than tripled to seven percent.

The change in priorities is even evident among Trump rejecters, the group that had been least in line with Donald Trump's positions. Their shift toward Trump positions reveals just how powerful a force he has become in transforming Tea Party attitudes.
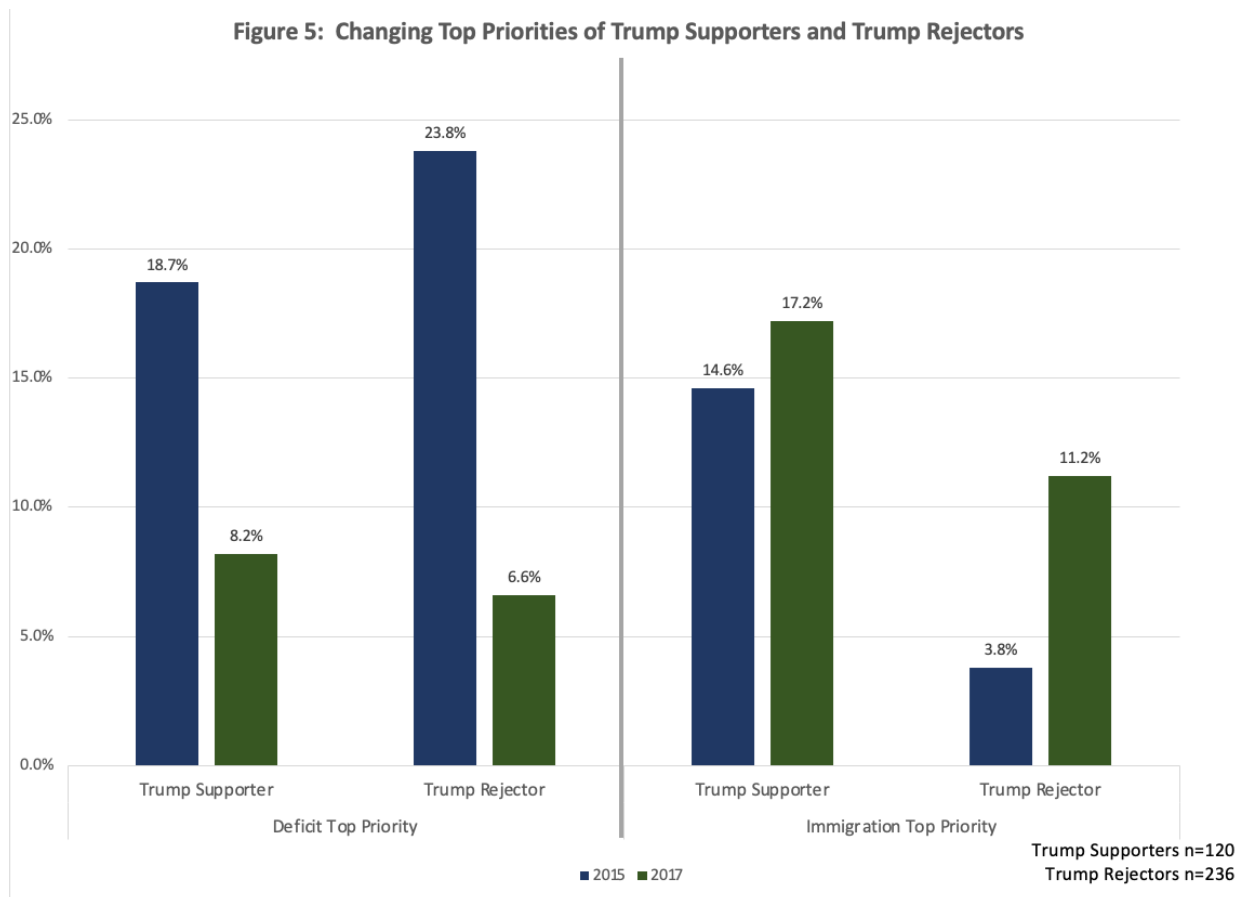
Both Trump supporters and rejecters showed increases in the percentage ranking immigration as their top priority issue and decreases in those ranking the budget deficit as their top priority (Figure 5). Those who had been least supportive of Trump pre-nomination account for virtually all the increase in selecting immigration as a top priority, while the decline in the deficit ranking occurs among both Trump supporters and rejecters. In fact, the two groups are similar in their prioritization of the deficit in both waves of the survey.

As a result, whereas in 2015 Trump supporters were just about as likely to prioritize immigration over the deficit (19 percent) as to prioritize the deficit over immigration (15 percent), by 2017 twice as many Trump supporters gave immigration a higher priority than the deficit. Trump rejecters showed the same dynamic: in 2015 six times as many prioritized the deficit over immigration as the reverse; by 2017, more prioritized immigration over the deficit as the reverse. (Figure 5).

Trump's lack of emphasis on reducing the budget deficit was on display with his first proposed budget. Experts determined that the Trump Administration's first proposed budget for fiscal year 2018 and the Republican tax reform bill passed in early 2018 would increase the U.S. federal deficit by approximately $1 trillion by 2020 (Jones 2018).
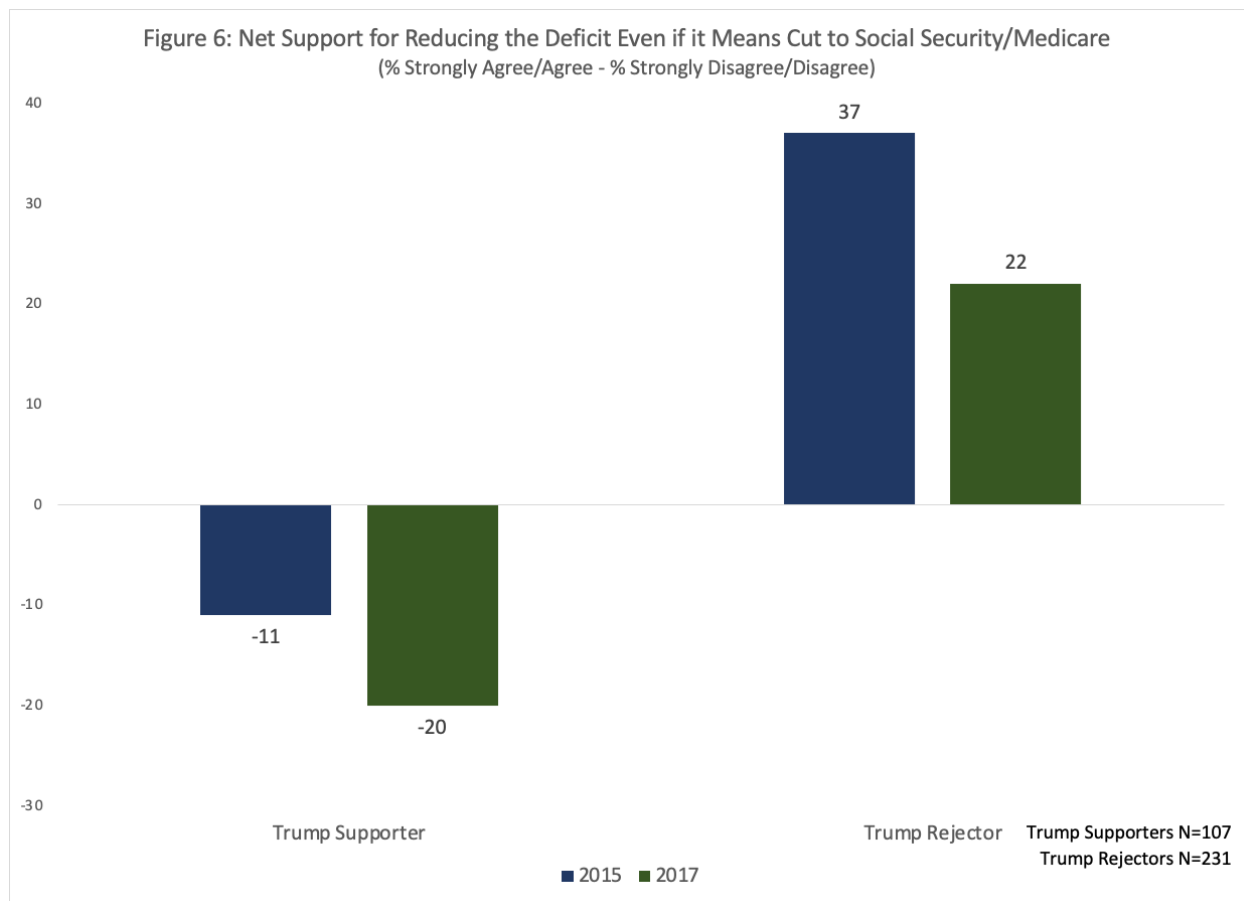
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[1] https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/president-trump-proposed-massive-tax-cut-heres-need-know/

But Trump's position on federal deficit issues was presaged by his interview on CNBC in May of 2016 where he stated, '[D]ebt was always sort of interesting to me. Now we're in a different situation with a country, but I would borrow knowing that if the economy crashed you could make a deal. And if the economy was good it was good so therefore you can't lose' (Kurtzleben 2016).

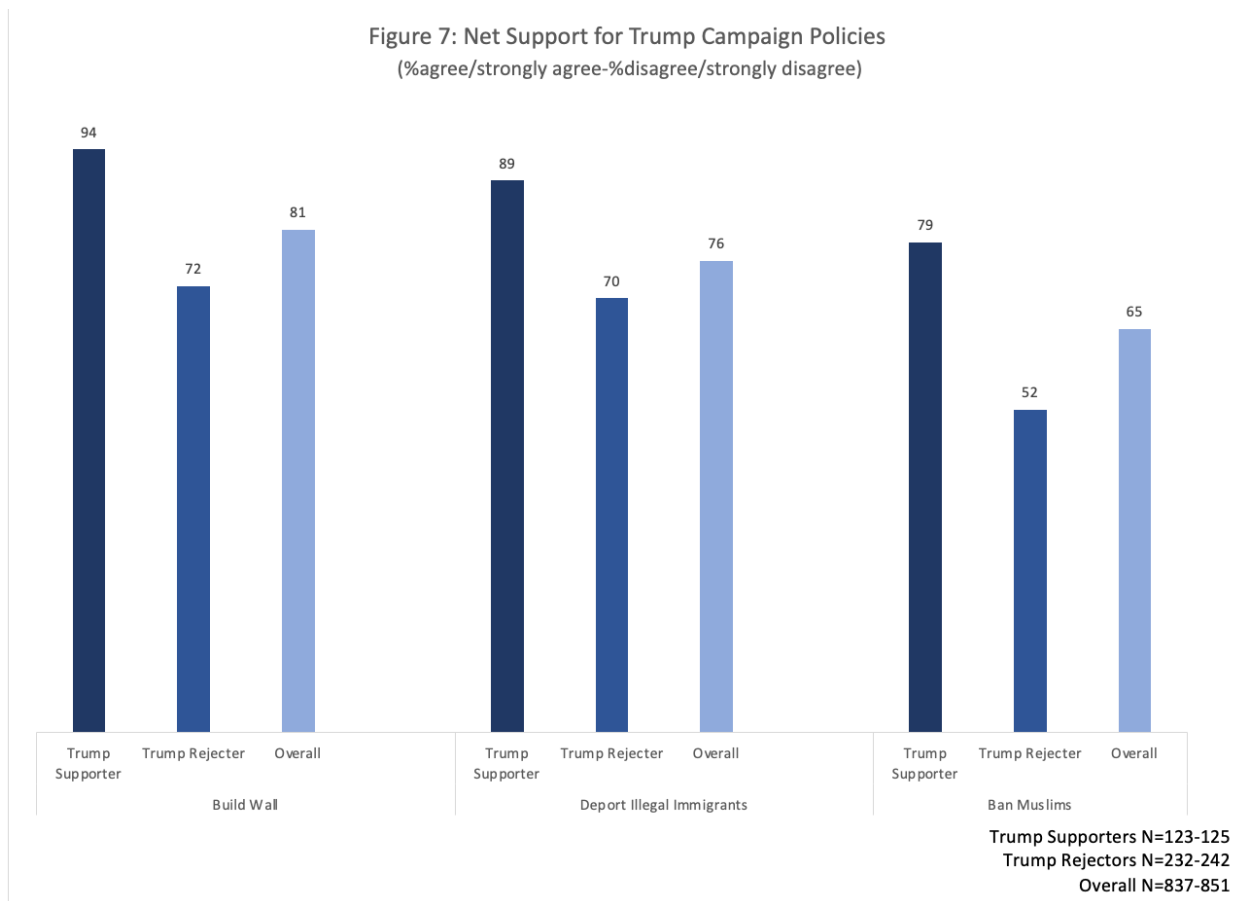Figure 5: Changing Top Priorities of Trump Supporters and Trump Rejectors

The diminished concern about the budget deficit carries over into changes in support for spending on programs like Social Security and Medicare over reducing the budget deficit. We asked respondents about their willingness to reduce the budget deficit even if it meant a cut in programs like Social Security and Medicare. Deficit hawks, whom we might expect to find among FreedomWorks activists, should show a willingness to make these cuts. We find support for this expectation in 2015: in the pre-nomination wave, almost twice as many respondents favored cutting the deficit even if it means cuts to social welfare programs as opposed it.[viii] In 2017, there

is still more support than opposition for cutting the deficit, but the percentage supporting cuts to social programs diminished significantly.[ix]

Figure 6: Net Support for Reducing the Deficit Even if it Means Cut to Social Security/Medicare
(% Strongly Agree/Agree - % Strongly Disagree/Disagree)

It is Trump rejecters, rather than Trump supporters who shift the most on this issue. In 2015, Trump rejecters who favored cutting the deficit at the expense of social programs outnumbered opponents by 35 percentage points (54 percent vs. 19 percent), but in 2017 this gap was cut in half to 19 percentage points. Among Trump supporters, opposition to cutting the deficit already outstripped support by about 12 percentage points in 2015, and this gap widened to about 21 percentage points in 2017. Although there is clear movement for both groups in opposition to cutting the budget deficit at the expense of spending on Social Security and Medicare, it is actually greater among Trump rejecters. As a result, the difference between the groups declines even though they still remain on opposite sides of the issue.

Figure 7: Net Support for Trump Campaign Policies
(%agree/strongly agree-%disagree/strongly disagree)

Trump Supporters N=123-125
Trump Rejectors N=232-242
Overall N=837-851

3.4.1 Support of Trump Immigration Policy Proposals

Immigration issues played a preeminent role in the Trump campaign and were closely linked to law and order, with claims that Mexicans were rapists and calls for banning Muslims, deporting illegal immigrants, and building a border wall becoming constant refrains at Trump's rallies. As we saw above, from 2015 to 2017 the percent of Tea Party activists indicating immigration as their top priority increased, reflecting a shift in support of Trump's policy priorities as evaluations of him surged over the same two-year period. Since we do not have identical questions on immigration issues across the two waves of the survey, examining change in issue positions is not possible. Nonetheless, it is clear that in 2017 the Tea Party sample as a whole is clearly on board with Trump's immigration positions, although the intensity of support varies between Trump supporters and rejecters.

As Figure 7 shows, the preponderance of support of proposals is consistent for both groups. Each entry in the figure is the proportion favoring the proposal minus the percentage in opposition. These findings further indicate that just as the sample as a whole has shifted to more highly prioritize immigration issues, FreedomWorks activists' stances on Trump specific immigration policies are highly supportive of Trump's positions and do not differ by initial support of Trump. Even Trump rejecters have become increasingly supportive of his policies.

3.5   Evaluations of the Tea Party

The final question we will now address is whether positive affect for Trump has contributed to lowered evaluations of the Tea Party. As we have shown, favorability toward the Tea Party in 2015 translated into more favorable attitude towards Trump by 2017. But is the reverse true? Did favorability toward Trump produce greater favorability towards the Tea Party over time?

Our argument that there has been a shift from Tea Party to Trump Party might suggest that Trump favorability supplanted Tea Party loyalty. If so, we should find that those most favorable towards Trump in 2015 became less favorable towards the Tea Party in 2017 as the Tea Party was replaced by Trump as an object of identity. On the other hand, if the Tea Party and Trump have become more closely entwined and mutually supportive, then we would expect to find that Trump 2015 evaluations might produce more positive attitudes towards the Tea Party in 2017.

In Table 3 we test these possibilities. In the first column, we simply regress 2017 evaluations of the Tea Party on 2015 evaluations and 2015 Trump evaluations. We see that Trump evaluations produce significantly higher Tea Party evaluations two years later. The coefficient for Trump evaluation is 0.073 (p<0.001). The difference between someone rating Trump as poor to someone rating him as excellent is almost half a point increase in Tea Party evaluation in 2017. Because other candidates, like Carson and Cruz, were more closely tied to the Tea Party, we reran

the model including evaluations of Cruz and Carson, as well as political ideology and evaluations of the Republican Party. As we see in the second column of Table 3, doing so does not change the coefficient for Trump at all (b=.073 in both cases; p<0.001), but somewhat surprisingly, none of the coefficients for evaluations of any other candidate is close to significant (in all cases p>0.20), and the coefficient for Carson is actually negative. Similarly, the coefficient for evaluations of the Republican Party is effectively zero (0.005). Besides Trump evaluations (and the lagged Tea Party evaluation) only ideology has a significant impact on 2017 Tea Party evaluations and based on the standardized betas – its effect is less than that for Trump evaluations.

Even though we find a change in many attitudes between 2015 and 2017 in line with the Trump agenda, it appears that, for our sample at least, affection for Trump did not detract from Tea Party affect but rather added to it. Combined with our results in Table 2 that 2015 Tea Party evaluations positively impacted 2017 Trump evaluations, it appears that the Tea Party-Trump relationship was one of mutual reinforcement rather than a substitution effect.[x]

Table 3

Effect of 2015 Candidate Evaluations on 2017 Tea Party Evaluation, Controlling for 2015 Tea Party Evaluation

	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error
(Constant)	0.874***	0.089	2.117***	0.383
Tea Party Evaluation 2015	0.456***	0.033	0.412***	0.037
Trump Evaluation 2015	0.073***	0.016	0.073***	0.017
Cruz Evaluation 2015			0.037	0.04
Carson Evaluation 2015			-0.026	0.026
Political Ideology			0.177***	0.051
Republican Party Evaluation 2015			0.005	0.024
N		646		646
Adjusted R-square		.252		.264

Note: *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; # p < 0.10

4 Conclusions

Over less than a two-year period, among FreedomWorks activists, Donald Trump moved from being an unpopular candidate for the Republican nomination to becoming an extraordinarily popular president. At the beginning of the nomination process, even though he did have a core of support, he was unpopular overall. Only four of the other thirteen candidates were rated less favorably. Almost a third of our sample indicated they were unwilling to support him for the nomination.

Yet, by 2017 he was almost as popular as Tea Party stalwart Ted Cruz, and even those who rated him in the two lowest categories and were unwilling to support him for the nomination in 2015 had come around to high levels of support. Support for Trump, even among this group of Tea Party activists at the beginning of the campaign was more strongly related to support for issues not typically associated with the Tea Party: protecting social security, lack of concern about the deficit, and high priority for immigration. By 2017 his bases of support included more typical predictors such as Tea Party and Republican Party affect.

Nonetheless, the sample shows clear shifts towards Trumpian positions over the two-year period across a wide range of issues. This shift is present for both those who supported Trump from the beginning and those who said they could not support Trump for the nomination.

Most remarkable, those assigning their highest priority to reducing the deficit dropped from 20 percent — a level it had held among FreedomWorks activists at least since 2011 — to only 8 percent, while those selecting immigration increased. We also see large shifts in support of protecting Social Security and Medicare over deficit reduction, another Trump position (at least rhetorically) that directly contradicts the policy preferences typically held by Tea Party members in 2015.

In these ways, the Tea Party as reflected in our FreedomWorks respondents appears to have become very much a Trump Party. On the other hand, positive affect for Trump activity did not detract from for Tea Party evaluations activity, but increased them. Trump nomination activity, but not activity for other candidates, was significantly related to increased activity for the Tea Party between 2015 and 2017.

Rather than concluding that the Tea Party has become the Trump Party, it is more accurate to say that a new form of Tea Party — a Trumpian Tea Party — emerged over the 2016 campaign. What this means for the future of the Tea Party movement and for the Republican Party is yet to be determined.

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Appendix A.

The panel utilized in this research spans almost a two-year period. In such cases panel mortality is an inevitable issue. Here the issue is compounded by the method of respondent acquisition - a blast email to members of a very large organization. Of those responding in 2015, only about 17 percent responded in 2017. Our *a priori* expectation is that since blast emails are opened somewhat randomly, that even with high panel mortality there should be little systematic bias.

On the other hand, the political world had changed significantly. At the time of the first wave, Tea Party favorites Ted Cruz and Ben Carson, had seemed to be possible party nominees in a matchup most likely with establishment candidate Jeb Bush. But Trump's campaign overwhelmed both Tea Party and establishment candidates on his way to the nomination and to the presidency.

Did 2015 characteristics influence the decision to drop out of the survey? Did Tea Partiers who disliked Trump drop out disproportionately? Did those who had been more active in past presidential and congressional races drop out disproportionately? Did Tea Party activists drop out more commonly?

To assess this effect, we use an asymmetric ordinal statistic (Somer's d). Because the sample size is so large, even small substantive effects will be statistically significant.

Below we give the ordinal statistics (Somer's d) for evaluations of Republican contestants for the nomination and for important groups, as well as for previous levels of activity for both the Tea Party and the Republican Party (Romney-Ryan in 2012 and Republican House candidates in both 2012 and 2014), and demographics.

In no case does the correlation exceed .050, with an average of .013. Only 10 of the 35 correlations is even significant at the .05 level. More importantly it is not those who are most favorable to Trump who are likely to remain in the sample but those who are slightly more negative (d=-.025) while those more favorable to Cruz are slightly more likely to remain in the sample (d=.044). No activity level (Republican presidential or congressional) reaches even .01.

2015 Predictor of 2017 Panel Participation	Somer's d	P- value
Evaluation of Republicans		
Evaluation of Ted Cruz	0.044	0
Evaluation of John Boehner	-0.026	0
Evaluation of Mitt Romney	-0.026	0
Evaluation of Donald Trump	-0.025	0
Evaluation of Paul Ryan	-0.023	0
Evaluation of Rand Paul	-0.021	0.001
Evaluation of Jeb Bush	-0.014	0.024
Evaluation of Ben Carson	-0.011	0.086
Evaluation of Marco Rubio	-0.011	0.086
Evaluation of Rick Santorum	-0.011	0.087
Evaluation of Chris Christie	-0.01	0.115
Evaluation of John Kasich	-0.007	0.262
Evaluation of Scott Walker	-0.005	0.503
Evaluation of Rick Perry	-0.002	0.748
Evaluation of Glenn Beck	-0.007	0.262
Evaluation of Parties		
Evaluation of Republicans in US House	-0.005	0.568
Evaluation of Republican Party	-0.023	0.004
Evaluation of Tea Party	-0.021	0.001
Evaluation of Democratic Party	-0.01	0.115
Evaluation of Democrats		
Evaluation of Hillary Clinton	-0.016	0.337
Evaluation of Nancy Pelosi	-0.015	0.232
Evaluation of Barack Obama	-0.005	0.503
Evaluation of Institutions		
Evaluation of Koch Foundation	-0.014	0.024
Evaluation of Christian Conservatives	-0.005	0.776
Prior Activity		
2012 Republican House Activity	-0.01	0.388
2014 Republican House Activity	0.005	0.563
Romney-Ryan Activity	-0.002	0.748
Tea Party Activity	0	0.96
Demographics		
Ideology	-0.009	0.134
Education	0.014	0.062
Income	0.007	0.288
Age	-0.005	0.464
Female	0.014	0.034

[i] In the appendix we address the issue of low response rate and panel mortality, showing that 2018 response is only weakly related to a full range of important predictors.

[ii] When the July 2015 survey was sent out, Walker and Perry were serious candidates. When the January 2016 follow-up was sent out, they had already dropped out. As a result, for respondents picking either of these as their first choice, their second choice was promoted to first choice. For the handful of respondents rating the two of them 1-2, their third choice was considered their first choice. This allows for comparability between the two emailings for the first wave of the survey.

[iii] Respondents were asked to select and rank the top five issue areas from a larger set of issue areas. If an area was not one of the top five, it was assigned six. We then subtracted the score for the immigration area from that for the deficit area. If immigration was rated 1 and the deficit a 4, this would give a score of three. If the ranking were reversed, the score would be -3.

[iv] https://www.republicanviews.org/donald-trumps-views-on-social-security/

[v] Using 2015 attitudes as predictors of 2017 Trump evaluations ensures that we guard against reverse causation in which 2017 Trump evaluations might cause attitude shifts between 2015 and 2017 in line with Trump's positions and inflate the actual effect of respondent attitudes on 2017 Trump evaluations.

[vi] A difference of means on the deficit as top issue priority comparing wave-1 and wave-2 yields a highly significant difference for the sample as a whole and for both Rejecters and Supporters ($p<.01$). Immigration as top issue shows a significant upward movement ($p<.01$) for the sample as a whole and for Trump rejecters, but not for Trump supporters ($p>.20$) who are already at a high level.

[vii] It is also the case that higher priority for immigration in 2017 was a significant predictor of Trump evaluations.

[viii] We combine the agree and strongly agree responses into one category, the slightly agree and slightly oppose responses into a second category, and the disagree and strongly disagree responses into a third. Using the full range does not affect the results. Favor includes agree and strongly agree responses. 46.0 percent of respondents favored making these cuts compared to 25.3 percent of respondents who opposed it.

[ix] Support declined from 46.0 percent in 2015 to 39.4 percent in 2017. This result is significant, $p<0.05$.

[x] We also ran analysis to determine whether activity for Trump detracted/substituted for Tea Party activity. The results there reinforced our findings on Tea Party evaluation. Activity for Trump was associated with increased activity for Tea Prty groups. So rather than diminishing Tea Party activity, Trump activity actually increased Tea Party activity.