



## The Sanders Electorate and Disapproval of the Democratic Party

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### Abstract

*Despite a two-party system that seemingly makes identification based on political alignment simple, American voters have more nuanced views than liberal or conservative leaning. Within each party is, of course, a variety of views on actual policy, but also varying philosophy regarding how a given candidate or organization should approach the political process. These differences become most evident when a divisive primary occurs in either party, a process that has appeared in the Democratic Party in a majority of recent presidential campaign cycles. Here, I will investigate the grassroots and, often, populist campaign of Senator Bernie Sanders in the 2016 Democratic primary. Using data from the 2016 Convention Delegate Study, I concluded that Sanders supporters, in comparison with supporters of Hillary Clinton, have a more negative view of the Democratic establishment, are more likely to agree with a purist political philosophy, and are less supportive of the overall Democratic Party. This indicates a fundamental lapse in support for the party organization, which calls into question future vote choice of 2016 Sanders supporters.*

As competition between polarized parties increases, party identification is becoming an even stronger cue for voters. However, in a primary this distinction is unavailable, separating voters into distinct groups within the parties: those loyal to the party and those whose allegiance is rooted in policy rather than the party itself. Likewise, divisive primaries pit those who hold a leadership position within their party against those involved for more personal, non-party reasons. Over time, divisive primaries have become more apparent and impactful for the average voter. As a result, party voters have the opportunity to align with candidates rather than with the parties themselves. The 2008 primary is a perfect example of a rising candidate (Barack Obama) focused on ideology running against the party establishment (Hillary Clinton). As was apparent in 2008 and beyond, modern technology and social media enables those outside of party leadership to gain support via grassroots mobilization.

By 2016, the shift towards policy and ideology within sects of the Democratic Party resulted in an escalation in distrust of the Party and its systems. The 2016 election cycle saw candidates with more extreme policy and an electorate leaning towards populist ideology (Dyck et al., 2018). Mobilizing a dissatisfied electorate were politicians who ran on anti-establishment sentiment and called for dramatic change. In the Democratic Party primary, Bernie Sanders rose as an independent who pledged to challenge establishment politicians and big business. By the end of the campaign, Sanders supporters moved away from seeing the Democratic Party as a means to an end of getting their desired policy passed, instead beginning to view the party as an obstacle in the way of policy achievements (Rosenfeld, 2018).

When looking towards the future of the Democratic Party, it is most important, at least when considering the 2016 primary cycle, to consider what happens to those who unequivocally supported Sanders's campaign for the Democratic nomination. In order to predict where they will vote next, it is not only necessary to see where they voted in prior election cycles, but also how the experience of the Sanders campaign affected their view of the Democratic Party as an entity. Continuing the momentum that Sanders created in mobilizing more liberal sects of the Democratic Party requires these questions to be considered. If Sanders supporters are amateur Democrats and purists, then policy will have to align with their ideals in order to gain their votes (Rao, 2020). As the Democratic Party pursues the presidency and Congress, in addition to state and local offices, the votes of Sanders supporters could potentially be valuable in achieving victory.

In this paper, I first review the history of divisions within the Democratic Party as well as the factors that created the situation of the 2016 primary. I will also seek to explain what constitutes the Sanders coalition and the common traits of this sect of voters. Senator Bernie Sanders was able to mobilize a progressive coalition using populist rhetoric and grassroots organizing, which left a lasting impact on the larger Democratic voter coalition.

Utilizing survey responses from the 2016 Convention Delegate Study, I find that Sanders supporters view the Democratic establishment more negatively, are more likely to be purists in their political decision making, and are less supportive of the Democratic Party overall as compared to Clinton supporters. Finally, I will discuss the relevance of Sanders supporters in the context of the 2020 Presidential election and how this sect of voters fits into the current and future Democratic Party.

### **Polarization and Dissatisfaction within the Democratic Party**

Partisanship has recently displayed a more significant connection to ideology and issue-based opinions (Bafumi & Shapiro, 2009). According to a unique interpretation of party alignment, the democratic model asserts that voters choose a party based on a party's policy ideas and then align themselves with that party's candidate in elections (Jackson, 1975). According to Jackson, policy positions are a central piece in every part of a voter's decision-making process, from choosing a party to ultimately selecting a candidate. This is the prescribed and practiced system through which voters aim to have their policy preferences enacted in American democracy. While a closer alignment between parties and ideology makes it a simpler process for voters to choose candidates (Levendusky, 2010), this interpretation of party alignment fails to take into account the diversity of ideological groups within the two parties.

Of course, this reliance on one's party to pick a candidate that stands for one's policy preferences puts an incredible amount of trust in the party system. It raises the question of how party nominees for a given election are chosen. There is a long history of dividing parties by various groups who approach the party system and the American political system with different philosophies. It began with James Q. Wilson's study of amateur clubs of Democrats who had a desire to alter the party system and focus on public interests (Wilson, 1962; Soule & Clarke, 1970). Wilson drew a distinction between the party professionals who worked within the system and loyally supported the party and the amateurs who saw the party as a means to an end of effective public policy. Moving later into the 20th century, these distinctions could consistently be seen.

Amateurs, specifically in the Democratic Party, tended to be younger, more educated, and more ideologically liberal (Soule & Clark, 1970; Hitlin & Jackson, 1977; Nimmo & Savage, 1972). Conversely, professionals tended to get involved in party activity at a younger age and have politically active families as well as be more likely to hold office (Hitlin & Jackson, 1977). A correlation can be drawn here between professionals being politically socialized earlier, both in their families and within the party, and having less of an interest in complex ideological issues. Amateurs were shown to be politically socialized later in life and rely on their friend groups as adults as well as public current events for political decision-making (Soule & Clarke, 1970).

Amateurs are more focused on an internal need to participate in democracy (Nimmo & Savage, 1972). They receive joy from pure involvement in the political process, while professionals are more interested in the winning objective involved in American elections. This distinction stretches further and affects what amateurs and professionals consider the perfect candidate (Nimmo & Savage, 1972). Philosophy regarding candidate selection also relies on another distinction between party members: that being between purists and pragmatists. While purists rely on ideological issues and pragmatists rely on winning elections and gaining party power or control, the two do not align evenly with amateurs and professionals (DeFelice, 1981). In fact, whether or not one is a professional is more likely to affect political behavior and choices than whether or not one is a pragmatist (DeFelice, 1981).

Yet another distinction frequently made is between party insiders and outsiders. Again, one could align an insider with a professional and an outsider with an amateur, although it is not mutually exclusive. However, party insiders are identified as caring more about winning elections, as are pragmatists (La Raja & Schaffner, 2015). This is extended into rewarding party followers with material power within government, a practice of those who aim to achieve more power for their party rather than specific policy. The party outsiders, however, have typically more ideological goals and are groups and activists outside of the typical party structure. Candidates recruited by such groups tend to be disliked by incumbents, who are often party professionals, for fear of innovations in policy goals (La Raja & Schaffner, 2015). This division can make for contested primaries, in which one candidate will obtain more resources and be able to win. Further, the candidate who wins gets to contribute to the creation of rules surrounding primaries and elections, likely easing the road to office for their sect of the party. This power struggle often comes down to finances, and campaign finance regulation has the power to determine who is in charge of party nominations and general elections (La Raja & Schaffner, 2015).

Despite the many differences among factions within each party structure, it is also possible that the outcome of previous nominations and primary elections determine who has the most power when it comes to party decision-making. Typically, when there is a contentious primary in the Democratic Party, there will be one candidate who lacks significant experience within the Party and, therefore, solid support from the party structure (Havick, 1978). In 2016, elected officials endorsed Clinton early on (Bycoffe, 2016), while grassroots organizations and voters themselves were more supportive of Sanders's campaign. When this "underdog" candidate loses, they are then often considered to be disloyal or a "sore loser." There is some truth to this argument in that party activists who are not party regulars and support the losing candidate in the primary are more likely to have a decreased commitment to the general election campaign (Havick, 1978).

It is the interest groups that form new coalitions within the party and demand policy positions of candidates, which candidates must abide by if they hope to get that interest group's support (Bawn et al., 2012). Therefore, the interest groups that comprise the Democratic Party determine candidate nominations based on who aligns with their interests and who can win.

The modern Democratic Party is considered a collection of smaller groups all with varying interests and goals (Grossman & Hopkins, 2015, 2016). These goals are achieved by government policy and activity, but Democratic elected officials often compromise to achieve just some goals or pieces of a goal. This creates a situation in which the Democratic Party does not possess a unified philosophy or ideology in terms of how government should behave and how activity should be enacted (Grossman & Hopkins, 2015). Yes, the founding principles of the Democratic Party surround achieving egalitarianism, but the various groups that make up the party disagree on the method by which egalitarianism is achieved (Masket, 2020). The Democrats' coalitional nature, in contrast to ideological movements like the Republican Party, prevents them from electing the most liberal candidates because Democratic candidates are generally more likely to compromise in writing policy (Grossman & Hopkins, 2015).

The involvement of individual citizens in determining the party nominee grew with the Bernie Sanders campaign in the 2016 primary. Sanders uniquely focused his campaign at the grassroots level, using the internet and digital media to build a campaign using small individual donations (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016). These practices enable candidates to question party culture and engage the larger public in such a process, creating more and more internal competition to gain party decision-making power.

Modern polarization among the various groups contributing to decision-making in the Democratic Party came to a head and simultaneously began with the 2008 primary election for the Democratic Party's nominee for President. The Obama-Clinton rivalry produced divisiveness at a local level that has continued to affect party dynamics (Maske & Sokhey, 2010). The rivalry within the party electorate continued even after Obama was chosen as the nominee. Clinton supporters were significantly less active in supporting the Obama campaign as well as the Democratic Party in the 2008 general election (Maske & Sokhey, 2016). Moving into the 2016 primary, Clinton brought with her the narrative the Obama campaign had created: that she was too moderate of a Democrat to serve liberal interests (Jacobsen, 2016). This problem was only exacerbated by the parallels in strategy between the 2008 Obama primary campaign and the 2016 Sanders primary campaign. Both candidates uniquely were able to mobilize the more liberal sect of the electorate with digital media and grassroots organizing (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016).

At the beginning of the 2016 primary, Sanders even followed a similar accumulation of support to Obama's in 2008. Sanders gained overwhelming

support in demographics that are typically considered more liberal sects of the population, such as millennials (Shelley & Hitt, 2016). This paralleled wide support for Obama among millennials, yet Sanders promoted policies that were further left than what Obama had promised. It is assumed that what allows these candidates to gain such ground with millennials is the era in which younger voting age groups were born. The economic recession of 2008 and subsequent economic challenges strengthened neoliberal sentiments in voting populations, leaving space for a candidate like Sanders to gain ground in 2016 (Rich, 2018). Modern Democratic candidates have the opportunity to appeal to generations born after the Cold War, which produced voters less afraid of more liberal, socialist policy than pre-Cold War babies (Shelley & Hitt, 2016). In addition to age, gender, race, and party affiliation were all significant predictors of Sanders's electorate (Dyck et al., 2018). Sanders supporters were likely to be more liberal than moderate, but they also were far more likely to exhibit a distrust in government. A similar likelihood was present in Trump's electorate (Dyck et al., 2018). The 2016 primaries exhibit a voting population that was in search of new ideas and an approach contrasting current government action. The candidates who gained the most ground and the most lasting ideological impact (Trump and Sanders) did so because they appealed to an electorate that no longer trusted the current system to enact the change they desired.

The Sanders campaign was able to bring out the more liberal sect of the Democratic Party, calling for more economic equality and bigger reform towards Democratic goals than what the Party attempted in the Obama era (Tankersley, 2016). While Sanders did not win the nomination, his campaign managed to further mobilize an existing faction of the Democratic Party that desires more liberal policy than the Party typically supports, shifting Democratic Party professionals towards the same policy. This movement has grown over time as candidates who are further left continue to vie for Democratic nominations as a means to achieve political office, each successive campaign with new technological developments and a different generation of voters. Yet, the Sanders campaign included something extra. Sanders himself was a party outsider who had previously labeled himself as an independent. Moreover, it has been proven that Sanders supporters exhibited distrust in government overall (Dyck et al., 2018), and Sanders's policies directly conflicted with much of the policy suggested by Democratic Party establishment officials. Sanders ran on an "anti-establishment" platform, arguing that the political establishment supported economic elites, and supporting a sect of left-wing populism focused on economic equality (Steger, 2018). Sanders's campaign's anti-elitist rhetoric has even been noted as similar to that of Trump's in his 2016 campaign (Carmines et al., 2017). The Sanders campaign mobilized sentiments among an electorate that already felt neglected by government policy and a lack of attention even from the Democratic Party, which is presumed to care for minorities and the underprivileged.

This active and angry sect of American voters was brought to the 2016 Democratic Convention following a primary process that many of them considered “rigged” (Azari & Masket, 2018). The selection of Clinton as the nominee in 2016 followed a proven strategic model of decision first by party elites and then the persuasion of party masses (Steger, 2018). The concept of a predetermined nomination for Clinton is most evident in the invisible primary in 2016, a process in which party elites select their favorite candidate and then proceed to convince voters to make the same choice (Bycoffe, 2016). This process has been proven to indicate success in the real primary for the candidate chosen by party elites (Cohen et al., 2008). Even prior to the launch of her campaign in June of 2015, Clinton had already received a significant number of endorsements from elected officials within the Democratic Party (Bycoffe, 2016). She grew her endorsements to have an overwhelming majority by the time the primary was declared over. Many of Clinton’s endorsements came from superdelegates, spots that are reserved for party elites and officials who technically are not required to vote with citizen preference and are designed to counter the influence of the masses when choosing a nominee. In the 2016 primary process, Sanders supporters harassed and even filed a class action lawsuit against the superdelegates for failing to represent them accurately (Jewitt, 2018).

Beyond the early endorsement of Clinton from various elites and elected officials within the Democratic Party, many Sanders supporters believe that there was more corruption within the Democratic National Committee (DNC) itself. Soon after the 2016 election, Donna Brazile, former Chair of the DNC and Elizabeth Warren, the Democratic Senator from Massachusetts, both publicly claimed that they believed the Clinton campaign had unfair and biased influence in the DNC (Blake, 2017; Wilts, 2017). In 2015, the DNC was struggling financially and was near bankruptcy, so it made a deal with the Clinton campaign for a bailout. In exchange for raising money for the DNC, Clinton’s campaign was to be given large amounts of control over DNC hiring and decisions. Sanders’s campaign was also given the opportunity to engage in such a deal but did not end up providing any money for the Party. Despite the obvious conflict of interests at play, both Brazile and Warren eventually retracted their statements, and it was found that all decisions regarding the primary, debate schedule, and rules were made prior to the deal between the DNC and the Clinton campaign (Klein, 2017).

The missing piece of the complicated Democratic Party puzzle, when considering the 2016 primary and its effects, is what happened to all of the voters who supported Sanders. I believe that these voters lost their trust in and connection to the Democratic Party. Subsequent to Sanders’ loss in the 2016 primary, it was predicted that Sanders supporters would attempt to mobilize and make change despite Clinton being the nominee. Voters were angry that party elites had determined the nomination before they even had a chance to fully

weigh in. Surmounting already existing distrust in government and in the current Democratic Party to make significant change, the primary process left Sanders supporters with even less allegiance to a party they were already questioning. In fact, it has been proven that the mass electorate as a whole has a lack of confidence in both party organizations and their primary processes (Jewitt, 2018). I will measure whether or not Sanders supporters truly exhibit this negative attitude and lack of trust in the Democratic Party using a variety of variables pertaining to political philosophy and alignment. Compared to Clinton supporters, I expect Sanders supporters to be less supportive of the establishment, more purist in their decision-making, and less supportive of the party overall.

## **Method**

I conducted my research using results from the 2016 Convention Delegate Study, which is the longest standing survey of political party delegates. This survey has existed and been used since 1972 to gather information about the delegates in attendance at each party convention as well as compare generations of delegates at the respective conventions (Miller et al., 1972). The survey includes questions regarding demographics, political preferences and personal ideology and philosophy of the delegates.

This study was a central piece of my research because it exclusively encompasses respondents who hold a particular level of standing within the Democratic Party, that position being a convention delegate. Therefore, there is an assumed level of understanding of political and party issues as well as an assumed level of allegiance to either the party, the candidate, or both. This level of political affiliation allowed me to gain a more nuanced view of Sanders and Clinton supporters as well as measure exclusively those who were most committed to their respective candidate. Further, delegates are uniquely positioned to answer the questions within this survey because they have taken certain proactive steps to attend the nominating convention. These delegates have committed themselves to travel to represent candidates for the Democratic Party's nomination for president and, therefore, are the most likely supporters of each respective candidate to also have strong ties to the Democratic Party itself. In many ways, this group of Sanders and Clinton supporters is the most conservative test of how Sanders supporters feel towards the Democratic Party. If these delegates, who were selected to work within the party's primary process, exhibit distrust or lack of support for the Democratic Party, how can the average Sanders supporter be expected to?

In this particular endeavor, I only used the data from the 2016 Democratic Convention, focusing on the similarities and differences between delegates who supported Hillary Clinton in the primary and delegates who supported Bernie Sanders in the primary. My independent variable is a dichotomous variable measuring candidate preference, which was measured by assigning a value of zero to delegates who supported Clinton in the primary



race and a value of one to those who supported Sanders in the primary race. The survey asked delegates “who did you most prefer as your party’s nominee for president in 2016?” I removed the surveys that chose options of Martin O’Malley and “someone else,” leaving my sample size at 688 Democrats.

Table 1: The Relationship between Candidate Preference, Demographics, and Political Opinions

	<b>Sanders (376)</b>	<b>Clinton (312)</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Experience v. new (1–7 with 7 being new ideas)	4.73 (1.50)	3.22 (1.41)	1.50 (0.12)***
Ideology (1–7 with 1 being most liberal)	1.61 (0.77)	2.31 (0.98)	-0.70 (0.07)***
Money (1–7 with 1 being most regulation)	1.36 (0.78)	2.47 (1.62)	-1.11 (0.10)***
Services (1–7 with 7 being most services)	6.36 (0.85)	5.73 (1.11)	0.63 (0.08)***
Environment (1–7 with 1 being most protection)	1.49 (0.75)	2.05 (1.21)	-0.56 (0.08)***
Tuition (1–5 with 5 being most supportive)	4.76 (0.57)	3.75 (1.11)	1.01 (0.07)***
Isolation (1–5 with 5 being most isolationist)	2.61 (1.32)	1.48 (0.80)	1.13 (0.09)***
Facts (1–5 with 5 being most reliant on facts)	4.07 (0.86)	3.90 (0.97)	0.17 (0.07)***
Income (1–6 with 6 being highest)	3.36 (1.45)	4.22 (1.30)	-0.86 (0.11)***
Education (1–5 with 5 being most educated)	3.77 (1.18)	4.10 (1.17)	-0.33 (0.09)***
White (0–1 with 1 being white)	0.84 (0.48)	0.75 (0.43)	0.09 (0.04)***
Gender (1–3 with 1 being male)	1.50 (0.53)	1.51 (0.51)	-0.01 (0.04)
Age (year of birth)	53.80 (15.39)	58.88 (14.31)	-5.08 (1.15)***
Attachment to Party (1–4 with 4 being most attached)	2.06 (0.98)	3.28 (0.7870)	1.22 (0.07)***
Feeling towards Obama (0–100 with 100 being warmest)	65.98 (28.58)	93.90 (11.66)	27.92 (1.74)***
Party process fair (1–4 with 4 being most fair)	1.51 (0.76)	3.25 (0.70)	1.74 (0.96)***
Democratic Party liberal (1–7 with 1 being most liberal)	2.65 (0.80)	4.45 (1.21)	-1.81 (0.08)***
Minimize disagreement (1–4 with 4 being most in agreement)	1.73 (0.79)	2.69 (0.71)	0.95 (0.06)***
Firm position (1–4 with 4 being most in agreement)	2.93 (0.91)	2.22 (0.80)	-0.71 (0.07)***

Play down issues (1–4 with 4 being most in agreement)	2.03 (0.83)	2.69 (0.79)	0.66 (0.06)***
Nominee on issues (1–4 with 4 being most in agreement)	3.74 (0.55)	3.36 (0.55)	-0.37 (0.04)***
Electoral appeal (1–4 with 4 being most in agreement)	1.90 (0.73)	2.79 (0.79)	0.90 (0.06)***
Party support (1–7 with 7 being most support)	4.64 (1.91)	6.51 (0.82)	1.87 (0.12)***
Support nominee (1–4 with 4 being most supportive)	2.17 (0.99)	3.35 (0.75)	1.18 (0.07)***
Feeling towards Party (0–100 with 100 being warmest)	57.90 (30.47)	89.47 (15.96)	31.57 (1.93)***

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$  \*\* $p < 0.05$  \* $p < 0.1$

In terms of basic characteristics of the two groups of Democratic delegates (Table 1), there were approximately 64 more Sanders supporters than Clinton supporters that participated in the survey. Sanders supporters were more likely to want new ideas and a fresh approach as opposed to experienced politicians. They also identified themselves as more liberal and proved more liberal when it came to issue opinions like more regulation of money in politics, more government services, more environmental protection, and more support of isolationist foreign policy. Sanders supporters were also more likely to agree that facts should be the true source of beliefs. Demographically, Sanders supporters were younger, more likely to be white, had lower incomes and were less educated. By a tiny margin, Sanders supporters were more likely to be male.

I operationalized my dependent variable, one's opinion of the Democratic Party, in three distinct ways: 1) feelings towards the Democratic "establishment," 2) whether a delegate is a purist or pragmatist in their political decision-making, and 3) their level of support for the Democratic Party. To measure feelings towards the Democratic "establishment," I include four variables. The first dependent variable was whether a delegate was involved in politics because of attachment to the party. This was measured on a scale from one to four with higher numbers indicating higher levels of agreement with the statement that a delegate is strongly attached to the party and wants to give it their support. Another variable was how warmly a delegate feels towards Barack Obama, utilizing a feeling thermometer rating measured from zero to one hundred. While Obama began as a representative for the more left sect of the Democratic electorate, throughout his presidency and beyond he has become a significant part of the Democratic Party establishment and frequently campaigns on behalf of a variety of Democratic candidates. I also included here whether or not a delegate feels the party process is fair. This was measured on a scale from one to four, with higher numbers indicating higher levels of

agreement with the statement that the process by which the Democratic Party chooses a nominee is fair. Finally, I included a measure of how liberal a delegate believes the Democratic Party to be. This was measured on a scale from one to seven, with one indicating “extremely liberal” and seven indicating “extremely conservative.” Based on the aspect of Sanders’s campaign that focused on changing “establishment” practices to create policies that better support the average American, I expected that Clinton supporters would exhibit warmer feelings towards the Democratic “establishment” than Sanders supporters.

My second group of dependent variables focused on whether a delegate is a purist or pragmatist in terms of their political decision-making. These included five variables measured on a scale from one to four, with higher numbers indicating higher levels of agreement with the provided statements. These statements included 1) “it is best to minimize disagreement within the party,” 2) “you should stand firm for a position even if it means resigning from the party,” 3) “the party should play down some issues if it will improve the chances of winning,” 4) “the party should select a nominee who is strongly committed on the issues,” and 5) “choosing a candidate with broad electoral appeal is more important than a consistent ideology.” While a purist would agree more with statements two and four, a pragmatist would agree more with statements one, three, and five. Since a purist is more likely to support policy and ideology over gaining power and a pragmatist is more likely to be focused on winning elections and, therefore government power for the party, I expected Sanders supporters to be more likely to be purists than Clinton supporters.

In my final grouping of dependent variables, I measured the level of support for the Democratic Party using three additional variables. The first variable measures the level of support for the Democratic Party as indicated on a numerical scale of one to seven with seven being the strongest. This set of questions also included whether or not a delegate agrees with the statement that one should always support the candidate nominated by the Democratic Party, regardless of who they supported during the primary. This was measured on a scale of one to four, with a higher number indicating a higher level of agreement with the aforementioned statement. Finally, I include how warmly a delegate feels towards the Democratic Party, utilizing a feeling thermometer rating measured from zero to one hundred. Following Sanders’s proposed policy and the actions of the Democratic Party in the primary, I expected Sanders supporters to be less supportive of the Democratic Party than Clinton supporters.

I first ran a t-test on each of the dependent variables to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between Clinton supporters and Sanders supporters. A t-test is also known as a difference in mean test. It is a way to assess whether the average value for any given dependent variable is statistically distinguishable based on the value of a dichotomous independent variable. Since I am interested in comparing

differences between Sanders and Clinton supporters, this allows me to assess whether any differences between these two groups of delegates are statistically significant. Then I ran a series of OLS, or ordinary least squares, regressions for each distinct dependent variable. OLS regression attempts to devise a straight line that best fits the pattern of the data describing the relationship between an independent and dependent variable. The coefficient in an OLS regression reflects the slope of that line. One benefit of utilizing regression compared to just a t-test is that I am able to control for, or take into account, other variables that might also affect the outcome of the dependent variable.

In my regressions, I controlled for a variety of demographic and political characteristics of the delegates. My control variables included whether or not a delegate preferred new ideas and a fresh approach or political experience in a candidate. This was measured on a scale from one to seven, with one indicating a preference towards experience and a proven track record and seven indicating a preference towards new ideas and a fresh approach. This was used as a control variable because delegates who fundamentally believe in integrating new ideas into high-level offices will be more likely to support the nominee who proposes a shift away from current political practices: Sanders in the case of 2016. Therefore, a Sanders supporter who habitually supports the “newer” candidate will have a lack of support for traditional Party candidates separate from any dislike of the Democratic Party associated with being a Sanders supporter.

I also controlled for a delegate’s personal ideological leanings, which were measured on a scale from one to seven, with one being “extremely liberal” and seven being “extremely conservative.” A delegate who identifies themselves as very liberal is likely to exhibit a lack of support for the Party whether or not they supported Sanders, since the Democratic Party historically fails to enact more liberal policy and nominate more liberal candidates. I also controlled for a variety of positions on policy issues, including views on government services, environmental protection, college tuition, foreign policy isolation, and campaign finance regulations. Policy positions are important to consider because if a delegate possesses a policy opinion different from that of Democratic Party actions, they are likely to not support the Party regardless of whether or not they supported Sanders’s nomination.

Other control variables include a delegate’s race, a delegate’s level of education, a delegate’s gender, and a delegate’s household income, all of which were measured by a series of multiple-choice selections, which were then associated with specific numbers for calculations. I also include a delegate’s age, which was measured by an open-ended question of the year in which a delegate was born. These basic demographic levels are important because minority groups and those with less representation are likely to exhibit a lack of support for the Democratic Party, regardless of whether or not they were a Sanders supporter. Finally, I controlled for whether or not a delegate relies on

guidance from non-religious sources as measured on a scale from one to four, with higher numbers indicating a larger degree of guidance. Individuals with less of an allegiance to religious beliefs and teachings are also less likely to support the “establishment” political system, which often promotes organized religion, whether or not they identified as a Sanders supporter.

## Results

In running the initial t-tests (Table 1), I found that my predictions were correct in terms of the differences between Sanders and Clinton supporters when considering my dependent variables. In the first grouping: feeling towards the Democratic “establishment,” Clinton supporters exhibited more attachment to the Democratic Party as their reasoning for involvement in politics, warmer feelings towards Barack Obama, a higher level of agreement that the Party process is fair, and a view that the Democratic Party is more liberal as compared to Sanders supporters. The “feelings towards Obama” variable was measured on a 100-point scale, with an average of 65.9 for Sanders supporters and 94.9 for Clinton supporters, evidence of a 27.9-point gap between the two groups. In terms of agreement that the Party process is fair, Sanders supporters thought the process was entirely unfair, with an average response of 1.5 on a four-point scale. Clinton supporters were more likely to believe the process was fair with an average response of 3.3, indicating a 1.8 difference.

In the second grouping, measurements of purist versus pragmatist ideology, Sanders supporters were more purist than Clinton supporters across all five statements. Sanders supporters want disagreement within the party, want candidates who will stand firm on the issues, refuse to play down issues for electoral appeal, and desire a candidate with consistent ideology. Conversely, Clinton supporters want to minimize disagreement within the party, want to prioritize the party rather than the issues, are willing to play down the issues in order to win elections, and desire a candidate with broad electoral appeal.

In the third grouping, overall support for the Democratic Party, Clinton supporters exhibited higher support in every measure. Sanders supporters said they were less supportive of the Party, not likely to unconditionally vote for the Party nominee, and recorded less warm feelings towards the Party. Meanwhile, Clinton supporters said they were more supportive of the Party, were more likely to support the Party nominee no matter who it was, and recorded warmer feelings towards the Democratic Party.

Table 2: The Relationship between Candidate Preference and View of Democratic Establishment

	<b>Attachment to Party</b>	<b>Feeling towards Obama</b>	<b>Party process fair</b>	<b>Democratic Party liberal</b>
Clinton Sanders	-0.87 (0.11)***	-15.45 (2.55)***	-1.42 (0.08)***	-1.32 (0.12)***
Experience v. new	-0.12 (0.03)***	-2.85 (0.64)***	-0.10 (0.02)***	0.22 (0.03)***
Ideology	-0.04 (0.05)	-0.60 (1.20)	-0.09 (0.04)**	0.12 (0.06)**
Money	0.07 (0.04)*	1.47 (0.85)*	0.10 (0.03)***	-0.03 (0.04)
Services	-0.00 (0.04)	1.10 (1.02)	0.05 (0.03)	0.10(0.05)**
Environment	-0.01 (0.05)	-0.21 (1.15)	0.05 (0.38)	-0.02 (0.06)
Tuition	-0.05 (0.05)	-0.52 (1.17)	-0.06 (0.04)*	0.00 (0.06)
Isolation	-0.89 (0.04)**	-5.56 (0.85)***	-0.09 (0.03)***	0.13 (0.04)***
Facts	0.07 (0.05)	3.20 (1.07)***	0.01 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.05)
Income	-0.03 (0.03)	0.49 (0.72)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.04)
Education	-0.09 (0.03)***	-0.71 (0.81)	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.0)
White	0.05 (0.09)	-2.26 (2.13)	-0.04 (0.07)	0.05 (0.10)
Gender	-0.13 (0.08)	-2.93 (2.13)	-0.31 (0.06)***	0.29 (0.09)***
Age	0.01 (0.00)**	0.07 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)***
Constant	3.96 (0.48)***	95.79 (11.23)***	4.12 (0.37)***	0.50 (0.55)
N	500	498	504	484

\*\*\*p<0.01 \*\*p<0.05 p\*<0.1

I then ran the first set of OLS regressions on my first group of dependent variables utilizing all of the aforementioned control variables (Table 2). The Clinton or Sanders support independent variable was statistically significant when tested against each dependent variable in this grouping, aligning with both my hypothesis and the previous t-tests. Again, Clinton supporters were shown to have a greater attachment to the Democratic Party and tied that attachment to their reason for political involvement. Clinton supporters also reported warmer feelings towards Barack Obama than did Sanders supporters and agreed more with the statement that the Democratic Party process is fair. Finally, Sanders supporters evaluated the Democratic Party as being less liberal than Clinton supporters did. Even when taking into account some of the demographic and ideological differences between Sanders supporters and Clinton supporters, candidate choice is still significantly associated with views towards the Democratic “establishment.” Sanders supporters rated President Obama 15.45 points less favorably than Clinton supporters did on a 100-point scale and ranked their level of attachment to the Party almost one point less than

Clinton supporters did on a four-point scale. Sanders supporters also ranked the fairness of the Party process 1.4 points less than Clinton supporters did on a four-point scale and ranked the ideology of the Democratic Party 1.3 points closer to “extremelyconservative” than Clinton supporters did on a seven-point scale.

The only control variables that proved to be statistically significant in at least three of the four models in this first grouping of support for the Democratic “establishment” were preference of a politician with experience versus one with new ideas and a fresh approach, stance on money in political campaigning, and stance on isolationism as an appropriate approach to foreign policy. Both opposition money in politics and isolationism are distinctly populist concepts, indicating that populist leanings also impact attitudes towards the “establishment.” A delegate became less supportive of the Democratic “establishment” as they became more supportive of politicians with new ideas and a fresh approach as to experience and more supportive of isolationism in foreign policy. A delegate became less supportive of the Democratic “establishment” as they became more supportive of campaign finance regulation.

Table 3: The Relationship between Candidate Preference and Pragmatism Versus Purism

	<b>Minimize disagreement</b>	<b>Firm position</b>	<b>Play down issues</b>	<b>Nominee on issues</b>	<b>Electoral appeal</b>
Clinton Sanders	-0.66 (0.09)***	0.25 (0.10)**	-0.43 (0.10)***	0.16 (0.07)**	-0.51 (0.09)***
Experience v. new	-0.10 (0.02)***	0.10 (0.03)***	-0.05 (0.02)*	0.03 (0.02)	-0.07 (0.02)***
Ideology	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.05)	0.03(0.05)	-0.04 (0.032)	0.06(0.04)
Money	0.07 (0.03)*	-0.10 (0.03)***	-0.04 (0.03)	0.00 (0.02)	0.08 (0.03)***
Services	0.01 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.03)**	-0.01 (0.04)
Environment	0.03 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.05)	0.16 (0.04)***	-0.09 (0.02)***	0.02 (0.04)
Tuition	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.04)	0.09 (0.03)***	-0.13 (0.04)***
Isolation	-0.04 (0.03)	0.10 (0.03)***	-0.04 (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.03)
Facts	-0.00 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	0.01 (0.03)	0.03 (0.04)
Income	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)
Education	-0.05 (0.03)*	0.04 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.05 (0.02)**	0.01 (0.03)
White	-0.12 (0.07)	0.08 (0.09)	0.04 (0.08)	-0.078 (0.05)	-0.05 (0.07)
Gender	-0.12 (0.07)*	0.07 (0.08)	-0.30 (0.07)***	0.18 (0.05)***	-0.25 (0.07)***

Age	0.01 (0.00)**	-0.01 (0.00)***	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Constant	3.21 (0.40)***	3.09 (0.46)***	2.98 (0.42)***	3.27 (0.29)***	3.46 (0.40)***
N	506	502	504	506	505

\*\*\*p<0.01 \*\*p<0.05 \*p<0.1

In running the OLS regression for my second grouping, purist versus pragmatist philosophy, I again found that my hypothesis was correct in that there is a statistically significant relationship between a delegate being a Sanders supporter and being a purist (Table 3). Sanders supporters were more likely to agree that candidates should hold a firm position on their issues, even if that means separating from the Democratic Party, as well as agreeing that the Party should select a nominee that is most in alignment with the Party's issues. These statements indicate more purist leanings. Simultaneously, Clinton supporters were more likely to agree that disagreement within the Party should be minimized, that the Party should play down issues if it gives them a better chance at winning, and that a candidate should be chosen based on their electoral appeal. These statements indicate more pragmatist leanings by delegates that supported Clinton. Sanders supporters were 0.7 points more supportive of disagreement within the Party than Clinton supporters on a four-point scale and were 0.5 points more opposed to considering candidates based on electoral appeal also on a four-point scale.

The control variables that were statistically significant in at least three of the five models in this grouping were whether a delegate prefers a candidate with political experience or one with new ideas and a fresh approach and a delegate's gender. Delegates exhibit more pragmatist leanings as they are more likely to prefer a candidate with political experience and more likely to be male. The opposite end of the spectrum in each of these control variables is more likely to align with a more purist delegate. Ideological leanings, such as money in political campaigns and isolationist foreign policy, are not as statistically significant in the purist versus pragmatist grouping as in the view of the Democratic "establishment" grouping. This indicates a lack of correlation between more populist opinions and purist versus pragmatist philosophy.

Table 4: The Relationship between Candidate Preference and Support of Democratic Party

	<b>Party support</b>	<b>Support nominee</b>	<b>Feeling towards Party</b>
Clinton Sanders	-1.05 (0.18)***	-0.77 (0.11)***	-17.42 (2.88)***
Experience v. new	-0.22 (0.05)***	-0.13 (0.03)***	-3.97 (0.73)***
Ideology	-0.02 (0.08)	0.02 (0.05)	-.59 (1.36)
Money	0.12 (0.06)*	0.11 (0.04)***	2.07 (0.96)**
Services	0.11 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.04)	0.92 (1.15)



Environment	0.02 (0.08)	-0.05 (0.05)	0.65 (1.29)
Tuition	-0.08 (0.08)	-0.03 (0.05)	-1.29 (1.32)
Isolation	-0.30 (0.06)***	-0.10 (0.04)***	-4.20 (0.96)***
Facts	0.13 (0.075)*	0.06 (0.05)	2.50 (1.21)**
Income	0.00 (0.05)	0.03 (0.03)	0.28 (0.82)
Education	-0.10 (0.06)*	-0.04 (0.03)	-1.84 (0.90)**
White	-0.24 (0.15)	-0.01 (0.09)	-0.94 (2.39)
Gender	-0.32 (0.13)**	-0.13 (0.08)	-5.98 (2.12)***
Age	0.01 (0.00)***	0.01 (0.00)*	0.26 (0.07)***
Constant	6.91 (0.78)***	3.66 (0.48)***	95.07 (12.64)***
(N)	494	504	494

\*\*\*p<0.01 \*\*p<0.05 \*p<0.1

In running my third round of OLS regressions for the third grouping, overall support for the Democratic Party, I once again found a statistically significant relationship between whether a delegate is a Clinton or Sanders supporter and each of the dependent variables (Table 4). As predicted, Sanders supporters reported less support for the Party, a likelihood to not support the chosen nominee regardless of who it is, and less warm feelings towards the Democratic Party itself. Sanders supporters rated their feelings towards the Democratic Party 17.42 points less than Clinton supporters did on a 100-point scale and were 1.05 points less supportive of the Party on a seven-point scale.

The only control variables that proved a statistically significant relationship in three out of the three models in this grouping were whether a delegate preferred a political candidate with experience or a candidate with new ideas and a fresh approach, a delegate's stance on money in political campaigning, and a delegate's stance on isolationism regarding foreign policy, and a delegate's age. A delegate became more supportive of the Democratic Party by all three measures as they became less supportive of regulation in campaign finance. A delegate became less supportive of the Democratic Party by all three measures as they became more supportive of political candidates with new ideas and a fresh approach, more supportive of isolationist foreign policy and older. The more populist ideological concepts included in the control variables, such as money in campaigning and isolationism, were more significant in this grouping than the purist versus pragmatist grouping. Yet, even considering the correlation between populist leanings and support for the Democratic Party, Sanders supporters exhibit significant differences from Clinton supporters in each of the models.

## Discussion

My results make it very clear that Sanders's campaign mobilized a group of voters who left the 2016 Democratic Party primary with anti-Party

sentiments. Whether it be through anti-establishment feelings, purist leanings, or overall lack of support for the Democratic Party, the responses of Democratic delegates to the 2016 Convention Delegate Survey exhibit a clear theme. More than just proving a correlation between support for Sanders and more negative attitudes towards the Democratic Party, the survey results show that even when certain policy opinions and demographics are taken into account, Sanders supporters are still significantly more likely to not support the Democratic Party. Those who take more populist views toward policy are also more likely to be anti-establishment and be less supportive of the Democratic Party overall.

The pressing question becomes: what does this mean for the future of the Democratic Party? The anti-establishment rhetoric that characterized Sanders's 2016 campaign for the presidency was primarily economically focused, mobilizing less affluent voters (Cohn, 2016; Quinpiac 2020). This attitude often presented itself as criticism toward the top 1% or big business, but it also accompanied calls for an array of populist economic policies. While policy is not what drove these voters to view the Democratic Party poorly, it enabled them to rally behind Sanders in 2016 and potentially has the capability to rally this sect of voters behind future Democratic candidates. Sanders's relative success in 2016 continued in his second bid for the presidency in the 2020 Democratic primary. Ultimately, more moderate and center-left Democrats coalesced around Vice President Biden not due to policy, but due to concerns that Sanders would not gain the professional political support necessary to win the presidency (Downie, 2019). With party leadership that was outwardly opposed to his nomination, Sanders yet again lost his campaign for the Democratic nomination.

Even though Biden managed to take the presidency from Donald J. Trump, Democrats saw a loss in the House of Representatives, where the Party expected gains. Further, Democrats failed to flip any of the state legislatures that were in Republican control (Galston, 2020). Even in the states that helped Biden win the presidency, it was by close margins (Davis, 2020). When looking at the actual demographics of voters in the 2020 presidential election, Biden won based on gains in the suburban vote and in white voters without college degrees (Galston, 2020). These groups of voters were part of the Republican coalition in 2016 and exhibited a split-ticket approach in 2020, voting for Republicans except in the case of Biden (Davis, 2020). These voters were united under Biden as a result of hatred towards Trump and in an effort to attempt to remove Trump from office, a factor that will not be present in future presidential elections and in lower-level races.

The demographics of Biden's voters become even more concerning in that they are the whitest and wealthiest Democratic coalition ever (Davis, 2020). Trump won more of the non-white working-class vote than any other recent Republican. These wealthy voters who helped Biden win are exactly who Sanders criticized in much of his rhetoric and who many of his supporters felt

were an obstacle to their own success. Contrasting the typical expectation of a Democratic electorate, Biden did not gain ground with the African American or Latino vote and only gained marginally with female populations (Galston, 2020). Some Sanders supporters voted for Biden, seeing no other option when faced with another term for the Trump administration (Goodkind, 2020). However, some communities where Sanders won in the primary, specifically Latino communities, voted for Trump in the general election (Davis, 2020). Biden did not engage the typically more progressive set of voters and ran his campaign, again, largely on getting Trump out of office, an opponent the likes of which is not likely to appear in most future campaigns.

In terms of policy, the 2020 election cycle exhibited a leaning towards the progressive left. Democratic incumbents in Congress who supported Medicare for All were undefeated, but incumbents with more conservative policies experienced losses (Davis, 2020). While many of these more progressive successful congressional candidates come from urban areas that often guarantee a Democratic win, others won in swing districts (Jones, 2020). 2020 also presented a large degree of support for raising the minimum wage, specifically in the battleground state of Florida. However, raising the minimum wage is not an issue that voters consistently associate with the Democratic Party (Davis, 2020). Exit polls showed that voters are leaning more towards left-wing policy agenda, yet the Democratic Party is not always willing to fully commit support behind such legislation. Exit polls also showed that a large majority of those who voted for Biden voted against his opponent (Trump) rather than voting for Biden himself. Introducing populist-leaning policy, specifically in terms of economics, could work towards gaining the vote of these individuals. Now that the potential to challenge the establishment has been proposed by candidates like Sanders, voters will not quickly forget the possibilities of policy that will align with their wants and needs.

It is difficult to decipher where we go from here, or how the Democratic Party can adjust its trajectory. Democrats could stick with the strategy of the 2020 Presidential race: choosing more moderate policies and winning white voters in the Upper Midwest, or they could mobilize new voters, as Sanders did in 2016, expanding the electorate and exploring the possibility of winning a new array of states. In a state where even those closely aligned with the party system as delegates question the DNC organization, it is clear that a change needs to be made. The 2020 presidential win is one victory in a long trajectory that will continue for decades to come, in which the two parties will need to adjust in order to be competitive in a modern electorate. Regardless of the specifics of how the Party chooses to engage these individuals with populist leanings and anti-establishment sentiment, they must be catered to. If the Democratic Party has hope of gaining back the House and the Senate and gaining ground at the state level, this is a sector of the electorate that requires attention.

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