The American Viewer:
Political Consequences of Entertainment Media

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*A*merican voters consume an astounding amount of entertainment media, yet its political consequences are often neglected. We argue that this ostensibly apolitical content can create unique opportunities for politicians to build parasocial ties with voters. We study this question in the context of Donald Trump's unconventional political trajectory and investigate the electoral consequences of The Apprentice. Using an array of data—content analysis, surveys, Twitter data, open-ended answers—we investigate how this TV program helped Trump brand himself as a competent leader and foster viewers trust in him. Exploiting the geographic variation in NBC channel inertia, we find that exposure to The Apprentice increased Donald Trumps electoral performance in the 2016 Republican primary. We discuss the implications of these findings in light of the rise of non-conventional politicians in this golden age of entertainment.

Word Count: 9798

"[I]t is difficult to distinguish politics from entertainment, and dangerous to try."
- *Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association* (2011)

"Trump got elected. But TV became president.
- James Poniewozik, *Audience of One* (2019)

*A*mericans consume a tremendous amount of television. The 96% of households with a television (Nielsen 2020) spend between eight and nine hours a day watching television (Madrigal 2018), with individuals averaging over four hours of television per day—over half of Americans' total leisure time (ATUS 2019).[1] Even in an increasingly digital world, no medium can compete with television's reach and potential to communicate with the American public. In this light, the extensive scholarship considering broadcast media's role in American politics should be no surprise. Research has amassed an impressive body of evidence estimating the media effects on

[1]And these estimates only partially account for modern media exposure through smartphones and streaming services.

election outcomes (Hopkins and Ladd 2014; Martin and Yurukoglu 2017), polarization (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013; Levendusky 2013), agenda setting (Boydstun 2013), and elite behaviors (Clinton and Enamorado 2014).[2]

While the outcomes differ, most previous studies have focused on the effect of *the news media* on political outcomes. Yet with the advent of cable television and the internet, the media landscape has changed dramatically. Fewer and fewer are tuning in to traditional news (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013; Bakshy et al. 2015; Flaxman et al. 2016; Van Aelst et al. 2017). Audiences for the evening newscasts, once the most watched time slot, have dropped by 31% in the past decade alone (Moskowitz 2021). Our fragmented media environment provides countless alternatives to conventional news coverage, breaking its' previous monopoly over content and allowing the less politically attentive to choose entertainment instead. Despite a handful of studies that examine the effect of entertainment on political attitudes—ranging from foreign policy knowledge (Baum 2011) to the perceived legitimacy of radical political action (Jones and Paris 2018), from beliefs in the American Dream (Kim 2023) to politicized views of ESPN (Peterson and Muñoz 2022)—the extent to which entertainment media shape contemporary electoral politics remains largely unknown.

In this paper, we bridge neighboring theories in political science and communication to conceptualize the potential power of entertainment media in the realm of electoral politics. As most voters lack personal interactions with politicians, the candidate-voter connections are primarily parasocial. We argue that entertainment media offer unique opportunities for politicians to build parasocial ties with voters, not only because Americans primarily consume entertainment over the news but also because it provides some of the only uncontested, "one-sided information flows" (Zaller 1992). Accepted without much resistance in an ostensibly apolitical context, these considerations can then be accessed in more explicitly political arenas.

We begin by describing how entertainment media provided Trump the opportunity to develop a public persona that would benefit his eventual political career. For 11 years, *The Apprentice* presented Trump to an audience of millions as "America's Boss" — a successful businessman; a savvy negotiator; a tough, but supportive mentor; adept at reaching profitable deals in high-pressure situations. While scholars have presented a range of compelling explanations for his unconventional path to the White House (Inglehart and Norris 2017; Hochschild 2018; Sides et al. 2019), we use an eclectic array of data to describe how this program fostered a favorable image of Donald Trump, which would in turn propel his successful, insurgent 2016 campaign.

We then turn to national survey data to probe the mechanism of parasocial ties. Using a survey of white voters conducted before the 2016 presidential election, we find that regular viewers of the program were more likely to trust Trump, feel a personal connection to him, and reject information critical of his candidacy. Open-ended answers further reveal that avid *Apprentice* viewers were explicitly relying on aspects of his television persona, such as his business experience and leadership potential, to explain their support. In contrast, non-viewers supporting Trump were more likely to evaluate his campaign along more typical partisan dimensions.

Next, by exploiting the geographic variation in viewership induced by channel inertia—the estimated spillover in ratings driven by the previous time block's viewership—we show that exposure to *The Apprentice* increased Trump's electoral performance in the 2016 Republican primary. Such effects do not exist for other Republican presidential candidates in either general or primary elections, or other primetime TV shows on NBC during the same TV season. We report no effect of *The Apprentice* on the general election, a finding that sheds light on the possible scope conditions of entertainment media

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[2]Not to mention the substantial work demonstrating the small (Coppock et al. 2020), short-lived (Hill et al. 2013), but persistent (Sides et al. 2022) effects of campaign advertising.

effects; they might matter more in a setting where partisan heuristics are lacking.

Together, these results suggest that *The Apprentice* allowed Trump to cultivate a reputation that would bear fruit for his nascent political career through the parasocial ties he established with the viewers/future voters. By providing a deluge of uncontested, seemingly apolitical considerations, entertainment media provides a unique route into the public consciousness.

Early theories of media effects relied on "an implicit acceptance of the media regime in place at the time" (Williams and Delli Carpini 2011, 63)—an era where Walter Cronkite was a household name and *60 Minutes* was America's most watched television program. This tradition often discounts entertainment media as politically irrelevant, driving a research agenda removed from the daily media diet of ordinary Americans. But in this high-choice media environment where public attention increasingly turns from news and toward entertainment (Boydstun and Lawrence 2020; Chadwick 2017; Krupnikov and Ryan 2022; Nielsen et al. 2023; Prior 2013), what entertainers can accumulate is political power (Street 2004; Archer et al. 2020). Our findings here serve as a sober reminder that the study of the American voter can't be removed from the study of the American viewer.

THE POWER OF ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA IN BUILDING PARASOCIAL TIES

Does entertainment media matter for the study of politics? By any metric, the American consumption of entertainment dwarfs that of the news (Jones and Paris 2018). Yet the prevailing assumption has been that the political consequences of entertainment would be trivial because of its scattered messaging and seemingly apolitical narrative. The substantive content of entertainment programs was deemed too sporadic to produce large-scale message effects of the sort described by the classic persuasion paradigm (Bennett and Iyengar 2010) or a force that simply dilutes news media effects (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013) and distracts the public from current affairs (Prior 2013).

This isn't to suggest that entertainment can't deflect or dilute. For example, Velez and Newman (2019) explore the effect of Spanish-language television (SLTV) within Latino communities, focusing specifically on its introduction in North Carolina and Florida. By comparing Latinos residing just inside and outside the stations reception boundaries, they find that exposure to SLTV dampened political participation. Why? Because, as the authors note, very little SLTV programming is devoted to political news (p. 821).

When political science research does consider the effects of entertainment media, it focuses on its role as an alternative source of information, especially for those who avoid more traditional news. Baum (2011), for instance, argues that foreign affairs covered in "soft news" programs get viewers otherwise uninterested in politics to pay attention to international crises. Scholars have also found that exposure to satire, comedy, and talk shows can promote political learning, whether knowledge of campaign finance regulations (Hardy 2016) or recognition of political candidates (Brewer and Cao 2006; Hollander 2005).

It would be remiss not to recognize the contributions of communication studies and cultural sociology to our understanding of entertainment media effects (Appel 2008; Bryant and Miron 2002; Bartsch and Schneider 2014; Mulligan and Habel 2011). Here, scholars have long explored cultivation theory—the idea that habitual exposure to the wider entertainment media environment can affect the audiences perception of social and political realities. For instance, heavy television viewers are more likely to perceive the world as a meaner and scarier place, and support more restrictive criminal justice policies (Gerbner et al. 1986; Gerbner 1998). Similarly, exposure to prime-time dramas featuring progressive portrayals of women was found to enhance support for increased gender equality (Holbert et al. 2003) while watching science fiction programs, such as *The X-Files*, reduced trust in government (Pfau et al. 2001).

However, much of this evidence is correlational in nature, limiting our ability to make causal claims about the effects of entertainment. Some research has leveraged experimental tools to address this problem. Mulligan and Habel (2011) find that watching the film *Cider House Rules* induced more pro-choice abortion views in its audience. Jones and Paris (2018) find that exposure to dystopian narratives, such as those present in the popular young adult films *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*, increased the willingness to justify radical, even violent, forms of government resistance. Kim (2023) shows that exposure to "rags-to-riches" narratives common in reality television programs can increase viewers beliefs in the American Dream and promote tolerance for income inequality. Other scholars have utilized natural experiments to quantify the effects of entertainment, ranging from the impact of America's first blockbuster movie, *Birth of a Nation*, on white supremacist activities (Ang 2020) to the effects of cable soap opera on female school enrollment in India (Jensen and Oster 2009).

Yet it is unclear whether entertainment media can influence *electoral* politics in contemporary America. On the one hand, the powerful force of partisan identity, which increasingly aligns with racial and social identities, suggests that the impact of other factors may be negligible, if not non-existent. In this context, the idea that entertainment media could have a significant influence on voting patterns may seem a bit far-fetched. On the other hand, some empirical studies—all of them from earlier eras and different countries—highlight the potential of entertainment media. Xiong (2021) finds that exposure to Ronald Reagan as a television host in the 1950s led to greater support for his early bids for elected office. Similarly, Durante et al. (2019) find that early access to Italys Mediaset all-entertainment content increased the likelihood of voting for its founder, Silvio Berlusconi, decades later.

This evidence underscores the potential of entertainment media to shape candidate-voter connections. Just as humans form attitudes and impressions toward other people, how voters evaluate politicians tends to be grounded in interpersonal notions of attraction and familiarity. Citizens' perceptions of candidates' personality traits, such as their perceived competence, empathy, integrity, or warmth, have a well-documented electoral impact (Fridkin and Kenney 2011; Hayes 2010; Lodge et al. 1989). But as most citizens do not interact with politicians in person, the candidate-voter connections are primarily parasocial—one-sided psychological bonds viewers cognitively develop with images of people they see through mass media (Cohen and Holbert 2021; Horton and Wohl 1956; Giles 2002). While parasocial ties can form through various media experiences, including news media, the majority of evidence on the medias role in cultivating such relationships is situated within the context of entertainment media. This body of work demonstrates how parasocial interactions between audiences and celebritiesbe they actors, comedians, or show hostscan trigger various attitudinal and behavioral changes.[3]

In many ways, these parasocial relationships are particularly well-positioned to influence political behavior. First, entertainment constitutes the vast majority of the average American's media diet (Madrigal 2018; Pinsker 2018; Kim 2023), providing a greater opportunity to form these bonds. Second, messages and narratives provided through entertainment media are more likely to be accepted. For example, comedy has been shown to reduce the tendency to counterargue a persuasive message (Boukes et al. 2015), as a comedic message focuses people on processing the humor making them less likely to resist the underlying argument (Young 2008). And third, in comparison to the traditional news media environment where political candidates actively counter their opponents messages, entertainment media usually provides a one-sided information flow—notably lacking a "countervailing

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[3]Researchers have found that parasocial ties can lead to social facilitation effects (Gardner and Knowles 2008), reduce prejudice toward out-group members (Schiappa et al. 2006), and promote self-esteem and increase political efficacy (Papa et al. 2000) to name just a few.

signal" that reduces susceptibility (Zaller 1992, 267).

When celebrity candidates take center stage in the electoral processes, the lines between politics and entertainment blur, allowing non-traditional candidates to exploit the parasocial relationship they have built from popular culture (Adam and Maier 2010; Balmas and Sheafer 2015; Boydstun and Lawrence 2020). For example, WWF star Jesse Ventura can present himself as a "political action figure" ready to "battle special interest groups" (Ventura 1998). Arnold Schwarzenegger, *The Terminator* star and former Mr. Universe, can criticize the "girlie men" in Sacramento during budget negotiations (Broder 2004). Fred Thompson had little difficulty convincing Tennesseans he could serve as a statesman in the Senate, having "played a White House chief of staff, a director of the Central Intelligence Agency, a highly placed F.B.I. agent, a rear admiral, [and] even a senator" on the big screen (Bragg 1994). Mehmet Oz's major Senate campaign slogan during the pandemic was "A Dose of Reality," priming both his medical and celebrity reputations cultivated through *The Dr. Oz Show*. Yet no case could be a more prominent test of the parasocial ties that entertainment media can forge than Donald Trump and *The Apprentice*.

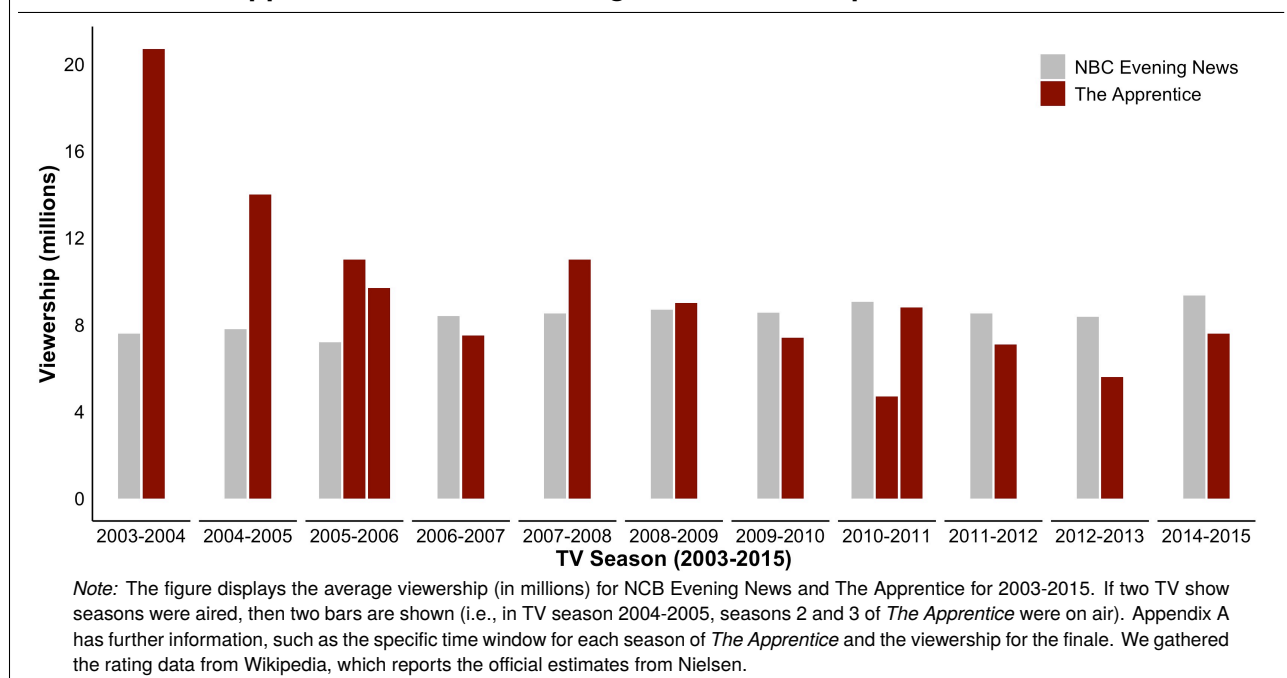## *THE APPRENTICE*: PRIME-TIME EXPOSURE TO TRUMP AS "AMERICA'S BOSS"

How did entertainment media provide Trump the opportunity to develop a public persona that would benefit his eventual political career? Many commentators from left and right have suspected the role that a popular reality TV show, *The Apprentice*, may have played (Nussbaum 2017; Poniewozik 2019).[4] Heritage (2020), for instance, rather bluntly argued: "You might think that the rise of president-elect Trump is down to sexism, or social media filter bubbles, or a country's ability to put partisan politics ahead of personal judgment, or the dying roar of a frightened white majority. But it isn't. It's because of *The Apprentice*." Though disentangling the causal link between the TV show and Trump's electoral success is not as easy as pundits would put it, we argue that exposure to *The Apprentice* gave Trump a unique opportunity to build parasocial ties with viewers (see also Gabriel et al. 2018).[5]

First, *The Apprentice* was popular. This competition-based reality TV—in which a group of contestants fight for the opportunity to run one of Donald Trump's companies—drew 28.1 million viewers at its peak popularity. Its early seasons were NBC's ratings juggernaut and nominated for the 2004 Emmy's Best Reality Television Program. As seen in Figure 1, it attracted an average viewership of around 20 million viewers in its first year, an audience nearly three times greater than *NBC Evening News* and ten times greater than *Fox News*. Though the popularity dwindled over time, it continued to attract a greater or comparable audience to the evening news until 2015 (Appendix A).

Second, with its universally positive portrayal of Trump, *The Apprentice* helped re-brand his public persona. By no means an unknown quantity, Trump had long used television as a means of brandishing his image. As early as the mid-1980s, Trump would appear as the sharp-dressed landlord or the wealthy suitor in cameo appearances on different television programs. But as Nussbaum (2017) describes, his cameos throughout the 1980s and 1990s were that of an "arrogant self-promoter", "omnipresent in pop

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[4]Post-2016 political commentary often credited *The Apprentice* for Trump's reputation as a successful businessman; his campaign tactics and acumen (Keefe 2018); and raucous, avid fan-base (Wickenden 2019). Even "the Donald's" ride down a golden escalator and into contention for the Presidency "looked like a promotional appearance for the next season of *The Apprentice*" (Kruse 2019).

[5]Here, we interpret parasocial ties broadly. One may argue that parasocial relationships usually require perceptions of much deeper realism and involvement. Here, we follow previous literature that defines parasocial ties as one-sided psychological bonds with specific media figures such as celebrities or fictional characters. See also Alrababah et al. (2021).

**FIGURE 1. The Apprentice and NBC Evening News Viewership Over Time**

Note: The figure displays the average viewership (in millions) for NCB Evening News and The Apprentice for 2003-2015. If two TV show seasons were aired, then two bars are shown (i.e., in TV season 2004-2005, seasons 2 and 3 of *The Apprentice* were on air). Appendix A has further information, such as the specific time window for each season of *The Apprentice* and the viewership for the finale. We gathered the rating data from Wikipedia, which reports the official estimates from Nielsen.

culture," but "often as a punch line". The Donald Trump of the early 2000s, fresh off public divorces and bankruptcies, was held in nothing like the esteem "America's Boss" would be in *The Apprentice*. For 11 years, *The Apprentice* presented Trump to an audience of millions as a savvy businessman and a decisive mentor.

Third, reality television provides an effective avenue for generating parasocial ties. Unlike other programming, reality TV is billed *as reality*. As Von Drehle described in his coverage of the 2016 election, "the crafted characters of reality TV experience a different kind of stardom from the TV and movie idols of the past. Fans are encouraged to feel that they know these people, not as fictional characters but as flesh and blood" (2016). Trump, in this view, is not playing the role of a successful, powerful businessman, he *is* a successful, powerful businessman.

A closer look at the scripts themselves sheds light on how the *The Apprentice* contributed to revamping Trump's image. The phrases that contestants used to describe Trump throughout the thirteen seasons align with his own 2016 campaign messages. Trump is portrayed as someone who "has certainly given everybody a shortcut to the American Dream" (Season 1:Episode 1); "one of the most powerful men in the world" (S2:E1); "... a humanitarian. And somebody who's also concerned about important causes" (S4:E13); "the greatest businessman ever" (S6:E1); "the Mack Daddy of the United States" (S3:E7); "...an icon...an amazing individual and everybody looks up to [Trump]" (S7:E13); There is even a scene in which Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) lent credence to Trump's success, saying that "even when [Trump] was much younger," he knew that "[Trump] was gonna go places" (S5:E8). Season 6, aired in 2007, features a person holding a "Trump for PRESIDENT" sign.

Public attitudes toward Donald Trump were not systematically measured while he was a (mere) reality TV celebrity, but scattered surveys between 1999 and 2005 (Appendix B), hint that *The Apprentice* may have helped boost Trump's favorability ratings. After the first two seasons were aired, more than half of Americans viewed Trump favorably.

Finally, the mainstream media frequently referenced *The Apprentice* during the 2016 election cycle.

FIGURE 2. News Reference to Key Issues and *The Apprentice* During 2016 Election Cycle
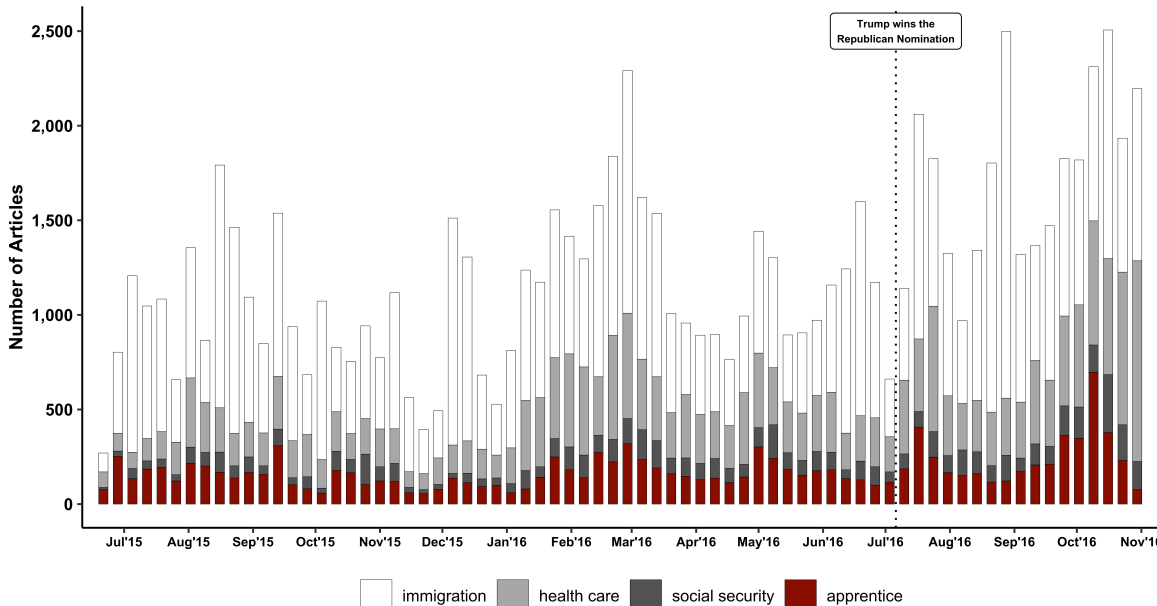
Note: The stacked bar chart displays the weekly variations in the number of news articles that mention Trump and one of the four keywords: immigration, health care, social security, and apprentice. For the apprentice search, we included references to reality television as well. The period is from June 16, 2015 (when Trump announced his candidacy for president) to November 5, 2016 (the last Saturday before the election day). We used the Nexis Uni database, which allows us to do a keyword search for all major U.S.-based national and local newspapers, news magazines, and broadcast transcripts.
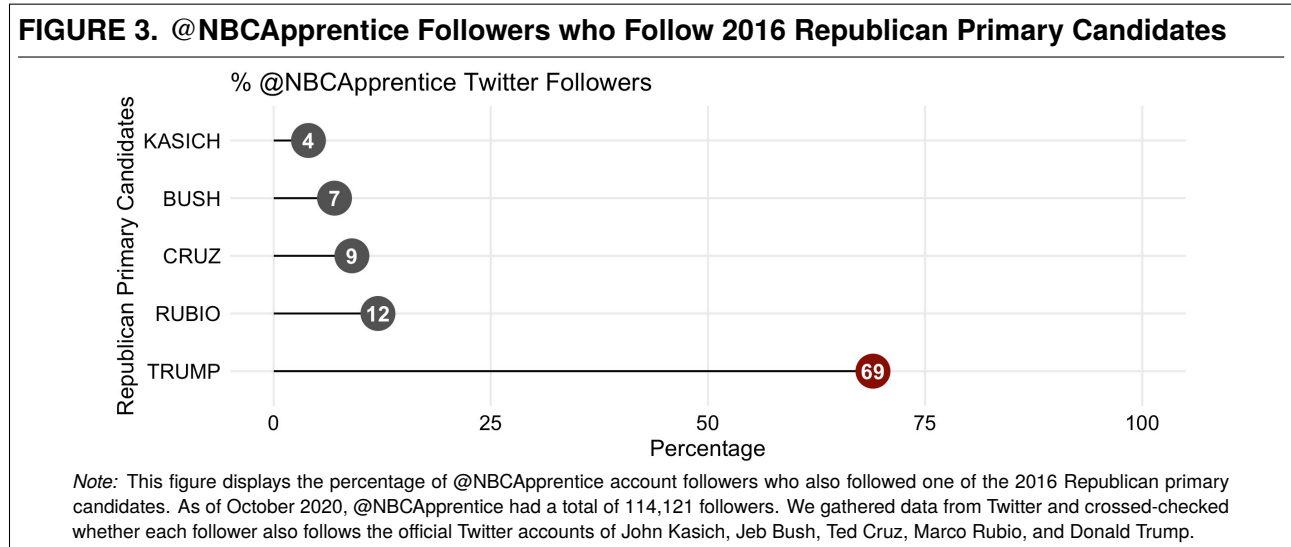
Figure 2 displays the weekly number of news articles[6] that mentioned Donald Trump and one of four issues—immigration (white), health care (light grey), social security (dark grey), and *The Apprentice* (dark red). Perhaps not surprisingly, immigration was more discussed than issues of health care and social security in the articles that refer to Trump throughout the 2016 election cycle. Yet the total number of articles that refer to *The Apprentice* or Donald Trump's former career as the reality TV show host was twice as high than the number of articles that mention social security (N=697 vs. 306). For every three articles about Trump and immigration, there was one article that mentioned Trump's reality TV program (N=1,938 vs 697). This is in sync with existing evidence that finds that the heavy mainstream media coverage of Trump (Patterson 2016), driven by the collision of celebrity politics with traditional journalism resulted in "as much clown-like coverage as serious coverage" throughout the campaign (Boydstun and Lawrence 2020).

This is not to suggest that *The Apprentice* was more potent than other substantive political issues such as immigration. Rather, our goal is to illustrate that the mainstream media often depicted Trump through the lens of his reality TV persona from *The Apprentice* or as the successful businessman that the show helped to craft in public perception.[7] Though we do not have direct empirical evidence to probe whether such reminders could strengthen the connections between candidate Trump and "America's Boss" for those who previously watched *The Apprentice*, we speculate that it is likely given the long-standing evidence on priming and cue activation in campaign communications. It is well-documented, for instance, how various explicit and implicit cues, as well as appeals to racial and gender identities, family upbringing, and former occupations, can influence the public's evaluation

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[6]We used Nexis Uni, which allows us to search for keywords across hundreds of national and local news outlets, including TV news scripts.

[7]Appendix C shows the news references to his identity as a real estate mogul and a reality TV host.

of candidates (Mendelberg 2001; Druckman 2004; Hutchings and Jardina 2009; Carnes 2013; Sides et al. 2019).

FIGURE 3. @NBCApprentice Followers who Follow 2016 Republican Primary Candidates

Note: This figure displays the percentage of @NBCApprentice account followers who also followed one of the 2016 Republican primary candidates. As of October 2020, @NBCApprentice had a total of 114,121 followers. We gathered data from Twitter and crossed-checked whether each follower also follows the official Twitter accounts of John Kasich, Jeb Bush, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and Donald Trump.

The link between Trump and *The Apprentice*—ironically activated by the mainstream media—is reflected in social media data as well. We scraped the Twitter handles of every user who follows the @NBCApprentice account (*N*=114,121 in October 2020), and determined whether each user followed any other 2016 Republican primary candidates.[8] Figure 3 below shows the percentage of the overlapping audience. We find that less than 15% of *The Apprentice* fans follow other Republican politicians, while 69% of them follow Trump on Twitter. Granted, as we do not know when a user started following Trump on Twitter, it is possible that they began to follow NBC's *The Apprentice* account after becoming a supporter of Donald Trump. However, it would be hard to explain this scenario without the psychological bond of *The Apprentice*, particularly as Trump was no longer hosting the program.

Altogether, an eclectic array of descriptive data we assembled here—viewership statistics, TV transcripts, public opinion polls, news coverage, and Twitter data—strongly suggest that Trump's candidacy could have benefited from the parasocial ties built via the entertainment media.

PROBING THE MICRO-MECHANISM OF PARASOCIAL TIES

While many have argued that *The Apprentice* contributed to the electoral success of Donald Trump, demonstrating this empirically is difficult. The first problem is a lack of data. Scholars were not thinking about the potential impact of *The Apprentice* per se, let alone thinking about the scenario of Trump running for office. Widely-used national election surveys rarely ask about people's entertainment media preferences, let alone their particular consumption of *The Apprentice*. Contemporary survey experiments that would have people watch *The Apprentice* and then measure their attitudes toward Trump would all suffer from post-treatment bias.

Given these limitations, to probe whether *The Apprentice* provided Donald Trump the opportunity to build parasocial ties with viewers, we first turn to one existing survey of white voters launched before the 2016 election—that happened to include several questions about Trump's character and, importantly, reality television consumption habits. To our knowledge, this is the only pre-election

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[8]We were able to conduct this analysis, as this was before Trump was suspended from Twitter.

survey that addressed both support for Trump and *The Apprentice* viewership.[9]

TABLE 1. The Apprentice Viewership and Attitudes Toward Trump

	Support Trump	Trump believes in his policies	Trump cares about people like me	Do not mind the Access Hollywood tape
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Frequency of Watching *The Apprentice*	0.070***	0.026*	0.050***	0.036***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.008)
General Television Habit	−0.001	0.008	−0.013	−0.016
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.009)
Preference for Reality TV	0.012	0.004	0.009	−0.001
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.006)
Demographic controls	Y	Y	Y	Y
State FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	916	916	916	916

* $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$. All outcomes are re-coded to range from 0 to 1 for ease of interpretation. See Appendix E for full results.
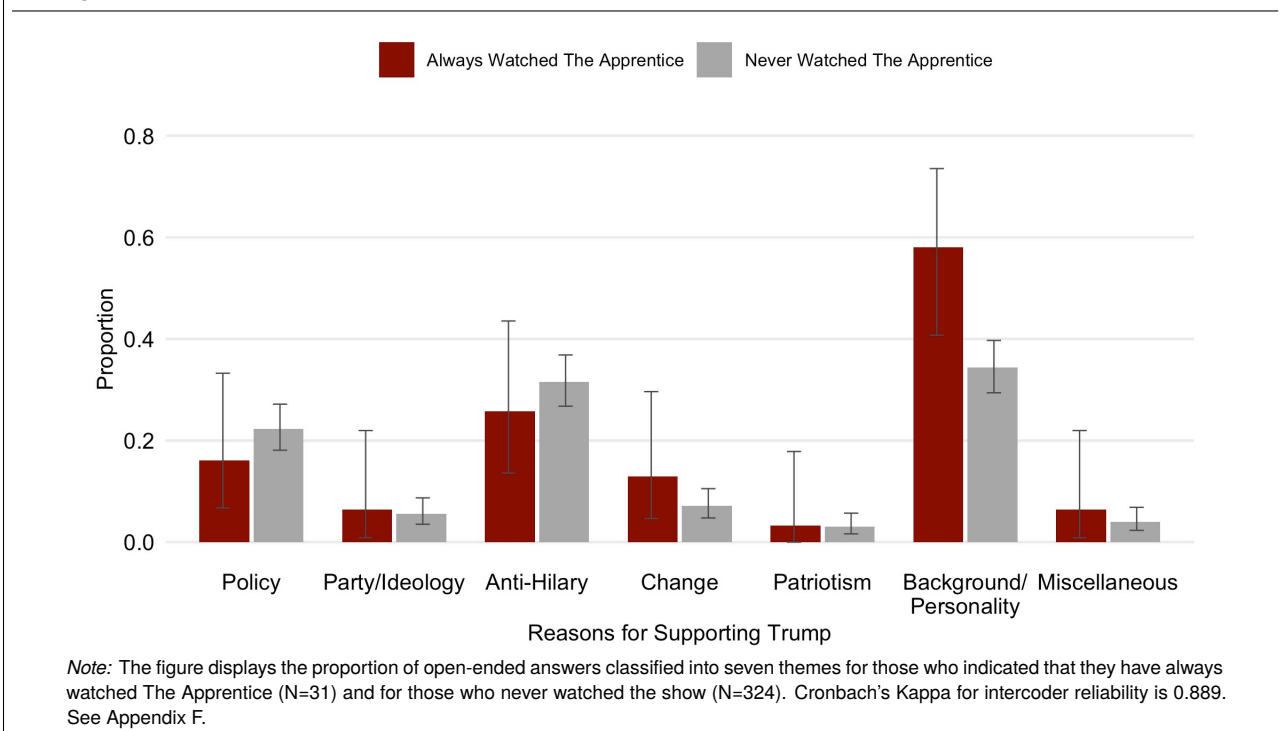

Table 1 presents the relationship between self-reported viewership of *The Apprentice* and attitudes toward Trump. *Support Trump* measures the strength of electoral support for Trump. Both *Trump believes in his policies* and *Trump cares about people like me* measure agreement with that statement. *Do not mind the Access Hollywood tape* measures how respondents' assessment of Trump was affected by the *Access Hollywood* tape (reverse coded). All outcomes have been re-coded to range from 0 to 1. We control for general television habits, preference for reality TV, political ideology, trust in politicians, as well as a host of demographic variables (age, income, education, gender[10]) and state fixed effects in each regression. Even after controlling for observables, the frequency of watching *The Apprentice* is positively correlated with all dimensions of Trump support. Frequent viewers of *The Apprentice* are more likely to say that Trump believes in his policies and cares about people like them. They are less likely to say that the *Access Hollywood* tape—in which Donald Trump bragged about groping women—negatively affected how they think of Trump.

These effects are not negligible. In our full model specification (Appendix E), we find that female voters on average are 7.3 percentage points less likely to support Trump than their male counterparts. The size of the coefficient on *The Apprentice* viewership in Column (1) is of similar magnitude. If we compare those who are avid fans—who indicated that they watched *The Apprentice* every season—to those who never watched *The Apprentice*, then the avid viewers (N=40 out of 916) are 28 percentage points more likely to support Trump. Given that 33% of the entire sample or 22% of those who are not liberal reported that they watched *The Apprentice*, the findings here shed light on how the parasocial ties built via entertainment media made Trump as a politically viable candidate in spite of a host of typically disqualifying political setbacks.

Among Trump supporters who never watched *The Apprentice*, we find frequent references to various policy issues ("Illegal immigrants", "not planning war with Russia", "Wall. Trade. Foreign policy.") or the fact that he is just a better alternative than Clinton ("He's not Hillary", "He's the

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[9]This data was first introduced and discussed in the Online Appendix of Xiong (2021). We thank Xiong for generously sharing the data. The survey was administered using the Survata platform. See Appendix D for the full questionnaire. It was conducted over the week of October 24th, collecting 932 responses. Potential respondents were screened to include only White registered voters from the United States aged 21+. Therefore, to the degree that the effect of *The Apprentice* could be heterogeneous across ethnic groups, this limits the interpretation of our results.

[10]Since this is a survey of white voters, we didn't control for race.

FIGURE 4. Content Analysis of the Open-Ended Answers for the Reasons Supporting Donald Trump

Note: The figure displays the proportion of open-ended answers classified into seven themes for those who indicated that they have always watched The Apprentice (N=31) and for those who never watched the show (N=324). Cronbach's Kappa for intercoder reliability is 0.889. See Appendix F.

only one that can save our country. Hillary belongs in jail.") in their open-ended justifications for supporting Trump. In contrast, those who always watched *The Apprentice* relied more so on his personality traits ("a lot tougher", "speaks his mind") and business expertise ("Business man and not a politician")—the Trump persona that *The Apprentice* cultivated. While the small sample size prevents a more systematic, rigorous text analysis of these open-ended answers, Figure 4 summarizes the content analysis of the open-ended answers (Cronbach's Kappa = 0.889, see Appendix F). Out of seven thematic categories, the only category that showed a meaningful difference between the avid viewers and non-viewers was the one on Trump's background and personality. While 58% of open-ended answers from avid viewers referred to Trump's personal characteristics, 34% of the answers from non-viewers contained such references.

Our goal here is not to argue that the results—both the regressions and content analysis—are causal. If a respondent indicated that she regularly watched *The Apprentice* and intended to vote for Donald Trump, we could not know whether her vote intention prompted her to claim that she used to watch the TV show. It is also possible that the correlation between exposure to *The Apprentice* and electoral support for Donald Trump could be due to some other unobservable characteristics (Fioroni et al. 2022). While this concern is partially mitigated by the small and insignicant coefficients on the impact of general television habit and preference for reality TV on supporting Trump, we now turn to a causal inference strategy using observational data to more convincingly claim that *The Apprentice* affected Trump's political prospects.

IDENTIFYING THE ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCES OF *THE APPRENTICE* USING CHANNEL INERTIA

To identify the electoral consequences of *The Apprentice*, we exploit the fact that in the early 2000s, channel inertia—viewers staying on the same channel even when a program ends—was quite common (Gershon 2013). A rich strand of social psychology research finds that the default options substantially affect viewers' choices and substantial inertia exists even when the cost of switching—such as requiring a press of a button on a remote control—is negligible (Esteves-Sorenson and Perretti 2012). As one advertising executive put, the media environment in pre-Netflix America was the one in which "you could read the phone book after Seinfeld and get a 25% viewer share."[11] Indeed, network producers designed TV programs to encourage a natural audience flow so that people can transfer from the completion of one program to the beginning of another without much resistance (Gershon 2013, Chapter 2). Such an idea is captured in the phrase "watching television" as opposed to watching a particular program; for network producers, television viewing was about promotion and information for an entire evening (Turner and Tay 2009).

Building on this insight, we exploit the fact that early seasons of *The Apprentice* used to be aired on Thursdays after popular 8pm-sitcoms *Joey* and *Will & Grace*—programs that attracted around 20 million viewers. We use the 8pm Nielsen ratings in 2004 as an instrumental variable for the ratings for the 9pm program, *The Apprentice*, as we expect those ratings are correlated due to channel inertia. In particular, we rely on ratings data during the "sweeps" periods (November, February, and May) for 2004-2005 period where two early seasons of *The Apprentice* (seasons 2 and 3) were aired.[12] We argue that this is a valid instrument as it is implausible to believe that viewership of those two sitcoms—while related to the ratings of *The Apprentice*—would affect people's vote choice in a Republican primary more than a decade later, after conditioning on a host of socio-demographic variables.[13]

Formally, this is encapsulated by the following system of equations:

$$Apprentice_i = \delta_1 Ratings\ 8pm_i + \alpha X_i + \alpha_s + u_i \tag{1}$$

$$Vote_i = \beta \widehat{Apprentice}_i + \alpha X_i + \gamma_s + \epsilon_i \tag{2}$$

The first stage regression describes how viewership of *The Apprentice* varies with the popularity of the program immediately preceding it (*Joey* or *Will & Grace*) in county i. The idea is that viewers who just finished watching the program immediately preceding *The Apprentice* might be more inclined to remain and continue watching television on the same channel. The resulting variation would be

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[11]Harvard Business School case, "Frasier" (A), 2001, p.2.

[12]We also chose this particular time period as the county-level geographic coverage of Nielsen rating data for the TV season 2003-2004 was too sparse.

[13]We rely on county-level demographic data from the U.S. Census and electoral data from Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections for our covariates. To achieve conditional exogeneity, we control for theoretically-motivated potential confounders. First, as voting patterns in America are correlated with party identification, we control for county-level vote share for the Republican Party in the 2012 presidential election. Second, building on the well-established evidence of the critical role that racial, gender, and rural identity played in the 2016 election, we control for county-level racial and gender composition as well as population size and population density. Third, given Trump's campaign rhetoric about immigration and globalization, we control for county-level unemployment rates, median household income, and the proportion of college degrees and foreign-born population. Fourth, we also control for county-level share of same-sex couples and religiosity, for the potential role that the attitudes toward LGBTQ could have played. We also take into account the population change between 2004 and 2016, captured by the logged number of the average outflow and inflow movers.

driven by channel inertia rather than explicit preferences for *The Apprentice*. In the second stage, we estimate our coefficient of interest by regressing the Trump vote share on predicted viewership of *The Apprentice*.

We argue that our instrument is correlated with vote support for Trump, but uncorrelated with the error term. People choose to watch entertainment media primarily to entertain themselves. Some of the characteristics that lead people to watch entertainment (i.e. low education) might lead them to vote for the populist political candidate, for instance. But after conditioning on relevant factors in the first stage, we find that 8pm rating is a relevant instrument, as evidenced by the strong first-stage results in Table 2. If our instrument affects our outcome through some mechanism other than our endogenous regressor, the validity of our instrument would be called into question. The exclusion restriction is difficult to verify empirically. To address the possibility that there might be some unobservable traits that affect the instrument (watching *Will & Grace* and *Joey*), the treatment (watching *The Apprentice*), and support for Donald Trump, we conduct three tests.

First, we address the possibility that existing attitudes toward the LGBTQ could affect both the likelihood of watching *Will & Grace* and electoral support for Trump in 2016. The fact that *Will & Grace*—TV show widely considered to cultivate pro-LGBTQ attitudes—was one of the lead-ins to *The Apprentice* raises the question about the validity of the instrument, particularly if the effect of viewership of *Will & Grace* on support for Trump in the 2016 primaries was at least partly mediated through attitudes toward gays and lesbians (Schiappa et al. 2006; Mason et al. 2021). To alleviate this concern, we include county-level measures of religiosity and the proportion of same-sex couples as covariates, as rough proxies for attitudes toward LGBTQ.[14]

Second, we also show that it is unlikely that attitudes toward LGBTQ were electorally consequential among Republican voters in 2016. For example, the 2016 CCES asked respondents to rate the importance of 15 different political issues. Among voters who either identified with or leaned toward the Republican Party, all considered "gay marriage" overwhelmingly a "not important" issue, regardless of which Republican candidate they supported. Indeed, it was considered the least important issue regardless of whom they supported in the primary. Moreover, these individuals' support for "allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally" was not predictive of voting for Donald Trump in the primary among registered Republicans (see Appendix G).

Third, we also address the potential concern that our instrument might be correlated with non-traditional sources of support for the Republican party since Trump was an outlier candidate. We test to see if the county-level viewership of the 8pm program is correlated with the factors that have been argued as precursors to Trumpism, such as the Tea Party movement (Skocpol and Tervo 2019) and backlash against trade liberalization (Hochschild 2016; Mutz 2018). As reported in Appendix H, we find no evidence that our instrument—8pm rating—correlates with any of these factors that may have foreshadowed Trump's candidacy.

Results

Table 1 presents our instrumental variable estimates of the effect of *The Apprentice* on two outcome measures using a two-stage least squares (2SLS) model. All regressions are weighted by the number of households with a television in each county and include state fixed effects. Column (1) presents the first-stage relationship between 8pm ratings and *The Apprentice* (9pm) ratings. This estimate indicates that 8pm ratings are indeed positively related to 9 pm ratings. The statistical significance

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[14]We controlled for the proportion of anyone who is affiliated with all kinds of religious tradition; we also try the model where we control the proportions of two religious affiliations that are known to be most anti-LGBTQevangelical protestants and Mormons, and there were no meaningful differences.

here underscores the relevance of the instrument and serves as evidence of channel inertia. The first-stage F-statistics for the excluded instrument are all over 270, which means that it is unlikely that a weak instrument biases our estimates.

TABLE 2. The Apprentice Effect on Trump Vote Share

	Apprentice Ratings OLS	Trump Vote Share			
		Primary Election		General Election	
		OLS	2SLS	OLS	2SLS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
8pm TV Show Ratings	0.593***				
	(0.036)				
The Apprentice Ratings (9pm)		0.148**	0.239*	0.00002	0.0004
		(0.049)	(0.102)	(0.0002)	(0.001)
F-Statistic			282.24		278.46
Covariates	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
State FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Model	First stage		Second stage		Second stage
N	1,065	960		1,065	

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. All regressions are weighted by the number of TV households in each county. Appendix I has full regression results. Trump Vote Share is measured as a percentage, ranging from 0 to 100.

Columns (2) and (4) show the ordinary least squares estimates. Analyzing the OLS estimates first, 9pm ratings have a positive association with Trump's vote share in the primary election (Column 2), but not in the general election (Column 4). Panel A Columns (3) and (5) present the second-stage estimates of the effect of 8 pm ratings on the Trump vote share for the Republican primary and presidential election. As shown, there is a clear causal effect of *The Apprentice* for the Trump vote share for the Republican primary. Note that our 2SLS estimates are larger than OLS estimates because our instrumental variable strategy estimates the Local Average Treatment Effect (LATE)—treatment effect among those who saw *The Apprentice* if and only if they were watching the previous show. This heterogeneity will make the IV estimates larger than the OLS estimates. Substantively speaking, the 2SLS estimate from Column (3) indicates that one standard deviation (4.83) increase in the (instrumented) *Apprentice* ratings would lead to a roughly 1 percentage-point increase in county-level vote share for Trump. In the context of a competitive primary election with more than ten candidates, these effects are not insignificant. In the Iowa caucus, the difference in vote share between Trump and Rubio was 1 percentage point. In Arkansas, Trump's overall vote share was 33% while it was 31% for Cruz. Considering the winner-take-all delegate allocation in Republican primaries, these increases can lead to dramatic changes in primary outcomes.[15]

But one might wonder whether those who watch television, not *The Apprentice* per se, are inherently different from those who don't. Those fundamental differences somehow made them more prone to voting for Trump. For instance, frequent TV viewers might be more vulnerable to populist rhetoric (Durante et al. 2019). We address this concern by exploiting the fact that later in the 2004-2005 TV season (that is, July 2005), at 9pm, instead of *The Apprentice*, *Will & Grace* was aired—followed by

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[15]In Appendix I, we also show the null effects of *The Apprentice* on the campaign donation (logged) for Trump during the primary and general elections. We interpret these null effects to be consistent with the image Trump cultivated in *The Apprentice*—a successful businessman—and re-ignited throughout the election cycle. Trump has made self-funding a major selling point, and used it as proof that, unlike other politicians, hes not beholden to anyone, whether it's special interests or lobbyists: "I don't need anybody's money. I'm using my own money. I'm not using the lobbyists. I'm not using donors. I don't care. I'm really rich."[16]

TABLE 3. No Effect of Another NBC 9pm Program (*Will & Grace*) on Support for Trump

| | Trump Vote Share | | | |
| | Primary | | General | |
	(1) OLS	(2) 2SLS	(3) OLS	(4) 2SLS
Will & Grace (July 9pm) Ratings	−0.051	−0.200	−0.0002	−0.0003
	(0.059)	(0.148)	(0.0003)	(0.001)
F-Statistic	176.26		193.17	
Covariates	Y		Y	
State FE	Y		Y	
N	960		1,065	

Note: * $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$. All regressions are weighted by the number of TV households and include state fixed effects. Appendix J has full regression results.

Joey (8pm-9pm). If there is something about those who watch television at 9pm that made them more likely to support for Trump–regardless of *The Apprentice*, then we would see the significant effects when we use the July 9pm ratings data. We find that both a simple OLS regression and an instrumental variable regression show no effect, as shown in Table 3.

We also conduct placebo tests where we use the same IV specification but look at the vote share of the major candidates for the previous election's Republican primary. As seen in Table 4, the results are either null or substantively not meaningful. The (instrumented) *The Apprentice* ratings seem to have tangential, negative effects on Gingrich's primary vote share, but the size of the 2SLS coefficient (-0.001) is a fraction of the one predicting Trump's primary vote share (0.239). We find these placebo tests reconfirming our main findings on the unique role of *The Apprentice* in cultivating support for Trump.

TABLE 4. The Apprentice Effect on Republican Primary Candidates in 2012

| | Romney Share | Santorum Share | Gingrich Share | Paul Share |
	(1) 2SLS	(2) 2SLS	(3) 2SLS	(4) 2SLS
The Apprentice Ratings (9pm)	0.002	−0.001	−0.001[+]	0.0002
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Covariate	Y	Y	Y	Y
State FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	1,022	1,022	1,022	1,022

Note: + $p<0.1$, * $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$. All regressions are weighted by the number of TV households and include state fixed effects. Appendix K has full regression results.

It is also worth reflecting on how our LATE relates to our underlying theory of parasocial relationships. These relationships are typically characterized by strong, *habitual* connections with media figures. This could appear at odds with our estimand in the instrumental variable analysis, which identifies the impact of *incidental* viewership of *The Apprentice*. However, this is why we focus on early ratings for *The Apprentice*. We think it reasonable to assume that the 2004 compliers are more likely to become habitual viewers (in later years) than non-viewers. The incidental viewership induced by channel intertia would not have immediately sparked the parasocial ties, but increased the opportunity for them to form. By the end of Trump's tenure on *The Apprentice*, it becomes more difficult to make causal arguments about exposure to the program.

In many ways, our approach echoes those of studies of Fox News, which use channel positioning as an instrumental variable. This approach is based on the observation that viewers are more inclined to watch Fox News when it's assigned a lower channel number (Ash and Poyker 2023; Li and Martin

2022; Martin and Yurukoglu 2017). However, once viewers become familiar with Fox News' channel number, cease channel surfing, and start directly selecting Fox News, they are no longer the 'compliers' in an IV analysis. Despite this shift, these studies remain insightful regarding the influence of Fox News on viewers who initially discovered the channel by chance, while follow-up observational studies can shed light on the impact of Fox News on its habitual audience.

Similarly, we pair our correlational evidence on the effects of habitual viewership with our better-identified effects of incidental viewership to suggest that Donald Trump was able to cultivate a politically relevant persona from his tenure on *The Apprentice*. By exposing "America's Boss" to millions of Americans over many years, we believe his persona was transmitted into the public's consciousness, providing Trump fertile ground for his 2016 election.

DISCUSSION

Donald Trump's unprecedented electoral success has produced no shortage of scholarly explanations. Some work highlights the very predictable nature of the 2016 election (Dassonneville and Tien 2021), while others have attributed his rise to numerous specific factors, including white working-class economic anxieties (Porter 2016); long-term economic deprivation (Gest et al. 2018); exposure to greater trade competition (Ballard-Rosa et al. 2021), attitudes surrounding race, ethnicity, and religion (Lajevardi and Abrajano 2019; Reny et al. 2019; Sides et al. 2019); and the status threat and cultural backlash felt by white voters in the face of growing domestic diversity and globalization (Inglehart and Norris 2017; Mutz 2018). All of these factors contributed to Trump's election, but our evidence suggests another: the consequences of entertainment media.

We argue that *The Apprentice* allowed Donald Trump to form parasocial bonds with his audience and one-day electorate. Using a pre-election survey of white voters, we show that regular viewers of the program were more likely to feel connected with Trump and reject negative information about him than other white respondents. They were also more likely to rely explicitly on aspects of his business mogul persona in describing their support for his campaign. Using the estimated effect of spillover ratings, we then show that exposure to *The Apprentice* fostered electoral support for Donald Trump in the 2016 Republican primary.

Granted, each piece of evidence alone is an imperfect test of our hypothesis: Nielsen's ratings data back in 2004 is incomplete; the survey of white voters was conducted right before the general election, instead of the primary, and due to its sampling frame is unrepresentative of the electorate at-large; the open-end responses are too sparse for more systematic text analysis; and the potential priming mechanism is speculative. Yet taken together all available data we could gather, we interpret our findings as evidence that Donald Trump's role as "America's Boss" on *The Apprentice* provided him with the public credibility necessary to secure an advantage in the Republican nomination in 2016.

We find little evidence that *The Apprentice* increased campaign contributions to the Trump campaign or improved his performance in the general election, suggesting possible scope conditions for entertainment. Theses null effects in the general election likely reflect classic explanations of voting behavior—ranging from partisan identity to the state of the national economy. Yet in an electoral setting lacking partisan heuristics, where voters struggled to differentiate him ideologically (Eady and Loewen 2021), Trump, like all celebrity candidates, came with the natural advantage of built-in ties and familiarity with voters. To the extent that voters follow party cues regardless of who the candidate is for a presidential election, then the power of entertainment media to influence the nomination is all the more consequential.

Some have argued that Donald Trump's unprecedented success was in many ways an anomaly, a

reality TV star who stumbled his way into the White House. However, the use of entertainment media to propel political campaigns well predates Trump's success. From 1954 to 1961, Ronald Reagan hosted *General Electric Theater*, which at its peak was viewed by over 25 million households per week. Using CBS signal strength as a proxy for viewership, Xiong (2021) finds that exposure to this ostensibly apolitical programming increased Reagan's electoral performance in the 1976 Republican primaries and to a lesser extent his gubernatorial and presidential general elections. In 1988, Salvatore "Sonny" Bono leveraged his fame to become mayor of Palm Springs, and later a member of Congress. Sean Duffy, once a cast member in a MTV reality show *The Real World: Boston*, has been serving as the U.S. Representative for Wisconsin's 7th congressional district since 2011. From Jesse Ventura to Al Franken, from Arnold Schwarzenegger to Cynthia Nixon, entertainment has and continues to serve as an avenue for candidate emergence (Wright 2019). These are not isolated incidents. As Knecht and Rosentrater (2021) show, there has been a steady increase in the number of celebrity candidates seeking elected office in the United States since the 1980s (see Appendix L). Increasingly blurred boundaries between entertainment and politics mean that the actors from one space can easily enter and shape the other with increasing frequency (Lawrence and Boydstun 2017).

Nor is this trend unique to American politics. Durante et al. (2019) leverage the staggered introduction of Silvio Berlusconi's Mediaset all-entertainment television programming to show that it increased support for his party persistently over five elections. Jimmy Morales, who served as president of Guatemala (2016-2020), rose to fame starring in the comedy television program *Moralejas*; Marjan Sarec, who served as the Prime Minister of Slovenia (2018-2020), began as a political satirist and impressionist; twin brothers and child actors Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński would later co-found the Polish Law and Justice party and serve concurrently as President and Prime Minister of Poland, respectively; George Weah, often described as one of the greatest African football players of all time, served as the President of Liberia. Positions of celebrity in mass entertainment often serve as springboards to public office and political power around the globe.

What these celebrity politics portend for democracy, however, remains unclear. On the one hand, the influence of entertainment can foster and reinforce democratic norms. Long before Volodymyr Zelensky was elected as the president of Ukraine, his comedy show was watched by millions of viewers across countries previously colonized by the Soviet Union. His previous career is viewed as something that de-polarized the country in terms of language and forged a nationalist Ukrainian identity (Pisano 2022). He used entertainment to foster a new "capacious form of patriotism focusing on love for Ukraine," without which "the country might not have unified" in the face of Russian invasion (Pisano 2023). Here we can see the tremendous potential of entertainment—accepted without much resistance in an ostensibly apolitical context, these attitudes can make or break a democratic state.

Meanwhile, we see an important parallel between the increasing prevalence of populist celebrity candidates who campaign as "outsiders" and the rise in polarization, nativism, and the politics of othering (see also Durante et al. 2019; Lindstaedt 2020; Hameleers et al. 2017). Relying on public support unmediated by traditional political institutions, these leaders can drive dramatic, heterodox shifts in mass opinion and public policy. For example, long the party of free trade, Trump's protectionist platform (Bown and Irwin 2019) drove Republicans to adopt anti-free trade positions (Essig et al. 2021). Trump's trade war with China reportedly cost the U.S. economy nearly a quarter million jobs, not to mention a tremendous amount of uncertainty in the world of diplomacy (Pettis 2021).

Many keen observers of politics from Harold Lasswell to the thinkers of the Frankfurt School have long speculated that popular culture *is* political, significantly affecting how average citizens understand their political environment (Dorzweiler 2017). However, the consumption of non-political media has sparked debates more attuned to how voters make political decisions given limited information, rather than how entertainment media affects their political behaviors (Delli Carpini 2014; Van Zoonen 2005).

American viewers have been tuning in nonetheless, with politics happening there all along.

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ONLINE APPENDIX

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APPENDIX A. *THE APPRENTICE* RATINGS

We gathered this data from Wikipedia, which reports the publicly released/available Nielsen ratings.

Table A1. The Apprentice Ratings									
S.	Winner	Winner's Project/ Charity	Time Slot	Season Premiere	Season Finale	TV Season	Rank	Viewers (millions)	Finale Viewers (millions)
1	Bill Rancic	Trump Tower Chicago	Thursday 9:00 pm	8-Jan-04	15-Apr-04	2003-04	7	20.7	28.1
2	Kelly Perdew	Trump Place	Thursday 9:00 pm	9-Sep-04	16-Dec-04	2004-05	11	16.1	16.9
3	Kendra Todd	Palm Beach Mansion	Thursday 9:00 pm	20-Jan-05	19-May-05	2004-05	15	14	14
4	Randal Pinkett	Trump Entertainment	Thursday 9:00 pm	22-Sep-05	15-Dec-05	2005-06	38	11	12.8
5	Sean Yazbeck	Trump SoHo	Monday 9:00 pm	27-Feb-06	5-Jun-06	2005-06	51	9.7	11.3
6	Stefanie Schaeffer	Cap Cana	Sunday 10:00 pm	7-Jan-07	22-Apr-07	2006-07	75	7.5	10.6
7	Piers Morgan	Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund	Thusday 9:00 pm	3-Jan-08	27-Mar-08	2007-08	48	11	12.1
8	Joan Rivers	God's Love We Deliver	Sunday 9:00 pm	1-Mar-09	10-May-09	2008-09	52	9	8.7
9	Bret Michaels	American Diabetes Association	Sunday 9:00 pm	14-Mar-10	23-May-10	2009-10	59	7.4	9.3
10	Brandy Kuentzel	VIP Golf Tournament	Thusday 10:00 pm	16-Sep-10	9-Dec-10	2010-11	113	4.7	4.5
11	John Rich	St. Jude Children's Research Hospital	Sunday 9:00 pm	6-Mar-11	22-May-11	2010-11	46	8.8	8.3
12	Arsenio Hall	Magic Johnson Foundation	Sunday 9:00 pm	18-Feb-12	20-May-12	2011-12	73	7.1	6
13	Trace Adkins	American Red Cross	Sunday 9:00 pm	3-Mar-13	19-May-13	2012-12	84	5.6	5.3
14	Leeza Gibbons	Leeza's Care Connection	Monday 8:00 pm	4-Jan-15	16-Feb-15	2014-15	67	7.6	6.1

APPENDIX B. PUBLIC OPINION POLLS ON TRUMP

Figure B1. Public opinion polls on Donald Trump before and after The Apprentice
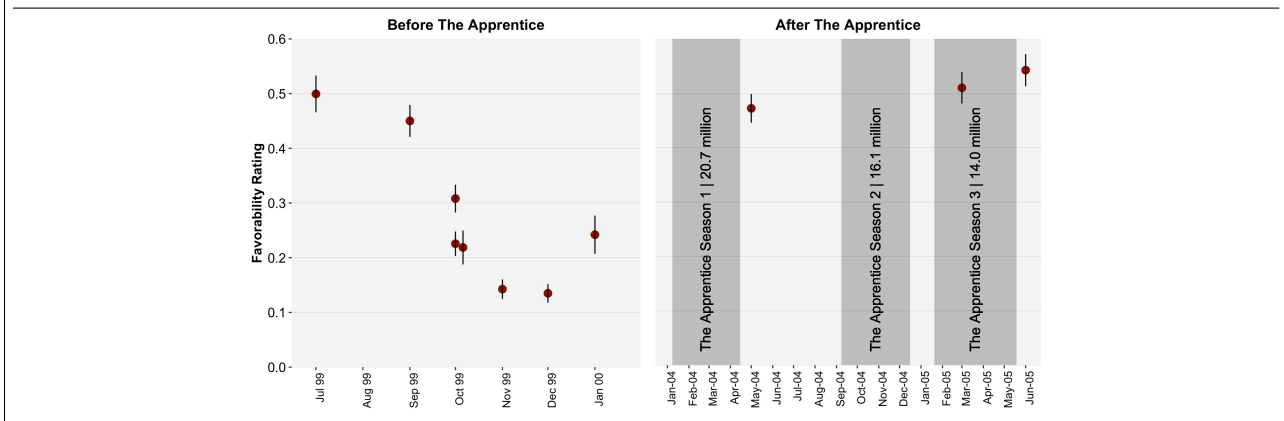
Table B1. Data Source

Survey Source	Date	Link
Time/CNN/Yankelovich Partners Poll	July 1999	Roper Center
Gallup Poll	September 1999	Roper Center
NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll	October 1999	Roper Center
ABC News Poll	October 1999	Roper Center
CBS News/New York Times Poll	October 1999	Roper Center
CBS News/New York Times Poll	November 1999	Roper Center
CBS News Poll	December 1999	Roper Center
ABC News/Washington Post Poll	January 2000	Roper Center
NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll	May 2004	Roper Center
FOX News/Opinion Dynamics Poll	March 2005	Roper Center
Gallup Poll	June 2005	Roper Center

APPENDIX C. LEXIS NEXIS KEYWORD SEARCH

Figure 2 isn't to suggest that *The Apprentice* was more potent than other substantive political issues such as immigration. Rather, our goal is to illustrate that the mainstream media often depicted Trump through the lens of his reality TV persona from *The Apprentice* or as the successful businessman that the show helped to craft in public perception. This intertwining of his business success with the show's format played a pivotal role in reinforcing his image as a successful and authoritative figure, making the distinction between his identity as a real estate mogul and his role in *The Apprentice* somewhat artificial for the purposes of our analysis. Given this context, we think that our focus on *The Apprentice* inherently incorporates an examination of how Trump's real estate achievements were presented and perceived.

Figure C1. News Reference to *The Apprentice* and Trump's Real Estate Background During 2016 Election Cycle

Note: The stacked bar chart displays the weekly variations in the number of news articles that mention Trump and two keywords: apprentice, real estate, and both. For the apprentice search, we included references to reality television as well. The period is from June 16, 2015 (when Trump announced his candidacy for president) to November 5, 2016 (the last Saturday before the election day). We used the Nexis Uni database, which allows us to do a keyword search for all major U.S.-based national and local newspapers, news magazines, and broadcast transcripts.

Figure C1 above shows the stacked bar chart, which displays weekly variations in the number of news articles that mention 1) *Donald Trump* and *The Apprentice*, 2) *Donald Trump* and *Real Estate* and 3) *Donald Trump*, *Real Estate*, and *The Apprentice*. As shown, there were roughly a similar number of articles that mention Trump as a real estate mogul and as the host of *The Apprentice*. There were also articles that explicitly mention both, albeit in smaller quantities. Mentions of his real estate experience and tenure on *The Apprentice* compare to the coverage of major campaign issues like immigration and health care. We thank Reviewer 3 for the suggestions.

APPENDIX D. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Which of the following describes your ethnicity? [White or Caucasian/Hispanic or Latino/Black or African American/Asian/Pacic Islander/Native American/Other] screening question.

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received. [Nursery school to 8th grade/Some high school, no diploma/High school graduate, diploma or GED/Some college credit, no degree/Associate degree/Bachelors degree/Masters degree or above/No schooling completed] referred to as Highest education

What was your total household income before taxes last year? [Less than 25, 000/25,000 to 34, 999/35,000 to 49, 999/50,000 to 74, 999/75,000 to 99, 999/100,000 to 149, 999/150,000 or more] referred to as Household income.

Please position yourself on the following political spectrum: [Very Liberal/Moderately Liberal/Moderately Conservative/Very Conservative/Apolitical] referred to as Political Aliation and Apolitical dummy.

Which candidate would you rather vote for in the 2016 Presidential election? [Hillary Clinton/Donald Trump] referred to as Trump vote.

How strongly do you support candidate named in rst question? [1/2/3/4/5] referred to as Trump vote.

Is there anything in particular about candidate named in rst question that might make you want to vote for him/her? [Free Response]

Please position yourself on the following political spectrum. [Very Liberal/Moderate Liberal/Moderate Conservative/Very Conservative/Apolitical] referred to as Political aliation.

How did Donald Trumps comments regarding women to Billy Bush on the Access Hollywood bus aect your perception of him? [Very Negatively/Negatively/Neutrally/Positively/Do not know about comments] referred to as Trump negatives.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Donald Trump believes in his policies. [Strongly agree/Somewhat agree/Neither agree, nor disagree/Somewhat disagree/Strongly disagree] referred to as Politician trust.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Politicians keep their promises to their voters. [Strongly agree/Somewhat agree/Neither agree, nor disagree/Somewhat disagree/Strongly disagree] referred to as Trump trust.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Donald Trump cares about people like me. [Strongly agree/Somewhat agree/Neither agree, nor disagree/Somewhat disagree/Strongly disagree] referred to as Trump anity.

The full set of television preferences and prior Trump knowledge are provided below. These information serve as explanatory variables.

How frequently do you watch television? [Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never] referred to as Television preference.

On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you enjoy reality TV programs? [1/2/3/4/5] referred to as Reality tv preference.

Please list some of your favorite television programs [Free response]

How frequently did you watch TV shows The Apprentice or Celebrity Apprentice? [1 Never /2/3/4/5 Every season] referred to as Apprentice.

APPENDIX E. TABLE 1 FULL RESULTS

Table E1. *The Apprentice* Viewership and Attitudes Toward Trump

	Support Trump	Trump believes in his policies	Trump cares about people like me	Do dot mind the Billy Bush incident
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
The Apprentice viewing	0.070***	0.026*	0.050***	0.036***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.008)
General TV consumption	−0.001	0.008	−0.013	−0.016
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.009)
Preference for reality TV	0.012	0.004	0.009	−0.001
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.006)
Female	−0.073**	−0.013	−0.044	−0.053***
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.015)
Education	−0.027*	−0.008	−0.024	−0.024**
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.008)
Income	0.001	0.001	0.0002	−0.002
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.004)
Political ideology	0.184***	0.096***	0.149***	0.080***
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.006)
Age	0.014	−0.0002	0.005	−0.012*
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.005)
General trust in politicians	0.080	0.029	0.206***	0.049
	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.039)	(0.026)
Constant	−0.165	0.312*	−0.120	0.181*
	(0.132)	(0.132)	(0.124)	(0.082)
State FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	916	916	916	916

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. The table displays the OLS regression results with standard errors in parentheses. All outcomes are re-coded to range from 0 to 1 for ease of interpretation.

APPENDIX F. SELECTED OPEN-ENDED ANSWERS AND CONTENT ANALYSIS

Table F1. Selected Open-Ended Answers

Trump Supporters Who Always Watched The Apprentice (N=32 out of 541)

"Is a lot tougher more confident and more straightforward and tells it how it is"; "Straight";

"Yes he's not a politician & in my opinion most politicians are corrupt!?"

"He's smart and tells it like it is. He says the things everyone is thinking, but no one has the guts to say out loud"

"hes real and he will get this country headed back into the right direction unlike Hilary Obama and

her fake ass smile while she is thinking about bengazi" ; 'True to his word" ;

"NO BS" ; "He is honestly going to try and make our country great again!"; "Business experience" ;

"honesty" ; "Business man and not a politician. Wants lower taxes and boarder control.";

"His honesty...Business knowledge" ; "He's just different than the normal candidates";

"He's straight forward and hadn't killed anyone or stole furniture or called artistic children

"imbeciles Clinton is nothing but s liar."; "He tells it like it is and can help America"

"He seems to care more for the people then Hillary. Hillary is a liar";

"The better of the two candidates. Also he is a Republican and not a politician!"

Trump Supporters Who Never Watched The Apprentice (N=334 out of 541)

*We show a randomly selected set (32 responses)

"Good leader" ; "Jobs" ; "The alternative is Hillary" ; "Republican" ; "He's not Hillary" ; "Not Hilary";

"Other than regular politician" ; "Not a political" ; "He wants change" ; "Change";

"Illegal immigrants" ; "anti-establishment" ; "real" ; "Anyone but Hillary. He is better of the 2!;

"He's the only one that can save our country. Hillary belongs in jail." ; "His ability to manage";

"The fact that Hillary is the only other choice" ; "His lack of political ties is good for future politics";

"He is not planning war with Russia" ; "Wall. Trade. Foreign policy."

Content Analysis

Cronbach's Kappa between two coders was 0.889. Coders classified responses into:

- 1. Policy

  - Economy: 1-1 (i.e. "Economic plan", "Tax break", "Jobs")
  - Health Care: 1-2 (i.e. "abolish Obamacare", "getting rid of Obama care!")
  - Immigration: 1-3 (i.e. "Enforcing the borders", "He wants to build a wall")
  - Abortion: 1-4 (i.e. "He is pro life, which is very important to me", "Right to life")
  - Gun: 1-5 (i.e. "protecting the 2nd amendment", "Pro guns")
  - Supreme Court: 1-6 (i.e. "Supreme judges picks", "conservative judges")
  - National Security/Foreign Policy: 1-7 (i.e. "Changing America with foreign politics", "strengthening our military")
  - Corruption: 1-8 (i.e. "opening peoples eyes to corruption", "He isn't corrupt")

- 2. Party/Ideology
- 3. Anti-Hillary (i.e. "He is not Hillary Clinton", "The alternative is Hillary." This includes responses like "lesser of 2 evils","both options are bad")
- 4. Change (i.e. time for a change, he offers change so desperately needed)
- 5. Patriotism/Nationalism (i.e., he loves america, make America great again, getting america back on the right track)
- 6. Career Background (i.e. not a career politician, hes a businessman)
- 7. Personality Trait (i.e. hes true to his people", hes real", hes honest", he tells it like it is", he speaks his mind)
- 8. Miscellaneous

APPENDIX G. ATTITUDES TOWARD THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

We first note that none of the Republican primary candidates in 2016 endorsed same-sex marriage. Granted, there were candidate-level variations. Trump, for instance, pledged to protect the LGBTQ community from discrimination, and he was 'fine' with *Obergefell vs. Hodges* as the law of the land, while believed in the traditional marriage between a man and woman. By this standard, he could be classified as more pro-LGBTQ candidate, compared to, for instance, Ted Cruz who disagreed with *Obergefell vs. Hodges* decision.

But survey responses suggest LGBTQ attitudes were not meaningfully associated with 2016 Republican primary candidate preferences. 2016 CCES asked respondents to rate the importance of 15 different political issues, including the issue of gay marriage. Figure J1 shows the distribution of survey responses to the gay marriage question among Republican primary voters who reported that they voted for Trump, Cruz, Kasich, Rubio and Other. 1 indicates "Not Important at All" and 5 indicates "Very Important." As shown, regardless of which Republican candidate voters supported, gay marriage was overwhelmingly 'not important' issue.

We can turn to the same data (2016 CCES) to see what (other) issues seemed to have mattered more during the primary. Table J1 shows the mean importance level, now scaled to range from 0 (least important) to 1 (most important) for 15 different issues. We sorted the table by the issue importance among those who voted for Trump in the primary. As seen, gay marriage was the least important issue—not just for Trump voters but for all other Republican primary voters. And there was no difference between issue importance put on gay marriage among Trump primary voters and those who supported candidates other than Cruz, Kasich, and Rubio.

Figure G1. Issue Importance - Gay Marriage

Note: This figure displays the distribution of issue importance given to gay marriage among Republican primary voters. Data source: 2016 CCES
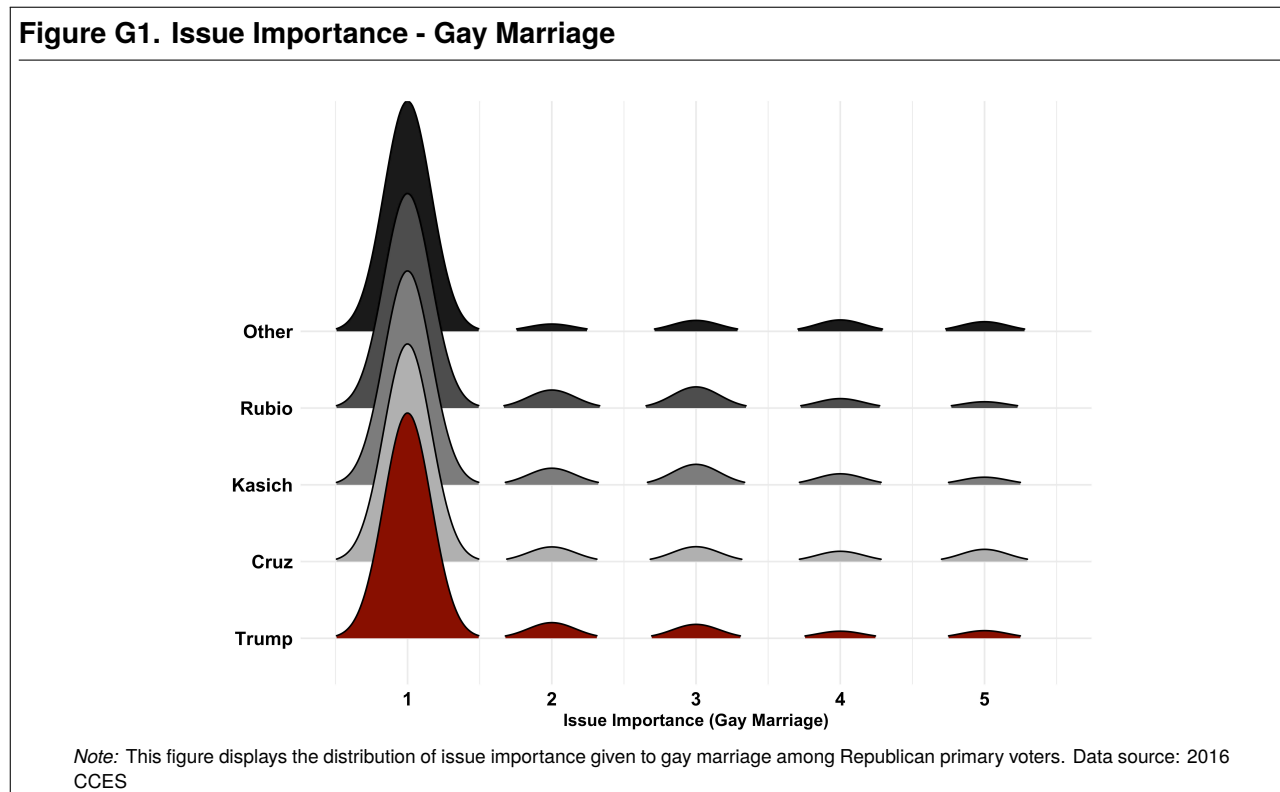
Table G1. Mean Issue Importance by Voter Support Group

	Trump	Cruz	Kasich	Other	Rubio
National Security	0.24	0.27	0.26	0.23	0.26
Corruption	0.24	0.27	0.24	0.23	0.25
Immigration	0.24	0.26	0.22	0.21	0.23
Budget Deficit	0.23	0.26	0.24	0.22	0.25
Crime	0.23	0.25	0.23	0.21	0.23
Taxes	0.23	0.26	0.24	0.22	0.24
Social Security	0.23	0.23	0.24	0.21	0.23
Jobs	0.23	0.25	0.24	0.21	0.24
Healthcare	0.22	0.23	0.24	0.21	0.23
Defense	0.22	0.24	0.22	0.20	0.23
Race Relations	0.16	0.18	0.20	0.16	0.18
Gun Control	0.16	0.18	0.19	0.15	0.17
Abortion	0.16	0.21	0.17	0.17	0.17
Environment	0.13	0.12	0.18	0.14	0.15
Gay Marriage	0.09	0.11	0.11	0.09	0.11

Yet the extent to which voters think certain issues to be important does not tell us much about their issue stance. Luckily, the same data (2016 CCES) happened to have one question that asked respondents whether they favor or oppose same-sex marriage (see Table J2). They also solicited people's policy stances on a couple of other issues–gun control, deporting immigrants, abortion, environment, crime, and tax. We ran a multivariate regression to see which issues mattered more than others, after controlling for a host of demographic variables. Among registered voters who either identified with or leaned toward the Republican Party, support for same-sex marriage was unrelated to support for Donald Trump in the 2016 Republican primary.

Table G2. Issues Predictive of Trump Support in 2016 Republican Primary

	Trump Support
pro gay marriage	−0.017
	(0.010)
pro gun control	−0.085***
	(0.020)
anti-immigration	0.132***
	(0.010)
anti-abortion	−0.080***
	(0.017)
pro-environment	0.025
	(0.013)
tougher crime policy	0.079***
	(0.019)
higher tax	0.007
	(0.011)
Covariates	Y
N	13,749

Note: * $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$
The outcome is recoded to range from 0 to 1.
Covariates include gender, education, race, income,
employment status, party ID, ideology, religion,
church attendance, news interest, and economic perceptions.

APPENDIX H. EXCLUSION RESTRICTION

Table H1: No Correlation Between the Instrument and GOP Support

	GOP Share 2012	GOP Share 2008	GOP Share 2004	GOP Diff (12-08)	GOP Diff (08-04)	GOP Diff (04-00)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
8pm TV Show Ratings	−0.0002	0.00001	0.0004	−0.0001	−0.0002	0.0004
	(0.0002)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0002)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)
2008 Rep Vote %	1.026***					
	(0.006)					
2004 Rep Vote %		0.895***				
		(0.010)				
2000 Rep Vote %			0.996***			
			(0.010)			
Population (logged)	0.001	0.025***	−0.009**	0.001	0.029***	−0.009**
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Household income (logged)	0.001	0.001	0.007	0.003	−0.011+	0.006
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.006)	(0.005)
Female %	−0.069	−0.273***	0.042	−0.079	−0.259**	0.043
	(0.049)	(0.082)	(0.075)	(0.049)	(0.086)	(0.075)
Age 65 or over %	0.047**	0.216***	0.065*	0.047**	0.241***	0.066*
	(0.017)	(0.028)	(0.026)	(0.017)	(0.030)	(0.026)
White %	0.068***	0.067***	0.047**	0.080***	0.022	0.046**
	(0.011)	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.011)	(0.019)	(0.017)
Black %	0.046***	−0.025	−0.044*	0.041***	−0.005	−0.044*
	(0.011)	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.011)	(0.020)	(0.017)
College degree %	0.032***	−0.004	−0.189***	0.019**	0.055***	−0.188***
	(0.007)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.006)	(0.011)	(0.010)
Foreign born %	0.001	0.015	0.036*	−0.002	0.029	0.037*
	(0.011)	(0.018)	(0.016)	(0.011)	(0.019)	(0.016)
Unemployed %	−0.161**	0.080	−0.043	−0.180**	0.172+	−0.039
	(0.055)	(0.092)	(0.085)	(0.056)	(0.097)	(0.085)
Outflow movers (logged)	−0.005	−0.010+	0.021***	−0.005	−0.013*	0.021***
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Inflow movers (logged)	0.0001	−0.023***	−0.010**	−0.0003	−0.024***	−0.010**
	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.004)
pop_density.x	0.00000***	0.00000	0.00000***	0.00000***	0.00000	0.00000***
	(0.00000)	(0.00000)	(0.00000)	(0.00000)	(0.00000)	(0.00000)
N	1,065	1,065	1,065	1,065	1,065	1,065

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. All regressions are weighted by the number of TV households in each county and include state fixed effects.

Table H2: Instrument is Not Correlated with Precursors of Trumpism

	Tea Party	(ln) Number of affected workers by approved TAA
	(1)	(2)
8pm TV Show Ratings	0.003	0.036
	(0.031)	(0.026)
2008 Rep. Vote %	3.069**	
	(1.007)	
2012 Rep. Vote %		−1.445
		(0.821)
Population (logged)	0.981**	2.743***
	(0.341)	(0.280)
Household Income (logged)	−3.242***	−0.171
	(0.573)	(0.470)
Female %	−23.854**	2.150
	(7.850)	(6.560)
Age over 65%	2.465	−8.916***
	(2.721)	(2.277)
White %	1.216	6.684***
	(1.890)	(1.551)
Black %	4.905**	2.834
	(1.882)	(1.515)
College degree %	6.396***	1.644
	(1.167)	(0.937)
Foreign Born %	−5.546**	0.040
	(2.023)	(1.417)
Unemployed %	−4.686	2.011
	(8.661)	(7.412)
Outflow movers (logged)	0.341	−1.165*
	(0.593)	(0.489)
Inflow movers (logged)	−0.085	−0.330
	(0.400)	(0.326)
Population density	−0.0001	0.00002
	(0.00004)	(0.00001)
N	1,028	1,065

Note: * $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$. All regressions are weighted by the number of TV households in each county and include state fixed effects.

APPENDIX I. TABLE 2 FULL RESULTS

Table I1: Table 2 Columns (2-5) Full Results

	Primary Election		General Election	
	(1) OLS	(2) 2SLS	(3) OLS	(4) 2SLS
The Apprentice Ratings	0.148**		0.0002	
	(0.049)		(0.0002)	
The Apprentice Ratings (instrumented)		0.239*		0.0004
		(0.102)		(0.001)
2012 Rep. Vote %	6.682**	6.976**	0.858***	0.859***
	(2.211)	(2.234)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Population (logged)	0.999	1.152	0.016***	0.016***
	(0.717)	(0.734)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Household Income (logged)	3.173**	2.869*	0.019**	0.018**
	(1.162)	(1.202)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Female %	−13.862	−13.956	−0.424***	−0.424***
	(16.422)	(16.452)	(0.083)	(0.083)
Over 65%	39.820***	38.859***	0.270***	0.268***
	(5.500)	(5.590)	(0.028)	(0.029)
White %	16.929***	16.768***	0.068***	0.068***
	(3.757)	(3.767)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Black %	15.036***	14.889***	−0.055**	−0.055**
	(3.691)	(3.700)	(0.019)	(0.019)
College degree %	−41.193***	−41.466***	−0.270***	−0.270***
	(2.432)	(2.451)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Foreign Born %	16.898***	17.656***	−0.052**	−0.051**
	(3.437)	(3.523)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Unemployed %	24.235	28.526	0.382***	0.389***
	(18.073)	(18.593)	(0.092)	(0.095)
Same-sex couples %	−27.047	−11.981	2.669***	2.692***
	(80.696)	(82.194)	(0.406)	(0.413)
All religions %	−12.139***	−12.352***	0.007	0.007
	(2.168)	(2.182)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Outflow movers (logged)	−0.578	−0.860	−0.016**	−0.016**
	(1.199)	(1.232)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Inflow movers (logged)	−0.567	−0.490	−0.013**	−0.013**
	(0.803)	(0.808)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Population density	−0.0001***	−0.0001***	−0.00000**	−0.00000**
	(0.00003)	(0.00003)	(0.00000)	(0.00000)
N	960	960	1,065	1,065

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. All regressions are weighted by the number of TV households in each county and include state fixed effects.

Table I2: Table 2 Column (1) First Stage Results

	9pm TV Show (Apprentice) Ratings
8pm TV Show Ratings	0.593***
	(0.036)
Population (logged)	−1.210**
	(0.404)
Household Income (logged)	1.960**
	(0.652)
Female %	2.632
	(9.197)
Age 65+ %	8.281**
	(3.148)
White %	0.321
	(2.055)
Black %	2.880
	(2.110)
College degree %	1.727
	(1.305)
Foreign Born %	−2.955
	(2.001)
Unemployed %	−46.525***
	(10.213)
Same-sex couples %	−74.189
	(41.892)
All religions %	1.551
	(1.185)
Outflow movers (logged)	1.817**
	(0.681)
Inflow movers (logged)	−0.467
	(0.461)
Population density	0.0001***
	(0.00001)
N	1,065

Note: * $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$. All regressions are weighted by the number of TV households in each county and include state fixed effects.

Table I3: No Apprentice Effects on Campaign Donation for Donald Trump

	Primary		General	
	(1) OLS	(2) 2SLS	(3) OLS	(4) 2SLS
The Apprentice Ratings	−0.003		0.005	
	(0.008)		(0.006)	
The Apprentice Ratings (Instrumented)		0.003		0.018
		(0.018)		(0.012)
2012 Rep. Vote %	2.451***	2.469***	2.329***	2.370***
	(0.381)	(0.384)	(0.248)	(0.251)
Population (logged)	0.721***	0.732***	0.747***	0.770***
	(0.127)	(0.129)	(0.082)	(0.085)
Household income (logged)	1.121***	1.100***	1.053***	1.006***
	(0.200)	(0.207)	(0.130)	(0.135)
Female %	−1.637	−1.630	−2.167	−2.151
	(2.855)	(2.856)	(1.860)	(1.866)
Age 65+ %	3.492***	3.419***	2.623***	2.459***
	(0.958)	(0.976)	(0.624)	(0.638)
White %	1.436*	1.428*	−0.133	−0.153
	(0.651)	(0.652)	(0.424)	(0.426)
Black %	1.604*	1.595*	0.151	0.130
	(0.641)	(0.642)	(0.418)	(0.419)
College degree %	1.836***	1.820***	1.492***	1.455***
	(0.416)	(0.418)	(0.271)	(0.273)
Foreign born %	0.094	0.144	−0.401	−0.288
	(0.602)	(0.617)	(0.392)	(0.403)
Unemployed %	0.109	0.411	−1.620	−0.939
	(3.133)	(3.230)	(2.041)	(2.110)
Same-sex couples %	13.011	13.935	6.973	9.055
	(13.816)	(14.026)	(9.000)	(9.163)
All religions %	−0.317	−0.332	−0.344	−0.378
	(0.366)	(0.369)	(0.239)	(0.241)
Outflow movers (logged)	0.315	0.296	0.188	0.145
	(0.211)	(0.217)	(0.137)	(0.142)
Inflow movers (logged)	0.167	0.172	0.124	0.136
	(0.140)	(0.141)	(0.091)	(0.092)
Population density	0.00001	0.00001	0.00001***	0.00001**
	(0.00000)	(0.00000)	(0.00000)	(0.00000)
N	1,045	1,045	1,045	1,045

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. All regressions are weighted by the number of TV households in each county and include state fixed effects.

APPENDIX J. TABLE 3 FULL RESULTS

Table J1. Placebo Test - Table 3 Full Results

	Primary Election		General Election	
	(1) OLS	(2) 2SLS	(3) OLS	(4) 2SLS
Will & Grace Ratings	−0.051		−0.0002	
	(0.059)		(0.0003)	
Will & Grace Ratings (instrumented)		−0.200		−0.0003
		(0.148)		(0.001)
2012 Rep. Vote %	6.162**	6.056**	0.857***	0.857***
	(2.216)	(2.226)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Population (logged)	0.732	0.685	0.016***	0.016***
	(0.716)	(0.719)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Household Income (logged)	3.676**	3.683**	0.019***	0.019***
	(1.156)	(1.159)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Female %	−13.241	−11.895	−0.422***	−0.421***
	(16.505)	(16.607)	(0.083)	(0.083)
Age 65+ %	41.337***	41.148***	0.272***	0.272***
	(5.500)	(5.521)	(0.028)	(0.028)
White %	17.186***	17.162***	0.069***	0.068***
	(3.773)	(3.786)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Black %	15.232***	15.102***	−0.054**	−0.055**
	(3.707)	(3.722)	(0.019)	(0.019)
College degree %	−40.738***	−40.726***	−0.269***	−0.269***
	(2.438)	(2.447)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Foreign Born %	15.430***	14.803***	−0.055**	−0.055**
	(3.436)	(3.495)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Unemployed %	16.408	14.219	0.369***	0.367***
	(18.022)	(18.194)	(0.091)	(0.092)
Same-sex couples %	−53.571	−58.493	2.634***	2.631***
	(80.662)	(81.063)	(0.405)	(0.405)
All religions %	−11.796***	−11.816***	0.008	0.008
	(2.175)	(2.182)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Outflow movers (logged)	−0.047	0.148	−0.015*	−0.015*
	(1.197)	(1.214)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Inflow movers (logged)	−0.736	−0.854	−0.013**	−0.013**
	(0.807)	(0.817)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Population density	−0.0001***	−0.0001***	−0.00000**	−0.00000**
	(0.00003)	(0.00003)	(0.00000)	(0.00000)
N	960	960	1,065	1,065

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. All regressions are weighted by the number of TV households in each county and include state fixed effects.

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APPENDIX K. TABLE 4 FULL RESULTS

Table K1. The Apprentice Effect on 2012 Republican Primary Candidates

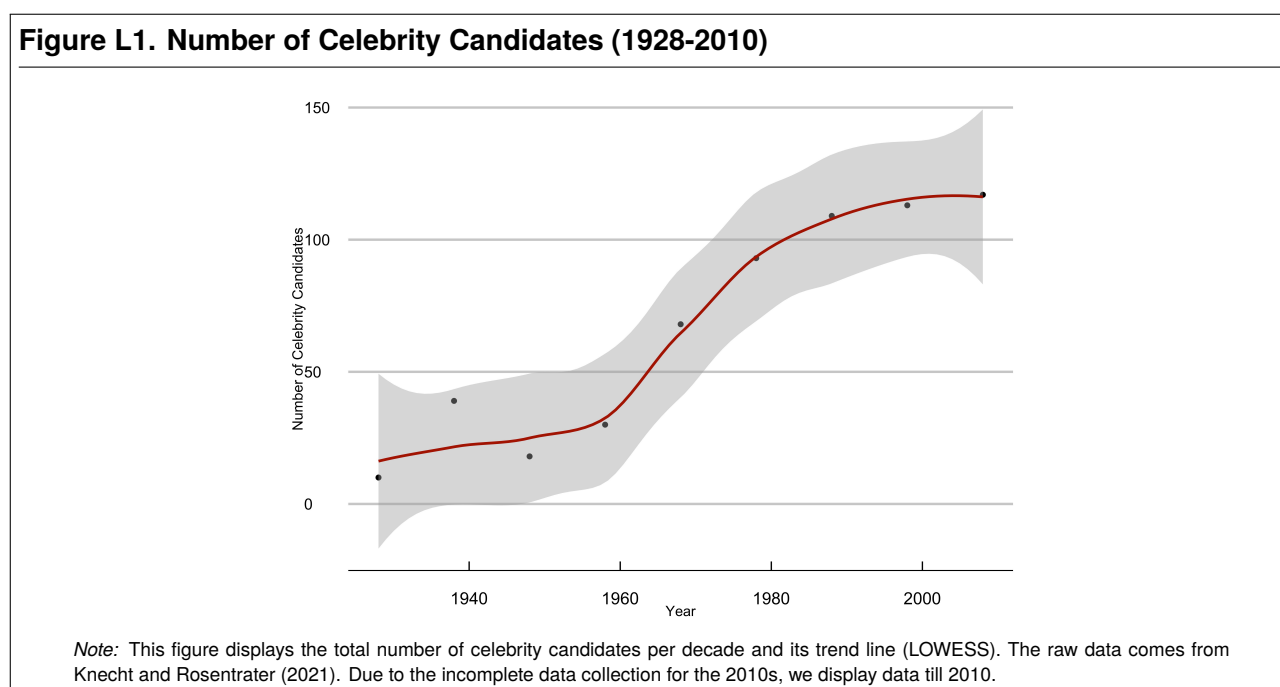|	Romney Share 12	Santorum Share 12	Gingrich Share 12	Paul Share 12
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
2008 Rep. Vote %	0.209***	−0.061**	−0.013	−0.131***
	(0.025)	(0.019)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Population (logged)	0.010	−0.002	−0.008	0.0002
	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Household Income (logged)	0.054***	−0.025*	−0.016*	−0.014+
	(0.013)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.007)
Female %	0.129	−0.109	0.089	−0.189+
	(0.174)	(0.135)	(0.106)	(0.102)
Age 65+ %	0.485***	−0.203***	−0.194***	−0.087*
	(0.060)	(0.046)	(0.037)	(0.035)
White %	−0.108**	0.069*	0.012	0.027
	(0.040)	(0.031)	(0.024)	(0.023)
Black %	0.123**	−0.039	−0.038	−0.045+
	(0.040)	(0.031)	(0.024)	(0.023)
College degree %	0.204***	−0.107***	−0.063***	−0.039*
	(0.026)	(0.020)	(0.016)	(0.015)
Foreign Born %	−0.037	0.071*	0.010	−0.051*
	(0.038)	(0.029)	(0.023)	(0.022)
Unemployed %	0.057	0.081	−0.113	−0.077
	(0.200)	(0.155)	(0.122)	(0.117)
Same-sex couples %	−0.248	−1.596*	−0.957+	2.206***
	(0.863)	(0.667)	(0.524)	(0.503)
All religions %	−0.090***	0.061***	0.054***	−0.025+
	(0.023)	(0.018)	(0.014)	(0.013)
Outflow movers (logged)	0.026+	−0.025*	0.007	−0.006
	(0.014)	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Inflow movers (logged)	−0.017+	0.018*	−0.004	0.003
	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Population density	0.00000	0.00000	−0.00000	0.000
	(0.00000)	(0.00000)	(0.00000)	(0.00000)
The Apprentice Ratings (9pm)	0.002	−0.001	−0.001+	0.0002
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
N	1,022	1,022	1,022	1,022

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. All regressions are weighted by the number of TV households in each county and include state fixed effects.

Table K2. Apprentice Effects on 2008 Republican Primary Candidates

	Huckabee Share	Paul Share	Romney Share	McCain Share
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
The Apprentice Ratings (9pm)	−0.003**	−0.0001	0.002*	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
2004 Rep. Vote %	−0.006	−0.102***	0.185***	−0.051*
	(0.020)	(0.011)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Population (logged)	0.0004	−0.004	−0.013*	0.017**
	(0.007)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Household Income (logged)	−0.009	−0.012*	−0.009	0.020+
	(0.011)	(0.006)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Female %	−0.091	−0.246**	−0.040	0.204
	(0.144)	(0.082)	(0.140)	(0.142)
Age 65+ %	−0.369***	−0.024	0.060	0.305***
	(0.050)	(0.028)	(0.049)	(0.049)
White %	0.043	0.001	−0.108***	−0.037
	(0.033)	(0.019)	(0.032)	(0.032)
Black %	−0.049	−0.079***	−0.007	0.048
	(0.033)	(0.019)	(0.032)	(0.032)
College degree %	−0.170***	−0.004	0.050*	0.146***
	(0.022)	(0.012)	(0.021)	(0.022)
Foreign born %	−0.058+	−0.041*	−0.135***	0.105***
	(0.032)	(0.018)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Unemployed %	0.123	−0.121	0.010	−0.202
	(0.169)	(0.096)	(0.165)	(0.167)
Same-sex couples %	−1.345+	0.464	−2.163**	2.524***
	(0.725)	(0.411)	(0.706)	(0.714)
All religions %	0.097***	−0.0001	−0.005	−0.065***
	(0.019)	(0.011)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Outflow movers (logged)	−0.020+	−0.003	0.046***	−0.005
	(0.011)	(0.006)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Inflow movers (logged)	0.010	0.009*	−0.015*	−0.021**
	(0.007)	(0.004)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Population density	0.00000***	−0.00000	−0.00000***	−0.00000
	(0.00000)	(0.00000)	(0.00000)	(0.00000)
N	1,023	1,023	1,023	1,023

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. All regressions are weighted by the number of TV households in each county and include state fixed effects.

APPENDIX L. THE RISE OF CELEBRITY CANDIDATES IN THE U.S.

Figure L1. Number of Celebrity Candidates (1928-2010)

Note: This figure displays the total number of celebrity candidates per decade and its trend line (LOWESS). The raw data comes from Knecht and Rosentrater (2021). Due to the incomplete data collection for the 2010s, we display data till 2010.

APPENDIX M. ETHICAL STANDARDS

This study relies upon a wide range of observational data on human behavior and preferences. We note that our paper used already existing data, and we did not commission any original survey of our own. However, the data that we purchased (i.e., Nielsen) and the social media data we collected still merit discussion of research ethics and expectations of privacy. The data collected from Twitter collected in compliance with each platforms terms of service and via the respective API. No identifying information about individual users was collected. The data we purchased from Nielsen was fully anonymized and at the aggregate level. We did not obtain nor request any personally identifying information (PII) about people in Nielsens sample. Because the data are fully anonymized and aggregated, we are confident that we have not violated the privacy of TV viewers.