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**Campaign Visits, Issues, and Demographics: A Multilevel Approach to Understanding Voter Decision-Making in the 2016 Presidential Nominating Contests**

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Shortened Title: Campaign Visits, Issues, and Demographics

**Abstract**

The 2016 presidential nominating process presented the American public with an interesting and tumultuous set of contests. Despite the unique nature of both the Democratic and Republican contests, the candidates stuck to the usual campaign activities to help influence voters. However, one of these campaign tactics, campaign visits, has been vastly understudied. Using a uniquely compiled dataset and a hierarchical linear model I am able to test how campaign effects, including visits, as well as an individual's predispositions impacted vote choice in the 2016 presidential nominating contests. The results demonstrate that the 2016 presidential nominating contests were decided based on a combination of both campaign activities and individual-level predictors.

**Keywords**

Campaign Visits, Presidential Nominations, Campaign Effects, Campaign Advertisements

Throughout the 2016 presidential nominating season, political pundits and newscasters constantly argued about what was driving vote choice (Dutton, DePinto, and Backus 2016; Lee 2016; Schreckinger 2015; Zitner, Chinni, and McGill 2016). Was it an individual's ideology? The idea of a border wall being built along the United States-Mexico border? A voter's allegiance to a political party? Or, did a voter's decision have less to do with their own predispositions and characteristics and more with the various campaign activities conducted by the candidates? For example, did the well-attended and record-setting rallies held by Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders (see Freeman 2016 and Schleifer and Gray 2015) convince voters to cast their ballots in a particular way?

Political scientists are also divided on whether it is individual-level predictors that drive vote choice or if vote choice is influenced by various campaign activities. While there are several who believe in the minimal effects theory (Campbell et al. 1960; Hillygus and Jackman 2003; Lazarsfeld et al. 1944), still others tell us that campaign activities should increase the number of votes a candidate receives (Herr 2002; Holbrook 1996; McClurg and Holbrook 2009; Shaw and Roberts 2000; Shepard 1977; Thomas 1989). More importantly, there is a copious amount of evidence that campaigns have an even greater impact on an individual's vote choice at the nomination stage than at the general election stage (e.g. Adams 1987; Arterton 1978; Crouse 1972; Haynes and Flowers 2002; Lichter; Amundson, and Noyes 1988; Mayer 1987; Norrander 2006; Wendland 2017). This disagreement raises an important question: which of these schools of thought better explains the 2016 nomination results? There seems to be compelling arguments for both individual predispositions and campaign activities being a driving force behind vote choice in this most recent set of nominating contests.

I answer this question by using a hierarchical linear model [HLM] to incorporate both individual- and state-level predictors of vote choice. In the models I have developed I include measures of momentum, advertisements, endorsements, and visits to account for a candidate's campaign activities. As the existing literature (further reviewed below) demonstrates, these variables have much

explanatory power when it comes to a voter's decision-making process. The campaign visits variable is one of particular interest here, as campaign visits have been a rather understudied predictor of vote choice. Few studies have been conducted strictly examining the effects of visits on vote choice in either the nominating or general election stage of an election—and some of these studies use visits as a control rather than a variable of interest (e.g. Aldrich 1980; Haynes and Murray 1998). As I will further argue, I believe visits may be an important explanatory variable that often gets overlooked. All of the raw data on the state-level variables can be found in the Appendix. In addition to these contextual variables, I include several individual-level variables as well. These include ideology, party identification, age, race, sex, and several issue positions. By combining both state-level and individual-level variables, we will be able to get a comprehensive view of how a voter makes a decision in the voting booth.

I begin this analysis by reviewing the relevant literature and laying out the hypotheses I will be testing throughout the remainder of this paper. Then, I describe the data used to develop my measurements as well as the model developed to test the hypotheses. My data include a full list of all of the visits conducted and ads developed by all candidates throughout the 2016 nominating season as well as all of the endorsements from Governors, Senators, and Congress members. For the individual-level variables, I use the 2016 ANES Time Series Study. Finally, I conclude by discussing how the results highlight the fact that the 2016 presidential nominating contests were decided by a mix of both campaign- and individual-level factors.

### **How Do Voters Make Decisions in Presidential Nominating Contests?**

Looking at existing research we know a great deal about what factors affect a voter's decision in the voting booth in presidential nominations. We see many arguments in favor of analyzing the momentum a candidate has generated coming out of early wins in Iowa and New Hampshire (Aldrich 1980; Bartels 1988; Kenney and Rice 1994). Others argue that momentum is not a full explanation for

what is ultimately driving the decisions made by voters and we should instead look at what factors make candidates drop out of the race rather than surge ahead (Damore, Hansford, and Barghothi 2010; Norrander 2000; Norrander 2006). Looking at the nomination process as a game of attrition rather than momentum seems to help solidify the importance of campaign advertising, visits, and other candidate activities that may influence a voter's decision. Other scholars argue that party and elite endorsements along with the cues they send voters are what really matter when it comes to picking a party's nominee (Anderson 2013; Cohen, Karol, Noel, and Zaller 2008; Dowdle, Adkins, and Steger 2009; Kousser, Lucas, Masket, and McGhee 2015; Rapoport, Stone, and Abramowitz 1991; Steger 2007). Finally, still other scholars point to individual-level predictors (e.g. issue positions, ideology, partisanship) as the driving force behind an individual's vote choice.

While we have several explanations for how voters make decisions in nominating contests and understand the important predictors that aid in explaining vote choice (e.g. momentum, visits ads, endorsements, ideology, issues), there has yet to be a comprehensive look at the 2016 nomination process. Further, as Aldrich (1980) tells us, because of the differing dynamics between the nominating process and general elections, there is compelling evidence that the behavior of individual voters varies between these two distinct phases of a presidential election. Because the decision costs of participating in nominating contests are generally higher than for general elections—largely due to their intra-party nature—these predictors of vote choice should arguably play a larger role in explaining a voter's decision. Were campaign dynamics the driving force behind a voter's choice? Was it elite endorsements? Or, were the predispositions and characteristics voters brought with them into the voting booth the driving force behind their decision? To answer these questions, it is important to understand the various reasons why these campaign aspects may have an impact on voters' decisions—the relevant literature that helps with this understanding is reviewed below.

Since Jimmy Carter's surprising win in Iowa garnered him more media attention than anticipated and catapulted him to the Democratic nomination in 1976, momentum has been viewed as an important predictor of a candidate's performance in a nomination campaign (Aldrich 1980; Bartels 1988). Aldrich (1980) points out that momentum has a two-fold effect: it raises a candidate's competitive standing and increases their ability to fundraise successfully. By winning early contests, a candidate is viewed as more viable than a candidate who has not won previously. This makes voters more willing to vote for that candidate in future contests as well as donate money, helping the candidate prolong her campaign. Kenney and Rice (1985) find support for the idea that momentum causes a bandwagon effect among voters in their analysis of the 1988 Republican nomination of George Bush, demonstrating that some voters were willing to support Bush because they thought he had the nomination locked up despite the fact that they supported a different candidate. *Thus, I expect that momentum will once again help voters decide. Specifically, in 2016, I expect momentum will help Trump because of his early and more consistent wins, whereas on the Democratic side I expect that momentum will not matter because Clinton and Sanders traded wins, with neither one being able to build momentum.*

Closely tied with the theory of momentum is the idea that endorsements play an important part in helping a candidate succeed (Anderson 2013; Cohen et al 2008). Cohen et al (2008) argue that while many believe that the McGovern Fraser Commission stripped parties of their power in the nomination season, this power was simply relocated. Party elites no longer make decisions in a smoke-filled back room, but instead make public endorsements of their preferred candidate. These authors thoroughly demonstrate that voters rely on these endorsements and do not seem to possess strong feelings about the candidates on their own.

Steger (2007) argues that endorsements help Republicans more than Democrats, as Republican elites are willing to make endorsements earlier in the invisible primary season and tend to rally around

one or two candidates, thus signaling to voters which candidate(s) is (are) best. Democratic elites, however, tend to send weaker messages through endorsements, as they tend to wait until after the Iowa Caucuses or New Hampshire primary to make an endorsement. Dowdle, Adkins, and Steger (2009) support Steger's (2007) findings that early coalescing of party elites behind a candidate gains that candidate more media attention, higher poll numbers, and better fundraising results. Kousser et al. (2015), however, pose the question of whether party elites are actually boosting a candidate's chances or jumping on a winning candidate's bandwagon. Despite initial skepticism, these authors discover that the effect of endorsements is likely smaller than many think, but ultimately both statistically and substantively significant. Specifically, they find that endorsements matter for Independent voters as well as voters who identify as the same party as the candidate being endorsed. *Thus, I expect that, consistent with existing research, elite endorsements will have a positive effect on vote choice for both Democratic and Republican candidates.*

What both of the preceding theories miss is the importance of the campaign activities candidates use to gain votes throughout the nomination season. Candidates advertise, hold rallies and town hall meetings, and ultimately spend millions of dollars running for their party's nomination. Conventional wisdom tells us that these candidate activities are not for naught at the nomination stage (Barker 2005; Bartels 1985, 1993; Grush 1980; Gurian 1993a, 1993b; Norrander 1993, 1996; Parent, Jillson, and Weber 1987; Ridout 2004, 2008). These authors find significant evidence that campaign spending and advertising impact voters when deciding which candidate to support. The more a candidate spends and advertises, the better that candidate does. Does this pattern hold for the 2016 contests? Taking a preliminary look at advertising in these contests (the raw data for which can be found in the Appendix), we see that both Clinton and Trump both ran more ads than their competitors. Clinton ran 216,989 ads, compared to Sanders' 209,576. On the Republican side, Trump ran 51,681 ads while Rubio and Cruz, Trump's closest competitors, ran 39,539 and 44,445 ads, respectively (Zubak-



Skees 2016). Obviously this does not imply causation, but it does demonstrate anecdotal support for the prior finding that more advertising leads to more votes as both Clinton and Trump won their respective party's nomination. *I therefore expect that advertising will help Trump and Clinton build support among voters because they spent more on advertising than their competitors.*

Finally, we have evidence that there are individual-level factors that are likely to impact a voter's choice in addition to campaign dynamics. An individual's issue positions may help influence how he or she votes (Marshall 1983; Kenney 1993) especially when a candidate has been focusing on a particular issue strongly (Norrander 1996). In 2016 there were clear issue positions taken by the candidates. Trump laid out a plan to build a wall at the Mexican-American border and deport undocumented immigrants. Several of his opponents (most notably Jeb Bush, John Kasich, and Marco Rubio) called for more compassionate policies toward undocumented immigrants. On the Democratic side, Clinton and Sanders took similar stances on immigration, with both candidates supporting a path to citizenship for those in the United States illegally and opposing the idea of a border wall. A Pew Research Center report (2016) points to the fact that immigration was more important to Republican voters, but not overlooked by Democrats either. The report states that 79 percent of Trump supporters viewed immigration as very important to their vote decision, while 65 percent of Clinton supporters viewed the issue as very important. Additionally, immigration was viewed as a more important issue in 2016 than in the past several election cycles. 70 percent of voters viewed immigration as important in 2016, compared to only 41 percent in 2012 and 54 percent in 2008 (Pew 2016).

Both Democrats and Republicans also stressed the economy on the campaign trail. Trump spoke repeatedly about his business experience and how this will translate into economic success. Clinton and Sanders focused on minimum wage increases, making college more affordable, and stronger regulations on the banking industry. This is likely due to the fact that many Americans viewed the economy as the most important issue facing the country right now (Casselman 2015; Gallup 2015; Pew

2016). According to a Gallup poll asking voters about America's most pressing problem, 33 percent of respondents said the economy, 16 percent said poorly run government, and 8 percent said immigration (Casselmann 2015). These were the top three problems, followed by gun control, health care, and education. Further, according to a partisan breakdown by the Pew Research Center (2016) 90 percent of Trump supporters said the economy was very important to their vote, as did 80 percent of Clinton voters. *Thus, I expect that voters focused on the increasingly salient issues of immigration and economic conditions received clear signals from the candidates and voted in accordance with their predisposed issue position(s).*

In addition to issue positions, Ideology and partisanship, while less important at the nomination stage, may still impact voters in nominating contests (Bartels 1988). While these traits take on tremendous importance at the general election stage (see Huddy et al 2015), they are of lesser importance at the nomination stage because of the intra-party nature of primaries and caucuses rather than the inter-party nature of general elections (Aldrich 1980). Kenney (1993), however, argues that these traits help voters infer a candidate's issue positions. With Trump portraying himself as more of a populist candidate than a true conservative, and Sanders self-identifying as a democratic-socialist, the American public was presented with candidates that diverged greatly from the norm in terms of typical nomination candidates. *Thus, I hypothesize that ideology and partisanship will be an asset to voters in 2016.*

Finally, there is evidence that demographics matter in nomination contests (Bartels 1988; Jackman and Vavreck 2010; Norrander 1996). Bartels (1988) tells us that demographics help determine and explain a voter's political predispositions, while Norrander (1996) explains that demographics influence the constituency groups to which a voter belongs. Jackman and Vavreck (2010) find that demographics were important in the 2008 Democratic nominating contest, with young voters two times as supportive of Obama over Clinton, female voters two times as supportive of Clinton, and White

voters more supportive of Clinton than Obama. Demographics are likely to matter in 2016 as well. *Clinton is likely to get more support from female and minority voters, as she stressed her work with minorities throughout her career, her strong support for women's issues, as well as her ties to Obama. Sanders is likely to gain support from younger voters because of his focus on education reform and raising the minimum wage. Trump, on the Republican side, is likely to see depressed support from females and minorities because of his many misogynistic and bigoted statements on the campaign trail.*

### **The Importance of Understudied Campaign Visits**

What all of this research reviewed above ignores is the impact of campaign visits. Campaign visits are appearances made by a candidate in a state. These visits include campaign rallies, town hall meetings, stump speeches, and stopping by a local restaurant or pub to talk with voters and sample the local cuisine—for example, ordering a Cheesesteak when visiting Philadelphia. Campaign visits may be an important tool in a candidate's strategy and all candidates conduct them, but very little work has been done to investigate the impact these visits have on a voter's decision in the voting booth. Campaign visits present candidates with another avenue for reaching out to voters. In fact, visits are a more personal way for candidates to connect with potential voters, as they are able to tailor their message to the crowd to which they are speaking. Similar to the argument presented by Domke and Coe (2010), through a visit, a candidate is able to connect with a group of people in a state by demonstrating their understanding of that state's concerns. These authors examine the role of "presidential pilgrimages" to religious landmarks and demonstrate that by visiting important religious landmarks, leaders, and locations, presidents are able to connect with and draw support from religious voters. This same logic should apply to campaign visits, generally.

When we look at the speeches made by candidates on the campaign trail, we can see that they do indeed try to personalize their messages in visits. For example, in her speech to voters in Detroit,

Michigan, Hillary Clinton spoke about the water crisis in Flint and the organized labor groups important to the manufacturing economy of Michigan (C-SPAN 2016). By discussing manufacturing and referencing a specific local factory, Clinton made a personal appeal to these voters and tried to demonstrate that she understands what is important to Michigan voters.

Visits do not only allow candidates to personalize their message to the voters, but they allow voters to get a more personal view of the candidate. They are not watching the candidate in a prepared media appearance or a scripted ad. Instead, they see the candidate live and in-person, allowing them to get a better idea of a candidate's character and personal qualities. They are also able to observe how the candidate handles a question and answer session. Are they able to speak off the cuff without committing a major gaffe? Are they able to have a substantive policy discussion without necessarily being prepared ahead of time? These are questions voters are able to get answers to that other campaign activities cannot showcase.

We can expect visits to impact election results in several ways. Visits allow candidates to make direct appeals to voters and ask for their support on election day, simply by asking for their vote. These visits are also another source of information for voters. Aldrich (1993) demonstrates that it is the job of the candidate to provide voters with information in an effort to make it as easy as possible for voters to choose for whom to vote. The candidate that makes the decision easiest for the voter stands to gain votes (Jamieson 2001; Popkin 1994). Campaign visits are likely going to appeal to party activists—or at least those that are already paying attention to the campaign. Nonetheless, this is where we may see visits have a two-step effect, in that these activists will likely speak with their neighbors, friends, family, and coworkers about the candidate they support. By energizing activists through a visit, candidates are also hoping to gain grass roots volunteers to help inspire further support and more volunteers.

Jones (1998) looks at the impact visits have on both turnout rates and candidate preference. He finds that visits are an effective mobilization tool, especially when they are conducted closer to the primary or caucus date. In terms of vote choice, he found that visits were only a significant predictor for Democratic candidates and had no impact among Republican voters. He attributes this to a higher susceptibility of Democrats to campaign activities, as Republicans are more naturally predisposed to voting because of their higher income and education levels. Based on the research available, it seems likely that visits should indeed have an impact on vote choice. However, there are clearly mixed results, as very little consistency has been found over the few studies that have analyzed the impact of campaign visits. When we look at the 2016 contests, we see Trump and Clinton were able to conduct more visits than their opponents. The number of visits conducted by candidates throughout the nominating season can be found in the Appendix. Specifically, Trump conducted 192 visits compared to the 147 conducted by Cruz and 145 by Rubio. On the Democratic side, Clinton made 188 visits compared to Sanders' 182 visits. However, this is not a substantial difference and Sanders repeatedly made headlines for the size of his crowds, while Clinton's rallies were well attended, but failed to achieve the record-breaking headlines like Sanders' rallies (Landers 2016; O'Keefe and Wagner 2015). In addition, Trump was able to draw large crowds, but at the same time had conducted more visits than his opponents as well. *Therefore, I expect that campaign visits will increase support for Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, as both of these candidates turned out record-breaking crowds and created enthusiasm among voters.*

### **Data and Testing Strategy**

The data to test the hypotheses above come from a variety of sources. For the dependent variable, the data come from the American National Election Studies [ANES] 2016 Time Series Study. The respondent is asked which candidate he or she voted for in the 2016 presidential nominating contests. I use this data to construct five separate models: one for each of the leading candidates. Each

one, therefore, models vote choice for Clinton, Sanders, Trump, Cruz, or Rubio as a function of the independent variables discussed below. I break the survey into Democrats and Republicans and for each model, code a respondent as one if they intend to vote for the candidate in question and zero otherwise. For the 2016 Democrats, because it was mostly a two-candidate race, I simply compare the votes for Clinton and Sanders. Therefore in the Clinton model, Clinton's supporters are coded one and Sanders' supporters are coded zero. For the Republicans, because it was a multi-candidate race, the dependent variable is coded one if the respondent voted for the candidate of interest and zero if he or she voted for a different candidate. For example, in the Trump model, the dependent variable is coded one if the respondent voted for Trump and zero if he or she voted for one of the other Republican candidates.

The data on party endorsements comes from the compilation of endorsements from U.S. Representatives, U.S. Senators, and U.S. state Governors done by Aaron Bycoffe at [fivethirtyeight.com](http://fivethirtyeight.com). Modeled on Steger (2007), I create a percentage of state-level endorsements received by each candidate in each state. For example, Hillary Clinton received four out of Minnesota's seven endorsements, while Sanders received three. Clinton's endorsement percentage for Minnesota is therefore 57 percent while Sanders' percentage is 43 percent.

Momentum is measured similarly to Norrandar (1993). I score the top three primary finishers three, two, and one for a first, second, and third place finish, respectively starting with the Iowa Caucuses. Then, to discount this effect over time, as voters forget which candidate won previous contests, each week's score is multiplied by a factor of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 for the three weeks following each state's contest, respectively.

The campaign ads data come from the Center for Public Integrity, which counted the number of ads run by the various presidential candidates. Similar to my endorsement score, each candidate is

given a percentage score for each state, exemplifying the percentage of their party's campaign ads run by that candidate. Looking at the Republican race in Missouri as an example, we see that Cruz ran 1,938 ads, Trump ran 1,463 ads, Rubio ran 55, and Rand Paul ran 50 for a total of 3,506 run in Missouri. Therefore, Cruz's ad percent is 55 percent, while Trump's ad percent is 42 percent, and Rubio's ad percent is just 2 percent.

The data on campaign visits comes from my compilation of the data available from *The National Journal's* candidate travel tracker, which I also verified through newspaper searches via LexisNexis. I was able to compile a comprehensive list of all visits conducted throughout the entire length of the primary contest—including the invisible primary—broken down by state. In some cases, some states received multiple visits in one day (e.g. a candidate visited both Buffalo, NY, and New York City, NY, on the same day). In these cases, both visits were counted, as the candidate visited different locations, so they were likely speaking to different crowds. For continuity, these are coded in the same way as ads and endorsements, using a percentage measurement. By using a percentage rather than raw measurement, we are able to include data from all candidates that conducted visits and account for the relative differences between visits conducted by competitors. For example, looking at the 37 total visits made by Democrats to California, we see that Clinton made 18 of those visits, compared to the 16 made by Sanders. Clinton's visit percentage is therefore 49 percent and Sander's visit percentage is 43 percent.

Finally, the data for the individual-level variables come from the 2016 ANES Time Series Study. The gender and race variables are both dichotomous, with female and African American respondents coded 1 and their counterparts coded zero. Age is coded as a continuous variable according to the age reported by the respondent. The two issue variables used measure attitudes toward the economy and immigration. The economy variable asks respondents what they think about the current state of the U.S. economy. Responses range from very bad (coded 1) to very good (coded 5). The immigration

variable asks respondents what U.S. immigration levels should be. This is coded similarly to the economy variable on a one to five scale, ranging from immigration levels should be decreased a lot (coded one) to increased a lot (coded five). For party identification and ideology, I use the reported seven-point scales ranging from strong Democrat and strong liberal to strong Republican and strong conservative, respectively.

Lastly, I include control variables for a respondent's religiosity and education level as well as a candidate's home state. Candidates tend to perform better in their home state and other candidates campaign less in an opponent's home state because of the competitor's favorite-son status. I control for religiosity (in Republican models) because of the importance of religious, or evangelical, voters in Republican primaries. Religiosity is coded on a one through five scale measuring regularity of church attendance, similarly to current research (Brewer 2003; Domke and Coe 2010; Fiorina et al 2011; Kellstedt et al 2007; Wuthnow 1988). The responses to this question range from one (the respondent attends a religious service at least weekly) to five (the respondent never attends a religious service). Finally, I control for education among Republican voters, as several news reports pointed to the fact that Trump seemed to be exciting this group of voters, with Trump going so far as to say "I love the poorly educated" (Kerr 2016). Education is coded on a one to five scale, ranging from less than a high school degree (coded one) to advanced, or post-Bachelor's, degree (coded five).

In order to properly test this model, I have chosen to use a hierarchical linear model [HLM] with a random intercept because of the nested nature of the data of individuals within states. Each voter brings with them predispositions—party identification, ideology, and preferences on issues. Yet at the same time, these voters are also exposed to various campaign activities, such as advertisements and visits. Voters are not making decisions in a vacuum; they are exposed to new information about the candidates running for office and often use this information when making a decision about which candidate to support (Jerit et al. 2006). Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) demonstrate that even when the



information voters are exposed to contradicts the predisposed beliefs they already hold, in some cases these voters reassess their decision about which candidate to support. Thus, these authors demonstrate that the context in which a voter resides (e.g. a state) can influence the individual-level predispositions a voter holds, exemplifying the need for incorporating both individual- and state-level predictors in our models of vote choice. Thus, I argue that using an HLM to test these data is an appropriate modeling strategy. Specifically, because of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable I run a mixed-effects logistic regression with a random intercept.

## **Results**

The results for the Democratic candidates are presented in Table 1. Among the state-level variables, campaign visits prove to be an asset to Bernie Sanders, while none of them seemed to motivate Clinton supporters to vote in her favor. Sanders' visits generated much excitement among voters, often drawing large and sometimes record-breaking crowds (for accounts of Sanders' campaign rallies see Dillon 2016; Purcell and Barry 2016; Wagner 2016). Clinton's strategy involved holding smaller campaign events in which she could entertain questions and showcase her breadth of knowledge on policy issues, while Sanders opted for larger rallies showcasing the growing enthusiasm for his candidacy (Alba 2016; Zelany 2015). In fact, one of Clinton's largest rallies was her kickoff event in New York, which garnered about 5,000 people in attendance (Alba 2016). In contrast to this, Sanders regularly attracted tens of thousands of people to his rallies. For example, at a rally in Los Angeles, CA Sanders drew a crowd of 27,500 while also drawing a crowd of 28,000 in Portland, OR (O'Keefe and Wagner 2015). The volume of people Sanders spoke to and the enthusiasm he developed at these rallies paid off in terms of votes. For each additional visit conducted by Sanders, the odds of a voter supporting him increased by 3.7.

**[Table 1 about here]**

While visits were the only state-level variable that helped explain an individual's vote choice for one of the Democratic candidates, several individual-level variables assist in explaining vote choice for Clinton and Sanders. Age, race, gender, and issues all proved important for voters when they were choosing between Clinton and Sanders. Older voter, females, and African American voters all supported Clinton over Sanders, while younger voters opted for Sanders. Specifically, for each year older a voter was, the odds of he or she supporting Clinton increased by 1.04. Sanders attracted younger voters at the same rate. Sanders spoke often about making college more affordable, raising the minimum wage, and was quite popular with younger voters on social media. This effort from Sanders to reach out to younger voters seems to have been effective, as they were more supportive of him than Clinton. Among female voters, the odds of supporting Clinton over Sanders increased by a factor of 1.65, likely because she was the first viable female candidate for a major party's nomination. African American voters were also more likely to support Clinton over Sanders by a factor of 2.94. Clinton spent time on the campaign trail targeting African American voters, highlighting her past experience fighting discrimination and her more recent work for the Obama administration.

The issues of the economy and immigration also helped voters decide between Clinton and Sanders. Voters who believed the economy had improved since the last election were more likely to support Clinton while those who believed the economy had not improved were more likely to support Sanders. Specifically, the odds of supporting Clinton increased by 1.69 among those who believed the economy was improving, while the odds of supporting Sanders decreased by 0.59. Because Clinton chose to strongly associate herself with Obama, she benefited from support from those who believed Obama had improved the U.S. economy, while Sanders received support from those who believed Obama had not done enough to improve the economic status of Americans. Additionally, Sanders campaigned on multiple economic issues: increasing minimum wage to \$15 per hour, increasing Wall Street regulations, and closing the wealth gap between the richest and poorest Americans.

The issue of immigration also helped increase the number of votes Sanders received. Those that wanted to see immigration numbers increased were more likely to vote for Sanders by a factor of 1.13. Despite the fact that Clinton and Sanders had similar immigration stances, Sanders received more votes because of this issue. This is likely due to the fact that immigration was largely framed as a compassion issue throughout this election cycle, with several Republicans calling for mass deportation and the building of a border wall and Democrats calling for compassion for those living in the United States illegally. According to an AP poll, Sanders was viewed as the most compassionate candidate (cited in Holloway 2016), which is highlighted by his calls for increasing the number of Syrian refugees taken in by the U.S. (Gass 2015; PBS 2015). This allowed Sanders to benefit from voters who cared about the issue of immigration.

Turning now to Table 2, we see the results for the Republican candidates. When we look at the various campaign activities, we can see that momentum helped Donald Trump, campaign visits helped Ted Cruz, and Marco Rubio benefited from home state advantage. Trump, despite his overall unpopularity, continued to win nominating contests. In fact, Trump won 41 contests out of a total of 56. His core group of supporters in each state showed up to vote and because he was able to keep winning contests, he developed a sense of momentum as the nominating season continued on. While the substantial impact of this is practically negligible, he still received a slight bounce in support from voters.

**[Table 2 about here]**

Campaign visits proved to be an important predictor of vote choice for Cruz voters, but not Trump voters as was the expected outcome. Despite the fact that Trump touted the size of the crowds at his rallies, these visits did not increase the odds of a voter supporting him over another Republican candidate. Trump supporters were not motivated to vote for him because of the visits he conducted. The rallies Trump held attracted voters who were already convinced to support him. Trump was well

known prior to running for the Republican nomination—not for his political prowess, but for his real estate experience. Ted Cruz, in contrast, was less well known than Trump and over the course of the nominating season, he was labeled as the only real chance at stopping Trump from receiving the nomination (Glueck 2016). Further, those that attended Cruz events were not just Cruz supporters, but those that were “on-the-fence” (Zezima 2016). So, while Cruz was not receiving as much headline attention as Trump via rallies and other campaign visits, the fact that his rallies were well attended and also attracted voters who were “on-the-fence” about who to vote for, demonstrates the ability visits have to sway voters in the voting booth.

Marco Rubio benefited from home state advantage in Florida. In fact, the odds of supporting Rubio increased by 4.31 in Florida. Nonetheless, Rubio was unable to turn this home state advantage into a win. Why was Trump able to win Rubio’s home state? Likely because of the demographics of Florida’s primary voters. As will be discussed further below, Trump won support from voters with lower levels of education. Looking at the exit polls out of Florida, reported by CNN (2016), we can see that 47 percent of those who turned out to vote had less than a college education and 51 percent of these voters supported Trump. In addition, 85 percent of those who voted in Florida were dissatisfied with the federal government and Trump won 49 percent of these voters (CNN 2016). So even though Rubio received a bump due to his favored-son status, he nonetheless lost the primary because he was part of the federal government the Floridian citizenry was overwhelmingly upset with.

Looking now at the individual-level predictors of vote choice, we see that there are several predictors that help explain who voters chose in the voting booth. Trump and Cruz both benefited from religiosity, though from different ends of the spectrum. Trump benefited from those who did not identify as religious, while Cruz benefited from those who did. Those who ranked higher on the religiosity scale (i.e. those who did not often attend a religious service) were more likely to vote for Trump by a factor of 1.33. Those that ranked lower on the religiosity scale (i.e. those who did regularly

attend a religious service) were more likely to support Cruz. Considering Cruz's messaging and support of the religious right, it is unsurprising to see Cruz benefit from the more religious voters. In addition, Trump's religious attachment was murky at best so it makes sense that he received support from voters who were less religious. In a related vein, Cruz also won support of the more conservative voters. Those that identified as more conservative were more likely to support Cruz over his rivals by a factor of 1.84. This can also be explained by Cruz's support of the religious right and his conservative messaging.

Trump also benefited from voters who did not have high levels of education. In fact, the more education a voter had, the odds of him or her voting for Trump decreased by 0.78. On the campaign trail, Trump regularly attacked the higher education system and the politically correct nature of American politics, much of which many conservatives blame on the higher education system. Many voters also appreciated Trump's ability to be plain spoken and "tell it like it is." All of this demonstrates why lower levels of education were a strong predictor of Trump's support.

Rubio and Trump were also buoyed by voters that viewed immigration as important; and similarly to the religiosity variable, these two candidates received support from voters at the opposite ends of the spectrum. Trump received support from voters who wanted to see the number of immigrants in America decreased while Rubio received support from those who wanted to see this number increase. Immigration was a major part of Trump's campaign rhetoric, with him regularly calling for a wall to be built at the Mexican-American border and undocumented immigrants to be deported. Rubio, on the other hand was less hard-lined on the issue. He was an initial sponsor of the "Gang of Eight" bill which would have granted provisional citizenship status to many undocumented immigrants. While this legislation did not pass, Rubio took further stances that supported an increase in the number of H-1B visas to increase the number of skilled immigrants allowed into the United States. Thus Republicans on both sides of the immigration debate had a candidate to turn to in the nomination contests.

Rubio also received support from female voters. In fact, among female voters, the odds of supporting Rubio increased by 2.13. Given the fact that Trump's support from women was never high, Cruz continually struggled with female voters (in fact, according to Glueck 2016, Cruz's favorability polling among female voters was lower than Trump's), and John Kasich was seen as a long shot by many Republican voters regardless of gender, Rubio was likely the only viable Republican candidate left for female Republicans to support.

Now, if we look at Tables 3 and 4, which present the results without controlling for the individual-level predictors, we see that we get a completely different story for both the Democratic and Republican contests. To obtain these results, I ran logistic regressions with only state-level predictors and clustered the standard errors by state to account for the multiple observations within each state.

**[Table 3 about here]**

The results in Table 3 present the results for the Democratic contests. These results demonstrate that visits are no longer a significant predictor of vote choice for Sanders, but home state is. For Clinton, her advertisements are shown to increase the odds of voters supporting her. While these are not necessarily problematic results per se, they are problematic in the sense that without controlling for the individual-level predictors, we are not given the full picture of how voters make decisions.

**[Table 4 about here]**

Similarly for the Republican candidates, the results for which are presented in Table 4, we can see that we are given a different explanation for an individual's vote choice when removing the individual-level controls. While momentum still attains significance for Trump and Rubio still maintains his home state advantage, the visits variable is no longer predictive of support for Cruz, as demonstrated

in the full model. Again, these are not problematic results on their own, they simply do not give us the full explanation for how voters made a decision in 2016.

## **Conclusions**

In 2016, both the Republican and Democratic nominating contests appear to have been decided by a combination of campaign activities and individual-level traits and predispositions. Endorsements and advertisements did not attain significance in any of the models, while visits and momentum mattered for some candidates, but not all. Among the Democratic candidates, Clinton received an overwhelming number of elite endorsements, but they did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. The 2016 nominating season included much pushback against the party establishment. This is one of the reasons Bernie Sanders was able to pose such a strong challenge to Hillary Clinton, who was the overwhelming favorite throughout the invisible primary period. Further, neither Clinton nor Sanders was able to achieve any sort of momentum throughout the nomination season. This is likely due to the fact that the Democratic race ultimately came down to only two candidates, which makes it harder for one of these candidates to develop momentum. Aldrich (1980) tells us that in a two candidate race, it is more difficult for one candidate to develop momentum because as the two candidates volley wins back and forth, their resources will also ebb and flow with those wins—provided both candidates are considered competitive, which was the case in 2016.

On the Republican side, we saw the elites mostly in agreement that Trump should not be the party's nominee; however, the elites could not pick a candidate to rally behind and instead split their endorsements between Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and John Kasich. Specifically, Trump received no endorsements until February 24, 2017, well after primary voting began on February 1, 2017. Further, he amassed only 15 out of 204 total endorsements, while Marco Rubio received the most among the

Republican candidates with 62 (Bycoffe 2017). This, coupled with the antiestablishment nature of the 2016 nominating contests helps explain why elite endorsements did not matter in this nomination cycle.

In terms of advertisements, on the Democratic side, Clinton and Sanders ran comparable numbers of ads, with Clinton running only slightly more. Among the Republican candidates, there was again, not much difference in the number of overall ads run by the candidates. None of these three candidates, at least, was completely out-advertised by his competitors. In addition, there is a possibility that television advertising is losing effectiveness. With the increased availability of online streaming of television shows and movies, fewer Americans are exposed to commercials. In addition, the number of Americans with DVR devices is increasing, allowing television viewers the ability to fast forward through ads. In fact, according to a report from the Leichtman Research Group, 81 percent of Americans have a DVR, a Netflix subscription, or a subscription to an on-demand service—all of which allows them the opportunity to bypass paid advertising (Frankel 2016).

In addition, the importance of using an HLM—or at least controlling for both individual- and state-level predictors—has been established. Without looking at both levels of predictors, we would not know whether the campaign activities candidates took part in were truly having an impact, or if votes mainly resulted from individual predispositions. Using a hierarchical linear model to test for campaign effects allows us to see that in 2016, individual- and state-level variables were important to voters as they decided which candidate to support, thus bolstered the idea that campaigns do indeed matter.

Further, I have demonstrated the importance of separating out the effects of visits and ads. Visits proved effective for Cruz and Sanders, while ads did not help any candidate gain votes. Visits deserve a more thorough treatment from elections scholars seeking to understand how voters make decisions in the voting booth. These visits are an important aspect of a voter's decision making process and need to be further studied. One future avenue for a richer understanding of the effects of visits



would be to look at the interaction between visits and media coverage. Not all voters will attend a visit, but they may learn about the visit—or more importantly, the candidate—through local news coverage. Local newspapers and television news crews will likely cover a campaign rally or town hall meeting and thus spread a candidate’s message to those who did not attend the campaign event. So despite the fact that visits did prove effective for Sanders and Cruz, their effects are potentially even greater than reported here.

Overall, what has been demonstrated here is that individual-level predictors of vote choice along with campaign activities are important for voters. If we are to truly understand how voters make a decision, we need to include variables from both levels and an HLM allows us to do just that. Further, campaign visits are an important—if understudied—campaign activity that require further attention if we want to better understand a voter’s decision-making process.

**Table 1: Predictors of Vote Choice in 2016 Democratic Nominating Contests**

	Clinton		Sanders	
	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Odds Ratio</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Odds Ratio</u>
Endorsements	0.591 (0.407)		-0.612 (1.142)	
Momentum	0.001 (0.001)		-0.000 (0.001)	
Visits	0.413 (0.677)		1.307* (0.629)	3.70
Advertisements	0.780 (0.511)		0.562 (0.528)	
Home State	-0.032 (0.327)		1.543 1.299	
Age	0.044** (0.006)	1.04	-0.044** (0.006)	0.96
Gender	0.500** (0.183)	1.65	-0.496 (0.183)	
Race	1.077** (0.294)	2.94	-1.030 (0.297)	
Party ID	-0.015 (0.038)		0.014 (0.038)	
Ideology	0.071 (0.080)		-0.076 (0.079)	
Economy	0.523** (0.108)	1.69	-0.522* (0.108)	0.59
Immigration	-0.108 (0.098)		0.119** (0.098)	1.13
Constant	-5.086** (0.805)		3.091** (0.700)	
Variance Components:				
Intercept	0.208 (0.210)		0.135 (0.306)	
Intra-Class Correlation	0.013		0.005	
N (Individual/State)	651/46		651/46	

\*denotes  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*denotes  $p < 0.01$

Note: Standard Errors in parentheses; Odds ratios provided for variables that attain statistical significance.

**Table 2: Predictors of Vote Choice in 2016 Republican Nominating Contests**

	Trump		Cruz		Rubio	
	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio
Endorsements	0.249 (0.911)		0.439 (0.584)		-0.219 (0.592)	
Momentum	0.001* (0.000)	1.00	-0.000 (0.001)		-0.001 (0.001)	
Visits	-2.207 (1.449)		3.804* (1.893)	44.88	3.187 (2.186)	
Advertisements	-0.082 (0.451)		0.456 (0.566)		0.847 (0.971)	
Home State	0.317 (0.710)		0.093 (0.659)		1.462* (0.603)	4.31
Age	0.004 (0.005)		-0.014 (0.008)		0.007 (0.010)	
Gender	-0.371 (0.201)		-0.071 (0.242)		0.757* (0.321)	2.13
Race	----- (-----)		----- (-----)		----- (-----)	
Party ID	0.028 (0.042)		-0.021 (0.049)		0.034 (0.070)	
Ideology	-0.109 (0.105)		0.612** (0.153)	1.84	0.053 (0.162)	
Religiosity	0.288** (0.089)	1.33	-0.294** (0.113)	0.75	-0.032 (0.140)	
Economy	-0.054 (0.122)		-0.213 (0.150)		-0.053 (0.186)	
Education	-0.247* (0.103)	0.78	0.010 (0.126)		0.064 (0.160)	
Immigration	-0.589** (0.107)	0.55	-0.048 (0.124)		0.457** (0.151)	1.58
Constant	2.046* (1.025)		-3.382* (1.384)		-4.907** (1.624)	
<i>Variance Components:</i>						
Intercept	0.000 (0.081)		0.001 (0.015)		0.209 (0.428)	
Intra-Class Correlation	0.000000001		0.0000004		0.013	
N (Individual/State)	486/46		486/46		486/46	

\*denotes  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*denotes  $p < 0.01$

Note: Standard Errors in parentheses; Race dropped for all three models because it predicted failure perfectly; Odds ratios provided for variables that attain statistical significance.

**Table 3: Logistic Regression of State-Level Predictors Only for 2016 Democrats**

	Clinton		Sanders	
	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio
Endorsements	0.155 (0.257)		-0.495 (0.820)	
Momentum	0.000 (0.001)		-0.000 (0.001)	
Visits	0.632 (0.639)		1.067 (0.560)	
Advertisements	0.764* (0.380)	2.15	0.530 (0.429)	
Home State	-0.020 (0.383)		1.595** (0.419)	4.93
Constant	-0.427 (0.307)		-1.092** (0.185)	
N	971		971	

\*denotes  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*denotes  $p < 0.01$

Note: Standard errors clustered by state in parentheses; Odds ratios provided for variables that attain statistical significance.

**Table 4: Logistic Regression of State-Level Predictors Only for 2016 Republicans**

	<b>Trump</b>		<b>Cruz</b>		<b>Rubio</b>	
	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Odds Ratio</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Odds Ratio</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Odds Ratio</u>
Endorsements	0.480 (0.659)		0.534 (0.365)		-0.569 (0.545)	
Momentum	0.001** (0.000)	1.00	-0.001 (0.001)		-0.001 (0.001)	
Visits	-0.188 (0.940)		1.628 (1.313)		2.247 (1.570)	
Advertisements	-0.093 (0.297)		0.600 (0.492)		1.853** (0.693)	6.38
Home State	0.308 (0.229)		-0.090 (0.340)		1.990** (0.236)	7.32
Constant	-0.026 (0.145)		-1.845** (0.213)		-2.674** (0.326)	
N	859		859		859	

\*denotes  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*denotes  $p < 0.01$

Note: Standard errors clustered by state in parentheses; Odds ratios provided for variables that attain statistical significance.

**Appendix: Raw Numbers of Endorsements, Visits, and Advertisements for Candidates Analyzed**

State	Endorsements Received					Visits Conducted					Advertisements Run				
	Clinton	Sanders	Trump	Rubio	Cruz	Clinton	Sanders	Trump	Rubio	Cruz	Clinton	Sanders	Trump	Rubio	Cruz
Alabama	1	0	1	0	1	3	1	3	3	3	1699	0	758	71	374
Alaska	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	799	0	0	114
Arizona	2	1	0	2	4	1	5	3	0	2	1627	3674	832	0	0
Arkansas	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	3	3	2	941	0	580	441	881
California	39	0	1	3	2	18	16	8	7	6	10777	11643	380	350	167
Colorado	5	0	0	2	3	2	4	1	2	2	2604	4275	0	0	0
Connecticut	8	0	0	0	0	3	1	2	2	0	4638	4486	0	0	0
Delaware	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1176	2036	347	0	206
Washington, D.C.	0	0	0	0	0	10	2	5	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Florida	9	1	2	7	0	6	1	11	2	6	3941	972	2891	0	0
Georgia	2	0	0	3	1	3	3	4	7	6	741	0	1963	1583	3287
Hawaii	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	293	733	0	528	0
Idaho	0	0	0	1	2	0	2	0	3	1	0	1345	0	1088	817
Illinois	9	0	0	3	0	4	8	3	5	1	13577	13303	2448	1195	3400
Indiana	2	0	0	3	1	3	2	3	0	3	4135	6257	2926	0	4436
Iowa	1	0	0	0	1	21	17	22	15	20	23001	21139	6336	8311	4570
Kansas	0	0	0	3	1	0	1	0	1	2	2079	2316	170	137	1370
Kentucky	1	0	0	0	0	4	2	1	1	1	2946	2320	493	0	1573
Louisiana	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	2	757	0	0	0	713
Maine	1	0	1	0	0	1	2	1	0	1	4504	1676	929	125	225
Maryland	9	0	0	0	0	2	3	2	1	2	1305	1521	0	0	0
Massachusetts	10	0	0	0	0	6	4	4	2	2	13819	9026	1120	1355	106
Michigan	7	0	0	3	1	7	5	4	3	5	6980	9976	2046	0	1057
Minnesota	4	3	0	2	0	5	6	0	2	1	4528	7706	900	621	623
Mississippi	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	2	885	152	133	104	72
Missouri	4	0	0	1	2	3	4	2	1	2	13149	5221	1463	55	1938
Montana	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	159	0	0	0
Nebraska	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	4198	4895	2061	3150	1535
Nevada	2	0	0	0	0	9	7	6	7	7	7097	7781	745	738	182
New Hampshire	3	0	0	0	0	18	21	24	18	13	12510	10963	2544	3367	443
New Jersey	7	0	1	0	0	4	1	2	1	0	2939	4226	347	0	206
New Mexico	4	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	660	230	240	0	0
New York	21	0	2	1	0	6	9	10	12	7	9800	12986	1335	722	124
North Carolina	3	0	1	2	1	1	3	5	2	4	6292	3903	2148	4440	0
North Dakota	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	683	0	0	0
Ohio	3	1	0	0	0	6	4	6	4	3	7895	5431	3047	0	994
Oklahoma	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	3	3	2299	4400	156	459	1279
Oregon	5	1	0	0	0	1	4	1	0	0	0	692	0	0	0
Pennsylvania	7	0	3	2	0	7	6	4	1	1	6126	8300	1382	0	1041
Rhode Island	5	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	1005	2933	0	0	0
South Carolina	1	0	0	4	4	8	8	20	18	17	5164	4509	3675	7298	5945
South Dakota	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2881	1277	15	1189
Tennessee	2	0	2	3	0	2	0	3	4	3	1850	0	973	575	1284
Texas	10	0	0	0	11	5	4	4	8	1	3522	1402	864	0	1322
Utah	0	0	0	5	3	1	1	1	2	1	0	1987	255	0	324
Vermont	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	6776	4283	1615	1887	0
Virginia	6	0	0	2	0	4	5	7	1	2	2927	0	884	924	69
Washington	9	0	0	1	0	1	3	1	1	2	0	2346	0	0	153
West Virginia	2	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	997	549	59	0	0
Wisconsin	3	0	0	2	3	3	4	4	1	7	14830	12755	1359	0	2426
Wyoming	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	706	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>216989</b>	<b>209576</b>	<b>51681</b>	<b>39539</b>	<b>44445</b>

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