

## RACE, PLACE, AND BUILDING A BASE LATINO POPULATION GROWTH AND THE NASCENT TRUMP CAMPAIGN FOR PRESIDENT

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**Abstract** A prominent feature of Donald Trump's campaign for president was the use of racially inflammatory rhetoric and fear over immigration—specifically from Mexico—to galvanize the electorate. Despite the commonly accepted assertion that hostility toward Mexican immigrants was an important attractor of core supporters to his base, analysts and academics alike have failed to explore the role that environmental indicators of perceived threat from immigration, such as residing in an area with a growing Latino population, played in generating support for Trump early in his campaign. We demonstrate that residing in a high-Latino-growth area is predictive of support for Trump following, but not before, his utterance of inflammatory and bellicose comments about Mexican immigrants. Our results suggest that, in addition to the importance of racial resentment and economic frustration, support for Trump in the early campaign period represented an adversarial reaction among Americans to Latino-led diversity.

On June 16, 2015, Donald Trump gave a rousing presidential announcement speech, sparking an immediate reaction among the public, media, and political scientists. A prominent feature of the Trump campaign was the galvanizing role that race played throughout his campaign. Trump's campaign was marked

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by a focus on themes of fear and safety, with recurrent attention given to the putative threat of rampant immigration from Mexico. Key moments in his campaign were his reference to Mexican immigrants as “criminals” and “rapists” and his promise to build a “great wall” along the border and make Mexico pay for the wall. These statements, occurring during the summer of 2015, were met with significant controversy, as many commentators decried them as explicitly racist. Trump’s blunt statements violated many tenets of candidate behavior, including the norm of equality and racial tolerance (Mendelberg 2001). Nevertheless, Trump’s poll numbers continued to rise in the lead-up to the 2016 primary elections, causing pundits and scholars to search for explanations for Trump’s political ascent.

Over the course of the campaign trail, many explanations were offered for the rise of Trump. Importantly, nearly all of these explanations point to voters’ characteristics, such as Anglo heritage and lack of education (Cohn 2016), economic frustration (Sides and Tesler 2016), racial resentment (Tesler and Sides 2016), authoritarianism (MacWilliams 2016), and ethnocentrism (Kalkan 2016). Left out of the discussion so far is the role that *environmental* factors, such as local ethnic context, may have played in influencing citizens’ gravitation toward Trump. Indeed, while scholarship has identified fear of immigration and growing minority populations as an important predictor of support for Trump (Nteta and Schaffner 2016), it is unclear whether locally experienced increases in immigration-driven ethnic diversity drew citizens to Trump’s base. In the early campaign period, as Trump increasingly established himself as *the* hardline opponent of immigration, it is possible that rising Trump support came from areas of the country experiencing large growths in immigrant populations.

One literature that provides a basis for the expectation of an effect of citizens’ local ethnic context on their evaluations of Trump is the public opinion research on immigration. A dominant thread of work in this literature focuses on how citizens’ racial context influences their perception of threat from immigrants (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). This research indicates that Americans are particularly sensitive to *changes* in levels of diversity (Newman and Velez 2014), and that *increases* in local immigrant populations can trigger threat perceptions and activate support for restrictive policies (Hopkins 2010; Newman 2013; Enos 2014). This work provides a foundation for the expectation that local ethnic change was an important element in the genesis of Trump’s base of electoral support. In addition to helping explain *where* Trump support emerged, this research provides insights about *when* the effects of ethnic context should manifest. According to Hopkins (2010), many aspects of citizens’ local environments—such as increasing diversity—will capture their attention but remain nonpolitical until prompted by external agents, such as the media or political elites, to be connected with specific policy issues. The timing of Trump’s racially inflammatory statements represents cutpoints in time where, following each controversial statement, increasing national

attention was given to his campaign and the issue of immigration. This leads to the expectation that residing in a context with growing immigrant minority populations served as a contextual factor attracting residents to Trump's campaign, but only *after* his controversial anti-immigrant statements.

Beyond informing expectations concerning where and when immigration-driven ethnic change may have translated into support for Trump, the literature offers insights about *what* immigrant group should be most influential. Research indicates that not all immigrant minorities are equally threatening, as some immigrant groups, such as Asians, are constructed as "model minorities" (Maddux et al. 2008), while others, such as Latinos, are constructed as threats (Chavez 2013). Observational research finds that while residing near large Asian populations is associated with *less* opposition to immigration, residing near large Latino populations is associated with *greater* opposition to immigration (Ha 2010). Adding to this, experimental research finds that citizens are more incensed by information about the costs of immigration when the group in question is Latino (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008), and express greater disapproval of transgressive behaviors (e.g., being undocumented) when engaged in by a Latino immigrant (Hartman, Newman, and Bell 2014).

This work leads us to the hypothesis that residing in an area where the *Latino* population experienced considerable growth should serve as a predictor of Trump support, but only *after* Trump's inflammatory and bellicose pronouncements concerning Mexican immigration. Prior to these statements, there should be no systematic differences in Trump support between citizens residing in low- versus high-Latino-growth areas. In short, we seek to test whether a pivotal factor in the building of Trump's base was his receipt of increasingly favorable evaluations among Americans residing in contexts experiencing Latino-led ethnic diversification. Such a test offers insight on whether an important component of the rise of Trump was a backlash among Americans not simply to the *abstract* threat of a racially diverse and majority-minority America, but rather to the lived experience and palpable threat of Latino population growth challenging prevailing racial hierarchies and community identities.

## Evidence Using National Survey Data

One challenge in testing our hypothesis is identifying national survey data conducted at key moments in the nascent Trump campaign. These key moments are (1) the period of time after his entry as a potential candidate in March 2015 (e.g., his formation of an exploratory committee on March 18) but before his infamous comments about Mexican immigrants, and (2) the period of time following his campaign announcement speech on June 16, 2015, where he made his "rapists" and "criminals" comment about Mexican immigrants. These pockets of time represent key moments in the nascent Trump campaign,

serving as cutpoints demarcating the period before and after Trump established himself as a hardline opponent of immigration and racial provocateur. In addition to occurring within these points in time, any useable data would require (1) items soliciting evaluations of Trump, (2) geocodes for respondents' local area of residence, and (3) a range of relevant control variables.

We located four surveys conducted by Monmouth University Polling Institute that met these criteria: (1) the March 2015 Poll, conducted (March 30–April 2) immediately after Trump formed his exploratory committee; (2) the June 2015 Poll, conducted (June 11–14) right before Trump's announcement speech and "rapists" comment; (3) the July 2015 Poll, conducted (July 9–12) roughly a month after Trump's announcement speech; and (4) the August 2015 Poll, conducted (July 30–August 2) weeks after Trump's July 11 speech proclaiming he would build a wall along the US–Mexico border. Each survey asked Republican respondents whether they held a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward Donald Trump.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, each survey included geocodes for respondents' county of residence and a range of demographic control variables and other relevant controls, such as disapproval of Obama.

We merged the Monmouth data into a single data set, creating a unique *Time* variable for each survey indicating survey-month.<sup>2</sup> We then merged this with data from the 2000 Decennial Census and 2010–2014 American Community Surveys, which enabled us to construct our key independent variable, *Latino Growth*, which is the percentage-point increase in county Latino populations between 2000 and 2010–2014.<sup>3</sup> A moderated multiple regression analysis<sup>4</sup> assessed the marginal effect of *Latino Growth* conditional upon *Time*—that is, across the March 2015–August 2015 time span of the combined Monmouth data. The analysis includes a range of individual and contextual controls, and

1. This includes Republicans and Republican-leaning. Respondents identifying with the Democratic Party were asked to evaluate Democratic candidates for president. While it would be of interest to know whether Trump's racial appeals resonated with Independent and Democratic voters residing in high *Latino Growth* contexts, the branched nature of the candidate favorability questions in the Monmouth surveys preclude this type of analysis, which we believe represents an important direction for future research.

2. The variable *Time* is coded as follows: "1" for the March 2015 Poll, "2" for the June 2015 Poll, "3" for the July 2015 Poll, and "4" for the August 2015 Poll.

3. To provide complete coverage of all counties in the Monmouth data, we relied upon the 2010–2014 Five-Year American Community Survey (ACS) data file. Our use of a 10–14-year time frame for measuring *Latino Growth* is consistent with leading research on ethnic change in political science and sociology (Citrin, Reingold, and Green 1990; Green, Strolovitch, and Wong 1998; Alexseev 2006; Hopkins 2010; Newman 2013), which measures change over time spans roughly comparable in length to the one selected in our analysis.

4. Given the hierarchical structure of the data, where individual respondents are embedded within counties, we estimated a random intercepts multilevel logistic regression model. Our results entirely hold when estimating a single-level logistic regression model (see Online Appendix Table 3). Our main results presented in figure 1, panel A (and Online Appendix Table 1), also hold when applying survey weights (see Online Appendix Table 4).

we provide information about question wording, variable measurement, and descriptive statistics in the [Appendix](#).

[Figure 1](#), panel A, plots the estimated effects of county *Latino Growth* on the probability of reporting a “favorable” opinion of Trump across each survey. Full results are presented in Online Appendix Table 1. As can be seen, prior to Trump’s issuance of his two most infamous anti-Mexican statements, we do not observe a statistically significant effect of *Latino Growth* on evaluations of Trump.

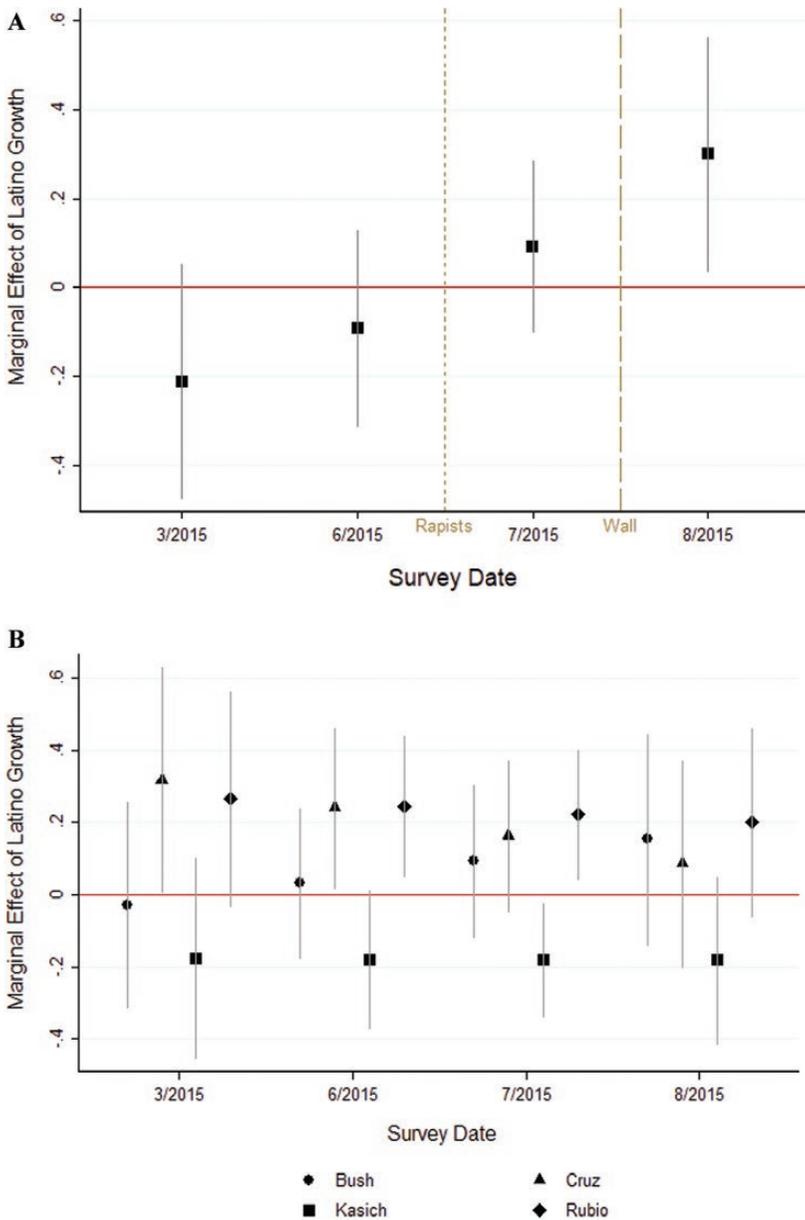
However, immediately following the “rapists” comment, the coefficient begins to take on a positive value (though statistically insignificant). After Trump had made both the “rapists” and the “wall” statements, a positive and statistically significant effect of *Latino Growth* emerged.<sup>5</sup> The pattern of coefficients indicates a significant and positive interaction of *Latino Growth* with *Time* ( $\beta = 2.57$ , s.e. = 1.27,  $p < .05$ ). This effect is not an artifact of the interactive model specification, as the pattern of estimates for *Latino Growth* derived from the moderated regression is comparable to that obtained from by-survey regressions (see Online Appendix Table 2). These results provide support for the hypothesis that residing in a context experiencing Latino population growth created a latent source of support for Trump that was “activated” by his racially inflammatory statements about Mexican immigrants.

## Robustness Checks

These results hold when excluding Latinos from the analysis (Online Appendix Table 5) and when measuring *Latino Growth* over a wider time period, such as 1990 to 2014 (Online Appendix Table 6). Interestingly, the results for *Latino Growth* weaken when focusing more specifically on *Latino Immigrant Growth* (Online Appendix Table 7), suggesting that support for Trump following his anti-Mexican comments is indicative of hostility toward Latinos in general.<sup>6</sup> An important alternative model is one that includes dynamic versions of key contextual variables—specifically, the economic variables that may serve as indicators of downward changes in economic conditions. Indeed,

5. The size of this effect is displayed at the bottom of Online Appendix Table 1. The effect is substantively significant, as a 5th to 95th percentile increase in *Latino Growth* in August 2015 is associated with a .13 increase in the probability of favoring Trump.

6. Less than half of the Latino population in the United States is foreign-born, and most of its recent growth has been due to birth rates instead of immigration (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2014/04/29/hispanic-nativity-shift/>). Nevertheless, there persists a strong link between Latinos and immigration in the mass media (Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013) and the minds of many Americans (Pérez 2010). It is likely that the average American does not differentiate in their response to observing native-born versus foreign-born Latino population growth. In fact, recent research by Rocha et al. (2011) demonstrates that Anglo American support for restrictive immigration policy increases the most in response to residing near large native-born, as compared to foreign-born, Latino populations.



**Figure 1. Effect of Local Latino Growth on Favorability of Republican Candidates in Nascent Stage of Presidential Campaign (Republicans only).**

Trump’s campaign focused on the loss of manufacturing jobs, unemployment, and the slipping “American dream”; thus, it is possible that the estimated effects of *Latino Growth* are capturing the effects of changes in income levels,

manufacturing jobs, and employment. Online Appendix Table 8 demonstrates that this is not the case, as our core results hold when  $\Delta$ Median Income,  $\Delta$ Manufacturing Jobs, and  $\Delta$ Unemployment are interacted with *Time*.

An additional issue is the problem of residential self-selection and potentially non-random assignment of the “treatment” variable in observational data. If residential self-selection were at work, there is no reason to expect such an effect to be more or less operative across the Monmouth surveys, and thus to serve as an explanation for the varying effects of *Latino Growth* in March 2015 versus September 2015. Despite this, we estimated an alternative model controlling for county demographics in the year 2000 as possible pre-treatment confounders. These confounders are characteristics of counties in the year 2000 that may have influenced both where *Latino Growth* occurred and where Trump support evolved. On top of this, our 2014 contextual measures may be influenced by *Latino Growth*, and thus introduce post-treatment bias. Online Appendix Table 9 reveals that when we replace our 2014 contextual controls with 2000 controls, our results are actually strengthened.

One additional concern is that the pattern of coefficients observed in [figure 1](#), panel A, represents some unidentified trend that led Republican identifiers in high *Latino Growth* contexts to report increasingly favorable evaluations of in-party elites in general. Over time, candidates were investing more resources in campaigning and citizens may have become increasingly polarized, especially in diversifying contexts, given the salience of immigration as a political issue. [Figure 1](#), panel B, presents the results from our model for Trump, substituting evaluations for other prominent Republican candidates for president (full results in Online Appendix Table 1). The pattern observed for Trump that is indexed to the timing of his inflammatory statements is unique to evaluations of Trump and not observed for evaluations of the other candidates. Additionally, Trump may have intensified his campaigning efforts in states with early primaries, and such states also house counties experiencing high Latino growth. To check this, a re-estimated model including a dummy variable for residence in an early primary state and its interaction with *Time* indicates that our core results entirely hold, and that no significant effects are observed for residence in an early primary state nor its interaction with time (Online Appendix Table 10).

One final concern is that the significant effect of *Latino Growth* observed in the August 2015 Monmouth survey is a fluke and not indicative of Trump’s racial rhetoric activating support in high-Latino-growth contexts. In response, we obtained the 2015 Governance Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center<sup>7</sup> in the months (August 27 and October 4) immediately following the latest Monmouth poll in our analysis. These data enable us to assess whether similar effects are observed for *Latino Growth* on favorability evaluations

7. Drawn from landline and cellular RDD (AAPOR3 response rate: 9.5 percent landline, 8.3 percent cellular).  $N = 6,004$ . However, two phases of the survey and different versions of the questionnaire were randomly administered to half-samples. This left 1,491 respondents in phase B

of Trump roughly one month later. The data also include a range of potentially relevant controls not included in the Monmouth data, such as respondent income, nationalism, racial resentment, political trust, and dissatisfaction with the “direction” of the nation. As shown in [table 1](#), there continues to be a positive relationship between *Latino Growth* and evaluations of Trump.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1. Replication—Effect of Local Latino Growth on Evaluations of Donald Trump in Early Campaign Period (Republicans Only)**

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Local ethnic context		
Latino growth	1.810	(.892)*
Contextual controls		
Median income	-.396	(.797)
Unemployment rate	.634	(.860)
Manufacturing jobs	.184	(.615)
Percent Black	-.169	(.763)
Romney vote	.470	(.617)
Population density	1.330	(1.180)
Individual controls		
Education	-1.180	(.390)**
Income	.396	(.372)
Age	.004	(.005)
Male	.358	(.177)*
Black	-.247	(.558)
Latino	-.806	(.363)*
Asian	.605	(.617)
Dissatisfied	-.007	(.274)
Nationalism	.351	(.286)
Racial resentment	.865	(.276)**
Obama disapproval	1.110	(.407)**
Ideology	-.097	(.444)
Trust in government	-.342	(.486)
Constant	-2.750	(.946)
# Level 1 units (Individuals)		632
# Level 2 units (County)		415

NOTE.—Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients from a random intercepts logistic regression model estimated using *xtlogit* in Stata®, with standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ , based upon two-tailed hypothesis tests.

SOURCE.—2015 Governance Survey (August 27–October 4), Pew Research Center.

receiving questionnaire form 1, which was the subset of respondents given items about Trump and key control variables. Of these 1,491 respondents, 636 identified as Republican or Republican-leaning. This analysis is restricted to this subset of respondents.

8. These results essentially hold in early 2016 as well (Online Appendix Table 12).

Additionally, this relationship is unique to evaluations of Trump, with null effects for *Latino Growth* on evaluations of Bush, Cruz, and Rubio in this Pew data (Online Appendix Table 11).

## **Conclusion**

Scholars argue that the growth of the Latino population and the presence of a black man in the White House has caused many white Americans to feel that the extant racial hierarchy is under attack, which in turn unleashed a white backlash in the form of the Tea Party movement (Parker and Barreto 2014) and the Trump campaign (Nteta and Schaffner 2016). Our research strongly aligns with this narrative: We find that support for Trump early in the campaign was drawn from areas where citizens had *lived experience* with Latino growth, suggesting that the political ascent of Trump represents an adversarial reaction among racially threatened Americans to the expansion of Latino populations in their own communities.

The findings from this article add to the popular and scholarly discourse concerning the political ascent of Donald Trump, which previously had overlooked the role of demographic context as a key factor predicting the rise of Trump supporters. Moreover, this research note makes a broader contribution by building a bridge between existing research on race-based campaign appeals and the effect of racial context on public opinion and electoral behavior (Hutchings and Valentino 2004). Future research could build on this article by exploring whether our observed results extend to Arab Americans and Muslim immigrants, as Trump's campaign rhetoric targeted this group as well as Latinos. Indeed, future research could analyze whether Americans residing in contexts with growing Arab and Muslim populations gravitated toward Trump following his campaign pronouncements to create a database for tracking Muslims (Haberma 2015) and a temporary ban on the entry of Muslims (Johnson 2015).

## **Appendix. Question Wording and Variable Measurement**

### **I. Contextual Variables**

#### LATINO GROWTH

The percentage-point change in the estimated percent Latino in each county between the 2000 Decennial Census and the 2010–2014 five-year American Community Survey. Mean = 3.81, standard deviation=2.68.

#### MANUFACTURING JOBS

The percent of the total employed civilian population that is 16 years and over within a county reporting working in a job classified by the Census Bureau

as a “Manufacturing” job. Derived from the 2010–2014 ACS. Mean = 10.8%, standard deviation = 5.5.

#### ROMNEY VOTE

The percent of votes within a county in the 2012 presidential election cast for Republican candidate Mitt Romney. These data were obtained from David Leip’s Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections. Mean = 48%, standard deviation = 15.2.

## II. Monmouth Polls

#### EVALUATION OF DONALD TRUMP

“I’m going to read you a few names of people who are running for president in 2016. Please tell me if your general impression of each is favorable or unfavorable, or if you don’t really have an opinion.” This list included “businessman Donald Trump.” Response options were “Favorable” or “Unfavorable.” From this question, we constructed an item coded “1” for respondents reporting “Favorable” evaluations of Trump and “0” for respondents reporting “Unfavorable” evaluations of Trump or failing to provide an answer or reporting “no opinion.” The percent of respondents in the data reporting favorable evaluations of Trump by survey are as follows: (1) March 2015 = 25.07%, (2) June 2015 = 21.4%, (3) July 2015 = 43.4%, and (4) August 2015 = 52%.

#### EDUCATION

“What was the last grade in school you completed?” Response options: (1) 8th Grade or Less, (2) High School Incomplete (Grades 9, 10, and 11), (3) High School Complete (Grade 12), (4) Vocational/Technical School, (5) Some College, (6) Junior College Graduate (2-Year, Associate Degree), (7) 4-Year College Graduate (Bachelor’s Degree), and (8) Graduate School (Master’s, Law/Medical School, etc.). Mean = 5.51, standard deviation = 1.98.

#### AGE

Respondents were asked to report their age on their last birthday. This item was open response. Mean = 53 years, standard deviation = 17.8.

#### RACE

Respondents were asked whether or not they are of Latino or Hispanic origin, as well as to report whether they are of White, Black, or Asian origin. Using responses to these items, we constructed dummy variables for non-Hispanic Whites, non-Hispanic Blacks, non-Hispanic Asians, and Latin@ respondents.

CHILDREN

Respondents were asked if they have any children under the age of 18. Those who reported “Yes” were coded “1,” and those who reported “No” were coded “0.”

OBAMA DISAPPROVAL

Respondents were asked whether they approve or disapprove of the job Barack Obama is doing as President. Those who reported “disapprove” were coded “1,” and those who reported “approve” were coded “0.” Those reporting no opinion or not answering the question were coded “0”; 49.4 percent of respondents across the combined Monmouth data disapproved of Obama.

IDEOLOGY

“In general, would you describe your political views as liberal, moderate, or conservative?” Response options for this item ranged from (1) “Very Liberal” to (5) “Very Conservative.” Mean = 3.2, standard deviation = 1.1.

### **III. 2015 Governance Survey, Pew Research Center**

NATIONALISM

“Which of these statements best describes your opinion about the United States?” The response options were: (1) “The U.S. stands above all other countries in the world,” (2) “The U.S. is one of the greatest countries in the world, along with some others,” and (3) “There are other countries that are better than the U.S.” From this item, we constructed a three-category ordinal variable reversing the coding of the original variable, so that higher values indicate higher levels of nationalism (i.e., agreement with the notion that the U.S. stands above all other countries in the world).

RACIAL RESENTMENT

“I’m going to read you some pairs of statements that will help us understand how you feel about a number of things. As I read each pair, tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views—even if neither is exactly right,” and then presented with the following pair of statements: “Racial discrimination is the main reason why many black people can’t get ahead these days” and [OR] “Blacks who can’t get ahead in this country are mostly responsible for their own condition.” Respondents who reported agreeing with the second statement were coded “1,” and those agreeing with the former statement were coded “0.”

## TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

“How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right? Just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?” From this item, we constructed a variable coded from (1) “Never” to (4) “Just About Always.”

## DISSATISFIED

“All in all, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in this country today?” Using this item, we constructed a dichotomous variable coded “1” for those reporting being “dissatisfied” and “0” for those reporting being “satisfied” or reporting no opinion or failing to provide an answer.

## TRUMP EVALUATION

“Is your overall opinion of Donald J. Trump very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable, or very unfavorable?” From this item, we constructed a dichotomous variable, coded “1” for respondents reporting “very favorable” or “favorable” and “0” otherwise.

## Supplemental Data

Supplementary data are freely available at *Public Opinion Quarterly* online.

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