Measuring Contempt toward Candidates in the 2016 Presidential Election:

Predicting Candidate Evaluation, Party Polarization, Turnout, and Candidate Choice

New data indicate that contempt, expressed by candidates and felt toward candidates by voters, accounts for significant variance (beyond the standard ANES emotions of fear and anger) in candidate evaluations in the 2016 presidential election. This converges with evidence of the unique influence of contempt in the 1995 and 2008 presidential elections, and in a 2014 U.S. Senate election. To assess its effect on voting and other election-related variables, we propose adding contempt, measured by a single item (shown in bold on p. 8), to the existing ANES emotion battery.

The Prevalence of Contempt in the 2016 Presidential Election

Donald Trump calls Marco Rubio "a lightweight," and says Ted Cruz has "a mental problem."[1] The contempt Trump heaps on rivals, together with his popularity among many voters, has prompted increased attention to political uses of this understudied emotion. But Trump is not alone in showing contempt. An ad for Jeb Bush called Trump "unhinged, liberal, and dishonest."[2] A Cruz ad disparaged Rubio as "just another pretty face."[3] Rubio said he didn't want to be part of Trump's "freak show," and called Hillary Clinton a liar.[4]

Contempt is Also Found in Other Elections

Contempt is not confined to the 2016 contest, nor to Republicans. For example, at a 2008 rally, Hillary Clinton mocked rival Barack Obama: "Now, I could stand up here and say, 'Let's just get everybody together. Let's get unified.' The skies will open, the light will come down, celestial choirs will be singing and everyone will know we should do the right thing and the world will be perfect."[5] In a 1980 ad for Jimmy Carter, "people of California" say "I can't imagine [Ronald Reagan] being President. It's too complex a job."[6]

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[1] https://ballotpedia.org/Donald_Trump_presidential_campaign,_2016/Campaign_preparation
[2] https://amp.twimg.com/v/11e59ebd-56b2-480d-a760-5392415df93d
[3] http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/presidential-races/269136-cruz-ad-on-rubio-vote-for-more-than-pretty-face
[4] http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/avoiding-donald-trump-summer-marco-rubio-strikes-back/story?id=34128226;
   http://time.com/4091301/republican-debate-transcript-cnbc-boulder/
[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbIN3GLynXk
[6] http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1980/streetgov

Numerous other examples could be cited. Over time, the growing utilization of contempt in rhetoric and negative advertising may be one reason why Iyengar and Westwood (2015) find partisan negative affect has increased dramatically, with affective polarization promoting confrontation rather than cooperation.

Theoretical Foundations and Relevance: Distinctive Characteristics and Impact of Contempt

Most analyses of ANES affect data have focused on the contrast of positive emotions (hopeful and proud) vs. negative emotions (afraid and angry). But increasingly, when researchers examine individual emotions, they find differential predictions of important electoral outcomes. For example, using ANES data on the 2008 election, Finn and Glaser (2010) found hope was a stronger predictor than pride of voting for Obama, while pride was a stronger predictor than hope of voting for McCain; furthermore, anger was a stronger predictor than fear of voting against Obama and against McCain. Also analyzing ANES data, Valentino, Brader, Groenendyk, Gregorowicz, and Hutchings (2011) found that anger was a stronger predictor than fear of relatively "costly" political participation (such as working for a campaign or donating money) in all presidential elections from 1980-2004.

The 1995 ANES pilot included contempt in an expanded emotion battery. Because these additional emotion items were included, Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2000) were able to find evidence of a factor labeled as "aversion" in addition to anxiety. However, according to Brader and Marcus (2013), aversion is defined as "a cluster of feelings that includes anger, disgust, contempt, and hatred" (p. 179). Notably, many theorists view the first three of these as distinct emotions (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1986; Haidt, 2003; Rozin et al., 1999), and researchers find they have different determinants, characteristics, and effects. For example, while anger is elicited by appraisals that other people are to blame for unfair outcomes (Kuppens et al., 2003), contempt results from appraisals that others are incompetent (Hutcherson & Gross, 2011) or have bad character (Fischer & Roseman, 2007). Anger and contempt have different cross-culturally recognizable facial expressions (Ekman & Friesen, 1986), action tendencies (short-term confrontation or attack vs. long-term rejection; Fischer & Roseman, 2007), and goals (e.g., inflicting some form of harm vs.

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social exclusion; Berkowitz, 1993; Underwood, 2004). An important social goal in sharing expressions of contempt may be to have the object of contempt rejected by one's group (Roseman, 2013).

The distinctive causes, responses, and effects of contempt vs. anger have different implications for candidate evaluations and voting. For example, if appraisal determinants of contempt (incompetence, bad character) are more global and stable than those of anger (unfair outcomes), then contempt for a candidate or his/her group may be more damaging than anger and harder to reverse. Contempt toward a candidate may be especially influential as competence is a key criterion for voters (e.g., Todorov et al., 2005).

ANES measurement of contempt as well as anger may also help researchers better understand the divergent effects of negative campaigning. Despite its ubiquity, the empirical literature finds that negative campaigning fails as often as it succeeds, and much remains unknown about factors that determine this (Lau & Rovner, 2009; Mattes & Redlawsk, 2015). Fridkin and Kenney (2011) found the tone of negative ads (civil vs. uncivil, ranging from "diplomatically, without derision" to "overly strident, rude, discourteous") affected candidate evaluations across 21 U.S. Senate campaigns in 2006. Uncivil ads provoked backlash among voters who had low tolerance for incivility. Emotion-specific questions may reveal that these are people who are particularly discomforted by feeling contempt or feel it rarely (Roseman et al., 1986).

In Table 1 we specify a number of predictions that illustrate how measuring contempt as well as anger and fear in the ANES can advance understanding of candidate evaluation, party polarization, negative campaigning, political information-processing, political communication, turnout, and candidate choice.

Table 1. *Some Theory-Based Predictions Testable by Measuring Contempt vs. Anger in the ANES*

Characteristics of Contempt vs. Anger (and Related Predictors)	Sample Predictions that Can be Tested by Measuring Contempt in Addition to Anger
-Evidence indicates that anger and contempt are elicited by different appraisals, and have distinct cross-culturally recognizable facial expressions, feeling qualities, action tendencies, goals, and effects (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1986; Fischer & Roseman, 2007; Hutcherson & Gross, 2011; Romani et al., 2013; Rozin et al., 1999).	- Anger and contempt will vary independently, and each will account for unique variance in predicting election-relevant outcomes including **thermometer evaluations, turnout,** and **voting** (detailed below). -These predictions also test **discrete emotion theories** (e.g., AIT) vs. **dimensional theories** (e.g., JQP) of political affect and electoral behavior.

-Anger is elicited by appraisals of unfair negative outcomes caused by others, contempt by appraisals of others' inferior traits (Fischer & Roseman, 2007; Hutcherson & Gross, 2011; Kuppens et al., 2003). -Trait ascriptions are more stable and global than outcomes. -Negative outcomes experienced by oneself or one's group are likely seen as more immediate and relevant than negative traits possessed by other people.	-Speeches, ads, and elections higher in expressions of contempt will result in more **partisan polarization** than speeches, ads, and elections that are higher in anger. -Felt contempt will be associated with old-fashioned (biological) racism; anger with modern (symbolic) racism, differentially predicting **opposition to minority candidates** and liberal racial and immigration policies. -Felt anger will be associated with greater **political participation** (e.g. voter **turnout**) than felt contempt. -Speeches, ads, and elections higher in anger will be associated with greater **political participation** (including **turnout**) than those higher in contempt.
-Contempt is seen as a more extreme negative emotion than anger (Hutcherson & Gross, 2011). -There are individual and group differences in experience of and tolerance for particular emotions. For example, men report experiencing more contempt than women do (Stapley & Haviland, 1989). Men are also higher in Social Dominance Orientation (Pratto et al., 2006). But men and women experience anger with equal frequency (Simon & Nath, 2004). Frequency of experience predicts favorability to emotion-specific political appeals (Roseman et al., 1986).	-Like uncivil ads, contemptuous negative ads--if seen as relevant--will be more effective than angry ads in **lowering evaluations of target candidates** among voters who often experience contempt; they will be less effective than angry ads among voters who rarely experience contempt, and may **backfire on attackers**. -Contemptuous ads may be more effective (as compared to angry ads) among strong partisans than weak partisans, independents, and swing voters; voters higher in social dominance; men as compared to women; conservatives as compared to liberals; and Republicans as compared to Democrats.
Anger is characterized by action tendencies of confrontation and attack, and goals of deterrence and retribution; contempt by action tendencies of condescension and social exclusion, and the goal of getting others to reject the object of contempt (Fischer & Roseman, 2007; Miller, 1997; Roseman et al., 1994).	Felt anger will be more associated with **information-seeking** relevant to confrontation (e.g., about injustices) and retribution (e.g. punishing wrong-doers). Contempt will be associated with seeking information about the traits of target individuals and groups, and with **political communication** that involves sharing such information with like-minded in-group members.
Anger is associated with short-term attack but long-term reconciliation, contempt with long-term rejection and relationship termination (Fischer & Roseman, 2007). Contempt is seen as lengthier and less remediable (Hutcherson & Gross, 2011)	-Felt contempt toward a candidate will be **less reversible** than anger over the course of a campaign or between campaigns (if a candidate runs again). -Felt contempt will better predict stability of **candidate choice**.

The Importance of Contempt in the 2016 Election: New Data from the Iowa Caucuses

Do 2016 voters distinguish contempt from the other negative emotions traditionally measured by the

ANES? Does contempt have distinctive effects upon their choice of candidates? In late October 2015, we

surveyed nearly 1,000 likely Iowa Caucus attenders. Immediately following the February 2016 Caucuses,

we re-interviewed approximately 500 of these respondents about their Caucus experience, and included a

candidate affect battery patterned after ANES affect questions. We asked about candidates within

respondents' parties, as this reflected the choice set respondents had in the primary election environment.

Table 2 reports the percentage of respondents answering "Yes" to questions on specific emotions,

including hope, fear, anger, and contempt. The first set of entries reflect questions asking "Have you ever

heard or seen [candidate] express [emotion]." The second set is the standard ANES formulation: "Has

[candidate] because of who he/she is or something he/she has done, ever made you feel [emotion]?"

Table 2: *Percentages of Surveyed Iowa Caucus-Goers Reporting the Expression of Specific Emotions by Each Candidate, and Specific Emotions Ever Felt Toward Each Candidate*								
Specific Emotions		Republican Respondents						Democrat Rs	
		Trump	Carson	Bush	Christie	Cruz	Rubio	Clinton	Sanders
Expressed by Candidates	Hope	65%	84%	69%	62%	77%	82%	85%	79%
	Fear	35%	18%	25%	22%	32%	28%	19%	20%
	Anger	87%	26%	47%	66%	61%	43%	62%	63%
	Contempt	77%	22%	34%	50%	48%	28%	39%	39%
Felt toward Candidates	Hopeful	47%	80%	39%	42%	62%	71%	79%	71%
	Afraid	36%	6%	16%	12%	10%	12%	10%	14%
	Angry	56%	6%	9%	26%	34%	16%	18%	16%
	Contemptuous	38%	6%	16%	18%	12%	12%	10%	6%
Note. Entries are percentages answering "yes." N=251 Democrats, 215 Republicans through 2/7/16									

As Caucus goers were only asked about candidates within their party, these data effectively control for

partisan effects. (Had respondents been asked about candidates from the opposing party, hope would

likely drop, while fear, anger, and contempt would increase.) The data in Table 2 give evidence of face and

discriminant validity for the questions about contempt and other emotions expressed by candidates, and

these same emotions felt by voters. In particular, Trump is seen as having expressed contempt by 77% of

GOP respondents, far above the next candidates, Christie (50%) and Cruz (48%). The candidate perceived

as lowest on expressed contempt, Ben Carson, is the one journalists and observers (including an author of

this proposal, who spent 6 months in Iowa attending more than 100 events spanning every candidate in

both parties) have suggested is seen as the nicest person. A similar pattern holds for emotions felt by

Caucus goers: Trump elicits feelings of contempt at twice the rate of the next highest candidate (Christie).

These data also suggest that even if Trump is not the GOP nominee, contempt will play a role in the 2016 election. Although overall, anger is perceived more than contempt, nearly all candidates are seen by many voters as expressing contempt, and a significant number feel contemptuous about each candidate. On average, as many voters feel contempt toward a candidate (14.75%) as feel the traditionally ANES-measured emotion of fear (14.5%). Thus Iowa Caucus goers perceive contempt, as well as fear and anger, expressed by candidates, and also report feeling contempt toward Republican and Democratic candidates.

Does contempt make a unique contribution to evaluations of the candidates when the other emotions are simultaneously taken into account? Table 3 reports results of OLS regressions using the listed emotions to predict thermometer evaluations of the candidates, again within respondents' party. As seen in the table, contempt plays a significant role in predicting thermometer evaluations of most of the candidates, even when hope, fear, and anger are also included. The top half of Table 3 again shows that voters do in fact distinguish these emotions. Expressed hope predicts favorable evaluations for each candidate. Among negative emotions, expressed contempt has the largest number of beta weights that are significant or marginally significant, and it is the only emotion whose expression significantly predicts unfavorable

Table 3: *Results of Simultaneous Linear Regressions Predicting Candidate Thermometer Evaluation of Each Candidate from Emotions Expressed by the Candidate, and Emotions Ever Felt Toward the Candidate*

Specific Emotions		Republican Respondents					Democrat Rs	
		Trump	Bush	Christie	Cruz	Rubio	Clinton	Sanders
Expressed by Candidates	Hope	25.01***	23.25***	10.01*	31.24***	20.92***	18.44***	14.61***
	Fear	-0.44	-1.53	-8.23†	-9.33†	-3.58	-0.81	-8.29†
	Anger	-8.91	-7.28†	6.10	-4.44	-7.84†	-0.25	12.46**
	Contempt	-18.26**	-7.31†	-5.33	-9.02†	-6.31	-6.35†	-2.03
Felt toward Candidates	Hopeful	37.86***	24.91***	21.79***	34.08***	25.42***	18.82***	31.33***
	Afraid	-10.47**	-9.65*	-5.29	-3.22	-6.34	-12.39**	-3.17
	Angry	-14.79***	-9.23*	-12.78**	-18.45***	-9.60*	-16.72***	2.19
	Contemptuous	-8.90*	-9.74*	1.21	-14.21***	-10.51†	-12.67*	-6.95

Note. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. N= 251 Democrats, 215 Republicans through 2/7/16.
† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

evaluations in a sample of this size. Unlike contempt, anger expressed by Bernie Sanders predicts *positive* thermometer evaluations of him as a candidate, further supporting a distinction between the two emotions.

Most importantly—and directly related to our proposal to include contempt in the ANES affect battery—when voters feel contempt toward Trump, Bush, Cruz, or Clinton (and marginally for Rubio), it significantly lowers their thermometer evaluations; this significant effect exists on top of the effects of current ANES emotions hopeful, afraid, and angry. Across candidates, felt contempt again is at least as important as fear.

Further Evidence of the Electoral Importance of Contempt

The evidence that contempt is recognized and differentiated by voters, and significantly affects their evaluations of presidential candidates, converges with findings from other studies, both at the presidential and congressional level. For example, reanalyzing data from the 1995 ANES pilot study, Johnston et al. (2014) found that felt contempt toward Democrat President Bill Clinton, in addition to felt anger, significantly mediated the effects of perceptions of Clinton's leadership on his thermometer evaluations. In contrast, fear and anger—but not contempt—mediated the effects of perceptions of Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole's leadership on Dole's thermometer evaluations.

A similar pattern emerged in a study of undergraduates viewing excerpts from the 2008 debates between Barack Obama and John McCain (Roseman et al., 2013). Contempt, in addition to anger, mediated the relationship between rated undesirable qualities of Democrat Obama and favorability, while only anger mediated the relationship between undesirable qualities of Republican McCain and favorability.

These data further support the distinct importance of contempt and raise intriguing questions. Is contempt more important to Republican voters than to Democratic voters? Is it more relevant to Democratic candidates than Republican candidates? Or did the campaigns pursue different emotion strategies in their messaging and advertising? Perhaps Democratic strategists refrained from employing contempt against former war heroes Dole and McCain because it was unlikely to succeed and could provoke a backlash?

In a recent study of the 2014 U.S. Senate elections in Iowa and New Jersey, Redlawsk et al. (2015)

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tested relationships of six felt emotions (anxiety, anger, contempt, hope, enthusiasm, and admiration, measured with ANES-format questions) to vote intentions. Multinomial logistic regressions found voters' contempt predicted vote intentions (against) both Democrat Bruce Braley and Republican Joni Ernst in Iowa. Indeed, felt contempt was the *most* significant negative emotion in both models—more than anger (which also predicts Braley vote intentions) or anxiety (which also predicts Ernst vote intentions). Contempt had relatively little impact for either candidate in New Jersey, though voters did perceive contempt, distinct from anger, in a speech by Democrat Cory Booker and a TV interview with Republican Jeff Bell. These findings provide additional evidence of the utility of distinguishing contempt from anger—here in a Senate election, and with vote intentions as the dependent variable. They also suggest that the importance of contempt is not party-specific, but rather campaign-, candidate-, or election-specific. Contempt mattered greatly for candidates from both parties in the hotly contested Iowa race, where airwaves were saturated for months with negative ads. But in the relatively uncontested New Jersey race, where the Republican mounted no TV ads and his Democratic opponent aired very few, contempt was not a significant factor.

Proposed Item to Measure Contempt

Our proposal is simply to add the contempt item from the 1995 ANES pilot to the 2016 ANES Time Series Study. Following the identical format as the current ANES emotions, the item asks: **Has [candidate], because of the kind of person he/she is or because of something he/she has done, ever made you feel contempt? [Response: Yes/No]**. As with the other emotions in the affect battery, if—and only if—a respondent answers "Yes," he or she is asked **"How often would you say you've felt contempt? [always, most of the time, about half the time, some of the time,** or **never / never…]?** Adding this item would not require respondents to spend additional time mastering a new question type. While it may be desirable to measure a construct with multiple indicators, prior research has shown ANES single-item measures of particular emotions differentially predict electoral participation and voting (e.g., Finn & Glaser, 2010; Valentino et al., 2011). Ratings for *contemptuous* have been shown to correlate highly

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with ratings of other items measuring the same construct (e.g., *disdainful, scornful*; Melwani & Barsade,

2011) and are empirically distinct from items measuring other negative emotions, including anger and

disgust (Xie et al., 2015). Most widely-cited studies of contempt use a single-item measure (e.g., Fischer &

Roseman, 2007; Hutcherson & Gross, 2011; Rozin et al., 1999). The performance of the ANES contempt

item has been demonstrated in the 1995 Pilot Study and subsequent analyses showing significant

relationships with election-relevant variables (e.g., Marcus et al., 2000; Johnston et al., 2014).

ANES emotion items have a proven track record, having been asked in increasingly sophisticated

question formats since 1980. In numerous studies, the emotion items have been related to important

outcomes, including electoral participation and candidate choice. Recent research (e.g., Marcus et al.,

2000; Redlawsk et al., 2015; Valentino et al., 2011) demonstrates that expanding the set of emotion terms

can reveal significant new relationships to these and other election-relevant variables. In an election where

contempt figures so prominently, it would be unfortunate to miss the chance to assess its influence.

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