

# Cultural Trauma, Sexism, and the 2016 Election

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## Abstract

The results of the US presidential election of 2016 came as a surprise to many Americans. While Hillary Clinton won the popular vote, Donald Trump won the most votes in the electoral college, making him President (Merica, 2017). The purpose of this study is to examine the changes in attitudes of people who voted for Trump and people who did not vote for Trump. We predict that people who did not vote for Trump will decrease in their beliefs that the American political system is legitimate and just and that they will increase in their sexist beliefs. We will test these hypotheses through surveying an undergraduate sample and analyzing archival data from the American National Election Studies.

## Introduction

The 2016 US presidential election was unprecedented in many senses; the purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of system justification (SJ) on sexism as a function of vote choice. We predict that people who did not vote for the winning candidate will decrease in SJ and increase in sexism.

## Background

**Cultural Trauma** – changes at a societal level that are sudden and rapid, radical, have traceable origins, and are unexpected (Sztompka, 2000)

**System Justification** – explains how and why people view the social and political hierarchy as basically fair and legitimate (Jost & Kay, 2005). In this study, we are using SJ as a proxy measure for the “crisis of legitimacy” facet of cultural trauma theory.

**Sexism** – prejudice against someone (or a group) on the basis of sex and/or gender (Swim et al., 1995)

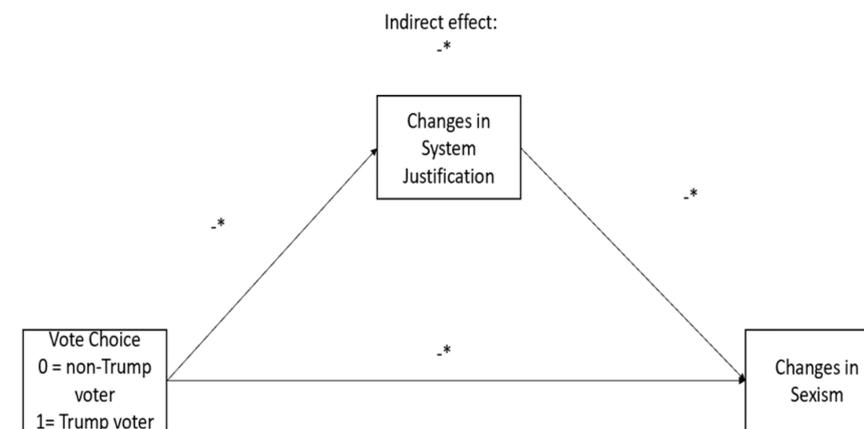
## Methods

•We will administer questions from the American National Election Studies (ANES) questionnaire along with the items from the System Justification Scale (Kay & Jost, 2003), Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996), and the Modern Sexism Scale (Swim et al., 1995) to an undergraduate sample (N = 400)

•We will analyze the ANES data for vote choice, system justification-related items, and sexism-related items

## Hypothesis

1. Compared to people who voted for the winning candidate, people who did not vote for the winning candidate in 2016 will show a decrease in system justification scores after the election.
2. Compared to people who voted for the winning candidate, people who did not vote for the winning candidate in 2016 will show an increase in sexism after the election.
3. The increases in sexism in non-Trump voters from Time A to Time B (measured via difference in sexism score between Time A and Time B) will be explained by lower system justification scores (mediation model).



## Projected Results

We expect to see a decrease in system justification scores among people who did not vote for the winning candidate in 2016. We also expect to see increases in sexism among voters who did not vote for the winning candidate. We expect to find a direct effect of vote choice on sexism, where Trump voters in general are highest in sexism among all voters.

## Implications

If we find a direct effect of vote choice on sexism and an indirect effect of SJ on sexism as a function of vote choice, this indicates a conservative shift in the American public (Bonnano & Jost, 2006). This study is a strict test of cultural trauma theory; if we find evidence for changes in system justification and sexism, this lends credibility to the notion of a conservative shift. A conservative shift can have real impacts on system justification endorsement and sexist attitudes at a societal level.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to Greg and Dr. Bosson for all your help with this project. Thank you to the American National Election Studies for their data.

## Further information

Please email [jordanthomps@usf.edu](mailto:jordanthomps@usf.edu) if you have a question or comment. References available upon request.