

How Do We Explain Trump's Paradoxical Yet Electorally Successful Use of a False US-Mexico Narrative?

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Much has been made of early studies that tried to equate Donald Trump's victory in 2016 with voters who had been hard hit by free trade policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and by job competition and social disintegration created by an increase in immigration—even though the actual economic and social impacts of Mexico-related trade and migration were not considered. In this chapter, we introduce (nonalternative) facts about Mexican migration and trade policies and compare the Trump narrative about how Mexican migration and trade have hurt the United States to actual economic and social exposure to Mexican trade and immigration. We focus on the following questions and hypotheses:

1. Was support for Trump based on the actual local presence of immigrants and trade, particularly from Mexico?
2. If we do not find that places with more trade and immigration predict Trump support, then is it attitudes about trade and immigration that predict Trump support instead? We thus open up the possibility that Trump may have tapped into attitudes about these rather than their actual impact.
3. Or perhaps both are operative: Trump support reflects negative attitudes about immigration and trade as well as a greater presence of immigration and trade, suggesting that negative attitudes would be a response to a greater local threat of immigration and trade.

4. Finally, does Trump support correlate with poorer socioeconomic conditions, and if so, how are these related to trade and immigration?

Our research shows the existence of a **Trump Paradox**. That is, while counties that voted for Trump are often struggling economically, with high concentrations of poverty and unemployment, and have negative attitudes about immigration and trade, these counties—paradoxically—have little exposure to immigration or trade with Mexico.

THE FALSE US-MEXICO NARRATIVE

From the launch of his campaign in June 2015, Donald Trump adeptly focused on US-Mexico relations to create a media narrative that America ceased being great because of border-raiding illegal immigrants (“murderers and rapists”) and trade agreements like NAFTA that ship US jobs across the border (Green 2017). In this narrative, “real” American working people are hurt because America’s border is being overrun by Mexico sending their worst people and because of “unfair” trade deals made by our “bad” leaders. This diagnosis leads to the magical solution that he can “Make America Great Again” by building a “big, beautiful wall,” deporting millions, dismantling NAFTA, and imposing huge tariffs. “We have no choice,” Trump says. “If we don’t defend our borders, then we cease to be a nation.” He has since continued to use this narrative with great success among his political base.

The dog whistle of this simply construed yet dangerously fictitious cross-border narrative—not to mention the full-throated denunciations of Mexicans and Central Americans—should not have been underestimated, especially given Trump’s openly racist demonizing, unprecedented in modern presidential campaigns. His narrative of nostalgia, forged as it is by white ethnic identity politics, invokes a long historical legacy of privileged supremacy but with a twist. In this telling of the story it is an “embattled” white citizenry that must make a stand or be swallowed up by a demographic transformation to a nonwhite-dominant multiracial America. Trump’s claim that “this is our last chance”—his presidential campaign’s forthright appeal for a **white backlash**—should have made clear what was at stake for American democracy in the twenty-first century.

The collective failure by the media and political leaders to immediately counter not only the blatant bigotry of his initial position but also

its manifest economic absurdity allowed Trump to elaborate a twenty-first century **nativism** based on anti-immigrant politics and similar to the nativist movements that emerged in the late nineteenth century, where “native-born” whites decried the upsurge in immigration from the “undesirables” of that day, painting the desperate immigrants from southern Italy, Ireland, Germany, and Eastern Europe with ugly ethnic stereotypes and slurs. Then as now, Trump’s **nativist narrative** insults immigrants, particularly Mexicans, with calls for deporting all undocumented immigrants and their US-born children and making Mexico pay for the wall by seizing family remittances to Mexico. Today, the narrative is augmented by vilifying international trade, especially from Mexico, the same country that the despised immigrants come from. Trade policies promoted by Trump’s narrative include voiding NAFTA and imposing tariffs as coercive threats around migration and trade.

Journalists, political leaders, and academics have sought to explain Trump’s political rise, initially accepting at face value Trump’s claim that immigration and the global economy threaten American workers. Journalists accepted preliminary scholarship suggesting that this was the basis for the popularity of his appeal and his electoral victory in key swing states (Davis and Hilsenrath 2016).¹ These journalists wrongly inferred that attitudes about immigration and trade were the result of actual immigration and trade, conflating these attitudes with the wrong-headed idea that Trump supporters had experienced negative impacts from both migration and US trade in a global economy.

Scholars have continued to debate the causes of Trump’s or other nationalist candidates’ unexpected electoral victory using a variety of techniques. Some economists use data on temporally specific regional impacts, looking for correlations between the “China shock” of increased imports in the early 2000s and voting that swung for Trump in 2016 (Autor, Dorn, and Hanson 2016; Autor et al. 2016). Chinese import penetration was also found to be a predictor of the rise of right-wing candidates and nationalism in Europe (Colantone and Stanig 2018). Other economists find a correlation between the decline in manufacturing employment and the counties that voted for Trump (Altik, Atkeson, and Hansen 2018). Prevailing theory in political science and journalistic readings of social science data expected that economic interests and support for Trump were positively correlated (Mutz 2018).

However, the political communication scholar Diana Mutz (2018), in a paper backed by the National Academy of Sciences, uses the leading election panel surveys and disputes the perceived economic interest

explanation, instead finding that attitudes concerning **white status** were a better explanation for Trump's victory. In particular, candidate Trump was able to tap into white voter anxiety about globalization and diversity. Specifically, concerns and anxieties about immigration and job displacement predicted greater support for Trump (Mutz 2018). A careful reanalysis of those same data concludes that the **status threat** explanation was overstated; indeed, perceptions of economic interests were at least as important, and perceived economic interests are intertwined with status issues (Morgan 2018). The political scientists Marc Hooghe and Ruth Dassonneville (2018), who study electoral behavior, found that anti-immigrant attitudes and racial resentments explained much of the Trump vote, though neither they nor any of the other authors mentioned explored the actual impact of immigration or trade.

Economic Self-Interest, Anti-Immigrant Attitudes, and Racial Resentments

Our research demonstrates that using data on actual Mexican trade and migration impacts challenges both the economic and the attitudinal-based explanations for Trump support. It shows the existence of a Trump Paradox that exposes dual yet systematic contradictions between Trump voter behavior and actual county economic exposure to Mexican trade and immigration, as well as contradictions between the attitudinally perceived economic and social impacts compared to actual economic and social exposure to Mexican trade and immigration. We do, however, confirm that places that voted for Trump are more economically challenged by unemployment and poverty than others. Yet these challenging economic conditions are unrelated to exposure to Mexican trade and immigration.

Arguments for the importance of attitudes rather than real self-interest are based on sociological and political science research. Work in group position theory, for example, posits that increases in the size of a given racial minority group can be seen as a **group threat** to political and social resources by the majority, triggering the fear that immigrants pose a potential challenge to the dominance of the white majority and generating hostility and negative stereotyping of the minority group (Blalock 1967; Hood and Morris 1997; Quillian 1995). Because of the growing Latino population across the United States (Krogstad and Lopez 2015), Latinos, and Mexicans in particular, may be perceived as a major threat to the white majority, especially when those fears are activated by political candidates.

Similarly, growing trade may threaten whites by challenging their sense of not only racial but also global supremacy. In this way, white Americans situate themselves as the “real” Americans in a world where “America’s” global leadership is at stake. On the other hand, white anxieties and negative attitudes about immigration and trade may be stirred up by political actors. These actors activate latent racial hostilities (Hopkins 2010; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002) as well as a preference for like-minded candidates (Mendelberg 2001), independent of actual immigration and trade.

Trump uses nationalist rhetoric to tie poor economic conditions to globalization and diversity (Monnat 2016; Rothwell and Diego-Rosell 2016), but this rhetoric obfuscates the deeper underlying dynamics of high unemployment and low income by falsely blaming trade and immigration for the economic challenges of unemployment and poverty. Our research shows that the challenging economic conditions in much of Trump country are real but are unrelated to local exposure to Mexican trade and immigration. We examine the actual volume of trade and immigration rather than simply attitudes about immigration and trade. As far as we know, no one has examined the effect of actual immigration and trade on the 2016 election, and the only paper that has examined **trade flows** (goods and services that are bought and sold between countries) is that by the labor economist David Autor and colleagues (2016) on Chinese imports. In particular, we focus on trade and immigration from Mexico, which has been particularly vilified by Trump’s campaign and his presidency as a primary source of the nation’s economic and social ills.

DATA AND METHODS: TRUMP SUPPORT, TRADE, AND IMMIGRATION

We analyze data at the county and congressional district (macro) and individual (micro) levels. We use county and congressional district data from the US Census and the American Community Survey, in addition to sources we indicate below. Our macro level data are composed of a mapping analysis of 1,925 counties, which account for 94.4 percent of the US population. Maps at the county level permit detailed geographic analysis. However, we were unable to get sufficient trade data for the smallest counties, which account for the remaining 5.6 percent, because their sales in **tradable sectors** (i.e., those goods and services large enough to trade internationally)² are too low to be included in the Economic Census at the county level.

For the macro analyses, we conducted a series of statistical models³ that could quantify the relationship between Trump support and both trade and migration, as well as a host of other variables, at the congressional district level. We calculated the percent that voted for Trump in 2016 minus the percent voting for the Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney in 2012. We examine the shift in Republican vote shares from 2012 to 2016 rather than Republican shares in 2016 since the percent of votes shares that go to one or another party in general elections largely depends on consistent partisan voting by a large percentage of Americans, which often is unaffected by candidate positions. By comparing 2012–16 vote shares we thus use a conservative or strict standard to assess the greater (or lesser) attraction of Trump over Romney, the previous Republican candidate. Alternatively, in a less strict test, we examined the percent voting for Trump, and the results are similar.

To quantify trade, we collected data on imports by sector (e.g., agricultural products, textiles) from the World Institute for Strategic Economic Research (WISER) trade database.⁴ To distribute this trade data at the county level, we created a ratio based on county sales by sector and then distributed the higher-level data according to this ratio. This sector's sales data were collected from the US Census Bureau's 2012 Survey of Business Owners and Self-Employed (SBO). Our analysis sought to replicate core aspects of the methodology used by Autor, Dorn, and Hanson (2016) to measure regional trade exposures in US trade with China. Their analysis of US-China trade is based on the share of each industry in the region's (e.g., county's) total sales on the US market; it summarizes differences across US regions in industry specialization patterns (e.g., for the distribution of labor, goods, and services in particular industries). Thus their methodology captures variation in regional exposure to China's supply-driven export growth. For our analysis of US trade with Mexico, we also extended and, we believe, improved the specificity of this measurement by including imports from Mexico for counties. Finally, we divide this measure of variation in regional exposure by total population to get a per capita measure of trade with Mexico.

To quantify immigration, we use the percent foreign-born Mexican-origin population, which is based on the 2016 American Community Survey. We also control for demographic variables, particularly percent white, percent college educated, and percent over age sixty-five, which are commonly used in studies of voter behaviors (Altick, Atkeson, and Hansen 2018). We then control for the effect of economic conditions,

including poverty levels, unemployment, median income, and whether employed in the manufacturing sector.

We first analyze macro level data for counties and congressional districts, using maps (for counties) and statistical models (for congressional districts) to illustrate the relation between places that voted for Trump and those where there is greater immigration and trade. Counties are used for the maps since they better illustrate geographical detail though we use congressional districts for the statistical analysis since voting and representation are done at that level. Since such ecological data cannot be used to deduce the voting behavior of individuals (King 2013), we complement our macro analysis with an analysis of a micro level data set from the Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES) to see if actual immigration and trade are associated with the preferences of (non-Hispanic) white voters for Donald Trump, independent of individual social and economic characteristics and attitudes about immigration and trade. We are particularly interested in parsing the effects of actual trade and immigration versus attitudes about them, again independent of personal economic situations and social characteristics.

The micro analysis also allows us to examine non-Hispanic white voters in isolation.⁵ The dependent variable is whether or not individuals voted for candidate Trump, with a control for whether the respondent voted for Romney in 2012 and for the political party he or she belongs to. The independent variables from the CCES data are (1) individual characteristics of voting history, partisanship, education, gender, age, income, and employment status; and (2) individual attitudes about immigration and trade, specifically those indicating agreement or disagreement on whether the US government should deport undocumented immigrants, and whether one supports the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Act.⁶ Using statistical models, we analyze both individual and congressional district level variables (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). We also include the independent variables Mexican immigration and per capita Mexican imports. To do this, we link the individuals in the CCES data to the information about immigration and trade in the congressional district in which they reside.

Finally, to analyze voters that flipped in 2018, we use statistical models with the 2018 CCES data to predict whether white voters who voted for Trump in 2016 then voted for the Democratic candidate in 2018. Among the independent variables, we changed only two variables from the 2016 to the 2018 analysis: we no longer control for whether they voted for Romney in 2012, and we use support for the border wall rather than support for deportations because the question itself changed in the CCES.

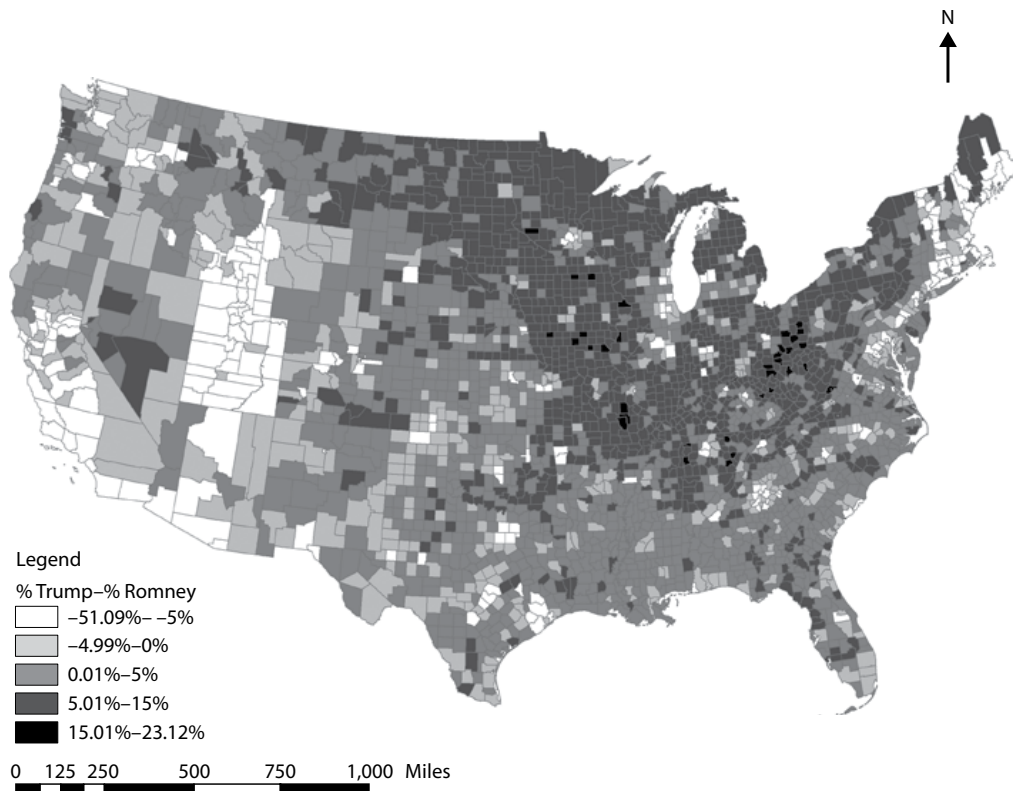


FIGURE 1.1A. US Counties by Percent Voting for Trump (2016) – Percent Voting for Romney (2012).

TRUMP SUPPORT GREATER WHERE THERE ARE FEWER MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS AND LESS TRADE

We illustrate how Trump voting, immigration, and trade were distributed across the country and then statistically examine the relation among these at the county level. At a descriptive level, **figure 1.1** shows several maps of US counties. As the white and light gray counties in Map A show, Trump lost support in much of California and Arizona, in some counties in the Northwest and New England, and in nearly all of Utah, but these were exceptions. Trump support expanded from the traditional Republican base throughout the rest of country but especially in the Midwest and surrounding areas. However, Map A shows that the county locations that shifted toward Trump are clearly distinct from the counties with Mexican immigrants (Map B), suggesting that the appeal of his narrative tended to be greater among voters who are

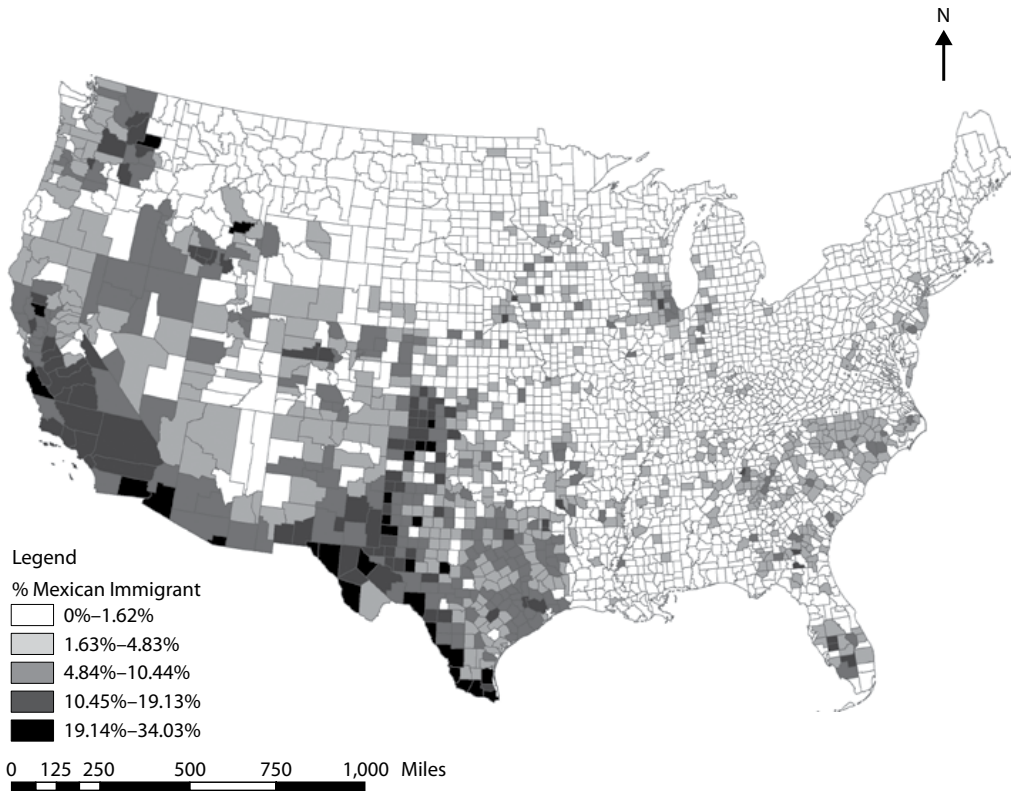


FIGURE 1.1B. US Counties by Percent Mexican Immigrants.

hardly affected by Mexican immigration. Most notably, the Midwest and northern states were regions with the lowest concentrations of Mexican immigrants, but support in those regions turned increasingly for the 2016 Republican candidate.

Map C shows that the relationship of Trump support to trade seems more mixed, at least descriptively. Map A and Map C together show that those counties that supported Trump often had little trade with Mexico, as evidenced by the fact that Mexican imports were concentrated on the Pacific Coast, along the Mexican border, in Utah, and in New England. These areas tended to vote for the Democratic candidate in 2016 and were often less likely to vote for Trump in 2016 compared to Romney in 2012. On the other hand, Map C shows that counties in the Great Lakes, the lower Midwest, and other regions also had very high levels of Mexican imports but widespread support for Trump, though the statistical analysis that follows shows these were exceptions.

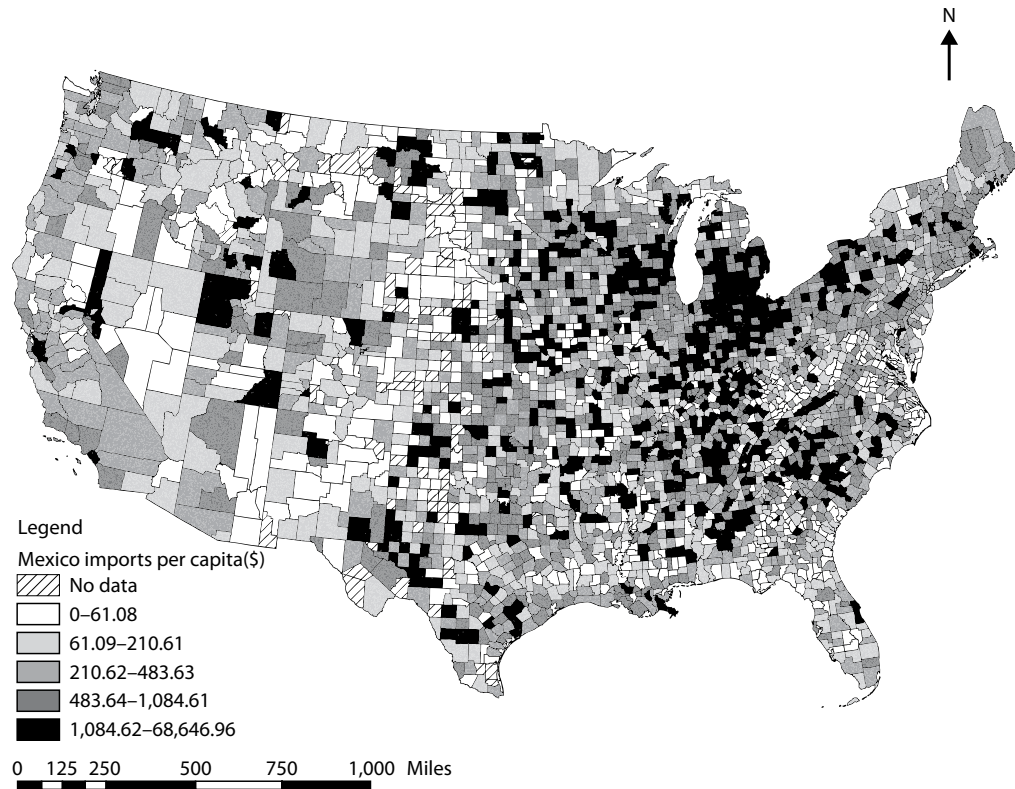


FIGURE 1.1.C. US Counties by Mexican Imports per Capita (in quantiles).

Table 1.1 more precisely determines the relation among these and other variables.⁷

In table 1.1, we present our statistical models of 373 congressional districts predicting changes in Republican voting in 2016. As with figure 1.1, table 1.1 shows that Trump support was greater than Romney support in counties where there were fewer Mexican immigrants (% Mexican Immigrants). These results persist regardless of whether we use total Mexican immigration, total Mexican non-naturalized immigration, or total immigration instead of recent Mexican immigration or Mexican trade exports instead of imports (results not shown). Similarly, levels of Mexican imports, our indicator of trade, are negatively correlated with Trump voting (Mexico Import [\$1,000]/Person); that is, no or very few Mexican imports occur in areas that supported Trump. These results held with other indicators of trade such as exports, net trade, and recent trade (data not shown). Last, results for the other variables show that congressional districts with higher proportions of

TABLE 1.1 STATISTICAL MODELS PREDICTING REPUBLICAN VOTE SHARE IN 2016 MINUS 2012 REPUBLICAN VOTE SHARE AT CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT LEVEL

	Immigration and Trade (1)	+Demographic (2)	+Economic (3)	All Variables (4)
% Mexican Immigrants	-0.225*** (0.044)			-0.338*** (0.055)
Mexico Import (\$1,000) / Person	-0.005*** (0.002)			-0.003** (0.001)
% Non-Hispanic White		0.037*** (0.011)	0.023* (0.013)	-0.045*** (0.016)
% BA or More		-0.227*** (0.019)	-0.247*** (0.034)	-0.275*** (0.033)
% 65+		0.373*** (0.068)	0.427*** (0.075)	0.434*** (0.072)
% Female		1.361*** (0.214)	1.431*** (0.229)	0.644** (0.256)
Log Median HH Income			0.015 (0.031)	0.034 (0.030)
% Unemployment			-0.040 (0.032)	-0.035 (0.030)
% Manufacturing			0.100 (0.107)	0.334*** (0.114)
Population Logged	-0.267*** (0.050)	-0.092** (0.039)	-0.087** (0.040)	-0.098** (0.040)
Constant	3.599 (0.673)	0.525 (0.535)	0.365 (0.569)	0.881 (0.586)
Observations	373	376	376	373
R-squared	0.158	0.442	0.448	0.511

NOTE: All independent variables computed for 2016. HH = Household.

SIGNIFICANCE: ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1.

whites (% non-Hispanic White) tended to vote for Trump rather than Romney, while places with more college-educated persons (% BA or More) and more females (% Female) shifted away from Trump, as did those with more manufacturing (% Manufacturing).

Therefore, our macro analysis suggests that an economic interest explanation for the presumed negative effects of immigration and trade do not explain the Trump vote. The Trump narrative that seeks to stoke fear about Mexican immigration and trade had the opposite effect: it seems to work best where there is little actual immigration and trade. Our results are consistent with economic evidence that immigration and

trade improve local economies, contrary to the Trump narrative that his base materially suffers because of immigration and trade with Mexico (Greenstone and Looney 2010; Furman 2018; National Academy of Sciences 2017).

ANTI-TRADE AND ANTI-IMMIGRANT ATTITUDES ACCOUNT FOR TRUMP SUPPORT, NOT ACTUAL IMMIGRATION OR TRADE

We further examine Trump voting and its relation to immigration and trade for individual voters, specifically white voters, rather than for counties. The county-level results in the previous analysis describe the geographic distributions and relations between Trump voting, immigration, and trade, but these are also subject to the effects of racial composition (e.g., Latino voters), as mentioned earlier, and the fact that in the previous analysis small counties carry as much weight as large urban counties. Thus, **table 1.2**⁸ uses statistical models to examine whether non-Hispanic whites voted for Trump in 2016 while controlling for whether they voted for Romney and for their party affiliation. Moreover, data from the CCES also allow us to model voter attitudes about immigration and trade, with questions ascertaining the extent of agreement with the assertions that the United States should deport illegal immigrants or whether they are against the TPP Act. These models also allow us to gauge the extent to which voters were exposed to actual immigration and trade (% Mexican Immigrants; Mexico Import [\$1,000]/Person).

Similar to table 1.1, table 1.2 shows that less educated (Completed College or More) and lower-income white voters (Family Income Logged) tended to vote for Trump, suggesting that Trump's candidacy appealed to less fortunate whites. Trump voters also tended to work in the manufacturing industries (Work in Manufacturing), suggesting that persons in that sector may have felt particularly vulnerable economically (Altick, Atkeson, and Hansen 2018). Models 2 and 4 show that percent Mexican immigrant (% Mexican Immigrants) and extent of Mexican trade (Mexico Import [\$1000]/Person) were unrelated to voting for Trump among white voters, but they reveal that negative attitudes about immigration and trade were clearly related to support for Trump (Believes US Should Build a Border Wall; Against Trans-Pacific Partnership Act). Actual immigration was negatively related to voting for Trump. Trade and immigration were unrelated to Trump support, suggesting that anti-immigrant and anti-trade attitudes bore no relation

TABLE 1.2 STATISTICAL MODELS PREDICTING TRUMP VOTE IN 2016

	Model Numbers			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Individual Level</i>				
Voted Romney in 2012 ^a	2.857*** (0.093)	3.003*** (0.077)	2.580*** (0.091)	2.721*** (0.082)
Independent	0.909*** (0.083)	1.010*** (0.090)	0.783*** (0.085)	0.891*** (0.091)
Republican	2.248*** (0.109)	2.392*** (0.113)	2.115*** (0.099)	2.255*** (0.107)
Completed College or More	-0.857*** (0.069)	-0.855*** (0.076)	-0.728*** (0.070)	-0.743*** (0.079)
Female	-0.210*** (0.060)	-0.229*** (0.065)	-0.085 (0.059)	-0.103 (0.064)
Age 65 and Over	0.102 (0.069)	0.071 (0.066)	0.094 (0.066)	0.049 (0.061)
Family Income Logged	-0.076** (0.037)	-0.067** (0.033)	-0.020 (0.038)	-0.017 (0.036)
Temporarily Laid Off	-0.060 (0.338)	-0.131 (0.374)	0.003 (0.312)	-0.060 (0.340)
Work in Manufacturing	0.411*** (0.109)	0.349*** (0.121)	0.246** (0.112)	0.203* (0.120)
Believes US Should Deport Illegal Immigrants			1.612*** (0.064)	1.645*** (0.061)
Against Trans-Pacific Partnership Act			0.655*** (0.070)	0.663*** (0.064)
<i>Congressional District (Groups) Level</i>				
% Mexican Immigrants		0.565 (2.085)		1.383 (2.274)
Mexico import (\$1,000) / person		-0.013 (0.054)		-0.007 (0.055)
Constant	-1.099 (0.409)	-1.324 (0.408)	-2.692 (0.423)	-2.879 (0.440)
Observations	22,475	21,857	22,441	21,823
Number of groups		373		373

NOTE: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

SIGNIFICANCE: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

^a Dummy variable for not voting in 2012 not shown.

TABLE 1.3 STATISTICAL MODELS PREDICTING WHETHER FLIPPED FROM VOTING FOR TRUMP IN 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION TO VOTING FOR DEMOCRATS IN 2018 HOUSE ELECTION

	Model Numbers			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Individual Level</i>				
Independent	-1.246*** (0.208)	-1.295*** (0.214)	-1.204*** (0.207)	-1.288*** (0.220)
Republican	-2.350*** (0.136)	-2.450*** (0.155)	-2.312*** (0.137)	-2.462*** (0.165)
Completed College or More	-0.137 (0.106)	-0.172 (0.130)	-0.222** (0.112)	-0.292** (0.144)
Female	0.189* (0.111)	0.238** (0.115)	-0.021 (0.121)	-0.020 (0.129)
Age 65 and Over	-0.559*** (0.092)	-0.609*** (0.098)	-0.316*** (0.092)	-0.337*** (0.103)
Family Income Logged	-0.092 (0.063)	-0.140** (0.071)	-0.024 (0.064)	-0.090 (0.075)
Temporarily Laid Off	0.547 (0.958)	0.556 (1.051)	0.900 (0.873)	1.095 (0.933)
Work in Manufacturing	0.275* (0.153)	0.261 (0.188)	0.371** (0.177)	0.353 (0.216)
Believes US Should Build a Border Wall			-1.372*** (0.138)	-1.641*** (0.199)
Against Trans-Pacific Partnership Act			-1.210*** (0.142)	-1.356*** (0.143)
<i>Congressional District (Groups) Level</i>				
% Mexican Immigrants		3.378*** (1.285)		3.447*** (1.279)
Mexico Import (\$1,000)/ Person		0.036 (0.037)		0.037 (0.037)
Constant	0.298 (0.723)	0.521 (0.760)	1.462 (0.709)	2.201 (0.798)
Observations	8,855	8,585	8,807	8,538
Number of Groups		370		370

NOTE: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

SIGNIFICANCE: ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1.

to the levels of trade and immigration. Thus candidate Trump was able to mobilize anti-immigrant and anti-trade sentiments among white voters through his narratives, whether or not there was an actual presence or threat of immigration and trade. In our full model, which includes individual characteristics, attitudes about immigration and trade, and congressional district characteristics of immigration and trade (Model 4), all the aforementioned results held. (In another set of models, we also examined the change in immigration and trade between 2010 and 2016, and these revealed similar results.)

Finally, in **table 1.3** we analyze the midterm House elections in 2018 in which fully forty congressional seats flipped from Republican to Democrat, representing a voter backlash against the Trump presidency. Table 1.3 is set up to mirror the model in table 1.2. Positive coefficients in table 1.3 represent a tendency to flip to the Democratic candidate (whereas positive coefficients represented voting for Trump in table 1.2). For example, the coefficient for female in Model 1 shows that women who voted for Trump in 2016 were more likely than men to flip to Democratic candidates. Also, the less educated and those working in manufacturing, who were more likely to vote for Trump in 2016, flipped to voting for Democrats in the midterms. Negative attitudes about both immigration and trade continued to drive voters against Democrats. However, although the presence of Mexican immigrants was unrelated to Trump voting, congressional districts with more immigrants were more likely to flip to Democratic candidates in 2018. This suggests that perhaps proximity to immigrants may have led to turning away from the Republican Party, which had become increasingly anti-immigrant under the leadership of Donald Trump. Trade with Mexico, on the other hand, continued to be unrelated to voting.

CONCLUSION: THE TRUMP PARADOX

Our research, at both the macro (county) and micro (individual voter) levels, shows that *virtually no aspects of Trump's simple narrative to his voters has any factual basis in economic data*. Ironically, in analyzing counties or congressional districts across the United States, Trump's voters are less likely to live in places that have a significant number of Mexican immigrants and that have been affected by trade with Mexico. When examining white voters specifically, neither actual immigration nor trade context is related to where his supporters resided, but in the 2018 midterm elections, the immigration context became important as

many Trump voters switched to vote for Democrats, especially in districts with more Mexican immigrants.

Our research shows the existence of a Trump Paradox that exposes dual yet systematic contradictions between Trump voter behavior and actual county economic exposure to Mexican trade and immigration, as well as contradictions between the attitudinally perceived economic and social impacts compared to actual county economic and social exposure to Mexican trade and immigration. While counties that voted for Trump are more economically challenged by unemployment and poverty than others, these challenging economic conditions are unrelated to exposure to Mexican trade and immigration.

Our research thus contradicts the core Trump narrative and demonstrates the need to develop a counternarrative. While many people in the United States are struggling financially in Trump voting counties, trade and migration are not to blame, even though many whites believe that to be the case. The difference between the two should not be understated. In fact, the evidence shows quite the opposite: places with more immigration and trade tend to do better economically, and there are only very small if any effects on native workers (National Academy of Sciences 2017). Trump's supporters may feel that trade and migration have damaged their economic prospects, but the empirical evidence says otherwise. Rather, candidate Trump successfully mobilized voters on the underlying sentiments that trade and immigration have hurt them. In the wake of Trump's political ascension, the worst thing that America's policy makers could do is treat Trump supporters' misdirected anger as a set of legitimate grievances in need of redress through anti-immigrant and anti-trade policies.

Trump's ability to successfully tap into anxieties about immigration and trade rather than the presence or threat of actual immigration and trade is consistent with social science research showing that economic self-interest generally has little effect on sociopolitical attitudes, especially those concerning issues of race and immigration (Sears and Funk 1991; Citrin et al. 1997; Green and McElwee 2018). Instead, attitudes about immigrants or racialized others may be based on factors such as media exposure (Héricourt and Spielvogel 2014), religious identity (Margolis 2018), racial anxieties (Sears and Funk 1991), or stereotypes about Latinos, all of which have been further stimulated during Trump's campaign and administration. Trump supporters may see nonwhites as altering their sense of American culture. They may see nonwhites growing in political power because of immigration and globalization, largely

represented by international trade. They may feel that nonwhites, therefore, threaten American power (Mutz 2018). Our evidence suggests that Trump's support is based on such racialized beliefs, even though diversity and globalization tend to be beneficial to even these white working-class voters (National Academy of Sciences 2017).

The need to provide solid data and critical analysis is now more important than ever, particularly with respect to an understanding of the real forces driving the Trump phenomenon. Rarely does research examine actual trade and migration, and weakly informed questioning by the media and their misleading reports legitimizes Donald Trump's false claims about the real problems facing the economy. This has implicitly endorsed a dangerously wrong-headed set of solutions. Implementing the highly restrictive trade and/or migration policy that Trump proposes would disproportionately hurt those areas that voted for Trump.

Suggested Reading

- Colantone, I., and P. Stanig. 2018. The trade origins of economic nationalism: Import competition and voting behavior in Western Europe. *American Journal of Political Science* (April 18). DOI.org/10.1111/ajps.12358.
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