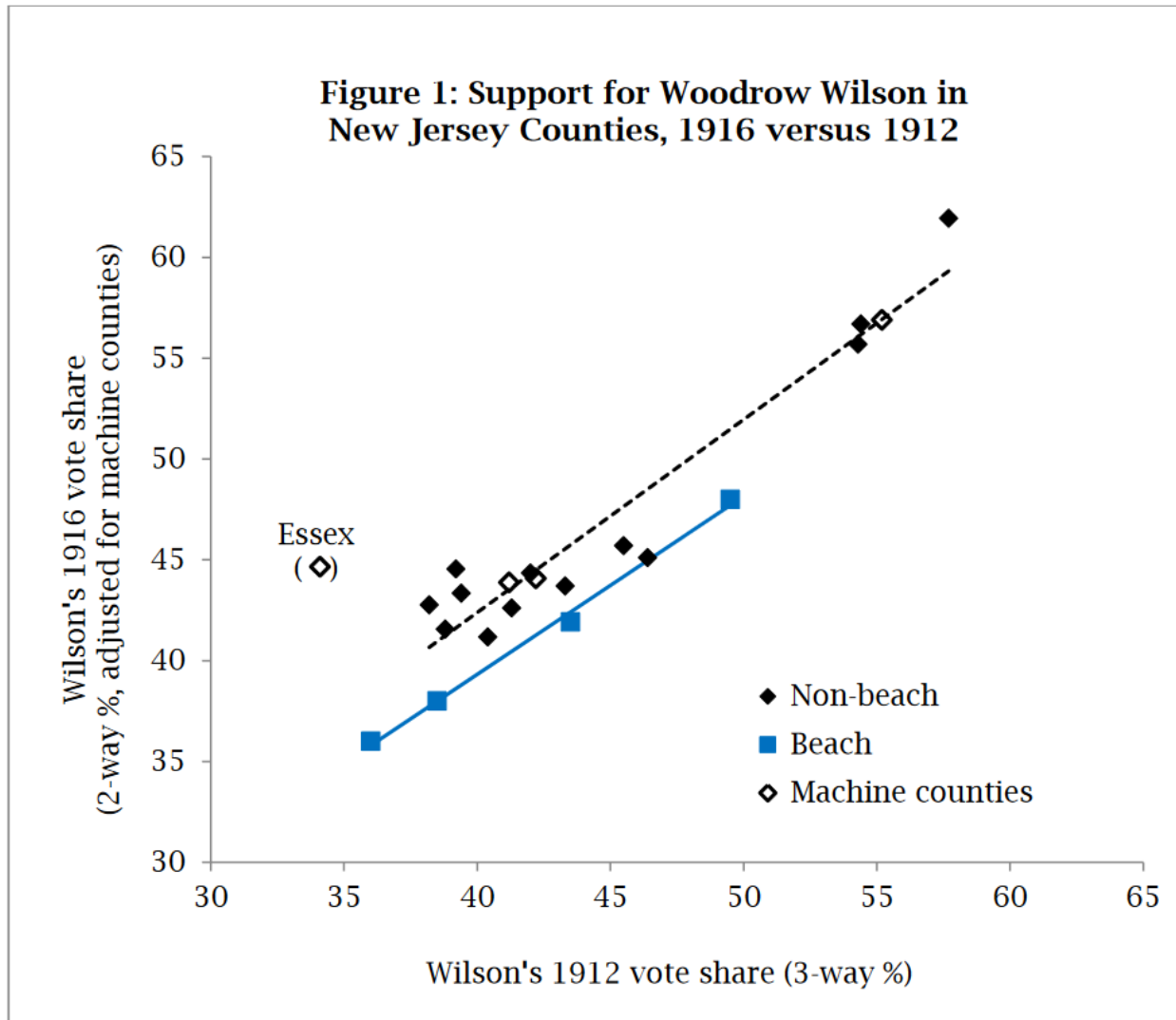


**“Shark Attacks in New Jersey: The Voters Bite Back”** (Achen & Bartel, 2017).



Achen, C. & Bartels, L. (2017). Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government. Princeton: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400888740>

*“This figure shows the statistical relationship between Wilson’s 1916 vote and his 1912 [...] as the graph shows, the beach counties are each depressed nearly the same amount from their expected 1916 vote [...] Thus, the shark effect stands up well under alternate specifications”* (Achen & Bartels, 2017).

Background: In July of 1916, tragedy struck the beaches of New Jersey. Five shark attacks left four individuals dead and one injured. Shortly after, the voters in New Jersey beach towns punished the incumbent, Pres. Woodrow Wilson, in the polls. **In Figure 1, the black line shows the expected number of votes Wilson should have received from each county, given the county’s vote share for Wilson in**

**1912** (in other words,  $E[\text{WilsonVotes}_{1916} | \text{WilsonVotes}_{1912}]$ ). **The blue line illustrates that, in reality, voters in New Jersey beach towns were systematically more likely to give Wilson less votes than expected.**

This provides support for a political science theory called “blind retrospection” which posits that voters are more likely to punish their governments, “so long as they can justify doing so with whatever plausible cultural constructions are available to them”, when they are in pain or facing extreme hardship (Achen & Bartels, 2017). In this case, the New Jersey shark attacks of 1916 created a plethora of communal, economic, and emotional pain for the residents of New Jersey beach towns, thus leading to political repercussions for the incumbent government.

**In sum, shark attacks are bad for your political careers.**



Non book article link:

[https://my.vanderbilt.edu/larrybartels/files/2011/12/CSDI\\_WP\\_05-2013.pdf](https://my.vanderbilt.edu/larrybartels/files/2011/12/CSDI_WP_05-2013.pdf)