

An Exploration of African American Trump Voters

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the motivations of African American Trump voters to identify how ideologies, beliefs, interests and Donald Trump's political strategies and discourses contributed to their voting choices in 2016 and 2020. This project provides additional information and commentary on the existing literature using the case study of African American Trump voters. This is executed by testing how accurately populist theories focused on ideologies, interests, discourses, and tactics explain the support of right-wing populist movements from non-White communities, using the example of Black Trump voters. The thesis finds that Black Trump voters are motivated by diverse values, perspectives, and experiences, and populism works to encourage many of these factors. Though the explanatory significance of populism upon Black Trump voters is limited, populist paradigms help highlight the diverse range of factors influencing the decisions of Trump's Black electorate.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AARC: African American Research Collaborative

ACLU: American Civil Liberties Union

ADL: Anti-Defamation League

ANES: American National Election Study

BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian political party)

BLT: Black Liberation Theology

BVP: Black Voter Project

CDC: Center for Disease Control and Prevention

C-FAM: Center for Family and Human Rights

CIRCLE: Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement

CIS: Center for Immigration Studies

CREW: Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington

EC: Electoral College

FAIR: Federation for American Immigration Reform

FEMA: Federal Emergency Management Agency

GOP: Grand Old Party (a term for the Republican Party)

GWR: Geographically Weighted Regression

ICPSR: Inter-university Consortium for Political Science Research

ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

NAICS: North American Industry Classification System

PG: Prosperity Gospel

RA: Regression Analysis

SG: Social Gospel

SPLC: Southern Poverty Law Center

UN: United Nations

US: United States of America

WVS: World Values Survey

CHAPTER ONE: AN INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In 2015, Donald Trump announced he would run for office in the 2016 federal American election (Neate 2015). As Trump became the Republican Party leader, he also became the frontman of an expanding right-wing populist movement, significantly characterized by its prejudices towards minorities, particularly racial and ethnic minorities. These views did not only come from populist supporters but were also echoed and promoted by Trump.

As the results of the 2016 election would eventually reveal, 9 out of 10 of Trump's voters were White (Pew Research Center 2018b), spotlighting the clear separation between many White Americans and persons of color. When considering the racist ideas pushed by the movement and Trump, it is clear why so few of Trump's supporters are persons of color. Nevertheless, what about the 10% of Trump's voters who are not White? What were their reasons for supporting such a controversial leader and movement? Why do some people of color support Trump and a movement characterized by its discrimination of their communities?

This thesis explores the case of Black Trump supporters to begin to answer these questions.¹ Trump's Black electorate is selected because they make up a mere 6% of Trump's 2016 supporters (Pew Research Center 2018b). In combing the fact that so many of Trump's voters are Caucasian with the fact that nearly 90% of African Americans vote Democratic at election time (Pew Research Center 2016b), the case of the Black Trumper is exceptionally perplexing.

¹ The term "Black" is used interchangeably with the term "African American" to represent individuals who identify themselves with the term. This practice is adopted from the established demographic indicators used throughout much of the political science literature and various organizations conducting demographic analyses. For more detail and information on the usage of the term Black in this thesis and other studies see Chapter Three.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Though there will always be exceptions to voter trends, it is still crucial for political scientists to understand why the behaviour of some voters varies from others. As Fields contends, “it’s important to look at people who don’t fit the mold. Doing this sometimes tells you more about the people who do fit the mold” (Shashkevich 2016). In the populist field of study, this is just as crucial, though the sentiment has often been overlooked when investigating the Trump phenomenon. Numerous studies in this area have worked to explain and comprehend Trump’s White electorate (as is illustrated later in this chapter), and fewer have showcased Trump voters of other races. With this thesis, I seek to contribute information and analysis with which the field can begin to bridge this gap. Simultaneously, because there are fewer studies conducted on non-White Trump supporters, the populist lenses frequently relied upon by the field have been rarely tested to explain groups of voters who differ from most others. In testing populist theories against the case of Black Trump voters, I hope to establish a basis upon which future researchers can expand to overcome this separation.

What Does This Thesis Contribute to the Field?

There are a few reasons why this thesis’ work is essential. Firstly, exploring Black Trump voters can help researchers understand the Trump movement and its supporters better. Suppose the ideas purported about the Black community and their racial or ethnic communities were not enough to dissuade their votes. What else was important to them that they ended up finding in the Trump movement? What new information can be obtained from exploring these motivations? These are vital questions for researchers to ask about the Trump movement and other populist movements as it can confirm information previously known or provide new perspectives to comprehending populist voters.

Secondly, looking at different subsets of populist voters also tests the methods the field uses to study populism. By employing established populist perspectives to study other groups of populist voters, researchers test the rigor and repeatability of these traditional theoretical perspectives.

Lastly, using populist theories is useful to highlight the diverse range of ideas, interests, values, and experiences that motivate Trump's Black supporters. As the following Chapter discusses in more depth, there are multiple perspectives one can employ to study populism, each illuminating distinct influences. Using any of these theories is useful in showcasing factors impacting the political participation of Black Trump voters.

Situating the Thesis Within the Field

Notably, the research on current American populism and Donald Trump has provided populist studies with substantial indicators about how Trump's electorate thinks and acts. The thesis relies upon these works to help identify how and to what extent Trump's Black electorate fits within established frameworks and the populist movement. As such, it is helpful to understand past works' contributions to use them effectively in understanding Black Trump voters.

Inglehart and Norris's oft-cited study highlights the cultural upsets underscoring the Trump phenomenon. The authors present convincing evidence that the Trump phenomenon is, in part, an adverse reaction to the cultural changes American society has experienced in recent decades (2016). In addition to the cultural upset, research has also suggested that the attitudes of American populist voters play an important role in predicting Trump support (see Smith and Hanley 2018; Dodson and Brooks 2022; Mutz 2018). Studies examining the demographics of Trump supporters (see Morgan and Lee 2018; Ekins 2017, 2018) have also significant contributions in connecting

various demographic factors to support for Trump. Overall, populist literature illustrates a breadth of influences that contribute to a Trump vote.

These works often reinforce the conclusions drawn by other studies as well. For instance, Luttig, Frederico, and Lavine's study connecting racial resentments to Trump support (2017), alongside Gusterson's analysis of nationalistic populism in the Trump movement (2017) illustrates the critical role attitudes and perspectives have in contributing to the Trump vote. So too does Enders and Thorntons 2021 explore the way attitudes and beliefs of White Trumpers impact their vote choice (see also Gusterson 2017; Reny, Collingwood and Valenzuela 2019).

In regard to the beliefs within the Trump movement, Ekins' work, highlights a range of common values among Trump voters, describing that many Trump voters are American Preservationists, Staunch Conservatives, Anti-Elites, Free Marketeers, and the Disengaged (2017). Ekins' work thus illustrates some of the key ideologies and values of the Trump electorate, providing important groundwork for the thesis to investigate the extent to which the ideologies of the Black Trump electorate correlate and contrast to the sentiments of other Trumpers.

Demographics have also been an important lens in studying the Trump movement. Carnes and Lupu 2021, Rothenberg 2019, and Morgan and Lee 2018 have examined the race and experiences of White voters and their advocacy for Trump, highlighting the role race has had in the Trump elections.

Because these studies work with data related directly to Trump's White electorate or many of his voters, the theories they test and the findings they conclude help researchers to understand the White Trump voters of 2016 and 2020. They also provide a core foundation to studying Black populist voters in that they illustrate important ideological, attitudinal, and demographic trends and characteristics underlying the Trump movement.

For the field to continue to progress, however, it is critical to acknowledge that some studies (such as the examples above) do not explain Trump voters of color, including African American Trump supporters. Discerning how Black Trump voters differ and align with the views and experiences of other Trump supporters is important to understanding the extent to which Black Trumpers fit into the populist movement, and the field's understandings about voters of populist movements and leaders. As such it is just as crucial to recognize that studying Trump voters who are "outside the mold" (Fields, as reported by Shashkevich 2016) can challenge or confirm previous works.

1.3 THESIS OVERVIEW

In Chapter Two the basics of populist movements, leaders and the phenomena that contributes to their rise are presented. With a workable understanding of populism, the thesis then presents the frameworks used to examine the motivations and perceptions of Black Trump voters. These frameworks are referred to as the strategic, discursive, ideational, and interest-based approaches. These lenses are categorized into two groups. The first grouping is focused on Black Trump voters, in that it examines how the ideologies and interests of Black Trumpers influence their support. The second category presents Donald Trump's personality, his political tactics and discourses to examine their affect on his Black electorate. The use of multiple frameworks is further justified and explained in Chapter Three.

In Chapter Three the methodologies used to employ the frameworks are introduced. As this thesis uses multiple theories to understand Black Trumpers, theoretical triangulation is the overarching approach taken by this project. In employing this triangulation of theories, the thesis includes quantitative and qualitative sources of data.

Chapter Four of the thesis presents an overview of the American populist movement. The chapter describes the key ideologies underscoring the Trump movement, as well as its origins. Exploring the populist movement's background is essential for developing a full understanding of the movement's values, which is necessary to assess how the ideas and interests of Black Trump voters compare to the movement.

Following this, Chapter Five employs a combination of the strategic approach and Laclauan discursive approach outlined in Chapter Two to identify ways Trump's personality, political style and discourses may have appealed to Black voters. This includes exploring the tactics and rhetoric used by Donald Trump to gain Black support or retain membership among established Black Republicans.

Chapter Six describes the ideologies and interests that are present in Trump's Black electorate, by exploring the key types of Black Trump voters. This section presents the ideas underlying Black Republican voters, those resentful of the Democratic Party, and foreign-born Blacks who often lean conservative (Gikandi 2020). These types of Black Trump voters are described here to make identifying relationships, or any lack thereof, between personal interests, ideologies, and the data in Chapter Seven, straightforward.

Chapter Seven presents quantifiable data on Trump's Black voters. In this chapter, borrowed statistic and numerical data that help to examine Black Trump voters are explored. In Chapter Seven, the thesis explores the demographic factors of age, gender, education, employment type, income, religion, geographical region, and community type (rural or urban) to assess their influence on Black Trump voters. These elements are assessed with the goal of illustrating the extent to which ideologies, interests and personal experiences motivated Black Trumpers.

Chapter Eight looks at some additional influences that may have impacted Black Trump voters. This includes an exploration of the electoral system, historical voter trends, as well as social media, misinformation, and foreign state actors. This is added with the intent of providing a more complete picture of the influences Black Trump voters can experience and helps to present some of the limitations of populism in explaining the behaviours of Trump's Black electorate.

As a source of discussion, of Chapter Nine explores the abilities of the populist theories overlook the case of committed Black Republicans and highlights the key information about the Black Trump electorate. This generates an important discussion about the effectiveness of populist approaches in examining different types of Black Trump voters. This reflection also highlights areas in which populism was and was not an obvious influence on Black Trump supporters with considerations from Chapter Eight.

Following this discussion, Chapter Ten outlines the limitations of the study with a final comment on possible directions future research on Black Trump supports can go.

CHAPTER TWO: BUILDING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

To clearly establish the populist frameworks the thesis applies to help understand the Black Trumper, it is important to describe what populism is and what its core elements are. Though populist movements look different in every nation, there are consistent factors that appear throughout all populist movements that help researchers to identify when a political movement is populist.

Below, the thesis highlights these core elements of populism and helps to illustrate how the Trump movement falls into the populist category. From here, the thesis briefly explains some of the outside factors that help to facilitate the emergence and spread of populist movements and how these preconditions were apparent in the US before Trump's political ambitions began. Globalization and its ties to economic and cultural backlashes are an important part of the Trump phenomenon and is thus vital to understanding the sentiments and perspectives that underly the movement. The connection to globalization is particularly important to understanding the recent American populist movement, as Chapter Four demonstrates.

Finally, with an understanding of populism, its defining features, the necessary preconditions, and the external motivators that help to facilitate its spread, the thesis establishes four key populist frameworks that are used within the populist literature to examine such movements. Using the basics of each of the four populist theories, I construct two overarching lenses that guide the inquiry of this thesis. These are best described as a voter-centric perspective which draws upon the ideational and interest approaches, and a leader-focused lens which implements a strategic and discursive positioning.

2.1 POPULIST FUNDAMENTALS

To first understand what populism entails, its fundamental components need to be outlined. The main factors of populism include conceptions of a united ‘people’, the act of ‘othering’ and sharing in anti-elitism, as well as the importance of a leader to guide and help organize the ‘people’. These elements are discussed in greater depth below.

The People

Populist movements rely upon distinguishing their followers as separate from the rest of the nation. This is typically done by framing populist supporters as a “people” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, 5; Otjes et al. 2018, 274; Inglehart and Norris 2016, 6; Gherghina and Soare 2013, 3) who are moral, good, and who reflect the true values of the nation or “the heartland” as Taggart proposes (2000). The heartland symbolizes the values of the nation (Taggart 2000, 3) and is where, “in the populist imagination, a virtuous and unified population resides” (Taggart 2000, 95).

In describing the movement as reflective of the “people”, “special people” (Gherghina and Soare 2013, 3) or “silent majority” (Inglehart and Norris 2016, 6), populist movements imply they represent the whole of society. As Mudde and Kaltwasser indicate, such phrases as act as an “adulation of the common people” (2017, 5) and are meant to appeal to the movement’s supporters. The idea of a homogenous, unified society is, of course, a fantasy, yet this does not deter populist movements and their leaders from pushing this narrative.

Though most people are quick to recognize the idea of a cohesive society is nonsensical, populist movements and their leaders promote the notion to benefit themselves. The insinuation that populist members are moral because they reflect “the heartland” and its values, makes supporters feel reassured in their beliefs. The more people believe the movement represents the

majority, the easier it is to justify one's beliefs as they see the majority as representative of what is 'right'. Through this logic, populist leaders and established members – as well as extremists - rationalize their beliefs.

This also assists in recruiting new members as well. In seeing that populist supporters are reassured and supported by a leader or one another, those holding similar positions are more likely to join. Gherghina and Soare also recognize this strategy, describing that “the sacralisation of the people becomes an instrument in the fight” (2013, 8). As more supporters join in, the populist movement gains greater social, cultural, and political influence spreading its ideas to more people and continuing the cycle of membership.

Othering and Discrimination

Those who do not support the movement and 'the people' are typically regarded as the 'other'. The term 'other' describes those 'the people' believe to be directly against their values and interests, despite if they are or not. As Laclau emphasizes, the concept of 'the people' only exists with its construction of “the other” (2005), indicating the necessity of populist movements to construct an opposition, or an enemy on which to shift blame. Laclau continues to explain the:

total equivalence [of society] would also make the emergence of the 'people' as a collective actor impossible. An equivalence which was total would cease to be equivalence and collapse into mere identity: there would no longer be a chain but a homogeneous, undifferentiated mass (2005, 200).

In contrast to the populist movement's conception of a homogenous 'people', the 'other' often consists of a wide variety of cultural, socio-economic, and ethnic groups. This is especially the case with anti-pluralist and nationalist populist movements. Right-wing populist movements – such as the Trump movement - are characterized by their adoption of nationalism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, 21) and exclusion.

However, as Inglehart and Norris explain, populist movements routinely define ‘others’ by cultural differences (2016, 7), exhibiting xenophobic nationalism (Inglehart and Norris 2016, 7). Xenophobic nationalism targets racial, ethnic, and cultural groups by “assum[ing] that the ‘people’ are a uniform whole, and that states should exclude people from other countries and cultures” (Inglehart and Norris 2016, 7). The rise in immigration in recent decades in the US has played a part in the growing dislike of those from other cultures, religions, and races (as is demonstrated in later in this chapter). Inglehart and Norris also state that the Trump movement “is culturally populist, emphasizing anti-immigration policies and rhetoric” (2016, 20). Research illustrating that Trump’s White electorate voted on prejudices and the rejection of modern American culture (Smith and Hanley 2018, 205) reiterates Inglehart and Norris’ (2016) conclusions.

Anti-Elitism and Anti-Establishment Views

Racial, social, and cultural prejudices are not the only ways in which populist movements practice ‘othering’. Those who have significant political and economic influence over society are often targets of a populist movement’s wrath. These sentiments are referred to as anti-elitist or anti-establishment. Anti-elitists are against elitism, which advocates for “giving special treatment and advantages to wealthy and powerful people” (Merriam-Webster n.d.b.). Meanwhile those with anti-establishment views oppose establishments, which are “a group of social, economic, and political leaders who form a ruling class (as of a nation)” (Merriam-Webster n.d.c.).

Mudde and Kaltwasser explain that “right-wing populists relate the ultimate struggle between the people and the elite to economic power, arguing that the political elite are in cahoots with the economic elite, and putting “special interests” above the “general interests” of the people” (2017, 13). As this thesis will demonstrate, the relationship of America’s political and

wealthy elites is unmistakable, and it has significant impacts on the political, cultural, and economic situations of the country. The substantial wealth and influence of societal elites makes them untouchable as they use financial power to sway policy outcomes. As a result, the disparity between the ultra rich and the rest of the population increases.

The Populist Leader

A final, but crucially important part of the populist puzzle is the populist leader. Though not all populist movements are led by a specific individual, (take for example the Brexit movement of 2016), for many movements a charismatic leader plays a vital role in growing membership and spreading the values of the movement.

There are a few regards in which the populist leader plays a crucial role in growing membership. Here, this section outlines the importance of the charismatic personality, and the way in which populist leaders strategize to garner support, which often includes the use of language and discourse as previously indicated.

One of the most prominent characteristics of populist leaders is their charisma. Mudde notes that, despite the fact a leader's charisma is not a necessity for populist movements to succeed, their charm is useful in cultivating movements (2004, 545). Morris explains this in more detail, writing "Charisma is a compelling attractiveness that can inspire devotion" (2018, 24). Research from Nai, i Coma and Maier also asserts that the "personality of political leader (and, by extension, Trump's personality) is likely to matter" in determining political successes (2019, 611). This underscores the magnitude of Trump's personality in the evolution of the populist movement, making it even more important to explore the extent to which Trump's demeanour influenced the Black Trump vote.

In addition to one's personality, the language style of the populist leader is important in getting as the public to see them as trustworthy. Citing Weber, Morris describes that "charisma, [is] the entirely personal devotion to, and personal trust in, revelations, heroism, or other qualities of leadership in an individual" (2018, 24). The combination of personality and language is pertinent for Trump (and many other populist leaders) to push the ideas of the populist movement to more people. In the case of Trump and past American political and populist leaders, these frontmen tend to emphasize a "hostile and conspiratorial world... [of which] the spokesman of the paranoid style finds it directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others (Hofstadter 1996, 4).

2.2 THE EXTERNAL FORCES OF POPULISM

Alongside the range of populist elements, there are various international and societal factors that foster the conditions for populist movements to arise. A feeling of crisis is often pivotal to the success of populist movements and in many recent campaigns is brought on by economic and cultural changes societies experience.

The work of modernization theory helps to explain the rise of populist movements in Western societies. The World Values Survey (WVS), founded by modernization theorist Ronald Inglehart describes as modern societies change, so too does the "[n]orms concerning marriage, family, gender and sexual orientation" (n.d.) However, Western nations are also facing "changes in political, economic and social spheres and increasingly rapid technological advances" (WVS n.d.) and have seen shifts from older "modes of production... toward more knowledge-intensive economies, weakening industrial-era mass manufacturing throughout the West" (Galston 2017, 23). These changes are "often attributed to the phenomenon of globalization" (WVS n.d.).

Globalization has contributed to the changes in American culture and its economy in a variety of ways. Culturally, globalization has contributed to a surge in the movement and relocation of people, meaning cultural and religious beliefs have spread rapidly across the globe. Immigration is one example of the intensity with which globalization has taken affect - in the US, immigration levels have continued to increase over the last five decades (Pew Research Center 2015).

Globalization has led to both cultural and economic changes in economically advanced societies, as the above information illustrates. However, whether cultural or economic changes are the area in which populist movements are most upset is sometimes debated by scholars. Though it appears the literature is partial to the cultural defence, (Margalit 2019, 153), there is equal evidence that economic insecurity play an important role in populist movements, especially in the case of Trump's election.

It is important to recognize that the beliefs of voters are impacted by the effects of globalization both culturally and economically. This is further reiterated by Spruyt, Keppens and Van Droogenbroeck who note that one study "empirically showed that in the support for populism, very different feelings of economic, cultural, and political vulnerability come together" (2016, 344). Therefore, the changes of culture and economics is used in later analysis of the Black Trump electorate.

Crises

In studying the ways economics and culture help to fuel populist movements, many scholars do agree that a sense of crisis is pertinent in motivating the populist voter. Taggart explains this, writing that "populism comes about when a larger process of transition gives rise to a sense of crisis, at least among one social group" (2000, 4). Stavrakakis et al. expand on this

also to suggest that it is specifically a “crisis of representation” (2018, 8) that leads to populist surges. Stavrakakis et al. posit that “crisis clearly pre-exists a populist mobilization, which is conditioned by it” (2018, 8). So too does Margalit argue that some sort of trigger “whether it be globalization, technological progress, or the financial crisis” (Margalit 2019, 152) has contributed to populist uprisings. To succinctly explain the crisis of representation Stavrakakis and his colleagues elaborate it

draws on both main perspectives, one focusing on the importance of crises of political representation as external triggers of populism as well as another highlighting the need to take into account the performative staging of crisis as an internal feature of populist discursive constructions (2018, 21).

Here Stavrakakis et al. emphasize the external nature of a representation crisis as well as the performative act of using crisis narratives and rhetoric to construct and reinforce a sense of crisis. Further analysis into the role of Trump highlights how he promotes a sense of crisis to his followers. As the following sections outline, a crisis of representation stems from the effects of globalization, further resulting in othering and anti-elitism.

Cultural Changes and Backlash

Cultural changes are often the result of new or different cultural movements and groups. In current literature, the cultural backlash thesis argues that many populist movements of the modern societies, are sparked by negative reactions to cultural shifts. Inglehart and Norris describe a cultural backlash as a “reaction against progressive cultural change” (2016, 1-2). In response to the spread of progressive values, ideas, and behaviours, opposing individuals reemphasize traditional beliefs and mannerisms.

The US has experienced a variety of cultural changes in recent decades. Budiman points out that “[s]ince 1965... the number of immigrants living in the U.S. has more than quadrupled” (2020) and thus American culture has changed to reflect and accept other religions, customs, and

beliefs brought by newcomers. However, many Americans, including many Trump supporters, are resistant or unaccepting of ‘other’ groups they believe have contributed to the new culture. For example, many White Christians (a key demographic of Trump’s) feel that Muslim immigrants are a threat both physically and religiously (Shortle and Gaddie 2015, 438), despite studies illustrating immigrants and foreign-borns are highly unlikely to partake in criminal behaviour (see Martinez, Jr. and Lee 2000, 506). Immigrational fears are often greatly misplaced. For instance, E. Jones suggests “immigration is not the problem per se. Rather immigration is the symbol to which many other problems—of poverty, insecurity, and alienation—have been attached” (2007, 44). Whether Black Trumpers feel similarly to their White counterparts on the issue of immigration is worth exploring, particularly amongst the foreign-born Black Republican population (whom of which are properly introduced in Chapter Six). Researching how Black Trump voters feel about immigration and cultural changes can showcase the ways their anxieties are similar and different to the broader Trump movement.

American society has also become socially progressive. Some of these social issues include sexuality, gender, climate change and racial equality (Maryville University n.d.) as well as human rights, guns, and more. The legalization of same-sex marriage in all 50 states in 2015 is one example reflecting the growing open-mindedness of American culture (Human Rights Campaign n.d.). Yet, those who oppose these social changes feel they do not fit in this new culture, making some feel the need to protect and defend their values out of a desperation to not be forgotten.

Economic Changes and Rising Insecurities

Though most scholars in the field have found the cultural backlash thesis to be a most compelling argument (see Inglehart and Norris 2016; Mutz 2018; Manuel 2017; Margalit 2019),

there are still some who emphasize the importance of the economic background of populist movements, particularly when it comes to the political success of such movements.

The US has experienced some important changes to its economy. *The Atlantic* describes the American economy has moved away from manufacturing towards services in recent decades (n.d.). With this change, many who thrived in the previous economy-type are unsure where to apply their skills in this new economy and subsequently feel left behind. Previous studies have shown this is true for many of Trump's supporters. Griffin and Sides point out that "black people and Hispanics are more likely than white people to report difficulty making housing, loan, or credit card payments and to report insufficient savings" (2018), meaning it is possible economic insecurities could have influenced a Black vote for Trump also, especially since he campaigned heavily on economic concerns. This plausibility is explored in later chapters.

Economic insecurities are not just determined by someone's financial or employment status alone. The way one understands their financial situation is subjective, meaning someone who feels they are "worse off" or in a worse position, is still able to feel worried about their finances or the economy. A false perception of economic situations is also a phenomenon known to significantly impact voters, according to Kivisto (2017, 43-4). Thus, it is important to take this into account when examining the role of economic insecurity for Trump's Black supporters.

Finally, and importantly, playing on economic insecurities can facilitate the political success of a populist movements. Margalit writes that though "the empirical evidence put forth to date does not establish that populism is predominantly an outcome of a rise in economic insecurity" (2019, 153), "economic insecurity affects the electoral outcome on the margin, sometimes in a highly consequential manner, but the overall explanatory significance for the level of support for populists is modest" (2019, 153). So, while many in populist movements are

more motivated by non-economic factors (meaning the explanatory significance of economic insecurity is low), economic motivations can have an exceptional impact on the electoral success of populist movements (meaning their outcome significance (Margalit 2019, 153) is high). Later in the thesis, Margalit's (2019) idea of "outcome significance" is explored using the case of Black Trump voters in 2016.

2.3 POPULISM: A COLLECTION OF STRATEGIES, DISCOURSES, IDEAS, AND INTERESTS

With an understanding of populist factors and the ways populism is related to globalization's effects, the thesis can begin to conceptualize populism in a way that can be used to examine Black Trump voters.

To first approach the task of findings a usable conception of populism, researchers must first decide whether to perceive populism as a strategy, a set of discourses, or an ideology. In the current field, these perceptions have been developed into three key approaches with which to understand and examine populism. To understand Black Trump voters in the needed depth, it is critical to acknowledge that a variety of populist factors can impact participation. As such, the thesis uses each of these frameworks, to capture the extent to which Trump's strategies and discourses and populist ideologies influenced the vote choice of Black Trumpers. Using each of these frameworks is effective in showcasing how populist elements intersect to contribute to vote choice as well. On top of these approaches, I include a fourth framework that is not exclusively populist but is useful in highlighting the experiences and interests of African-American Trumpers. This approach is referred to as the self-interest approach and asserts that voters make political decisions based on what they believe to be in their interest (Shabman and Stephenson 1994, 1173).

The Strategic Approach

Focusing on the abilities of charismatic leaders, the strategic lens explores how leaders obtain and mobilize support. Kenny explains that “[p]opulism in this sense is less a matter of what people supposedly believe than of what... their leaders, in fact do” (2021, 1). In this approach, operations overtake beliefs. Kenny further reflects that Mouzelis, who first popularized the approach in 1985, emphasizes populism as a relationship between leaders and voters, in which political leaders serve to “mobilize the public into the political system” (Kenny 2021, 3).

From this perspective, what separates clientelistic or programmatic parties from populist parties is the populist leader. Citing Kitschelt, Kenny writes that “populist movements or parties rely heavily on the charisma—or personalized authority—of the party leader to establish such linkages through the mass media and mass rallies” (2021, 4). The populist leader is thus the focal point of this perspective. In focusing on the tactics Trump employed to garner support, this thesis uses the strategic lens to examine Trump’s impact on his Black electorate.

The Laclauan Discursive Approach

A second approach to conceptualizing populism comes from influential scholar Ernesto Laclau. Laclau is known for his discursive approach to populism. To understand Laclau’s take on populism, it is best to give an overview of discourse analysis to situate Laclau’s interpretation.

Discourse analysis perceives language as more than just a means to communicate information (Gee 2005, 1). Rather, as Gee explains, language’s function in discourse analysis “is to support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions” (2005, 1).

Laclau's discursive framework is rooted in this same foundation, though it takes on additional intents. For instance, in *On Populist Reason*, Laclau explains that

[b]y discourse... I do not mean something that is essentially restricted to the areas of speech and writing, but any complex of elements in which relations play the constitutive role. This means that elements do not pre-exist the relational complex but are constituted through it (2005, 68).

Belinski explains his interpretation of Laclau's interpretation using the example of the addition symbol, +. On its own the + sign lacks meaning in the public arena, but when added to an acronym such as LGBTQ+ the symbol acquires societal significance (Belinski 2017). To put this analogy into Laclau's process, the + symbol obtains its meaning through its accompaniment to the LGBTQ acronym by representing other sexualities and gender identities outside of terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer that the acronym stands for. This connection between concepts is what required for discourse to exist. As such, Laclau's understanding of discourse moves beyond words and speech to include any thing, symbol or idea that procures its meaning through its connection to something else.

Laclau's discursive approach to populism views populism as "a performative act" (2005, 18) rather than "a clumsy political" (2005, 17). He suggests populism's vagueness is a necessary "precondition to constructing relevant political meanings" (2005, 18). This is especially to the advantage of the populist leader, as "what matters is the determination of the discursive sequences through which a social force or movement carries out its overall political performance" (2005, 13). As such, discourse is an inherent piece of populism creating connections between ideas and people and is abundantly crucial to the success of the populist movements.

Laclau's discursive approach also recognizes the importance of populist rhetoric. Laclau writes that "rhetoric is not epiphenomenal" (2005, 67) as "no conceptual structure finds its internal cohesion without appealing to rhetorical devices" (2005, 67). What Laclau means is that

rhetoric is not a byproduct of populism but is instead intrinsic to building any political conceptual structures, including populist movements.

For the thesis, Laclau's framework promotes an analysis of Trump and his African American voters. Past research has illustrated Trump's rhetoric was a central piece of his political strategy, enabling him to appeal to the masses (see Goldhill 2017; Golshan 2017). Identifying the extent to which political strategy and discourse helped Trump gain Black support is also important in identifying what messages appeal to this electorate. As such, Laclau's acknowledgement that rhetoric is inseparable from populism demonstrates the common overlap of populist approaches, encouraging their use in this thesis.

The Ideational Approach

This leads us to the last and final populist conceptualization: the ideational approach. While the field is highly contested over its ability to produce a stable, recognizable definition of populism, Mudde and Kaltwasser assert that such a feat is possible with the ideational approach (2017, 5), which regards populism as an ideology.

The ideational approach to understanding populism has been largely popularized by the work of scholars Cas Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017). The ideational comprehension has been further developed and relied upon by a variety of influential populist scholars (see Inglehart and Norris 2016; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2017). Inglehart and Norris, describe populism as "reflecting a loose political ideology" (2016, 17). Mudde and Kaltwasser contextualize populism as:

a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people (2017, 6, italics in original).

For context, an ideology can be described as

a body of normative ideas about the nature of man and society as well as the organization and purposes of society. Simply stated, it is a view of how the world is and should be (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, 6).

Furthermore, “thin-centered ideologies such as populism have a restricted morphology, which necessarily appears attached to...other ideologies” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, 6). However, because populist ideology, according to Hawkins and Kaltwasser, “is more specific and articulated than a mere set of personality traits, it is not quite as conscious and programmatic as an ideology. Rather, it always attaches itself to some “host” ideology” (2017, 514).

The thin-centeredness, or ‘looseness’ of populist ideology facilitates its intersection with other ideologies and perspectives within a populist movement. As Sandru emphasizes, ideas and philosophies that may not be inherent to populism often occur within populist movements (Sandru 2013, 53). For example, modern right-wing populism is often accompanied by nationalism (Inglehart and Norris 2016, 10). Fascism, as seen in the case of Weimar Germany or American McCarthyism of the 1940’s and 1950’s (Inglehart and Norris 2016, 10) has also been known to coexist with populism, as well as the ideologies of pluralism (Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2017, 514) and socialism in the case of the 2016 Bernie movement. Anti-elitism is also an intrinsic ideology of populism (Inglehart and Norris 2016; Gandesha 2018; Gökmen 2017; Wodak 2015).

In recent American populist movement, nationalism has become one of the most prominent ideologies, with Gusterson even dubbing the movement a type of ‘nationalist populism’ (2017, 209). Anti-elitism is also a predominant characteristic of Trump’s movement and supporters according to the findings of Oliver and Rahn (2016, 198). Some scholars, such as

Kellner, also insist the movement is fascist (2017, 79) a sentiment shared by nearly 40% of Americans (Hunter, Bowman and Puetz 2020, 3-4).

Populist ideologies are only successful if a population responds to them positively. Ideologies have been known to affect political behaviour. In one overview, the ICPSR notes that though “most voters lack a well-articulated and clearly thought out political ideology, they usually have some general ideological tendencies or predispositions” (n.d.). Such inclinations can affect one’s position on issues (ICPSR n.d.), though voters have been known to act ideologically different on social and economic issues (ICPSR n.d.). On political issues, American voters are often more ideological than politicians, as well. Broockman explains that “[o]n many issues, much of the public appears to support more extreme policies than legislators do” (2014).

As the literature establishes, there are important connections between voters and ideologies that influence political outcomes. The ideational lens is thus incorporated into the thesis’ analysis of Black Trump supporters to explore the extent ideologies influenced Black Trump voters.

Personal Interests and Voting

Instead of ideological voting, some voters make political decisions by deciding what issues are in their best self-interest. Many, “citizens seem indifferent to whether politicians mirror their ideological orientations but do want politicians to represent their preferences on individual issues” (Ahler and Broockman 2014, 1).

This interest approach assumes voters enter a kind of cost-benefit analysis when deciding on political issues. The idea is that the “personal agendas” of voters: the “extent of personal involvement in the issue of interest” (Young et al. 1987, 64) impacts which issues voters will focus on when voting, and thus influences their political behaviour. Young et al. explain that

“[p]ersonal agendas are subjective rankings of issues in terms of their personal importance to the individual as well as their perceived importance for others” (1987, 64).

Though it has been highly critiqued (see Shabman and Stephenson 1994), the “empirical public choice literature” as Shaman and Stephenson refer to it (1994, 1173) has contributed important information about how some voters vote. For instance, Young et al.’s study on the 1984 American presidential election identified a connection between voters who ranked issues as personally and nationally most important to their own self-interest (1987). Importantly, these authors reiterate that their results suggest “the influence of direct experience on the attitude-behavior relationship may be moderated by how individuals perceive the a priori importance of the attitude object” (Young et al. 1987, 69). Put plainly, the extent to which direct experiences impact vote choice is dependant on how important the issue is for the individual voter. This means experiences do not necessarily determine how important an issue is to an individual, as one might assume, but rather that the voter first places a level of importance on the issue and then draw upon personal experience to assist in decision-making. For examining Black Trump voters this means acknowledging the impact self-interest may have in their political decisions.

Crucial to emphasize, however, is that interest voting, and ideological voting are not necessarily distinct; personal interest and ideological support often overlap in the political sphere.

Some voters use self-interest with the goal of ensuring their needs and preferences met (Young et al. 1987, 64), in contrast to acting on what they *believe* is right. However, a self-interested voter who votes for a populist leader, does contribute to the populist movement through their vote. These voters tolerate the populist movement’s ideologies to ensure their interests are addressed. Thus, interest-based, and ideologically focused voters can reach similar political choices.

For this thesis, it is important to distinguish this because there is a possibility some Black Trumpers voted based on personal interest and preference more than a dedication to a philosophy or ideology. Thus, the personal and self-interest approach is essential to include to determine more fully the extent to which Black Trump supporters considered personal interest.

Employing the Frameworks Effectively

The above sections have illustrated the usefulness of the strategic, discursive, ideational, and interest-specific approaches to populism and political behaviour. In conjunction these approaches work to provide a robust picture of how Black Trump voters came to their decisions.

In an examination of Trump's role in motivating his Black supporters, the strategic approach promotes a study of the specific tactics and campaigns Trump directed at this electorate. To assist this analysis, the thesis combines Laclau's discursive approach to highlight the ways rhetoric and discourse assisted Trump in appealing to his Black audience. To balance this leader-specific focus, the thesis examines Black Trump voters using the ideational approach and the interest approach. These perspectives help to underscore the way the ideological and interest motivations of Black Trumpers align with other Trump voters identified by previous works.

Each of the populist approaches also remedy each's shortcomings. For instance, the strategic approach focuses on tactics used by populist leaders but does not highlight rhetoric and discourse the way Laclau's discursive lens does. A common critique of Laclau's perspective is that his approach deposes the power held by populist voters. Beasley-Murray describes that "[t]oo often... Laclau seems to accept the populist argument that power is held by the state and that the people are indeed powerless underdogs" (2006, 366). Because voters were paramount to

Trump's success. After all, if Trump had employed strategies and discourses people did not care for, he never would have found the political success he did.

In the same thought, though the ideological approach emphasizes the ways populist ideologies combine it can overlook voters who are not ideologically bound. Recognizing that other voters may prioritize their interests over ideological positions, however, helps to fill this gap. This also helps to illustrate the ways ideological voting and interest voting intersect.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This thesis examines the recent right-wing populist phenomenon in the US and as such is a single-n case study. The US was chosen for this project because of the interesting and unique nature of Trump and the populist movement. However, though there is abundant data and analysis on Donald Trump and his White voters, there appears to be a significant lack of examination into non-white Trump voters, as well as Black voters overall. As such, the topic of the Black Trump voters was also chosen to help overcome this gap and test the field's current understandings of populism.

3.1 THE RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

The overarching ontology of this thesis is positivist. Positivism seeks to explain and predict phenomena (Moon et al. 2021, 4) and believes that beliefs about reality are justified through observation (Moon et al. 2021, 4).

The theoretical perspective of this thesis is post-positivist in that it recognizes both quantitative and qualitative data as imperfect (Moon and Blackman 2017) and thus incorporates both to understand the motivations of the Black populist voter. Observable and interpretable data are included in this study to identify how discourse, leadership tactics, personal interest and ideological positions impacted African American Trump voters' decision-making. This study seeks to explain the vote choice of Black Trump voters in 2016 and 2020 by using four populist frameworks to help highlight the different factors influencing vote choice.

For example, Laclau's discursive method and the strategic method highlight ways in which the reality and behaviour of voters are shaped by the language and discourse of the populist leader, but quantitative data on the impact of Trump's influence on Black voters particularly is challenging to uncover without conducting statistical analysis, or similar methods. In this case, the thesis

employs four frameworks to test alternative possibilities to understand the behaviour of Black Trump voters.

3.2 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper takes a multi-method approach to explore what motivated Black populists to vote for Trump in 2016 and 2020. As Newman and Benz point out, perceiving quantitative and qualitative approaches as parts of a continuum is better than conceptualizing them as opposing dichotomies (1998, 9). The methods used by this thesis fall somewhere between the quantitative and qualitative ends of this continuum. This is intentional by design as it reflects the research design's philosophy that there are multiple ways to approach the research problem. The qualitative and quantitative information used in the thesis provides a full scope of the possible reasons Black Trump voters were encouraged to vote for Trump. Chiefly, this thesis's qualitative and quantitative methods are used together "to examine the same dimension of a research problem" (Jick 1974, 602).

Why is it essential to employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches? Firstly, the shortage of quantitative and qualitative studies on Black voters - particularly Black Trump voters - means questions such as "What issues do African Americans care about?" (African American Research Collaborative [AARC] n.d.), "What messengers do Black voters trust most?" (AARC n.d.) and "What combination of messages and messengers will inspire African Americans to mobilize around an issue?" (AARC n.d.) have been minimally explored (AARC n.d.). As most African American voters are Democrats (Pew Research Center 2016b), exploring how Black Republican and Black Trump voters fit in these issues is vital in shortening this gap. As such, using qualitative and quantitative assessments provides a robust scope of data, helping to get a comprehensive understanding of the motivations of Black Trump supporters. In addition, given

the strengths and weaknesses attributed to both quantitative and qualitative methods, assessing both data forms also allow these methods to be tested in a less traditional subject area.

Theoretical Triangulation

This thesis uses theory triangulation. Theoretical triangulation is when multiple theories are used to understand a phenomenon (Noble and Heale 2019). There are four theories of populist and political behaviour used throughout this study to assess the motivations of Black Trump supporters. Two frameworks – the strategic and discursive approaches - are used to study Trump’s role in impacting the choices of his Black electorate. The strategic approach examines the variety of strategies Trump employed to gain the support of his Black electorate strategies to gain support, while the discursive approach which is used as an additional way to understand how Trump’s messages, meanings and language incentivized his Black supporters. The remaining two approaches – the ideational and interest methods – explore the role ideology and personal interest play in motivating Black voters to support Trump. The ideational method highlights the range of ideologies within populist movements that voters can be attracted to. Meanwhile, the personal-interest approach to voting understands that voters vote based on what they feel has the most benefit.

The theoretical frameworks employed by this study require different assessment methods, making using qualitative and quantitative information necessary. For instance, Laclau’s discursive approach is qualitative in that meaning of words and ideas is flexible and subject to contextual meanings. However, to assess the role self-interest experience plays on the Black Republican voter, numerical data reflecting income levels and ages are required. Thus, as the thesis tests multiple approaches to studying populist movements, their different ontological positionings mandate different forms of data and analyses.

Theoretical triangulation is helpful in this inquiry because, though the attention remains on the research problem, “the mode of data collection varies” (Jick 1974, 602) and thus can highlight new information and understandings. Some of the benefits of triangulation methods are explained by Jick below:

Triangulation... can also capture a more complete, holistic, and contextual portrayal of the unit(s) under study. That is, beyond the analysis of overlapping variance, the use of multiple measures may also uncover some unique variance which otherwise may have been neglected by single methods. It is here that qualitative methods, in particular, can play an especially prominent role by eliciting data and suggesting conclusions to which other methods would be blind. Elements of the context are illuminated. In this sense, triangulation may be used not only to examine the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives but also to enrich our understanding by allowing for new or deeper dimensions to emerge (1974, 603-4).

The use of theory triangulation is important in testing how well the established populist frameworks explain the voting behaviours of populists who do not fit the ‘normal’ populist demographics. As Black Trump voters do not fit the assumed notion of a Trump voter (in the case of the Trump movement, populist voters are predominantly White), testing the populist theories used by the field tests their rigour in an unconventional way. How well these populist lenses explain the actions of Black Trump voters provides further information on their usefulness, particularly regarding their strengths and shortcomings.

The Challenges of Theory Triangulation

A principal concern with triangulation is that of combining qualitative data insufficiently with quantitative data (Jick 1974, 603). For clarity, using qualitative methods to back up quantitative or statistical findings can lead to an inaccurate accompaniment of qualitative data and provide an incomplete picture of research findings. It is therefore recognized that when using triangulation, qualitative assessments should not be used to build relationships with quantitative data when weak connections exist.

To prevent this shortcoming, this thesis does not employ qualitative data to justify existing survey data – mainly because statistical data does not explain causation. However, qualitative data does not cement conclusions independently, mainly because more studies must be conducted with these theories before concluding their usability. Instead, the qualitative works about Black Trump voters are only connected to quantitative findings when the connection is solid and previous research illustrates that there may be connections.

3.3 DATA AND SELECTION

Quantitative Data

Sources containing quantitative data (including polling, surveys and statistical results or data) were chosen considering the source's reputation and the data's relevance to the research problem. For this thesis, reputable sources include but are not limited to Gallup, the Pew Research Center, the *American Election Eve Poll (2020)*, CIRCLE, the United States Census Bureau, and the Roper Center. These sources were chosen because they have been cited repeatedly and are organizations known to produce reliable results. This study also includes smaller research centers and other organizations which focus specifically on studying the political participation of African Americans. These are the AARC, the Black Voter Pilot Study, Black Demographics, and the Center for American Progress.²

The benefit of using the data provided by large research organizations is that they have the finances and manpower to produce information for large sample sizes. This also means data is reliable in that similar findings are likely to be reproduced because they are more likely to represent

² The quantitative and statistical data from American National Election Studies (ANES) was not included in this study due to the thesis' design which seeks to balance the quantitative and qualitative means of assessing Black populist voters. An ideal study of Black Trump voters would also incorporate the use of ANES data and statistical analysis. More information on this limitation is available in Chapter Nine.

the American populous. At the same time, however, smaller organizations such as the newly established Black Voter Project (BVP) (which is also used by Towler and Parker (2018)) and the AARC are meaningful to this project as they provide information on Black voters that have only been studied minimally or not at all. The incorporation of direct comments and interviews with Black Trump voters also helps to establish validity to some of the findings of this thesis.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative works used in this study to assess Black Trump voters include a range of academic and journalistic works. On the nature of populism itself, established scholars such as Laclau 2005, Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, Inglehart and Norris 2016, are relied upon. In addition, academic journals, books and numerous news articles are sourced to create and support usable frameworks to understand Trump's movement and his supporters.

The qualitative methodology of this project involves using four conceptions of populism: as a strategy, a discourse, a set of ideologies and a vehicle for self-interest. These lenses are then evaluated using survey data, second-hand interviews, validated voter records, videos, and other forms of data to illustrate the extent to which these frameworks explain the vote of African American Trumpers and to evaluate how the motivations of Black Trump supporters fit into established paradigms.

3.4 DEFINING THE TERM "BLACK"

The research problem focuses on race and racial groupings. However, studying issues of race and ethnicity can be made more complex without a consistent definition of racial terms. The term 'Black' can hold various meanings in different contexts. The term also varies from person to person, as individuals attach meanings to the term based on their connection to their race(s), communities, and identities. Black persons do not always feel the same about their identity and

the importance of being “Black” in their political decisions (see Conroy and Bacon 2020). As such, it is crucial to explore Black Trump voters as their motivations and perceptions can indicate information about the ways Black voters can feel about their communities and a range of issues.

Heath and Halperin emphasize that “[t]he validity of a measure...depends upon how we define the concept” (2020, 189). Therefore, a vital concern of this study is ensuring the term ‘Black’ is used in a way that provides high validity. With this consideration in mind, producing a consistent definition for the term Black is essential. For this thesis, Black refers to individuals who self-identify as Black or African American.

I adopt the same standard for the term Black in this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, adopting the same approach as the quantitative sources in this thesis makes the data easily translatable because the definitions of “Black” and “African American” are the same. For example, the Pew Research Center uses the self-identification method for many surveys (see Lopez, Krogstad and Passel 2021; Pew Research Center 2018a). This method is also used by Gallup (Lopez, Krogstad and Passel 2021). In addition, the US Census Bureau often uses this approach (Lopez, Krogstad and Passel 2021). Importantly, this study assumes that “[t]he terms “whites,” “blacks” and “Asians” generally are used to refer to the non-Hispanic components of each population” (Pew Research Center n.d.b.), which is similar to how the Pew Research Center and other groups define the term, Black.

Secondly, retaining the self-identifying approach used by the respondents, voters, and individuals studied by these sources allows the story of Black Trump voters to be told from their perspective, which further ensures the accuracy of the research. As such, the thesis uses sources

that employ self-identifying standards, meaning that any studies of Black Trump supporters self-identified as Black.

Using this approach is beneficial because it leaves the distinction of race or ethnicity up to the subject, allowing them to assess their understanding of labels and communities. However, at the same time, this method means that racial and ethnic conceptions are stagnant in that they can be used in both the quantitative and qualitative assessments in this project. It is also fluid because the individuals assessed have control over their identification choices.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE TRUMP MOVEMENT AND ITS IDEOLOGIES

Providing a background and overview of the Trump movement can help to understand the key perspectives that make up the movement, and better understand why African American Trumpers are attracted to the movement. Like Mead insists, “past episodes of populist rebellion can help one think intelligently about the trajectory of the movement today” (2011, 32).

4.1 THE TEA PARTY CATALYST

The sentiments underlying the Trump movement have been in motion long before Trump entered the picture. Many of these patterns and conservative stances from previous centuries still underline American politics today. One key sentiment that has been present throughout America’s history is its anti-establishment (and sometimes anti-government) positions (see Hofstadter 1996). Since the 1990s, anti-government movements have been on the rise, according to the SPLC (n.d.). The SPLC elaborates that:

[t]he antigovernment movement of the 1990s, typified by the proliferation of militias, was fueled by a string of incidents, including the 1992 Ruby Ridge standoff, the 1993 Branch Davidian Waco compound siege and the 1996 Montana Freeman standoff. Other factors included the struggling economy in the early 1990s, particularly in Western states, and the election of President Bill Clinton, who was characterized by antigovernment activists as a liberal intent on seizing their weapons. Similarly, the in the last 2000s and 2010s the antigovernment was animated by the Tea Party movement, with both national and local groups mobilizing resentment around the economic challenges of the great recession and in opposition to the presidency of Barack Obama (n.d.)

Today, the Tea Party Movement is often regarded as the catalyst to the Trump movement (Kabaservice 2020; Lieberman 2019, 473). The movement, which emerged in 2009 (Crehan 2016, 118) gets its name from the 1773 Boston Tea Party Rebellion. On this day in, December of 1773, anywhere from six or seven to a dozen men boarded a tea-filled East India Company ship and “dumped at least £10,000 of tea (about \$1 million today) into Boston harbor” (Unger 2011,

3), ultimately sparking a bout of “social, political, and economic forces they would never again be able to control” (Unger 2011, 3).

This revolt was in response to “a three-penny-*per-pound* tax on British tea” (Unger 2011, 2 (italics in original text)), but it was not necessarily the tax itself that was the problem. Rather, it was that the Tea Tax was a part of a larger pattern of forced taxation. As Unger explains,

the Tea Tax, small as it was, marked the fourth time in forty years that Parliament had tried to tax Americans without their consent. They began with the Molasses Act of 1733, then added the Grenville acts in 1764, the Stamp Act of 1765, and, finally, the Townshend Acts of 1767, which included the notorious Tea Tax that would irritate Americans for more than eight years and provoke the Boston Massacre in 1770, the Boston Tea Party in 1773, and the American Revolution in 1775 (2011, 8).

Besides encouraging the shift to coffee as America’s beloved hot drink (American Battlefield Trust n.d.), the legacy of the Boston Tea Party Rebellion “has long served Americans as a powerful national myth of justified revolt by tax-paying citizens against tyrannical government” (Crehan 2016, 133). The people of 1773 had not elected to tax themselves and the ignorance of the Parliament of their representation was the central issue.

The same feelings of government distrust and representation from 1773 also underlined the Tea Party Movement of the late 2000s. The modern-day Tea Party “was founded amid a groundswell of populist anger over government bail-outs of failing banks, insurers and auto companies following the economic meltdown of 2008” (Connolly 2010). Many will agree that a rant by financial reporter Rick Santelli in 2009 was the moment of the movement’s birth (Crehan 2016, 132; Connolly 2010). There,

on the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, addressing the traders as well as the CNBC viewers, Santelli was incandescent with rage. His target was the recently elected Obama administration’s plan to provide help to those whose mortgages were being foreclosed (Crehan 2016, 132).

Unknowingly, Santelli would inspire demonstrations against “big government” across America (Connolly 2010).

At the time, Obama's 2008 election importantly symbolized the growing influence of leftist politics. Specifically, "[t]he accusation that Obama's policies represent socialism is one of the central tenets of the Tea Party" (Crehan 2016, 134). For context,

while this may sound bizarre to many on the left, the idea that even the smallest challenge to the sovereignty of the free market is tantamount to either socialism or fascism is an enduring staple of the American right (Crehan 2016, 134).

Thus, assisting those whose mortgages were being foreclosed was a direct challenge to the free-market economics prioritized by the political right.

Yet, it was not just Obama's actions that had upset Tea Partiers; They were also fed up with "George W Bush's big-spending Republicans" (Connolly 2010). In general, Tea Partiers were angry at where the government was headed. For instance, when

[a]sked what they are most angry about, the top four answers among Tea Party supporters who identify as angry were the health care reform bill (16 percent), the government not representing the people (14 percent), government spending (11 percent) and unemployment and the economy (8 percent) (Montopoli 2012).

4.2 CURRENT DAY POLITICS: THE TRUMP MOVEMENT

Many scholars agree that the Tea Party Movement has been an essential precursor to the rise of Trump and the populist movement. Lieberman et al. imply that the Tea Party Movement "nourished" the populist and anti-establishment sentiments underlying the Trump movement today (2019, 473). Savage importantly points out that both the Tea Party and the Trump movement rely "on the construction of a "left-oriented enemy," posed as a threat to the American values of freedom and independence" (2012, 564).

The SPLC also explains:

[a]ntigovernment groups [like the Tea Party Movement or Trump's populist surge] believe the federal government is tyrannical and they traffic in conspiracy theories about an illegitimate government of leftist elites seeking a "New World Order" (n.d.).

The evidence illustrates that the Tea Party and the Trump movements are concerned about the over-representation of elites and government – a fear also intrinsic to populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, 5; Inglehart and Norris 2016, 6-7). Research also indicates that “[w]hat distinguishes the American [conservative] right.... is hatred of the federal government” (Hochschild 2016). Like the Tea Party supporters, so too do Trump’s supporters dislike government, as the Capitol Hill riot of January 6th, 2021, made clear.

This upset at the government is partially rooted in experience, however. In a study by Gilens and Page exploring the influence of economic elites and organizations on policy outcomes, the authors found “that economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy, while average citizens and mass-based interest groups have little or no independent influence” (2014, 564). The influence of elites is also apparent in political parties as “congressional staffs, think tanks, and lobbying organizations - all funded by the Republican donor class -” (Lemann 2020, 59) have been known to influence the Republican Party (Lind 2020, 20). Of the Democratic Party, executives from technology companies like Facebook and Google and corporations like Blackstone and Bain Capital provided millions of dollars to support Biden in 2020 (Martin 2020). Elites use the American political system as a tool to pursue their interests. For instance, “instead of serving the general good as they are supposed to, economic or political elites use their power to their own benefit” (Otjes et al. 2018, 275).

The ability of those at the top to affect policy outcomes violates the purpose of the democratic system. The purpose of politics is to “translate the views of the people into policy” (Otjes et al. 2018, 274), but just as Gilens and Page concluded, this is counteracted by society’s powerful (2014, 564).

The connections between the Tea Party movement and the Trump movement extend beyond their shared beliefs to the people themselves. Many of Trump's supporters felt positive about the Tea Party movement. One study finds that "Republicans who had positive views of the tea party movement in 2014 or 2015 were among Trump's most enthusiastic backers during the 2016 campaign" (*ABC News* 2019). Furthermore, the demographics of Tea Partiers are the same as Trumpers. Connolly reports that "[d]emographically, several polls show that the Tea Party is overwhelmingly white and older than 45, and more likely to be male" (2010), and so too is Trump's electorate mostly made up of white males and those over the age of 50 (Pew Research Center 2018b).

A Cultural and Prejudicial Backlash

Immigration rates in the US have skyrocketed in recent decades. In 1970, 9.6 million people in the US were foreign-born and this has multiplied to almost 45 million peoples as of 2018 (Budiman et al. 2020). However,

[t]wo dominant features characterize this most recent wave of immigration: its intensity (the immigrant population grew by over 30 percent in the 1990s) and the somewhat radical shift in the sources of new immigration. Up to 1950, nearly 90 percent of all immigrants were Europeans or Canadians. Today, over 50 percent of all immigrants are from Latin America and over 25 percent are from Asia (Suarez-Orozco 2001, 180).

Thanks to the new globalized era, people from all over the world have found sanctity in the US. However, this influx has also brought with it a range of new ideas and cultural practices, leading some Americans to be concerned that their cultures are fading.

Out of 1151 surveyed Republicans and Republican leaners, "[a] majority of respondents (50.7%) agreed that "[t]he traditional American way of life is disappearing so fast that we may have to use force to save it" (Bartels 2020). Participants of a recent Pew study on globalization, also "see and feel globalization changing what it means to be British or American because of the

flow of people, cultures and ideas” (Silver et al. 2020). These respondents, particularly “highlighted wanting to be around people who pay their fair share and are morally upstanding, qualities they often attributed to themselves while contrasting themselves with people from other cultures” (Silver et al. 2020). And, for Republicans particularly, “the “out of control” levels of immigration and the accommodations immigrants receive may have created a deep sense of alienation in their own country” (Silver et al. 2020). Overall, many of the White Americans who supported Trump “see themselves as victims of affirmative action and betrayed by “line-cutters” - African-Americans, immigrants, refugees, and women - who jump ahead of them in the queue for the American Dream” (Inglehart and Norris 2017, 452).

Immigrants have shaped America’s culture into what it is today (see Hirschman 2013). This fact only reinforces that many cultural worries about immigration are often exaggerated and stem from false assumptions. For instance, respondents to the Pew survey mentioned above perceive other cultures as the opposite of ‘moral’ or ‘upstanding’ (Silver et al. 2020), yet there is little evidence to suggest this is true. Though the ADL notes that this “prevalent myth links undocumented immigrants to increased crime and violence” (2022), studies have repeatedly shown this is untrue (Burnett 2018). For instance, Nowrasteh’s analysis concludes that in the state of Texas, the only state to record “criminal convictions and arrests by immigration status” (2019, 2), when compared to native-born Americans, illegal immigrants were less likely to be convicted of a crime by 37.1 percent in 2019 (Nowrasteh 2019, 1). In the same year, legal immigrants were 57.2 percent less likely to be convicted of a crime than America-born persons (Nowrasteh 2019, 1).³

³ For additional studies illustrating immigrants have a smaller propensity for violence and crime than native-born Americans, see Yeager 1997; Piquero et al. 2014, and Sampson 2008.

Still, many concerned Americans have turned to alternative means to voice their concerns. Others who were already untrusting and even hateful of those bringing new ideas and cultures ramped up their prejudicial rhetoric and anti-immigrant messages. For example, the ideologies of such groups like FAIR (Federation for American Immigration Reform) and CIS (Center for Immigration Studies) have “been brought into the mainstream by policymakers who appear to agree with their rhetoric, and who have sought to institute harsh anti-immigrant laws nationwide” (2022) according to the ADL.

This cultural backlash is just as potent within Trump’s electorate. Specifically, research has linked prejudicial attitudes towards racial minorities to support for Trump. A study by Smith and Hanley finds that “eight attitudes predict Trump support: conservative identification; support or domineering leaders; fundamentalism; prejudice against immigrants, African Americans, Muslims, and women; and pessimism about the economy” (2018, 206). Such prejudicial sentiments are typical of populism (see Inglehart and Norris 2016, 17; McKeever 2020; Martínez, Van Prooijen and Van Lange 2022), and such movements are often “strengthened by anti-immigrant attitudes” (Inglehart and Norris 2016, 4) and racial resentments. In the American case, 66% and 65% of Trump supporters in 2016 and 2020, respectively, felt immigration and terrorism were the country’s most significant problems (Pew Research Center 2016a). Trump made repeated negative comments about immigration throughout his political career, like his assertion that Mexican immigrants were “rapists” (Kopan 2016) or his comments which mention immigrants from Islamic regions acting as an ISIS “Trojan Horse” (Krieg 2017). Many of Trump’s followers favored Trump because they shared his prejudices. Immigration is a key issue in which these sentiments were strengthened.

An Economic Backlash

Alongside cultural changes, the US has experienced many shifts in its economy and job markets due to globalization's rise. One drastic impact of globalization was the closure of the Youngstown Plant in 1977 due to outsourcing its manufacturing to other countries (Christie 2008). This event sparked a chain of Plant closures across the country. As a result, onwards of 1997, the US lost “[n]early 5 million manufacturing jobs and more than 91,000 plants” (Scott 2020). The diminishment of America's manufacturing industry has been further solidified by China's recent ascendance to the title of “the World's Manufacturing Superpower” (Ritcher 2021), replacing the US, which once held the same title (Ritcher 2021).

Today, America's manufacturing industry, which once thrived in cities across the country, has since been replaced by the growth of the service economy (*The Atlantic* n.d.). The service sector is “the part of a country's economy that is made up of businesses that provide services” (Cambridge Dictionary n.d.). These include, but are not limited to, “wholesale and retail trade; transportation and warehousing; information; finance and insurance; real estate brokering, rental, and leasing; professional, scientific, and technical services; administrative, support, and waste management services; healthcare and social assistance; and accommodation (NAICS sectors 42 through 92)” (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics n.d.b).

The shift away from manufacturing has had direct consequences for many Americans. Former Citi CEO Michael Corbat has remarked that as services become “rapidly ascendant, the skills necessary for the workplace are being redefined” (*Cheddar News* 2018). As a result, those whose qualifications and expertise (or lack thereof) do not fit into the new service economy have suffered financial instability, job loss and other economic insecurities. As a result, many have

experienced a loss of income and have seen their lives change dramatically (Inglehart and Norris 2017, 443).

The unfair actions of the government and wealthy elites have not helped these experiences. Lind explains that Democrats and Republicans have valued “trade policies, which encourage the disappearance of manufacturing jobs” (2020, 20). In many democracies today, “economic gains have gone almost entirely to those at the top, while a large share of the population [has] experienced declining real income and job security” (Inglehart and Norris 2017, 443).

It is common for voters to “factor the state of the national economy into their vote even if it’s not the most important issue to them” (Butchireddygari 2020), and previous research has shown that many Trump voters are especially concerned about the economic situations of themselves and the nation. For example, in 2016, only 18% of Republicans rated the national economic conditions as good or excellent, according to one study (Pew Research Center 2020a), and a study by the Institute for New Economic Thinking finds evidence that economic issues did help Trump to succeed to the extent that “Trump’s economic-based appeals were central to his success” (Ferguson et al. 2018, 46). Specifically, the study “repeatedly found that key economic factors had big effects on voting decisions and on aggregate congressional district vote totals” (Ferguson et al. 2018, 47).

Concerns about the national economy or one’s financial situation are not limited to ‘well-off’ Americans, as some might attest. White Trump voters (who make up an overwhelming majority of Trump’s electorate) record having the most positive employment experiences of any other race (Griffin and Sides 2018). In 2016, “[t]he median household income of a Trump voter...in the primaries is about \$72,000” (Silver 2016). In 2020, “54 percent of voters with an

income of 100,000 U.S. dollars or more reported voting for incumbent President Donald Trump” (Statista Research Department 2022).

Despite having respectable incomes, many Republicans prioritized economic issues in their vote choice (Ferguson et al. 2018, 47). There are possible explanations for this, despite the fact Trump voters are generally “well off.” First, the economic vote for Trump from well-off voters does not have to be based on reason or reality per se. Instead, one’s feelings and perceptions about the economic status of the country or themselves are subjective. For instance, even if the economic perceptions upon which voters vote are untrue, false perception is still a legitimate phenomenon that can impact an individual’s vote choice (Kivisto 2017, 43-4). Chiefly, financially stable individuals do not always perceive themselves as such, mainly because the measure of financial security is subjective and different for everyone.

Secondly, simply because one is financially stable now does not mean one will be in the future. It is impossible to know what one’s future financial situation will be. Predicting the future has become much more difficult when factoring in the recent changes to America’s economy. The American economic changes have highlighted the vivacity with which industries can shift. The US has rapidly and intensely shifted from a manufacturing economy to a service-based one in a matter of decades - what is to say that this could not happen again? Experiences can explain the economic fears of many Republicans and Trump voters.

4.3 SUMMARY

Overall, it is clear many of the Tea Party’s anti-government currents have transferred to the Trump movement. Many of the political actions from political and wealthy elites have also highlighted the political disparity occurring in the US. This inequality has been a crucial underpinning of the broader Trump movement.

At the same time, much of the Trump movement resents racial and ethnic minorities, and blames them for the changing culture. Much of the time immigrants have become the scapegoats for this. The xenophobic perspectives underlying the anti-immigrant sentiments within the Trump movement, also extend to non-foreign-born groups like the African American community, again raising the perplexity of Black support for Trump.

The economic situations unfolding in the US over the decades have also angered many Americans, driving some to support Trump and the populist movement. The drastic shift in the outsourcing of industrial and manufacturing jobs has also been exacerbated by elites, and as a result, many Americans have felt “left behind” by in the current economy.

CHAPTER FIVE: TRUMP, TRUMPISM AND STRATEGIES

In this chapter, the thesis examines the extent to which Trump's personality and political strategies encouraged and communicated cultural and economic concerns to voters. This analysis also incorporates a discursive assessment of Trump's language style to showcase the role of rhetoric. This blended analysis allows the thesis to establish how much Trump and his political style, Trumpism, are populist. This is done by comparing Trump to other populist leaders as this helps to identify how Trump and his political style are unique, or characteristic of populist leaders. The groundwork provided in this chapter on Trump and his politics is then used in Chapter Six to showcase Trump's approaches to targeting various groups of African American Trump voters.

5.1 TRUMP AND THE ROLE OF THE POPULIST LEADER

The exit of Britain from the European Union in 2016 (also commonly referred to as Brexit) has demonstrated the ability of populist movements to succeed without figureheads. Nonetheless, the Brexit case is a rather unique outcome. As past populist phenomena have illustrated, they often blossom immensely with the guidance of a leader. A notable example to demonstrate the cruciality of the populist leader is Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and his Chavismo style politics emphasizing nationalism (Vanden and Prevost 2017, 473), patriotism and Bolivarianism (*Diario VEA* 2014) which lasted from 1999 to 2013. Other famous leaders include Rodrigo Duterte who was elected in the Philippines in 2016 and motivated voters with his anti-American nationalism and drug-targeting campaigns (Teehankee 2016, 69) or India's Narendra Modi who, upon becoming party leader, "gave the BJP a new dimension" (Jaffrelot and Schoch 2021, 31). Each of these populist movements owe their advancements to the individuals who spearheaded them. Inglehart and Norris solidify the importance of populist leaders once again,

pointing out that “parties led by populist authoritarian leaders have grown in popularity” (2016, 6).

As the populist leaders mentioned above, Trump has had a tremendous impact on the success of the American populist movement. Using the combination of Laclau’s discursive approach and the strategic approach, Trump’s demeanour, and speaking style contribute to his influence.

Trump’s Personality

The charismatic persona of the populist leader is critical to growing populist movements and connecting to the public (Kenny 2021, 4). To best assess Trump’s political style, it is important to establish his personality and behavioural traits as they greatly influence his political strategies. Additionally, it is critical to examine how Trump’s personality compares to the archetypal personality of populist leaders, as this can reveal the extent to which Trump’s populist persona is indeed populist. This comparison is also vital to later identifying how his personality encouraged African American support.

Much of Trump’s personality is in sync with typical populist traits. A telling study of Trump’s personality comes from Nai, Martínez i Coma and Maier. These authors find that though Trump exhibits populist trademarks, he often scores higher than other populist leaders on a range of character traits tested (Nai, Martínez i Coma and Maier 2019). The study “provide[s] systematic evidence about Trump’s personality style, described in terms of both the five socially benevolent traits (Big Five) and the three socially malevolent traits (Dark Triad)” (Nai, Martínez i Coma and Maier 2019, 613). The results, based on the

“[s]ystematic comparison between Trump’s public persona and the profiles of other mainstream and populist candidates shows that Trump is, indeed, off the charts. Compared with 21 other populists worldwide, Trump ranks as the second highest score in perceived extraversion and as the single lowest score in agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability. Trump also has the highest score of narcissism and Machiavellianism and the third highest score on perceived psychopathy” (Nai, Martínez i Coma, and Maier 2019, 634).

These character traits underscore Trump’s behaviours. For instance, throughout his time on the television show *The Apprentice* it has been reported that Trump was fixated with controlling narratives on and off *The Apprentice* (Masters and Goldberg 2020), an act that illustrates narcissistic traits like “ego-reinforcement behaviours, [and the] tendency to seek attention and admiration” (Nai and Martínez i Coma 2019, 1340) as well as the Machiavellian desire to manipulate (Nai, Martínez i Coma and Maier 2019, 613). Nai, Martínez i Coma and Maier also explain that Trump’s desire to control exemplifies a lack of affability – a trait common to other populist leaders as well (2019, 624).

Other examples include Trump’s derogatory comments towards female staff during the filming of *The Apprentice* (Burke 2016) and the infamous 2005 audio of Donald Trump discussing manhandling women (Fahrenthold 2016). In his first campaign, Trump dubbed Ted Cruz a liar and fashioned the phrase “Lyin’ Ted” (Gurciullo 2016) and remarked that Vietnam War veteran and former prisoner of war John McCain was only “a war hero because he was captured” (Gonyea 2015). These acts reiterate his narcissistic personality and lack of conscientiousness.

Speaking Style

How populist leaders communicate ideas is also critical to their success. Language style is one tool populist leaders employ to garner support. Words and the emotions with which they

are delivered can be both a calculated strategy and a reflection of one's temperament. In Trump's case, his combination of temperament and speech worked to his political advantage.

Populist leaders often speak in a manner that emphasizes "vulgarity and plain-speaking" (McCargo 2001, 185), such as the Philippines' Rodrigo Du. They have also been known to utilize insults – like Chavez, who normalized this tactic in Venezuelan politics (Block 2022, 82). Trump employs these same strategies, assuring his title as a populist leader.

George Lakoff has described Trump's language "conversational" (Golshan 2017) and by others, like rhetoric professor Edward Schiappa, as employing a "plain style" that attracts voters who prefer simplicity (Goldhill 2017). Trump has been known to frequently shift "to an entirely new thought before finishing his previous one" (Golshan 2017), and this invokes a sense of intimacy between Trump and his audience (Golshan 2017). Additionally, Trump's speeches "aren't meant to be read or used for sound bites" (Golshan 2017). Instead, audio, and audio-visual forms of Trump's speeches are easier to comprehend than reading his speeches (Lieberman 2015) and that is because Trump's voice and emotion are just as important in conveying messages and ideas. Golshan also emphasizes the criticalness of Trump's passion writing, he "rallies people through impassioned, targeted conversation" (Golshan 2017).

Trump's language style has also been examined in further depth. For instance, some theorize that "Trump's unorganized sentences and short snippets might suggest something about how his mind works" (Golshan 2017). For Pullum, Trump's "speech suggests a man with scattered thoughts, a short span of attention, and a lack of intellectual discipline and analytical skills," (Golshan 2017). Trump's language style was not cultivated over night, however; Trump has a long history of an "off-the-cuff" speaking style, as is illustrated by the infamous 2005 video recording (Fahrenthold 2016). A casual speaking style is a sign of extraversion, according

to Beukeboom and de Jong (2008). This correlates with Nai, Martínez i Coma and Maier's conclusion that Trump is highly extraverted (2019, 634) and demonstrates that language style often reflects one's personality. Overall, previous research suggests that Trump's style of speaking is representative of his personality.

“Make American Great Again”: A Discursive Look

To comprehend Trump's language style through a discursive approach the thesis examines the slogan “Make America Great Again” (referred to as MAGA for short). The MAGA slogan has become a trademark of the Trump movement, but some may be surprised to learn that the phrase was first used by Ronald Reagan in the 1980s (chrismarkdonovan 2015). Bill Clinton also adopted the slogan in 1991 (Dangremond 2018).

For Trump, the use of the phrase “Make America Great Again” is an important political strategy used to invoke feelings of nostalgia among his supporters. Research makes clear that nostalgia “is most likely to appeal to older citizens who have seen changes erode their cultural predominance and threaten their core social values” (Inglehart and Norris 2016, 16). In adopting a term from the Reagan and Clinton eras, Trump clearly attempts to establish a connection with older populations. This is a particularly important tactic given the fact most Americans rate Reagan as the greatest US president (Newport 2011).

The MAGA slogan itself has an important discursive design in that it promotes a sense of simplicity. Goldhill describes that “Trump's simple speaking style also gives the impression that politics is straightforward” (2017). Trump's rhetoric is often simple and straightforward, thanks to his casual language style, but it often represents deeper and more meaningful ideas. The phrase “make America great again” is simple to remember, and straightforward in its goal. However, it brings forth feelings of nostalgia, anger, hurt at the changes America has faced.

5.2 ASSESSING TRUMPISM THROUGH A DISCURSIVE AND STRATEGIC LENS

An Overview

Getting a sense of Trump's personality and the way he approaches populist subjects is useful to further understanding the methods Trump used to push his politics and beliefs. Before exploring the connections between Trump's personality and political tactics, however, it is best to first identify what makes Trumpism, Trumpism.

Lieberman et al. describe Trumpism as

protectionism, isolationism mingled with militaristic bluster, skepticism toward environmental and other regulation, antipathy toward immigrants and people of color generally, and vague pledges to restore declining domestic industries such as manufacturing and coal mining (2017, 7).

According to Morris, describes the "open ideology" of Trumpism is also "constituted by a variety of signs, concepts, principles, ideas, and theories that translate into practices in the form of strategies, objectives, non-objectives, policy making, discourse, and political activities" (2019, 18-9).

The stances that make Trumpism have been referred to as "a syncretic amalgam of a particular narrative of Trump's business career and an articulation of right-wing populist rhetoric mixed with previously fringe conservative philosophies" (Mollan and Geesin 2020, 406). Morris explains that Trump's conservatism "resembles the ideas and various conservative interests... attributed to the Old Right" (2019, 20) which is known for its protectionist philosophies (Continetti 2022) and isolationist foreign policies (Stromberg 2000) – both of which Trump has adopted with his "America First" attitude.

Such nationalist and anti-interventionist philosophies are also marked by their nostalgic undertones. These policies have consequences for both the cultural and economic arenas of society and demonstrate the cultural and economic overlap of Trump's philosophies. Trump's

“American First” philosophy discourages the influence of ethnic, cultural, and religious groups that are not in line with the values of traditional America.

The following sections explore the critical elements of Trump’s politics using strategic and discursive approaches. This includes his propensity to blame minority groups and establishment elites, his ability to “turn on” the charm, and his economic and foreign policy stances. This analysis is conducted by comparing Trump’s political actions to those of other populist leaders and the populist criteria established by previous scholars. The use of strategic and discursive approaches showcases the populist themes of Trumpism while testing their usefulness in exploring the Trump movement. Finally, in understanding Trump’s politics and populist techniques, the thesis can explore how Trump’s strategies and discourses motivated his African American support.

Othering

One of Trump’s talents is his ability to separate his supporters and others. This is done by shifting the responsibility of society’s problems onto other groups, most notably American politicians, wealthy elites, immigrants, and various minority groups. This greatly exacerbates animosity among various groups. This tactic is populist in nature, as “[p]opulist leaders make intergroup comparisons salient and thereby exacerbate intergroup hostility” (Goethals 2018, 1).

Inglehart and Norris also explain that

Trump’s rhetoric seeks to stir up a potent mix of racial resentment, intolerance of multiculturalism, nationalistic isolationism, nostalgia for past glories, mistrust of outsiders, traditional misogyny and sexism, the appeal of forceful strong-man leadership, attack-dog politics, and racial and anti-Muslim animus” (2016, 7).

In the sections below, Trump’s intergroup comparisons of racial and social minority groups and elites is apparent.

Immigrants and Minority Groups

Trump has used discursive and political strategies to grow animosity towards immigrants and minority groups – a tactic frequently used by populist parties and leaders (Inglehart and Norris 2016, 2). Nagel points out that Trump has increased “hostility and fear towards immigrants (or feminists, gays, inner-city black populations, etc.)” (2019, 12). Some examples of Trump’s anti-minority rhetoric are his suggestion that illegal Mexican immigrants are “rapists” (Kopan 2016) and his consideration of closing and surveilling mosques because, as he stated, “[s]ome of the absolute hatred is coming from these areas” (Krieg 2017). Trump has also suggested that Syrian refugees could be a “Trojan Horse” (Krieg 2017) or connected to “ISIS” (Krieg 2017).

As previously noted, Trump’s rhetoric is often uncomplicated because he uses simple yet intense adjectives to describe certain groups. In his comments about various ethnic groups, this theme is apparent. For example, Trump associates illegal Mexican immigrants to “rapists” (Kopan 2016) and Muslims to “hate” and “ISIS” (Krieg 2017). Although these associations are, at the very least, fallacious (see Burnett 2018; Krieg 2017), they are still overwhelmingly powerful in influencing people’s perceptions of immigrants and racial minorities.

Mehltretter Drury points out that Rhetoric is used to “construct, represent, craft, interpret, and invoke public opinion” (Mehltretter Drury 2014, 1) and often gives “public opinion its form and function” (Mehltretter Drury 2014, 2). Thus, Trump’s discriminatory comments can shape people’s opinions about immigrants and racial minority groups.

Trump’s policy decisions reflected his discriminatory comments and targeted minorities in various ways. His Muslim ban barred the entry of

banned foreign nationals from seven predominantly Muslim countries from visiting the country for 90 days, suspended entry to the country of all Syrian refugees indefinitely, and prohibited any other refugees from coming into the country for 120 days (ACLU of Washington 2017).

The construction of the US-Mexico border wall, which civil rights groups and religious groups commented was “meanspirited, counterproductive and... would [undermine] the American tradition of welcoming people from around the world” (Hirschfield 2017), and the addition of anti-LGBT groups like C-FAM and the Heritage Foundation to the UN Commission on the Status of Women (Columbia Human Rights Law Review 2019) are other examples of Trump’s discriminatory actions. Trump’s strategy to scapegoat and discriminate against minority groups benefits him in gaining and retaining supporters. His comments and decisions attract prejudiced voters and reinforce the commitment of his established supporters by continuing to appeal to their views.

Elites

Trump is also infamous for his demonization of society’s elites. Importantly, however, some anti-elitism is rooted in the hatred of minority groups. For example, Inglehart and Norris explain, “[p]opulists support charismatic leaders, reflecting a deep mistrust of the ‘establishment’ and mainstream parties who are led nowadays by educated elites with progressive cultural views on moral issues” (2016, 30). Populists thus believe that the interests of minorities are protected by elites, especially those with liberal perspectives. This is especially apparent in Trump’s comments suggesting that mainstream media favours the Democratic Party and their liberal perspectives. For example, in response to the leak that Russian hackers had hacked the Clinton Foundation, Trump said that the mainstream media “doesn’t pick it up very well. They don’t want to pick it up. They’re defending her” (Fox Business 2016). Trump’s assertion suggests to his voters that elitist media corporations support liberal views and are at odds with his movement.

Trump has also gone on to call the establishment and its elites “corrupt” and “decrepit” (*The Sun* 2020). Various academics have previously highlighted Trump’s usage of anti-elitism too. Haberman concludes that the “[m]obilizing anger and mistrust toward the government was a crucial factor for Mr. Trump in [2016]” (2020). After careful analysis of 36 Trump speeches, Quigley finds substantial evidence that his anti-elitist statements are a “cornerstone of Trump’s campaign rhetoric.” (2018, 45). Since, as Jan-Werner Müller asserts, anti-elitism is necessary for populism (Gökmen 2017, 4), Trump’s anti-elitist rhetoric is no surprise.

Regarding his policy decisions about elites, Trump’s positions are less straightforward than his rhetoric. For instance, Trump implemented “The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 [which] provided many tax deductions favourable to real estate developers, including interest rate deductions, and the elimination of taxes on property exchanges” (CREW 2020) but also emboldened a trade war with China that was riddled with tariffs and “cost the U.S. economy nearly a quarter million jobs” (Pettis 2021). The trade war also meant “U.S. economic growth slowed, business investment froze, and companies didn’t hire as many people” (Long 2016). So, while the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act helped business elites (such as Trump himself) earn more, his trade war with China also harmed elites by costing them investments and opportunities for economic growth.

With the knowledge that he is both narcissistic and egotistical (Nai, Martínez i Coma and Maier 2019, 634), the conflicting nature of Trump’s economic policy decisions could be explained by his selfishness. His conflicting nature is expected of a business-owning politician: Trump’s interests are divided between maintaining political support and turning profits. Various individuals have already called out the unethical conflicts of interest between Trump’s government and his business (see Kumar 2020; CREW 2020). Illing pointed out that Trump’s policies are “conspicuously pro-elite” (2017), and CREW’s research has identified that several of Trump’s

economic policies benefit his business (2020). This conflicting behaviour is not entirely out of character for a populist leader, as they have been known to lie to obtain political support and then act oppositely once political victory has been achieved. Illing writes that “Trump’s apparent abandoning of his campaign promises isn’t that unusual - experts pointed to examples of Latin American politicians who also ran on populism but did not govern that way” (2017).

Trump’s anti-elitism is evident in his rhetoric and some of his political actions. However, though the anti-elitist discourse he pushes makes his political distaste for elites clear, the sentiment does not extend to all his government policies. Previous research on his personality and demeanour (see Nai, Martínez i Coma and Maier 2019; Nai and Martínez i Coma 2019), as well as the knowledge that he is a businessman and politician, suggests a combination of narcissism and self-interest played a part in some of his administration’s decision making.

Charisma and Charm

Trump’s lack of agreeableness is renowned (Nai, Martínez i Coma and Maier 2019, 634), and this is obvious in his discourses and actions surrounding various minority groups and elites. Nevertheless, though Trump is often uncongenial, he can “flip on” the charm. He has been known to flatter and praise his electorate, other supporting politicians, friends, and family. For instance, when Trump campaigned in Iowa in 2016, he flattered Iowans by complimenting their land (Haberman and Kaplan 2016) and stated that Trump voters were “the most loyal” (Haberman and Kaplan 2016). Donald Trump’s niece, psychologist Mary L. Trump, also provided an anecdote that her uncle once said, “I specifically asked for you to be here” when she attended a family event at the White House (Scipioni 2020) adding that it “was the kind of thing he often said to charm people” (Scipioni 2020).

The ability of a populist leader to be friendly despite their unwelcoming demeanour is not unique to Trump. Roberts notes that Perón and Chavez were charismatic despite still being populist leaders (2007, 3). Chavez’s combination of charisma (Roberts 2007, 3) and his tactic of insulting his competition (Block 2022, 82) reinforces that populist leaders often harness different personas. This talent assists populist leaders in appealing to their audiences. For instance, Cialdini, a psychology professor, explains that “[w]hen someone receives a compliment, their automatic reaction is to feel more positive toward the complimenter” (Scipioni 2020). Trump’s charm makes his electorate feel optimistic about him and makes them more receptive to his messages.

An Economic Look

Trump’s economic rhetoric was a cornerstone of his 2016 and 2020 campaigns. Trump was known to harken “back to a past where the economy thrived due to a robust industrial, producerist economy” (Skonieczny 2018, 67), especially when he described the need to “bring back our jobs” to America (*ABC News* 2016). For many Americans, Trump’s comments validated their economic concerns. This is especially true of voters who feel ‘left behind’ by globalization as manufacturing industries dwindle (Lieberman et al. 2017, 7; Kaufman 2020) and knowledge-based industries surge (Galston 2017, 23).

To circumvent the adverse effects of globalization, Trump’s economic plans proposed a more isolated foreign policy approach. He suggested isolationist and protectionist foreign economic policy, aligning with the philosophies of Jacksonianism (see Mead 2017; Clarke and Ricketts 2017), which believes the American government should only focus on the “physical security and economic well-being of the American people in their national home” (Mead 2017, 4). This contrasts with Hamiltonians and Wilsonians, who believe the “creation of a global liberal order was a vital U.S. interest” (Mead 2017, 2).

Once in office, Trump's foreign policy was greatly protectionist and non-interventionist.

Trump

“directed the United States to withdraw from a number of agreements and treaties, including the climate-focused Paris Agreement, the trade-oriented Trans-Pacific Partnership, and such arms-controls pacts as the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. He also renegotiated terms of the North American Free Trade Agreement and North Atlantic Treaty Organization as well accelerated U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria” (Dodson and Brooks 2022, 781).

However, Trump's “America first” policies were not the only types of policies he enacted; Trump also established policies that would continue to promote the interconnectedness of nations. According to Drucker and Tankersley, Donald Trump's “Treasury carved out exceptions to the [Federal Tax] law that mean many leading American and foreign companies will owe little or nothing in new taxes on offshore profit” (2019). The lobbying efforts for these tax breaks included companies such as General Electric and Coca-Cola (Drucker and Tankersley 2019). Trump's economic rhetoric coincides with his policy decisions only some of the time.

The contrast between both Trump's rhetoric actions is not an uncommon practice of populist leaders (see Illing 2017), as mentioned, and this is true for economic issues also. Most populist leaders “rather than effectively fighting corruption use the populist rhetoric as a smoke screen to redistribute the spoils of corruption amongst their allies” (Kossow 2019). This evidence suggests that Trump's economic rhetoric and actions align and conflict often. Trump's economic strategy in 2016 and 2020 was to appeal to individuals fearful about the economy's path; his rhetoric and discourses illustrate this clearly.

5.3 A HISTORICAL REFLECTION OF TRUMP'S STRATEGIES

Trump has adopted some traditional Republican Party tactics to increase Black support. These include embodying similar racist tactics to past Republican leaders and using the endorsements of Black celebrities.

Trump, Racism, and the Republican Party

A key similarity of Trump and the Republican Party is their use of discrimination tactics. Lopez outlines the history of Trump's racism from the 1970s onwards. He argues.

“This long history is important. It would be one thing if Trump misspoke one or two times. But when you take all of his actions and comments together, a clear pattern emerges — one that suggests that bigotry is not just political opportunism on Trump's part but a real element of his personality, character, and career” (Lopez 2020).

However, we can examine Trump's racism alongside other Republican leaders. How unique is Trump's racist history when looking at past Republican leaders? Did past Republican leaders also exemplify racist behaviour, and if so, to what extent? Did this racism impact the party's historical trend of 10% Black American support? Historical trends regarding the behaviour of Republican leaders are one way we can hypothesize whether the GOP would have seen its traditional 10% Black electorate, with or without Trump.

Research on past Republican presidential candidates illustrates that prejudicial behaviour and remarks are not uncommon. An important example is that Bush senior achieved roughly 10% of the Black vote in 1988, even though his campaign created the infamous Willie Horton ad. This campaign advertisement painted “Democrat Michael Dukakis as soft on crime” (Greenberg 2000) and “featured a menacing black rapist named Willie Horton” (Greenberg 2000). At the time, the ad was widely condemned as racist and is [still] regarded three decades later as one of the most extreme attack ads in modern political history” (Haines 2018).

Nevertheless, George H. W. Bush's history illustrates multiple discriminatory political advertisements. Haines goes on to explain that "During his first, losing bid for Congress in 1964, he criticized his opponent's support for the Civil Rights Act" (Haines 2018), and later "Bush caused a minor flap during the 1988 Republican National Convention" when referring to his son's Jeb and his Mexican wife, Columba's children as the "little brown ones" (2018).

The histories of other Republican candidates are also interwoven with discrimination. Reagan, who many Americans still support (Newport 2011), had a political career advanced by stoking racial anxieties. Lucks points out that,

[a]s far back as the mid-1960s, Reagan aggressively appealed to white working-class Democrats by stoking their anxieties over the pace of the civil rights movement, which reached a crescendo after the explosive 1965 Watts riots. Capitalizing on fears that the ghetto and mayhem would spread to their communities, Reagan announced his bid for Governor in January 1966, claiming he wanted to protect Californians from the city streets that are "jungles" after dark... (2021).

In later years "Ronald Reagan constantly spoke about "welfare queens" and characterized poverty as an African American issue" (Bates 2020).

The examples above illustrate that racism is almost a tradition among past Republican leaders. Today, Trump has continued this custom, though he stands apart in his bluntness, Zelizer remarks (Grigsby Bates 2020). With this historical context, Trump's racism is less distinctive. Furthermore, past Republican leaders have exhibited racist behaviour, such as Trump, and maintained 10% of the African American vote – something Trump has also maintained. Many of Trump's Black voters knew he was racist yet remained undeterred (Meredith 2018).

This is not to say that Trump's racism was not a turn-off to other Black voters; if Trump had been less transparent in his discrimination (or non-discriminatory), it is plausible he would have gained additional Black voters. According to Williams, many Black Americans, especially those who did not support Trump, "are justifiably wary of some of the racist rhetoric that seems to

have sprung up around the Trump candidacy” (2017). The same is also plausible for past Republican leaders. The problem, however, is that it is difficult to decipher how much Black voters would turn to Trump without his racism. Moreover, among older Black voters (see Conroy and Bacon 2020), the GOP has become antonymous with Black interests thanks to the actions of past political events and Republican leaders (see Fullwood 2020; Wright Rigueur 2014, 53), making it challenging to assume Black voters would flock to a hypothetical anti-discriminatory version of Trump.

The Republican Party and Black Celebrity Endorsements

Celebrity endorsements of Trump are another source of influence to push Black voters to Trump. One prominent Black celebrity is Ye (formerly known as Kanye) West, a Black “Grammy Award-winning rapper, record producer and fashion designer” (*Biography* n.d.). Ice Cube, another well-known rapper, has also declared support for Trump. According to Garcia, “Trump’s campaign has been working with the rapper Ice Cube, who has promoted his own Contract With Black America as a platform for the presidential campaigns to adopt” (Garcia 2020).

The influence of celebrities used by political campaigns has been studied. Veer, Becirovic and Martin’s study found that respondents who view politics and political issues as less critical are “significantly more likely to vote for the political party when a celebrity endorser is used” (2010, 436). Celebrity endorsements can influence voters and are significant opportunities for politicians to capitalize upon. Trump did use West’s endorsement to support his campaign. Trump met with West at Trump Tower, the Oval Office and promoted Ye’s support in many tweets (Penrose 2018).

However, some historical context illustrates that Trump’s use of this tactic is not unique or explicitly ‘populist.’ For instance, Nixon also used black celebrity endorsements as “evidence of

widespread black support and an excuse to ignore African Americans' most pressing criticisms and concerns" (Wright Rigueur 2018). Wright Rigueur continues to explain that in praising West,

Trump became only the latest Republican president to attempt to use black celebrities to reach African American voters. Since at least the 1960s, Republicans have courted black entertainers, musicians and athletes as political surrogates to "speak" to and for black communities (Wright Rigueur 2018).

Overall, Trump's use of celebrity endorsements is a strategy used by Republican politicians for more than half of a century, meaning it is not a uniquely populist tactic. Despite this, the works of previous studies suggest Trump's use of celebrity endorsements can influence the voters to support him. As such, though not exactly populist, this strategy

5.4 CONCLUSION

Overall, Trump's personality and political style embody traits known of other populist leaders. However, he still has a few unique qualities compared to other populist leaders - particularly an exceptionally high level of narcissism (Nai, Martínez i Coma and Maier 2019, 634) and an abysmal rating on agreeableness (Nai, Martínez i Coma and Maier 2019, 634). This chapter illustrates that his personality traits often bleed into his political discourses and strategies. For instance, Trump is incredibly hostile to the groups he sees as "others," such as minorities and elites, illustrating his divisive methods. At the same time, Trump's narcissism and self-centeredness bleed into his economic and foreign policy decisions as president. Some policies benefit his financial interests and conflict with his economic rhetoric. However, Trump's demeanour is not always disagreeable. Trump flatters and praises his voters, which benefits him by increasing his likability.

Trump's policy decisions and political behaviours as president illustrate that his loyalties are scattered. Trump's anti-minority policies largely coincide with his rhetoric. For example, Trump said he would implement a "Muslim ban" and did (ACLU of Washington 2017). On

economic policies, Trump follows through on some of his rhetoric, such as by adopting an isolationist economic policy, but does permit political acts that encourage elites to make more money and grow the wealth gap in America. Thus, the evidence suggests Trump's self-centeredness is a factor in his economic decision-making, though he still acts in ways that appeal to his electorate. Trump's tactics often focus on what his voters want to hear and see, but his actions sometimes depart from this. In these instances, his interests might be to blame.

Additionally, some of Trump's tactics and strategies are populist and not populist at the same time. For example, Trump's racism is populist as it works directly with the "othering" requirement of populist movements. However, it is also used by past Republican leaders such as George H. W. Bush and his Willie Horton campaign ad. Furthermore, Trump's promotion of Black celebrity endorsements is a strategy long employed by the GOP.

Overall, it appears Trump uses a blend of populist and other strategies to appeal to Black voters. However, his personality stands out as exceptionally populist and, as illustrated, dramatically influences some of his methods and decisions. His strategies also combine populist tactics and typical Republican Party methods.

CHAPTER SIX: TRUMP AND HIS BLACK VOTERS

Importantly, in establishing the discursive and strategic patterns Trump uses, the thesis can use this understanding to identify how he employed these tactics to appeal to African American voters. Knowing how Trump behaves to garner support also allows the thesis to test how much he acts on established behaviour to get Black votes. At the same time, employing the discursive and strategic approaches will help emphasize how Trump's appeals to Black voters follow or differ from his routine. The connections between Trump and his Black followers are analyzed in the following chapter.

In this chapter, the thesis explores the types of Black Trump voters and how Trump's narratives and strategies appeal to their beliefs and interests. Like the previous chapter, the strategic and discursive approaches to studying populism and populist leaders are employed to establish the connection between Trump and his Black electorate.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. Firstly, it is meant to establish the extent to which Trump attracted the support of Republican African Americans and the methods he employed to do so. Secondly, this chapter sets up Chapter Seven by introducing known types of Black Trump voters. The data incorporated in Chapter Seven also establishes how much Trump's Black electorate consists of the group types named in this chapter.

Importantly, it needs to be stressed that the Black Republican voter is not restricted to one group type alone. For example, the social conservative might also be an economic conservative, or the frustrated Democratic voter may have come to adopt the social conservative values represented by the Republican party or Donald Trump. Thus, the groups identified in this chapter are presented separately to provide a more transparent overview of the different beliefs that

motivate Black Trump supporters and not to suggest that Black Trump voters can only be categorized as one categorization type.

6.1 THE BLACK REPUBLICAN: POPULISM AND PARTY AFFILIATION

The Black Republican voting bloc is one of the most crucial components to understanding Trump's Black turnout. Some scholars indicate that Trump's African American support is not "indicative of the president's successful outreach efforts, but rather the long-standing relationship between this voting bloc and the GOP." (Wright Rigueur 2020). Much of Trump's support is explained by party affiliation. Thus, it is crucial to acknowledge this to ensure an accurate study of Black Trump voters. However, there are ways Trump's strategies and discourses encourage Black Republicans to stay with the party; Populism is finite in explaining Black Republican voters, but it still encourages their Republican partisanship in several ways. How populism encouraged the Black Republican vote is included in the analyses below.

A History of Black Americans and the Republican Party

Black conservatism in the GOP dates back to the time of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln, a Republican, was crucial to freeing Black Americans from slavery with his Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 (National Archives n.d.d.). Some Black conservatives today still feel an alignment with the party because of this, like Bailey, who believes the GOP is "praiseworthy" for its claiming "the likes of Abraham Lincoln" (2015). Trump has even made it a point to include Lincoln in comments, saying, "I have done more for the African American community than any president with the exception of Abraham Lincoln" (Cineas 2020).

An Overview of Black Republicans and Conservatism

The populist movement's beliefs resemble the foundational social and economic beliefs of the GOP (as Chapter Four highlighted) and the Black Republican bloc in several ways. In order to illustrate the connection between Black Republicans and GOP beliefs, it is practical to identify the conservative beliefs of Black Republicans first.

Black conservatism aligns with the fundamental principles of the broader American conservative ideology. Conservatism emphasizes the restriction of government in society (Ginsberg et al. 2010, 149). Conservatives believe “a large and powerful government poses a threat to citizens' freedom” (Ginsberg et al. 2010, 149) in both social and economic aspects. Furthermore, conservatism encourages the preservation of things that are perceived as safe or good (Scruton 2007, 131). Thus, conservatives are resistant to change (Scruton 2007, 131). Most fundamental to conservatism, however, “is individualism” - “the most fundamental of all the dominant American value systems” (Asumah and Perkins 2000, 53, italics in original).

Conservatism can impact vote choice. Previous examinations have found that though “the influence of Democratic Party allegiance is still a very powerful cue for black voter” (Kidd et al. 2007, 165), “Black conservatism on at least certain social issues is real and has the potential to influence vote choice” (Kidd et al. 2007, 165). Because Black conservative ideology can influence vote choice, exploring how these beliefs motivate conservative Black Trump voters to retain their affiliation is essential.

In the sections below, the beliefs of committed Black Republicans and, more broadly, Black conservatives are categorized into social and economic types. This is done to provide a more transparent overview of the beliefs underpinning the Black conservative movement. Though social and economic perspectives are outlined separately, many Black conservatives extend their

ideology to social and economic issues. Frequently, the social and economic conservative beliefs of Black conservatives overlap (see Kuhl's research (1997)).

6.2 THE SOCIAL CONSERVATIVE

Social conservatism calls for conservative solutions to social issues. For Black conservatives, especially those concerned about social issues, the GOP aligns most closely with their philosophies. Conservative positions on social topics can contribute to vote choice. As an example, Black conservative Republican Walker, “has identified as a conservative for more than 25 years, pointing to her pro-life leanings and support for free market economics” (Evelyn 2020).

Social Conservatism and Trump

Trump expressed socially conservative views. On abortion, Trump stated he was “pro-life,” though he clarified there should be exceptions for cases of “rape, incest and the life of the mother” (Wright 2016). Though Trump strays from some former Republican candidates in his support of such exceptions (Wright 2016), his pro-life stance correlates with the antiabortion beliefs of the Republican Party (Siddiqui 2015; Pew Research Center 2021). During his presidency, Trump also acted conservatively on issues of gender. As an example, he dissolved “access to gender-affirming medical and psychological care” (Jackson and Kube 2019) for transgender individuals serving in the military (Jackson and Kube 2019). Trump adopted many of the GOP's socially conservative positions, likely encouraging some socially conservative Black Republicans to remain with the party.

Trump's hypermasculinity and tough-man persona are vital in appealing to socially conservative Blacks who cherish traditional gender roles. Research has shown that Black male support of the GOP is “partially explained by the fact that Black men tend to prioritize presidential candidates' individual attributes, including race, personality, and experience” (Wright Rigueur

2020), and some Black Republican males are especially attracted to Trump’s masculine personality (Logan 2020). In one survey, Black male respondents “[w]hen given the statement “I do not always like President Trump’s policies, but I like the way President Trump shows strength and defies the establishment”” (2020) were more likely than Black females to agree with the statement and did so at a “far higher rate” (AU Media 2020). Some Black Republicans – predominantly males – are attracted to Trump’s hypermasculinity, further illustrating the role social conservative perspectives on gender have in influencing and encouraging voters.

Social Conservatism and Christianity

An important subgroup within the Black Republican Party is Christians. Most Black Americans identify as Christians (Masci, Mohamed and Smith 2018), and so do most Black Republicans (Pew Research Center n.d.e.). However, the religious views of some Black Christians lead them to lean socially conservative. For instance, Asumah and Perkins conclude that “[s]ome Black conservative Christian fundamentalists believe in traditional values [and]... are also antigay, antiabortion, and are traditionally conservative on other social issues” (2000, 57). As Chapter Four highlighted, the GOP and Trump have promoted socially conservative takes, making it plausible that their views appealed to new social conservatives and encouraged Black Republicans to remain committed. This relationship is explored in Chapter Seven using demographic data.

6.3 THE ECONOMIC CONSERVATIVE

Economic Beliefs and Trump

Many Black conservatives view the economy as central to the country’s well-being. These voters believe that “the American political economy is based or should be based on the three main

pillars of conservatism - individualism, materialism, and limited government - and that these can adequately solve the Black community's problems" (Asumah and Perkins 2000, 52).

Trump's economic views were a staple of his 2016 and 2020 campaigns. His economic rhetoric was crucial in appealing to Americans – like Black conservatives who believe financial success requires hard work (Johnson and Wright Rigueur 2016). For example, in 2016, Trump pledged to cut taxes for working-class and middle-class Americans (Allen 2016). Most Black Republican voters have working and middle-class incomes (Conroy and Bacon 2020; Wright Rigueur 2020), illustrating a desire to help some of society's hardest working classes. However, Trump's proposed tax cuts also aligned with the conservative philosophies of restricted government intervention.

Once in office, Trump's tax cuts also extended to corporations and businesses (Allen 2016). Cutting taxes on businesses also follows the conservative logic of limited government (United States Department of State (Denmark) n.d.). It is also thought that cutting business taxes provides businesses more freedom to pursue economic endeavours, further expanding supply and demand and employment opportunities. These cuts are appealing to newer economically conservative voters but also encourage support from (typically male) established Black conservatives who align with the GOP's prioritization of "right-leaning ideologies of conservatism, social conservatism, and economic libertarianism" (United States Department of State (Denmark) n.d.) and "broadly advocate for traditional values, a low degree of government interference, and large support of the private sector" (United States Department of State (Denmark) n.d.).

Economic Conservatism, Racism, and Trump

Black conservative ideology is unique because it equates economic success (achieved through the three pillars of conservatism) with improving the quality of life in African

American community. The philosophy is based on color-blindness: the belief that one's race should not influence how one treats themselves, particularly that Black persons do not "[view] themselves as victims of racism and so in need of unique public policies" (Kilson 1993, 7). Black conservative scholars argue that because the Black community perceives and advertises themselves as victims, society treats them as such. To describe scholar Shelby Steele's understanding of the phenomenon, Kilson summarizes:

Blacks... have mistakenly and obsessively clung to an identity derived from their historical victim status under American racism, causing themselves enormous emotional and behavioral dysfunction (1993, 8).

This is thought to encourage Black individuals to become increasingly defensive, although there are more opportunities for mobility and development than ever (Kilson 1993, 8). These perspectives oppose those held by liberal scholars and individuals who believe structural and systematic racism exists and negatively impacts Black individuals across America.

There is some evidence illustrating how Black Republicans feel about race. One survey conducted by the BVP regarding the 2020 election asked Black respondents whether "campaigns highlighting issues of race, or class, strategy achieve the most success at turning out the black community to vote?" (BVP 2020b). The results showed that political campaigns highlighting issues of race and framing Trump as a threat to racial victories are more likely to incentivize people to vote Democrat (BVP 2020b). This evidence suggests that Black Republicans are less likely to regard Trump as a threat to the Black community and are less receptive to messages focusing on race issues. According to McWhorter, the economy and Trump's charisma and political agenda outweighed racial prejudices for Black Trump voters (2020).

McWhorter suggests that while racism appears to be a significant "wedge issue" for many Americans, this is not always true for the Black community (2020). Instead, as he argues,

the support of Black Americans for Trump shows “a gulf between how the “woke” left processes racism and how many people in the real world do” (McWhorter 2020). In this case, the way Black Republican voters process racism is different from other Black voters and the political left, mainly because they believe conservatism’s tenets are integral in overcoming racism. Black Trump voters want the Black community to succeed, but how the community achieves this success differs from most Black Americans who favour left-leaning solutions to racism. While McWhorter (2020) and Johnson and Wright Rigueur (2016) illustrate that Black Trump voters overlooked Trump’s prejudices, this does not mean they overlooked racism. Instead, the traditional economic takes promoted by Trump aligned with Black conservatives who believe individualism, a free economy and limited government are vital to the success of the Black community.

Economic Interests and Experiences

Many Black conservative voters and Black Republicans accepted Trump’s sentiments because they related to their philosophies. However, it is logical to reason that Black Trump voters also considered their economic experiences and interests when voting for Trump.

Johnson and Wright Rigueur explain that Black conservative voters are often “more receptive to core messages of self-determination, financial success as a function of hard work, and personal responsibility, especially when conveyed in a plainspoken, hypermasculine manner” (2016). Trump promoted each of these ideas, mainly through his rhetoric to bring jobs back to America and consequently re-establish a culture in which hard work - blue-collar work - guarantees success.⁴

⁴ The term “blue-collar” is a “US expression for a person engaged in manual employment” (Rutherford 2013).

Furthermore, in 2020, Trump was “promising to bring Black unemployment down to its historic pre-coronavirus lows, as well as making the case that Biden does not have the safety or best interests of the Black community in mind” (Collins 2020). Trump’s “Platinum Plan for Black America” further sought to address economic woes by emphasizing the need for opportunity, security, prosperity, and fairness in the economy, to protect and support Black business owners and the larger Black community (Donald J. Trump For President, Inc. n.d.). For many Black business owners, and prospective Black business owners, the Platinum Plan’s commitment was to create 500,000 Black businesses, provide access to job training opportunities and promote onshoring manufacturing to advance jobs and create opportunities for Black-owned businesses (Donald J. Trump For President, Inc. n.d.). For those who work in manufacturing, promoting onshoring is also in their interest as it promotes the industry’s growth.

Important to note is that Trump did add jobs during his presidency. He added 6.4 million jobs, to be precise (Reality Check team 2020). However, many of these jobs went to areas other than manufacturing, as he had promised they would in his campaigns. For instance, “Michigan has lost fifty thousand manufacturing jobs since the start of Trump’s Presidency, about half of them in the auto industry” (Kaufman 2020). Furthermore, “[j]obs in Michigan lost to offshoring actually increased by more than two hundred per cent during the first three years of Trump’s Presidency, compared with the last three years of Obama’s” (Kaufman 2020).

Financial and Economic Woes

There is also the need to consider the case of economically dissatisfied voters. Whether their concerns are based upon real experiences of financial hardship or their fears of “what if”, it is indisputable that Trump incentivised many worried about the economy to support him.

For context, the US has shifted substantially towards a service-based economy and away from its past as an industry-based economy. Rutherford explains that for blue-collar workers “de-industrialization and the increasing education of the labour force have reduced the number of these workers and, also, labour union membership” (2013). Amadeo also points out,

“U.S. companies outsourced many of these jobs to save money. But robotics, artificial intelligence, and bio-engineering also made some jobs obsolete, so ending outsourcing may not bring back all the jobs that were lost. It's possible that government-sponsored training for these specialties might create more jobs for U.S. workers than a trade war” (2021).

While many once succeeded as blue-collar workers, the diminishment of their industries and redirection of the American economy has had severe ramifications for many individuals and communities across the US. As the effects of globalization have shifted various industries out of the country, many Americans have lost their jobs and seen their communities dry up. As a result, financial instability and employment insecurity has become their reality.

The 2008-2009 recession and housing crisis has also contributed to the suffering of many Americans. As Cassidy writes,

[t]he aftermath of the 2008 crisis saw plenty of hardship—millions of Americans lost their homes to mortgage foreclosures, and by the summer of 2010 the jobless rate had risen to almost ten per cent—but nothing of comparable scale. Today, the unemployment rate has fallen all the way to 3.9 per cent (2018).

On top of this, according to the CDC, the 2020 global pandemic has also seen not only over a million deaths (2022) but also numerous shutdowns, layoffs, losses in income and revenue, as well as an increase in food insecurity (Bauer et al. 2020). With all these economic events, Trump’s push for conservative-style economics appealed to many frustrated with these experiences, especially those who blame traditional politics and greedy elites for enabling these hardships.

Previous examinations have concluded that economic issues were of high priority for many of Trump’s followers. However, in the 2020 survey from Edison Research, among Democratic and

Republican voters, the issues of economy, race, and the coronavirus were found to be split heavily along partisan lines in 2020 (*BBC* 2020). The *BBC* reports that in this study, “more than four times as many Trump voters [said] the economy was the deciding factor, and Biden voters [answered] racial inequality and the virus.” (2020).

This information does not mean that conservative economic philosophies were not a motivator for the economically dissatisfied Black voter, but rather that dedication to such principles may not have existed prior to Trump’s run for office. Based upon personal and economic experiences, many Black voters and voters across all racial groups may have grown tired of the stagnation traditional Democratic politics and economics have delivered. For states that are typical Democratic strongholds, this is especially the case as several blue states turned Republican in 2016 (Crockett 2016). While conservative takes on how to affect the economy were important in motivating many committed to the GOP, it could have been enough to draw in new voters upset with the state of the economy.

6.4 THE FRUSTRATED DEMOCRAT: IGNORED AND PUSHED ASIDE

If you have a problem figuring out whether you’re for me or Trump, then you ain’t black.

- *Joe Biden*, (Bradner, Mucha and Saenz 2020).

Though 9 out of 10 Black voters vote for the Democrats in each election period (Pew Research Center 2016b), many have become increasingly frustrated with the party, largely because they feel excluded and ignored. Many of Trump’s appeals have related to the feelings of many discouraged Black voters.

The Black community has long been excluded from American society and politics. The African American community has endured social and physical brutality for centuries, and the most significant political gains have only occurred in the last century. For instance, though African

Americans were granted the right to vote in 1870 with the Fifteenth Amendment (National Archives n.d.e.), they “were still denied the right to vote by state constitutions and laws, poll taxes, literacy tests, the “grandfather clause,” and outright intimidation” (National Archives n.d.a.).

It was only in the Civil Rights era that many of these methods of vote suppression were overturned. Democrat Lyndon B. Johnson’s 1965 Voting Rights Act “outlawed the discriminatory voting practices adopted in many southern states after the Civil War” (National Archives n.d.e.). In helping African Americans achieve political equality, the Democratic Party quickly became a symbol of Black interests. However, White and Laird determine, “it was only when the Democratic Party took up the mantle of Civil Rights in the mid to late 1960’s that black support for the Party coalesced into the reliable Democratic voting bloc we know today” (2020).

In the decades since, however, the Black community’s Democratic loyalties have been significantly taken for granted. Many Black Americans feel their interests are not taken seriously and are instead only brought up at election time. The head of the Black to the Future Action Fund, Alicia Garza, emphasizes that Democrats have not addressed “issues on the ground in Black communities” (Daniels 2022). The president of the Republican Precinct Project of Chicago, Anthony Anderson, mentions that “in the past there has been a lot of talk about reaching out to the African American community [from the Democratic Party], but that was just a lot of talk” (Gunderson 2020). In 2020 Biden was also “criticized for neglecting Black and Latinx voters” (Cineas and North 2020). Black men also feel their interests have been ignored. For “Mondale Robinson, founder and principal of the Black Male Voter Project” (Daniels 2022), “[o]ne of the biggest blocs of Black voters often overlooked is Black men” (Daniels 2022).

The party’s growing elite influence partly explains these frustrations. Steinhorn describes that the Democratic Party has succumbed to a “political narrative that now has them on the side of

the establishment” (2017). As was established in Chapter Four, wealthy elites have the largest impacts on American politics (Gilens and Page 2014, 564). In the Democratic Party this elite influence is also becoming apparent. Particularly,

by cozying up to Wall Street and the privileged — and appearing more at ease hobnobbing among them than among those who work in factories, small businesses and call centers — Democrats have sent a subtle message about the people they prefer to associate with and seek out for advice (Steinhorn 2017).

There are facts to back up such claims. Brooks points out that “Democrats dominate society’s culture generators: the elite universities, the elite media, the entertainment industry, the big tech companies, the thriving elite places like Manhattan, San Francisco and Los Angeles” (2021). Facebook and Google have also funded Democratic candidates (Martin 2020).

Anderson also believes the Democratic Party’s indifference has been crucial in voter switching (Gunderson 2020). Though it is unclear how many Black Democrats partook in vote-switching using the methodologies of this study, vote switchers are still a plausible group making up Trump’s electorate. How much Trump could have facilitated this vote-switching is explored further below.

Trump and Frustrated Democrats

Trump’s anti-establishment and anti-elitist comments likely appealed to Democrats frustrated with the Democratic Party’s infiltration by elites. One example of this tactic was Trump’s proclamation that Clinton wanted to “give jobs to refugees rather than unemployed African-Americans in the US” (LoBianco and Killough 2016). Trump suggests the Democrats place the interests of Black voters below those of refugees, giving the idea that the party is not concerned about helping its Black voters. This illustrates Trump’s strategy to divide Black Americans and refugees over employment and attempt to lead those already upset with the Democratic Party toward the GOP. This message also conveys that the Democratic Party puts the

interests of refugees above those of Black Americans, which plays to Trump's favour in persuading undecided Black voters that the Republican Party will act differently.

The way he speaks takes on an inherent anti-establishment temperament as it does not appear to be rehearsed, organized or 'political' in nature. For Black Democrats upset with the growing elite influence in their party, Trump's language style may be appealing. Additionally, the fact that many Black Americans already do not feel that government has their interests in mind (Johnson and Wright Rigueur 2016) helps to explain why many of the Black Americans who voted for him were not "deterred by Trump's racially intolerant remarks" (Johnson and Wright Rigueur 2016) and instead "prefer his crude, straightforward manner to politicians' disingenuous placations" (Johnson and Wright Rigueur 2016).

Trump, Cambridge-Analytica and Vote Suppression

Some of Trump's online rhetoric resembles Black voters' concerns about the Democratic Party's intents. The discourses within his campaign videos, advertisements and commercials can potentially encourage vote-switching among Black voters. However, it can also discourage Black Americans from voting as well. The latter method has been demonstrated by the Trump campaign's work with Cambridge Analytica in 2016. As the data provided here and Bump (2016) asserts, this was an explicit strategy of the Trump campaign.

The Trump campaign worked with Cambridge Analytica on the 2016 election campaign. In partnering with the political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica, the 2016 Trump campaign "micro-target[ed] US voters with carefully tailored messages about the Republican nominee across digital channels" (Lewis and Hilder 2018). Using the data provided by Facebook of as many as 80 million of its users (Meredith 2018), Cambridge Analytica was able to "develop "psychographic"

profiles of people and deliver pro-Trump material to them online” (Meredith 2018).⁵ Using this data, 10,000 advertisements were promoted to various audiences in the months before the 2016 election. These advertisements were ultimately watched “billions of times” (Lewis and Hilder 2018).

The use of Facebook data by Cambridge Analytica and the Trump campaign did have significant impacts for Black Americans. As Channel 4 News reports,

3.5 million Black Americans were profiled and categorised as ‘Deterrence’ by Trump’s campaign... which was later described publicly by Trump’s chief data scientist as containing people that the campaign “hope don’t show up to vote (Channel 4 News Investigation Team 2020).

Advertisements targeted towards Black Americans often showed Clinton calling Black men “super predators” (Channel 4 News Investigation Team 2020). Though this may have worked in getting some Black Democrats to go Republican in 2016, these tactics may have had real impacts on the 2016 election results.

Deterring African Americans from voting works in Trump’s favour in a critical way. Because close to 90% of Black Americans vote Democrat (Pew Research Center 2016b), deterring Black voters from participating would lower the number of Democratic Party votes, meaning the threshold for which Trump needed to overtake Clinton in each state to win the election was also lower. In swing states, this was crucial for Trump’s electoral success as winning these states would increase the number of Electoral College votes Trump obtained, making him more likely to reach the vote requirement for the presidency (USA Government n.d.).⁶

However, Black voters often made-up disproportionate levels of the ‘Deterrence’ category. For instance, in Georgia, a key swing state for Trump in the 2016 election, “despite Black people

⁵ It was later determined Facebook breached and misused the privacy of its users (Wong 2019).

⁶ See Chapter Eight, for additional information about the 2016 election, swing states, and the US electoral system.

constituting 32% of the population, they made up 61% of the ‘Deterrence’ category” (Channel 4 News Investigation Team 2020) – a vast overrepresentation. Just as Black Georgians were the targets of voter suppression, so too were African Americans in the swing states of Wisconsin and North Carolina vastly overrepresented in the ‘Deterrence’ category (Channel 4 News Investigation Team 2020).

Trump and his campaign’s use of voter suppression are problematic for a few reasons. Firstly, the African American community has been the frequent and disproportionate target of vote suppression in the United States. The Trump campaign only contributes to an ongoing challenge for the Black community. As previously mentioned, following the right to vote, the African American community experienced various barriers to voting (National Archives n.d.a.; n.d.d.; n.d.e.). Trump’s tactics work to exclude Black voters from participating in politics and promote a society that encourages voter suppression. As a result, voter suppression harms a democratic state like the US since it violates the core premise of a “government of the people, by the people and for the people” (Watts 2010, 68). This illustrates Trump’s use of authoritarian strategies.

6.5 BLACK IMMIGRANT REPUBLICANS

America’s Black population is becoming increasingly foreign-born, according to findings from the Pew Research Center (Anderson 2015). To be precise, from 2010 to 2018, “the number of Black immigrants grew from 3.3 million people to more than 4.3 million—an increase of 30 percent.” (New American Economy 2020). Furthermore,

[i]n 2021, there were 4.8 million foreign-born Black Americans, about 10% of the U.S. Black population. This is an increase from 2000, when 2.4 million people, or 7%, among the Black population were foreign born (Moslimani et al. 2023).

Black immigrants are also diverse, and much more so than Joe Biden presumes, according to “Kevin Thomas, professor of African American and African diaspora studies at The University of

Texas at Austin” (Gikandi 2020). The distinguishing factor of Black immigrants, however, is that they “to lean more conservative” (Gikandi 2020) than most native-borns. Though it is difficult to identify how much of Trump’s Black electorate is foreign-born using the methodologies of this thesis, it is essential to recognize this subgroup of African American voters, as it is plausible that some Black immigrants found the conservative leanings of the GOP and Donald Trump appealing.

6.6 SUMMARY

As the above information highlights, the views of many types of Black voters align with Trump’s economic, social, or religious remarks and campaigns. As American conservatism, according to Sowell, includes individualism and rewarding the efforts of those who work hard (Allen 2016), traditional values and conservative understandings of the world are significant factors in motivating the Black Trump voter. The Black non-conservative or, perhaps, more correctly, the less-conservative Black Trump voter likely supported him based on Trump’s perspective on specific economic or social issues, as has been demonstrated. As this section described, some evidence supports that economic values alone were crucial in garnering new voters into the Republican Party in 2016, but that voters voted based on their positions on social issues also. Furthermore, racism is not overlooked by Black Republicans but is included within their economic framework; for these voters, economic success is essential to overcome racism.

Furthermore, religious followers are also connected to Trump’s socially conservative messages. The emphasis on prosperity and how some Christian streams can emphasize traditional gender roles and social conservatism amplifies the role conservatism plays in the decision-making of the Black Trump Voter. Overall, the beliefs of Black Trumpers help explain the demographic trends seen in the previous chapter. Similarly, the demographics also help to highlight which types of values are important for most African American Trump voters.

CHAPTER SEVEN: EXAMINING THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF BLACK TRUMP VOTERS USING IDEATIONAL AND INTEREST APPROACHES

As the previous chapter outlines, there are numerous reasons Black Trump voters voted as they did. Some of these influences were populist or were assisted by Trump's populist strategies. Other influences, however, were not populist.

In this chapter, the thesis explores the relationship between demographic factors and the vote choice of Black Trump voters.

There are two critical goals of this chapter. Firstly, identifying the age, gender, type of employment, education levels, income levels, religions, and locations of Black Trump voters helps relate their experiences to possible ideologies and interests influencing their vote choice. These factors also help identify the groups within Trump's Black electorate and how their experiences and makeup contributed to their vote choice. This analysis helps to define what interests and ideologies were the most likely to influence Trump's Black voters.

Secondly, this exploration is suitable for testing the frameworks of ideology and interest. We have to have concrete data about the makeup of Trump's Black electorate to move forward in examining how much ideologies and influences motivated them. When this is unavailable using the parameters of this study, additional data is collected to help establish plausible understandings.

7.1 AGE AND GENERATION

The ages of Black Trump voters are essential to uncover – particularly their generations. The correlations between age and political behaviour have been researched extensively, with research identifying that generational experiences can shape partisanship in numerous ways. For example, Ghitza, Gelman and Auerbach's analysis of American generations and presidential voting finds that political experiences in young adulthood have long-term effects on partisanship

(2019, 1). Similar results have been concluded by. Other studies have suggested age correlates with political maturity (see Chan and Clayton 2006) and one's likelihood to vote (see Bhatti, Hansen and Wass 2012; Dassonneville 2017; Blais et al. 2004). Academics have also identified relationships between aging and shifts in party affiliation. For example, younger liberal voters are more likely to shift conservative as they age, whereas younger conservatives often remain conservative (Peterson, Smith and Hibbing 2020, 600).

Critically, research indicates that age and political behaviour patterns are different among various races. Ansolabehere and Hersh's in-depth analysis of White, Hispanic and Black Americans conclude that "the relationship between age and participation is both not linear and varies by race and gender" (2013, 132). Ansolabehere and Hersh's (2013) conclusion is crucial to recognize as it reinforces that the relationship between age and partisanship for Black Trump voters (and Black voters) may differ from that of White voters. Therefore, the thesis's consideration of the ages of Black Trump voters is essential in providing additional analysis to study the partisanship among Black voters. This exploration is also crucial for identifying how age may play a role in influencing Black Trump voters' vote choice.

The Data

The figure below illustrates pre-election polling data from 2020 on the ages of Black voters and how much each generation is likely to support Trump. Figure 1 is included for two reasons. The first reason is to present a clear picture of the differences in Black generations' likelihood to support Trump using an image. This information is also included to support other post-election results about the ages of Trump's Black voters as they have similar conclusions. There are not as many post-election results about Black voters' ages using the methods of this study as there would be if the thesis used statistical analysis or data from the ANES, for example. Inclusion of these

methodologies could produce additional results about the generational makeup of Trump’s Black electorate.⁷

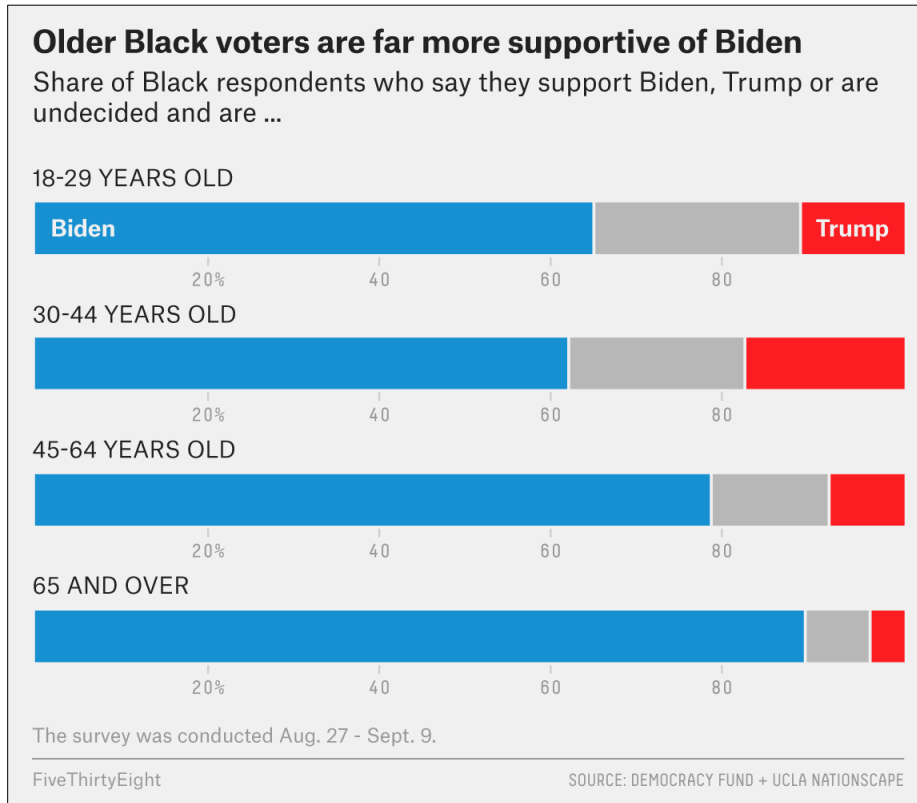


Figure 1. Conroy, Meredith and Perry Bacon Jr.. “The Partisan, Gender and Generational Differences Among Black Voters Heading Into Election Day.” *FiveThirtyEight*. 2020.

The above polling results aggregate the results of the Democracy Fund and the UCLA Nationscape studies and detail the intentions of Black voters by generation. Approximately 10% of 18–29-year-old Black voters and just under 20% of those aged 30-44 indicated an intent to support Trump in 2020 (figure 1). Post-election results conclude similar results about younger Black voters. CIRCLE reports that about 10% of Black voters aged 18-34 supported Trump in 2020 (CIRCLE 2020). Some 2016 findings hold similar results as 2020 in the case of Black

⁷ Please refer to Chapter Three or Chapter Ten for more on methodological limitations.

voters and age groups also. For instance, CIRCLE reports 9% of Millennial Black voters (those aged 18-34) supported Trump in 2016 (2016).

Data on the vote outcomes of older Black voters is less easy to accrue using the methodologies of this project. In the polling results above, however, there is a difference in the intent of older Black voters. Those aged 45-64 supported Trump at rates of under 10% of the time and those aged 65 and older Blacks intended to support Trump less than 5% of the time (figure 1). Figure 1 suggests that in the 2020 election Black voters under the age of 44 intended to support Trump more often than those 45 years and older. Younger Black voters appear to feel more favourably towards Trump than their older counterparts. Importantly, this data does not suggest most of Trump's Black are younger, only that higher percentages of younger generation Blacks are more likely to select Trump than older Black voters.

The Generational Gap

From the data above, there appears to be a generational gap between younger and older Black voters in their likelihood to support Trump. Additional survey research can help provide some explanation as to why this gap exists. Figure 2 below illustrates the levels of support for various statements about Trump and politics from generations of Black Americans.

The divide between older and younger Black voters

Share of Black voters who hold the following positions or agree with the given statements

| POSITION | AGE | | OVERALL |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----|---------|
| | 18-29 | 60+ | |
| Trump is a racist | 79% | 90% | 84% |
| Trump is incompetent | 74 | 90 | 79 |
| I vote to support the Black community * | 54 | 71 | 63 |
| Democratic Party is “welcoming” to Black Americans | 47 | 76 | 61 |
| Trust congressional Democrats to “do what is best” for Black people | 43 | 73 | 57 |
| I do not always like Trump’s policies, but I like the way he shows strength and defies the establishment. | 35 | 10 | 30 |
| Definitely motivated to vote | 29 | 78 | 55 |
| Trust congressional Republicans to do “what is best” for Black people | 29 | 8 | 21 |
| GOP is “welcoming” to Black Americans | 28 | 7 | 22 |
| I don’t vote because it doesn’t make a difference * | 21 | 2 | 14 |

* Share of voters who said they “agree strongly” with the statement.

Survey was conducted online July 1-9 in Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin on behalf of the American University Black Swing Voter Project.

SOURCE: AFRICAN AMERICAN RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE POLL

Figure 2. Conroy, Meredith and Perry Bacon Jr.. “The Partisan, Gender and Generational Differences Among Black Voters Heading Into Election Day.” *FiveThirtyEight*. 2020.

There are various issues in which the generational gap between 18–29-year-old voters and those 60 and over is evident. Concerning Trump, younger Blacks feel he is racist 11% less of the time than older Black voters. Younger Black Americans are also more likely to appreciate Trump’s strength and masculinity by 25%. In another survey, the American University Black Swing Voter Project also found “[f]ewer than half (47%) of respondents aged 18 to 29 say they plan to vote for Biden” in 2020 (AU Media 2020).

Regarding political parties, older and younger voters also feel differently. Forty-seven percent of Black voters aged 18-29 feel the Democratic Party is “welcoming,” in contrast to the 76% of Black voters aged 60 years and over who feel similarly. Blacks aged 18-29 were also 19% more likely to believe the GOP welcomes African Americans.

Additionally, younger, and older Black voters diverged on the importance of voting. Regarding political participation, older Black voters are exceptionally more eager to vote. Seventy-eight percent of those aged 60 and older wanted to vote in 2020, while just 29% of younger Blacks felt motivated. Younger Blacks' lack of voting motivation also extended to their belief that they do not make a difference: 21% feel their vote does not make a difference, while just 2% of older Blacks felt the same. Older African Americans are also more likely to believe voting is a tool to help the Black community than younger Blacks. Additional sources find similar findings. For instance, “[Black] respondents aged 18 to 29 45% say they will vote for someone else, won’t vote, or aren’t sure” (AU Media 2020), and 21% of respondents 18-29 years old in figure 2 said they do not vote at all. According to one Pew survey, “Black adults under 30 are among the least likely to say voting is an extremely or very effective path toward equality” (Cox and Edwards 2022). Older Black voters also have higher turnout rates and are often more partisan (Conroy and Bacon 2020).

Explaining the Generation Gap

A few significant issues appear to be dividing the youngest and oldest generations of Black voters: how they feel about Trump, the political parties, and the importance of voting. However, this can be explained by the differences in experiences between generations.

Younger Black voters are more skeptical of political elites than their elders. This affects their perceptions of the political parties, their leaders and voting because of what they have experienced. For example, much of the Democratic Party’s outreach to the Black community is criticized for its ignorance of the Black community (Nichols 2022) and for using the Black community as a pawn for elections (Charles 2022). On top of this, many Black voters already believe that government officials overall do not have the interests of the Black community at heart (Wright Rigueur 2020), and the Democratic Party’s growing elitist culture has demonstrated that

politicians are not as dedicated to the African American community as they say they are. The American University Black Swing Voter Project found, “[b]lack men and women under 30, compared to their elders, have far less trust in elected officials and far less enthusiasm for voting, [sic] former Vice President Joe Biden and the Democratic Party” (AU Media 2020) in 2020.

In contrast, older Black voters have had more positive experiences with the Democratic Party during their youth Civil Rights era (2020). For example, we know that “Barry Goldwater’s advocacy of the dismantling of the New Deal state and the repeal of the 1964 Civil Rights Act among other things [which] knocked loose the Republican moorings from most remaining black Republicans” (Bolce, De Maio and Muzzio 1992, 64).

Morals and Participation

These experiences also impact younger and older Black voters' faith in voting. With the negative experiences younger African Americans have with the Democratic Party, they are more likely to feel their vote is irrelevant.

Fullwood explains that because younger voters are less likely to trust politicians, they are less likely to put their morals aside to participate in voting (2020). Instead of compromising their morals to participate in a system they distrust, and which ignores them, many will decide not to participate at all (Fullwood 2020). Fullwood explains further that,

[t]he choice of political participation may be a moot point. Unlike their elders, who came up with fresh memories of civil rights activism, younger Black Americans aren’t willing to tolerate voting for the lesser of two evils. They would just as soon stay home than compromise on their idealism (Fullwood 2020).

There is evidence to support this as well. In 2020 *Politico* reported that “[o]ne black man from Philadelphia told a pollster that his mother and grandfather had voted [Democrat] over the years, and “all of them got nothing. So why should I participate in the same process?””

(Schneider and Barrón-López 2020). Younger Black voters are more likely to be undecided than their older counterparts (figure 1). The grey areas in figure 1 represent undecided voters. This grey section takes up more space in the two younger generations than in the older generations, meaning younger voters are undecided more of the time. For context, it is also important to add that because African American voters are more likely to report being undecided, this could also “explain at least somewhat why they indicated that they are unlikely to vote in the race” (Conroy and Bacon 2020).

Trump and Young Black Voters

As Chapter Six mentions, some of Trump’s Black electorate may consist of voters disenfranchised by the Democratic Party. It is plausible that the increased levels of support for the GOP and Trump come from younger Black voters since they are more likely to resent the Democratic Party.

Trump has often merged the hatred of the Democratic Party with a hatred of the politicians and elites who influence the party, as was highlighted in Chapter Six. However, it is relevant in this context because it may have helped attract younger Black voters who were unwilling to participate or were undecided because of these feelings. The different elements of populism can help to facilitate the intensity with which younger Black voters feel about politics in the current era. For example, a crucial part of Trump’s campaign strategies was to paint the Democratic Party and its politicians negatively. He often brought up Biden’s previous support for the crime policies of the 1990s, which targeted Black individuals - especially Black males - (Scott 2020), and Clinton’s use of private email servers during her time as Secretary of State (Abrams 2017). Trump’s campaign also deliberately targeted a supposed 3.5 million Black Americans on Facebook with negative ads of Hillary Clinton (Sabbagh 2020). In addition, Trump promoted anti-elitist

ideology with taglines like “Crooked Hillary,” the “Falling New York Times,” and “Crazy Joe Biden” (Bennett 2018). Again, this reinforces the idea of a pure people and a corrupt people, both intrinsic elements of populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, 6). Trump’s strong-man persona is also a populist tactic that appealed to some younger Black voters 60 (figure 2).

Conclusion

Principally, younger Black voters are more likely to vote for Trump than older Black voters. This divergence is primarily explained by their age differences and the political events they experienced in their youth. While older Black voters remember the gains the Democratic Party made for them in the Civil Rights era, younger Black voters have become more familiar with the elitism within the party and feel unheard by the party because of it.

Though populism does not explain these generational differences, it does encourage disenfranchised young Black voters to join the movement and support Trump or the GOP. Anti-government and anti-Democrat discourses are better received by younger Black voters (figure 2). Though many younger Black voters have given up on participating in the political system altogether because of these experiences and feelings, populist narratives and Trump’s tactics likely encourage these sentiments and may have encouraged upset voters to switch. It is also likely that these populist factors strengthened the decisions of young voters who had already aligned with the GOP. These two types of voters likely perceived it to be in their interest to invest in Trump to change the things they did not like with politics or the Democratic Party also – if no one else was going to take on the fight against elites and corrupt politicians, what did they have to lose with Trump?

7.2 GENDER

An additional important avenue for examining Trump's electorate is gender, as there have been many documented connections between one's gender and political behaviour. For instance, between 1994 and 2018, most men leaned Republican while most women leaned Democrat (Igielnik 2020). Newport also reports that "[m]en in the U.S. today are more likely than women to be Republican" (2020), emphasizing that "this skew holds to a limited degree among Black Americans" (Igielnik 2020). This trend is also apparent among Black Americans.

According to CNN data, in 2016, Black female support for Trump was estimated at a minuscule 4% (Cole 2019). This pattern also emerged in 2020 with an estimated 5% (Igielnik, Keeter and Hartig 2021) or 6% according to the Associated Press' VoteCast survey (NPR Staff 2021). Meanwhile, in 2016 an estimated 13% of Black men voted for Trump (Cole 2019), which remained similar in 2020 with 12%, according to Igielnik, Keeter and Hartig (2021). In addition, results from the 2020 Edison Research exit polls and Pew's demographic breakdown of the 2016 election indicate that Black males are more likely to support Trump than Black women (Collins 2020).

This gap is a reoccurrence for the Republican Party, however. Wright Rigueur explains that "men have been the drivers of Black support for the GOP for nearly a century" (2020). Additionally, it has been suggested that Trump's overwhelming lack of Black female support is due to his personality and demeanour. Johnson and Wright Rigueur explain that "[f]or Trump in particular, machismo and disrespect toward women, coupled with racially insensitive comments, are doubly offensive to black women" (2016). However, as Chapter Five previously outlined, Trump's racism and rudeness are not uncommon among past Republican leaders. As such, Black women may be turned off from the GOP because of its reputation as racist and disrespectful toward

Black women. However, Trump's encompassment of this trend and his push of populist narratives and ideologies may have exacerbated their dislike for him.

There are also some additional points about Trump's Black male vote. The growing dissatisfaction of Black men with the Democratic Party has been widely documented (see Nichols 2022; Ostfeld and Garcia 2020; Lee n.d.) and is often attributed to the Democratic Party's lack of inattentiveness to Black men. The Democratic Party has also seen a growing decrease in the rate of Black male support since its height in 2008 (Ostfeld and Garcia 2020). Nichols explains there is a growing sense among Black males that they "are spoken about by Democrats, rather than spoken to" (2022). He also suggests that part of the reason Black male support for the Democratic Party slipped in 2016 is that Clinton "didn't specifically message to Black men" (Nichols 2022). Similar conclusions are drawn by Johnson and Wright Rigueur, who suggest Black Trump voters,

likely [have] a strong opposition to Hillary Clinton. That's due to his demographic group bearing the brunt of her husband's welfare-reform and criminal-justice legislation starting in the 1990s, and the direct challenge she presents to notions of traditional gender roles (2016).

Trump's targeting of the Democratic Party also serves to enrapture Black men who have become frustrated with the party. However, how many new Black male voters were brought to the GOP is unclear with the methodologies of this thesis. Trump's adoption of past Republican tactics and positions likely strengthened the support of Black men already belonging to the GOP, however. Populist ideology also works to appeal to Black men. Trump's attack on the Democratic Party promotes anti-elitist ideology and works to separate Black male supporters (and the rest of Trump's electorate) from the "impure" elites and politicians.

Overall, the data of Black male and female Trump voters suggests that though an overwhelming majority of Black voters voted for the Democratic party, Black men are slightly more likely to favour Trump. The research above suggests that Black Republican men are likely

to come from two camps: the Black male voter who has become increasingly skeptical of the Democratic Party or those who are already committed members of the Republican Party. As such, populism was likely not a motivator for most of this electorate since Black GOP members were already predominantly male (Wright Rigueur 2020); however, Trump's populist strategies, discourses and ideas encourage this partisanship.

7.3 EDUCATION

An essential point to acknowledge is that “[r]ace and education may be a more reliable indicator for how someone will vote than gender” (Scott and Mueller 2020) alone. However, using the types of sources this thesis does, it is not easy to find much on the education levels of Black Trump voters. In this case, what information could be uncovered using the methods of this thesis are included to the best ability possible. However, the education levels of Black Trump voters are an important area in which future research can focus. Some future research may also consider employing different methods to study education and Black Trump voters.

In figure 3, the same percentage (8%) of Black voters in the categories of “Black college grad+” and “Black, some college or less” (Igielnik, Keeter and Hartig 2021) voted for Trump in 2020.⁸ Equal percentages of the two education categories of Black Americans supported Biden and Trump in 2020.

⁸ The education levels of 2016 Black voters are unavailable.

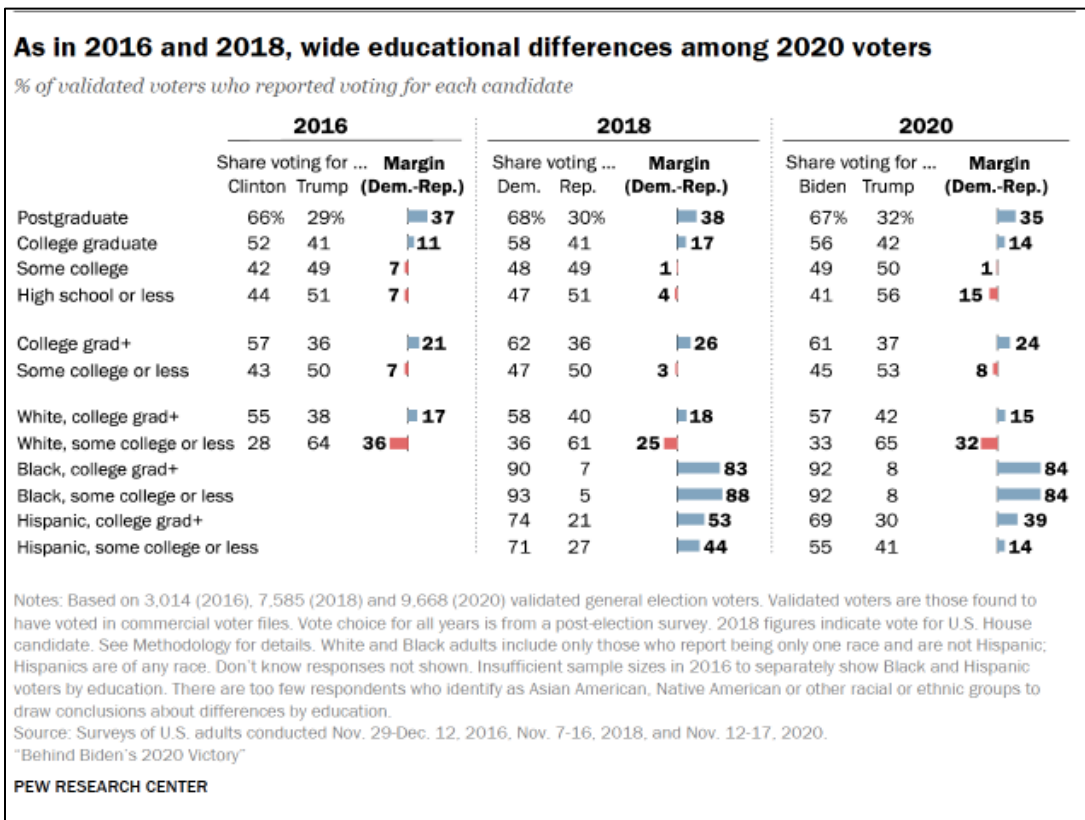


Figure 3. Igielnik, Keeter and Hartig. 2021. "Behind Biden's 2020 victory." Pew Research Center. June 30, 2021.

The results of a pre-election survey in 2020, pictured in figure 3 also suggests college graduates and non-college graduates are equally likely to follow Trump.

For the broader Trump electorate, the lack of a college degree indicates one might support Trump (71% and 68% of Trump voters in 2016 and 2020 did not possess a college degree (Igielnik, Keeter and Hartig 2021). Nevertheless, according to this data, it does not appear to be so for Black Trump voters. This research suggests that the education levels of Black Americans are not a reliable indicator of support for Trump. However, this is not enough evidence to draw a solid conclusion, especially since the relationship between partisanship and education levels of Black voters in 2016 is unclear. Furthermore, the methodology of this thesis limits the number of sources to draw upon. Thus there is some lack of evidence on Black Trump voters' education levels.

Incorporating additional methods such as statistical analysis and other analysis of validated voter records could produce additional information on which areas of education are shared among Black Trump voters. This would help understand this voting bloc better and help analyze connections between interests and values, partisanship, and support for Trump.

7.4 INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT

For many of Trump's supporters' socioeconomic class has been influential in predicting Trump support, according to Brownstein and *National Journal* (2015). In this section, the thesis explores the relationship between the income levels and employment types of Black populists to understand how important these concerns were in their vote choice, but also to investigate the extent to which employment is connected to income and how this relationship might have influenced Black Trump supporters. However, it is important to mention that the data available on the employment makeup of Trump voters is limited in some regards. For this inquiry, the thesis provides evidence to help create a picture of what kinds of work Black Trumpers might do, though drawing concrete conclusions is sometimes tricky.

The Data

Americans from various income ranges were closely split in their support for Clinton and Trump, as figure 4 below illustrates.

| income | | | |
|------------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------------|
| | clinton | trump | other/no answer |
| under \$30,000 17% | 53% | 41% | 6% |
| \$30k-\$49,999 19% | 51% | 42% | 7% |
| \$50k-\$99,999 31% | 46% | 50% | 4% |
| \$100k- \$199,999 24% | 47% | 48% | 5% |
| \$200k- \$249,999 4% | 48% | 49% | 3% |
| \$250,000 or more 6% | 46% | 48% | 6% |
| 24537 respondents | | | |

Figure 4. Nicki Lisa. “How Did Race, Gender, Class, and Education Influence the Election?” *ThoughtCo*. July 9, 2019.

Trump’s support is also evenly inclusive of upper-class individuals and middle and lower-class persons (Carnes and Lupu 2021).

However, regarding the Black electorate of 2020, income levels are somewhat better in predicting Trump support. This is demonstrated below in figure 5.

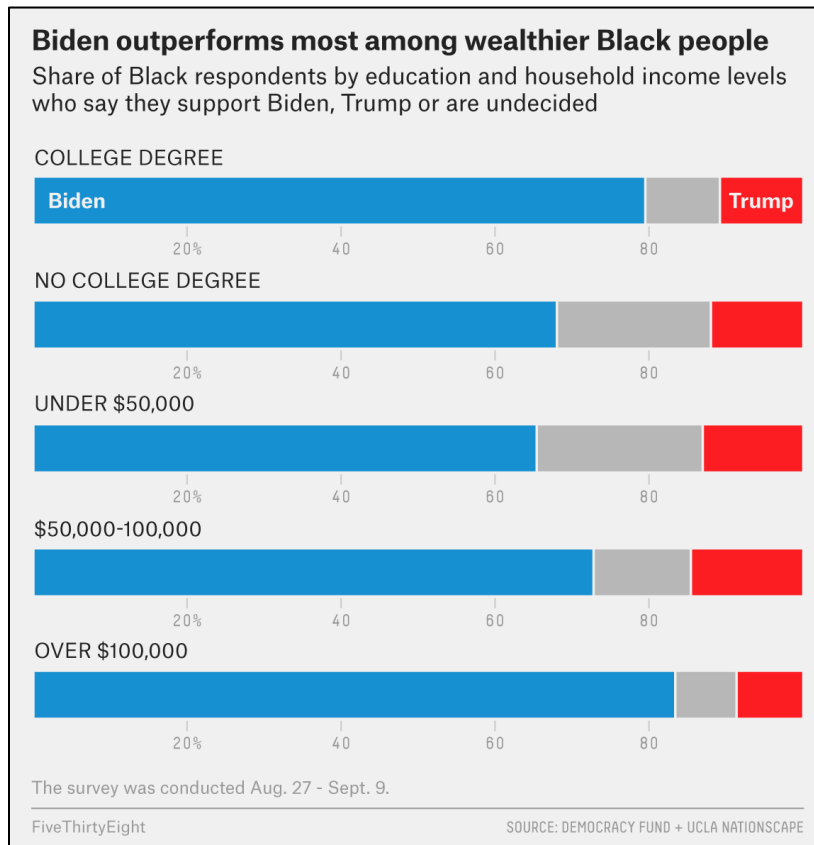


Figure 5. Conroy, Meredith and Perry Bacon Jr.. “The Partisan, Gender and Generational Differences Among Black Voters Heading Into Election Day.” *FiveThirtyEight*. 2020.

Figure 5 illustrates that Blacks earning \$100,000 or less are more likely to support Trump. The income of Black Trumpers as shown in figure 5 correlates with previous research about the class statuses of Black Republicans. Wright Rigueur identifies that working and middle-class Blacks are the driving force of the party’s Black support (2020; 2015; see also Fields 2016, 225). Overwhelmingly, “the last 52 years show similar data—black people that voted for the Republican Party tended to be middle-class and working-class men from the South” (Johnson and Wright Rigueur 2016).

Occupations

Racial minorities, including African Americans live more often in metropolitan areas where low-end service jobs are commonplace (Porter 2016). More concrete findings indicate that

almost half of Black individuals (49%) were employed in sales or service industries in 2017 (Black Demographics n.d.a.).⁹ However, these are not the same kinds of service jobs that “lifted white blue-collar workers into the middle class... [though they] do offer a more hopeful future than a shrinking employment base” (Porter 2016). In addition, black workers get paid less than their White counterparts on average (Miller 2020), and this gap is significantly larger for Black women (Miller 2020).

Additional research shows that in 2017 “73% of Black men ages 25 to 64 were in the labor force” (Black Demographics n.d.a.), and 36% of employed Black men hold blue-collar jobs (Black Demographics n.d.a.). Overall, the most common employment types for Black individuals are sales and services (49%) (Black Demographics n.d.a.). For Black men, one of the most common areas of employment is blue-collar work (Black Demographics n.d.a.).

Income in the Trump Era

With the most common job types of Black adults established, the thesis can explore relationships between jobs and finances, and support for Trump or the GOP.

According to Berube, Black household incomes rose during Trump’s presidency (2019) for many Black Americans. The unemployment rate of Black Americans also hit a record low in August 2019 (C. Jones 2020). In this case, some Black voters may see Trump as beneficial to their interests if their household incomes and employment opportunities rose. This is especially important since Black workers are “concentrated in healthcare, retail, and accommodation and food service” (McKinsey Global Institute 2021), and most “Black workers within those industries

⁹ Service occupations are those that to “attend to clients' beauty, fitness, and other needs” (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics n.d.b.). Sales workers “sell goods and services or connect buyers with sellers in a specific market, such as real estate or securities” (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics n.d.a.).

are in lower-paying service roles” (McKinsey Global Institute 2021). It is also crucial since Hispanic and Black Americans are more likely to experience financial hardship (Griifin and Sides 2018). These statistics, coupled with the fact that some Black Trump supporters make incomes of under \$50,000 (figure 5), it is likely a struggle to get by for some supporters.

Whether these gains are a product of Trump’s administration or other factors, voters may believe their financial successes is in part due to the actions of presidential administrations (finding research on the changing personal incomes and levels of presidential support is difficult with the methods of this thesis; however, the possibility exists and should be mentioned). How the economy is doing (or how voters believe it is doing) can impact their approval level of a president (Corujo 2022), and changes to one’s income can affect how they perceive the economy to be doing. Thus, this is a possible consideration.

African American Blue-Collar Workers: An Exploration

Previous research has established a relationship between blue-collar¹⁰ employment and Trump support. One study using Regression Analysis (RA) has found that “[t]he percentage of blue-collar workers [in a county] shows up as significant, with a positive relationship with the Trump vote” (Esri n.d.). As 36% of Black men hold blue-collar jobs (Black Demographics n.d.a.), this is important to explore as it may explain some of Trump’s Black support. In addition, as highlighted in Chapter Six, many workers, including blue-collar workers, have faced a loss of income, employment, and economic insecurity due to the US manufacturing decrease (see

¹⁰ The Rust Belt is in the Northeastern region of the country and includes “parts of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin” (Abadi and Gal 2018) with such many typically voting for the Democratic Party (Gittins 2020). The term Rust Belt refers to the “[f]ormer manufacturing zone, with many closed factories... [and] usually refers to the upper Midwest in the United States, where automobiles formerly were built” (Kurian 2013, 242).

Rutherford 2013; *The Atlantic* n.d.). Thus, it is essential to consider how employment and economic experiences correlate with a vote for Trump and the GOP.

Where are Blue-Collar Workers?

Esri's exploration determines what regions Trump's support among blue-collar workers was strongest (n.d.). Using GWR and critical variables from "literature—[like] income, education level, race, age, and so on" (Esri n.d.) Esri studies the relationship between 2016 White Trump support and concentrations of blue-collar workers by county (n.d.). Figure 6 identifies regions where the correlation between Trump support and blue-collar work was significant.

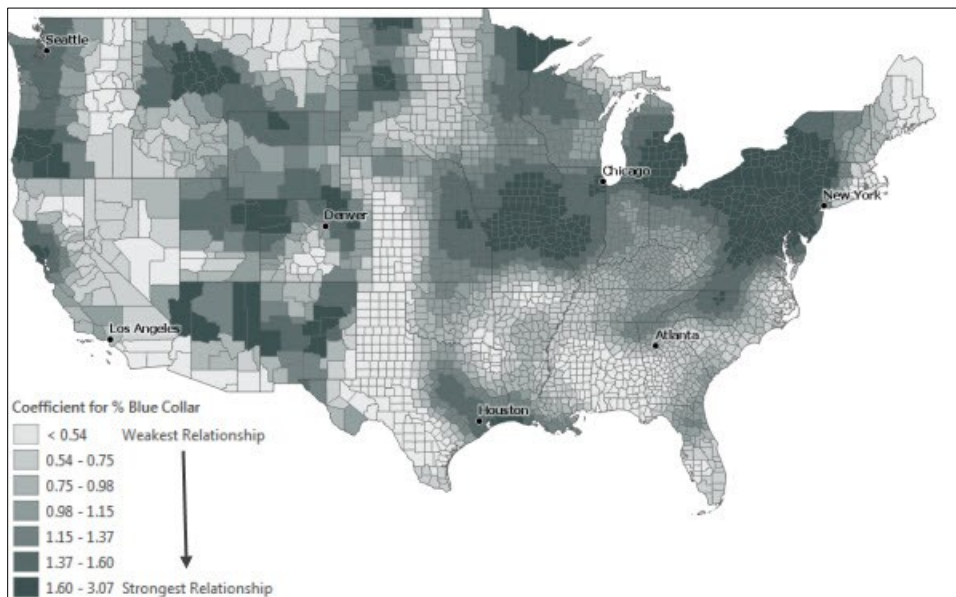


Figure 6. *Esri*. n.d. "Was geography a factor in the 2016 election?" Accessed October 10, 2022.

Ultimately, it is clear blue-collar workers are an immensely important part of the current American economy, despite the country's shift towards other industries. Crucially, figure 6 illustrates that strong relationships between blue-collar workers and Trump support occur throughout the country. However, when compared with figure 7 it is clear there is a strong correlation between Trump support and blue-collar workers in the Rust Belt and coal mining regions.

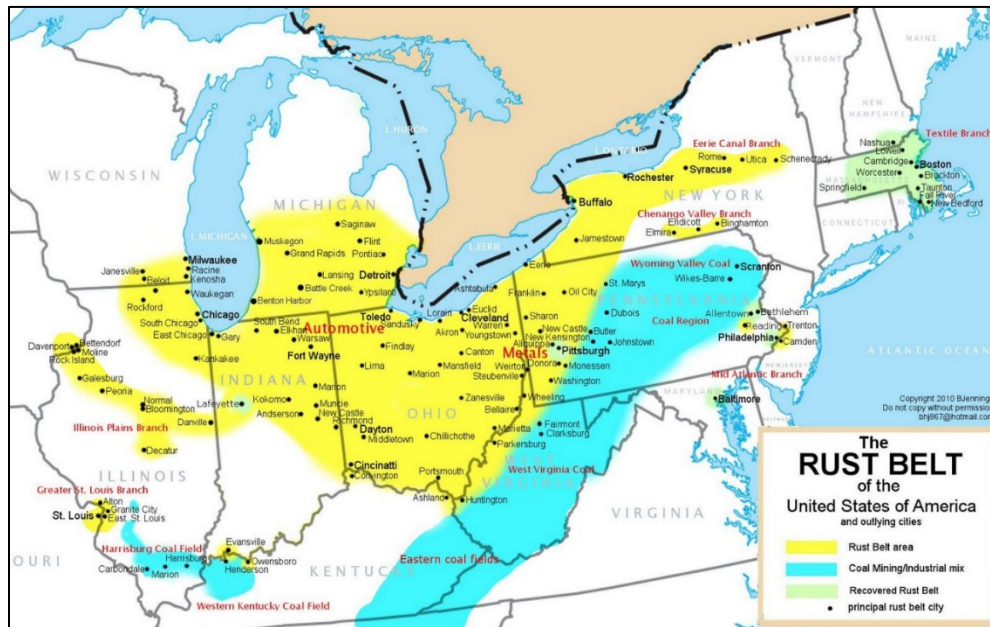


Figure 7. *Belt Magazine*. 2013. “Where is the Rust Belt?” Dec. 9, 2013.

When compared, figures 7 and 8 illustrate some connection between the Northeast region known for its blue-collar industries and the concentrations of blue-collar workers by precinct. The most apparent connection among figures 7 and 8 is of the number of strong correlations in counties in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and part of Indiana, Illinois, and West Virginia.

Pennsylvania has numerous coal counties with a high concentration of blue-collar workers (Esri n.d.) and was one of the Democratic states that turned towards Trump in 2016 (*Politico* 2016). This pattern also exists in Ohio (Esri n.d.; *Politico* 2016). Important to remember is that higher concentrations of blue-collar workers in a county do not mean there are more blue-collar workers than in counties with low concentrations; it simply means the concentrations of blue-collar workers to other workers are higher or lower.

Putting the Data Together

Most Black Republicans live in the South (Wright Rigueur 2016). As such, there does not appear to be an overwhelming correlation in the Northeast. However, figure 6 does show areas in the South with higher correlations between Trump support and blue-collar work, suggesting the possibility for some crossover. Esri's data also find counties with high concentrations of blue-collar workers in Florida and North Carolina (n.d.) – both of which Trump flipped in 2016 (*Politico* 2016).

However, determining a solid correlation is difficult using the methods of this thesis. Despite this, some information is still promising. For example, in Esri's research, Michigan had fewer counties with higher blue-collar concentrations (n.d.). However, the state saw an increase in Black voters' shift towards the Republican Party (Griffin, Teixeira and Halpin 2017). Overall, it is most likely that Black Americans employed in manufacturing and production supported Trump. It is also plausible that their personal economic and financial experiences working in these industries contributed to a decision to support Trump. However, the extent to which this is clear exactly is foggy without the inclusion of additional evidence and studies.

Conclusion

In summary, though conservatism has a vital role in the success of Trump's economic outreach, some Black voters likely voted out of frustration with the status quo and their economic, financial and employment struggles. This is especially possible considering much of Trump's efforts in 2016 were targeted at those working blue-collar jobs (see Townsend and Egkolfopoulou 2019), and especially those living in the Rust Belt states where "blue collar" work is or was once popular (see Townsend and Egkolfopoulou 2019; Isenstadt 2019). Furthermore, because Black men are more likely to hold occupations emphasizing manual labour and skills (Black

Demographics n.d.a) and are more likely to support Trump than Black women (Igielnik, Keeter and Hartig 2021), some Black workers probably found shelter in Trump's appeals. Nevertheless, the methods of this thesis contribute to the challenges in defining the exact extent to which this is true. An ideal study would include exploring additional data types on this subject area.

Additionally, the industry decrease could explain precincts with smaller densities of blue-collar workers in the Rust Belt region. Finally, though Esri's study accounts for blue-collar workers employed in 2016 (n.d.), it does not capture the number of blue-collar workers any longer employed due to the closure of factories, plants, and mills. The inclusion of such data might help to produce more solid conclusions.

7.5 RELIGION, IDEOLOGY AND THE BLACK TRUMP VOTER

Protestant voters were critical to Trump's support. According to one study,

“[o]verall, 58% of Trump voters were Protestant, compared with just 35% of Biden voters. White evangelical Protestants [also] remained a critical part of the Republican voting coalition, making up 34% of Trump's voters but just 6% of Biden's” (Igielnik, Keeter and Hartig 2021).

It is, therefore, crucial to explore the relationship between the religious views of Black Trump voters and their partisanship. As illustrated throughout this thesis, previous research has demonstrated that the Black conservative voting bloc is critical to Trump's support. However, conservatism is closely related to religious views and traditions for many Americans and Black Americans. Wilson explains that religion is important in the southern US, as the region is “[o]ften theologically and socially conservative” (2004). The examination conducted below also assesses how well the ideational approach helps assess Black populist voters and thus contributes research to the usefulness of the ideational approach overall.

Black Americans, Christianity, and Partisanship

To first identify the impacts of Black Trump voters’ religious views on political participation, one must first recognize where they fit within the overall Black voting population. An overwhelming majority of Black Christian voters are Democratic. From one study from the Pew Research Center, of the 99% of Protestant Black voters they recorded, only 3% voted for Trump in 2016 (Pew Research Center 2018b).¹¹ To further stress how many Black Christians are Democrat, figure 8 below illustrates Black Christian partisanship from 2019-2020.

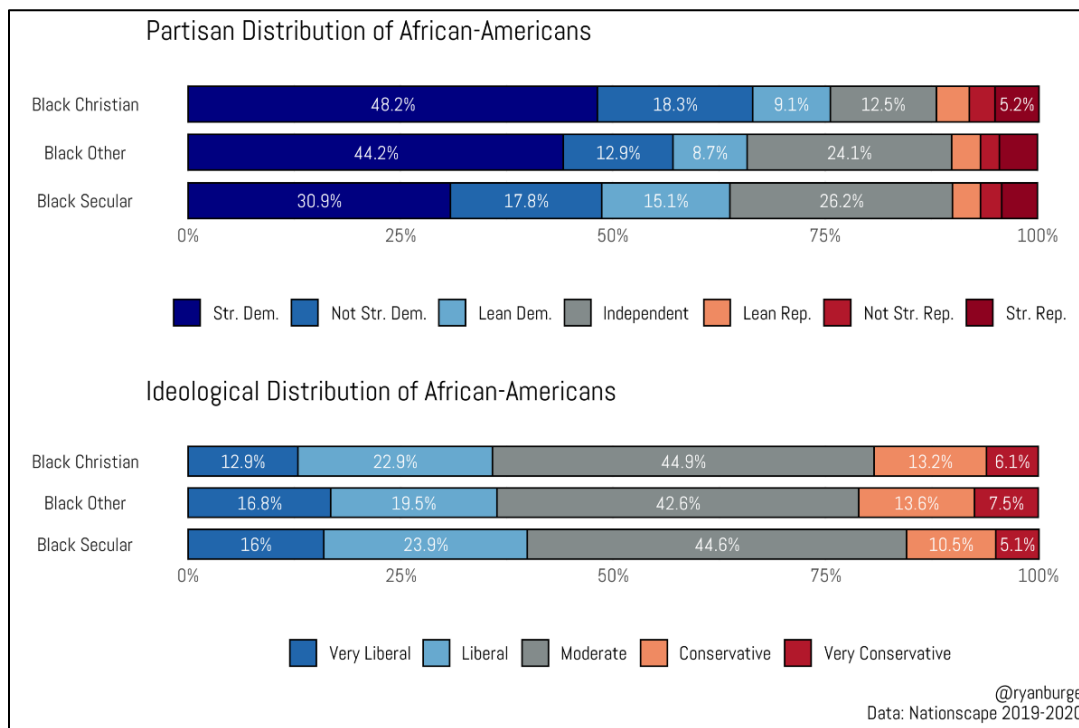


Figure 8. Burge, Ryan. “Black Christians and Black ‘Nones’ Show Little Ideological Divide.” *Religion. Unplugged*. January 22, 2021

Pictured above, 75.6% of Black Christians lean Democratic, whereas fewer than 12% are Republican. As this makes prominently clear, while many of Trump’s voters were Protestants,

¹¹ Protestantism is the only religious distinction available to describe Black validated voters in this study.

only a small minority of them are Black. However, though most of the Black Christian individuals are Democratic or lean Democratic, there are still individuals who are Christian and Republican. In fact, 74% of Black Republicans identify as Christian, according to one study by the Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center n.d.e.).

While most Black Christians lean Democrat, most Black Republicans, identify as Christian (Pew Research Put differently, most Black Republicans are Christian, and this suggests that religion could still play an important part on their partisanship, despite the evidence that Black Christianity is greatly synonymous with Democratic partisanship.

Religious Attendance

However, this does not mean religious perspectives were not crucial in influencing the Black Trump voter. There do exist several protestant denominations and streams that each blend different perspectives with Christianity. This is examined by identifying which types of churches Black Republicans attend, their attendance levels and the political ideologies of their churches.

Attendance Frequency

According to Ekins, of the total Trump population who attends religious services more than once a week, Blacks make up only 2%, while Whites make up 83% (2018). Research also indicates that “[f]requent religious service attenders’ preference for Trump was apparent among White voters but largely absent among Black voters” (Nortey 2021), as only 10% of Black voters in 2020 who report attending religious services “monthly or more often” (Nortey 2021) voted for Trump. In contrast, 71% of Whites who attended religious services once a month or more voted for Trump (Nortey 2021).

Religious attendance among Black Trump voters does not appear to be a reliable indicator of Trump support. However, one can explore other areas of religious attendance to provide

additional insight. This difference may relate to their differences in partisanship, in that different churches and denominational streams prioritize different religious aspects, beliefs and traditions. As such, examining what kinds of services Black Americans attend is critical.

Churches and Denominations

Attendance level is not the only area to explore the relationship between Trump or GOP support and religion. Researchers can also investigate what denominational streams Black Republican and Democratic Christians belong to. This helps identify where these two groups converge or diverge in their religious beliefs.

According to FEMA, the most popular churches of Black voters include:

the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church; the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church; the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church; the Church of God in Christ; and three National Baptist Conventions which convene Black Baptist congregations: the National Baptist Convention of America, the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., and the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. (n.d.).

Lipka also identifies these groups as most popular among Black individuals (2016). Analysis indicates that these groups are committed Democratic supporters (Lipka 2016), with only 4% of AME Church members, 5% of National Baptist Convention members, and 14% of Church of God in Christ members favouring the Republican Party (Lipka 2016).

The 74% of Black Republicans who identify as Christian predominantly belong to the Historically Black Protestant churches of the Baptist Family, (30%) and the Pentecostal Family with (8%), and some evangelical traditions – mainly Nondenominational Family (6%) and Baptist Family (5%) (Pew Research Center n.d.e.).¹² In combining the Protestant and Evangelical Baptist streams, it is clear that almost half of Black Republican or Republican-leaning Christians identify

¹² The remaining Christian denominations in this study each possessed fewer than 5% of the overall Christian makeup.

with the Baptist denomination. The same is true of Black Democratic and Democratic-leaning Christians as well (Pew Research Center n.d.a)

This evidence highlights that Baptist streams are popular among both Black Democrats and Black Republicans. However, denominational analysis can go deeper. For instance, additional investigation identifies that within the 30% of Black Republicans that belong to the historical Protestant tradition of Baptists, 18% identify as “Other Baptist,” which excludes denominations like the National Baptist Convention and the Progressive Baptist Convention (Pew Research Center n.d.e.). This contrasts with most Black Democrat and Democratic-leaning Christians of the same category who are split between the National Baptist Convention and Other Baptist affiliations (Pew Research Center n.d.a.). This indicates that Black Republican and Republican-leaning Baptists are often not affiliated with typical Democratic Baptist denominations.

Though there are similarities between the denominational streams of Black Republican and Democratic Christians, this does not mean there are no differences. Though it is difficult to determine the true extent of the relationship between the denominations (like Baptist) of Black Americans and the ideological sentiments being expressed in their religious teachings, there is some evidence to show that congregations and churches matter just as much, and if not more so, than the broader denomination in relating religious and political views. This is explored below.

Congregations and Religious-Political Ideological Streams

Black Republicans and Democrats attend different ethnic makeup churches and churches with differing political perspectives. As Mohamed et al. find that

[f]ewer than half of Black Republicans who attend religious services go to a Black congregation (43%), compared with 64% of Black Democrats. And Black Republicans are more likely than Black Democrats to go to congregations where most attendees are White (22% vs. 11%) (2021).

Additional connections exist between the racial makeups of congregations and their political stances. For instance, Mohamed et al. show that Black Christians attending congregations with Whites heard fewer sermons about racial issues and racial inequality (35%) than those who attend all-Black congregations (47%) (2021). African Americans attending mixed congregations also heard fewer sermons on criminal justice reforms (20%) and voting and political engagement (26%), compared to those in all-Black congregations who heard them 35% and 47% of the time, respectively. Those in mixed congregations also heard more sermons on abortion (28%) than those in homogenous Black congregations (19%).

This data suggests that churches with all-Black congregations focus more on progressive social issues like racial inequality and race and criminal justice reform more often than congregations with Black and Whites in attendance. In addition, where Republican Blacks attend mixed congregations more often than Black Democrats (Mohamed et al. 2021), there is some correlation between the racial makeups of churches and the political ideologies its followers lean towards.

Prosperity Gospel Streams

There are other ways to examine Black Americans' religious views besides specific Christian denominations. Black Protestantism (which most Republican and Republican-leaning and Democratic and Democratic-leaning Black Christians affiliate with (Pew Research Center n.d.a.; n.d.e.) houses three religious streams. These streams connect very clearly to political ideologies and are Social Gospel (SG), Prosperity Gospel (PG) (Gaskin and Jacobs 2022, 1) and Black Libertarian Theology (BLT) (McDaniel, Dwidar and Calderon 2018, 274). These streams are characterized by their ideological positions, with the most relevant for this thesis' analysis being PG.

PG has been growing in favour among Black Christians (Gaskin and Jacobs 2022, 1) and is worth exploring as there are some correlations with the ideologies of the Trump movement. Gaskins and Jacobs explain PG as “a spiritual belief that connects material wealth to faith in God and upholds individualism over social justice” (Gaskins and Jacobs 2022, 1), which is often “linked to conservative political values and decreased support for social services and the Democratic Party” (Gaskins and Jacobs 2022, 1). The influence of PG has increased in Black Protestant communities in recent years (Gaskin and Jacobs 2022, 1), illustrating a rise in social conservatism in the Black Protestant demographic. PG opposes the sentiments shared by Social Gospel (SG) and Black Liberation Theology (BLT) members (McDaniel, Dwidar and Calderon 2018, 274), in that individuals associating with SG or BLT “are more likely to express racial and class solidarity” (McDaniel, Dwidar and Calderon 2018, 274) and “are more likely to express attitudes associated with the civil rights movement” (McDaniel, Dwidar and Calderon 2018, 274), while PG promotes conservatism.

As this thesis emphasizes, Trump’s political campaigns have encouraged individualistic attitudes. Because PG also emphasizes individualism (McDaniel, Dwidar and Calderon 2018, 274), the conservative ideology adopted by the Trump movement likely appealed to some PG supporters. Coupled with the fact that Black Republican Christians attend churches with fewer sermons about social justice issues (Mohamed et al. 2021), this data suggests a relationship exists between the religious and political views of Black Christians and Black Republican Christians.

Conclusion

The religious denominations of Black Republican and Democratic Christians tend to overlap. However, they attend different churches with diverging ideological positions. Black Republicans or Republican-leaning are more likely to attend mixed-race congregations that also

discuss progressivism less often in sermons. These Christians are also more likely to affiliate with PG, a growing religious stream among Black Protestants. PG emphasizes the political views of individualism and economic success that the Republican Party and Donald Trump promote. Though it is difficult to determine the level of explanatory significance religious views have in pushing Black Republican Christians toward Trump, there are churches and congregations among Black Republican Christians that emphasize their traditional and conservative views. The apparent overlap of religious and political views of Black Republican Christians suggests their religious views and political views often reaffirm one another and thus indicate some level of importance in determining partisanship.

In saying this, the thesis does not want to rule out other means of categorizing Black Christians that may be useful for later research. A more landscape perspective on Black Christians could also provide helpful information on the connections between religion and politics. Additional data and analysis on the religious breakdowns of Black Trump supporters are also needed to produce more significant results on the relationship between religious perspectives and partisanship in this electorate. However, the data compiled here is a starting point to illustrate some correlation between the two.

7.6 GEOGRAPHY AND CULTURE

Over half of all Black Americans in 2021 live in the southern United States (Moslimani et al. 2023). As Johnson and Wright Rigueur have also pointed out, most Black Republicans live in southern states as well (2016).

The Data

According to *The American Election Eve Poll (2020)* of 2020, 12% of Black voters in Nevada voted for Trump, 10% in Texas, and 9% in Georgia and Florida (2020). These states

differed from Battleground States like Pennsylvania and Wisconsin who saw 5% of Black voters support Trump, with 6% in Michigan and 7% in Ohio (*The American Election Eve Poll (2020)*).¹³ Using this data, it appears that Black support for Trump was more concentrated in the South of the country - where Texas, Georgia, and Florida are located. This also supports previous research that most Black people voting for the Republican Party are from the South (Johnson and Wright Rigueur 2016). Living in the Bible belt region - “an area of the US where evangelical Protestantism plays an especially strong role in society and politics” (Abadi and Gal 2018) – suggests conservatism and Protestantism influence individuals.

Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the states with the highest and lowest concentrations of Black conservatives, respectively. Tables 3 and 4 depict States with the highest Republican, and Democratic leans among Black voters, respectively. Again, the discrepancies in Black conservatism between the North and the South are abundantly clear.

Table 1. States with the Highest Percentages Black Conservatives

| States | Percentage of Black Conservatives |
|----------------|------------------------------------------|
| Alabama | 20% |
| Louisiana | 27% |
| Georgia | 25% |
| Mississippi | 29% |
| South Carolina | 19% |

Source: Pew Research Center. n.d.d. “Racial and ethnic composition among conservatives by state.” Data collected from 2007-2014.

¹³ The data of Black American voters in this poll were only collected in the states of Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin.

Table 2. States with the Lowest Percentages of Black Conservatives

| State | Percentage of Black Conservatives |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| Iowa | <1% |
| Montana | <1% |
| North Dakota | <1% |
| Oregon | <1% |
| South Dakota | <1% |

Source: Pew Research Center. n.d.d. “Racial and ethnic composition among conservatives by state.” Data collected from 2007-2014.

Table 3. States Where Black Americans have the Highest Republican Leanings

| State | Percentage of Republican Lean |
|----------------|-------------------------------|
| Alabama | 11% |
| Georgia | 12% |
| Mississippi | 12% |
| North Carolina | 10% |
| Ohio | 13% |

Source: Pew Research Center n.d.c. “Party affiliation among blacks by state.” Data collected from 2007-2014.

Table 4. States Where Black Americans have the Highest Democratic Leanings¹⁴

| State | Percentage of Democratic Lean |
|--------------|-------------------------------|
| Maryland | 86% |
| Pennsylvania | 84% |
| Michigan | 81% |
| Alabama | 80% |
| Illinois | 80% |
| Louisiana | 80% |

Source: Pew Research Center n.d.c. “Party affiliation among blacks by state.” Data collected from 2007-2014.

Connecting the Dots: Conservatism, Christianity and Culture

From Table 1, states with the highest number of self-identifying Black conservatives are those from the South. Meanwhile, Northern states see the lowest numbers of Black conservatives (Table 2). Because religion influences southern society and politics (Abadi and Gal 2018), the divisions within the Black Trump electorate may be influenced by geography and its ties to

¹⁴ Please note that the states listed above in Table 3 and Table 4 are not all of the listed states in the results of the Pew Research Center’s Landscape Study survey, but are the states with the highest Republican or Democratic leanings.

southern culture. Tables 3 and 4 also illustrate this pattern. The states with the highest concentrations of Black-leaning Republicans are in the South (except for Ohio). Conversely, those with high concentrations of Black Democratic learners thrive predominantly in Northern states (except Alabama and Louisiana).

Importantly, these results do not mean more Black conservative voters are in the South than in the North. Instead, these results indicate that larger concentrations of Black conservatives live in southern states. Though belief systems, whether they are social, political, or religious, are important in influencing the lives of individuals, it is important to acknowledge the role that geography has in increasing these influences in an individual's life. It is one thing to believe something yourself, but it is a different experience and influence to be surrounded by communities and cultures who have such apparent and high priority on their belief systems. As Wilson writes:

A consideration of the regional contexts of religion in the South directs attention to the geographic, environmental, demographic, economic, social, and cultural factors of religious development. Spatial and social places mattered (2004).

Evangelical Protestantism has become an unofficial powerhouse of the southern culture, often acting as a moral authority (Wilson 2004). Thus, Americans who live in the South are likely to have experienced the influence of Christianity and conservatism in their everyday lives. As section 7.5 highlighted, a meaningful relationship exists between Christian religious streams, churches and conservative political leanings. When factoring in the geography and culture that Black Republicans are often surrounded by, the relationship between religion and politics is more evident.

Vendatum also explains that conservative-leaning individuals like to live among similarly minded people. The same pattern emerges for liberals (2014); Americans often prefer to live in areas where the culture reflects their political ideologies. Consequently, such regions' cultures

become increasingly reflective of conservatism or liberalism and become increasingly polarized (Vendatum 2014). This illustrates the symbiotic nature of how culture and geography impact one another.

The data and tables above indicate that most Black Republicans live in the southern US. Additionally, Blacks in the southern US are more likely to be Republican and conservative than in other locations in the US. Using the methods of this study, understanding the exact correlation between the geography of Black Trump voters and culture has limitations. However, with previous data points, it is plausible that Black Trump voters of some southern states were partly impacted by the culture surrounding them.

CHAPTER EIGHT: ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS: VOTER TRENDS, THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND OTHER INFLUENCES

Before discussing the effectiveness of populist approaches, there is a last but essential consideration to acknowledge, which provides additional context to the changes in Trump's numbers of Black supporters from 2016 to 2020. As the thesis has pointed out already, though Black voters overwhelmingly supported Clinton in 2016 and Biden in 2020, Trump's Black support increased in 2020 to 8%, according to results from the Pew Research Center (Igielnik, Keeter and Hartig 2021) from roughly 6% in 2016 (Pew Research Center 2018b). Collins reports that Trump made gains with Black voters from 2016 to 2020, citing the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study and the Edison Research exit polls from 2020 (2020). This increase is also supported by other Pew's analysis of the 2020 election (Igielnik, Keeter and Hartig 2021). Trump's increase in Black support has thus become one of the most noteworthy takeaways from the 2020 election, leading toward an important question: is the Black Republican electorate growing, and does Trump cause this?

These changes can be partly explained by the four approaches that have guided this thesis; undoubtedly, ideologies, interests and Trump's strategic and discursive appeals have played an essential role in motivating his Black supporters (the connections between these factors and the Black trump electorate will be explained in later sections). However, because the exploration of the demographics of Black Republican voters has already been outlined, answering this question here is fitting. As such, the following section explains that in order to fully understand Trump's increase in Black support from 2016 to 2020, non-populist influences must be considered.

8.1 A HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE BLACK REPUBLICAN VOTE

Evidence presented in this thesis indicates that a growing number of Black voters have turned away from the Democratic Party. After all, Black youth tend to be more critical of the Democratic Party than their elders (Conroy and Bacon Jr. 2020). Many Black men have become increasingly bitter towards the party in recent years (Nichols 2022; Ostfeld and Garcia 2020; Lee n.d.). Nevertheless, though there appear to be some shifts in the voting behaviours of the Black American community, this does not mean the historical voting trends of the African American community will dissipate. Instead, though some shifts are occurring in the Black community's political landscapes, some factors contextualize these changes. These shifts are thus partly explained by the Obama years – in 2008, Black voter turnout surpassed Whites for the first time in history (Stamm and Clement 2016). In 2020, however, a similar pattern unfolded in that more people than ever voted in the 2020 election (Budiman 2020), but many of the additional voters were not White.

Republican Leaders and the 10% Black Vote

Past rates of GOP support show that Black support tends to be about 10%. Even before George H. W. Bush, Republican candidates received about 10% of the African American vote. Bolce, De Maio and Muzzio write that in the elections before Bush senior's victory, "Over the past six presidential elections, the Republican black vote has averaged 10 percent; for whites it has varied from 47 to 68 percent, averaging 58 percent" (64, 1992). In regard to Trump, Conroy and Bacon, Jr. explain that "a core bloc of about 10 percent of Black Americans who are Republican-leaning... appear to be sticking with [him]" (2020). The Black Republican base is vital in making up Trump's Black electorate, as this thesis previously demonstrated.

Table 5. Black Support for President: 2000-2016

| Black Support for President: 2000-2016 | | |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 2016 | Trump 8% | Clinton 89% |
| 2012 | Romney 6% | Obama 93% |
| 2008 | McCain 4% | Obama 95% |
| 2004 | Bush 11% | Kerry 88% |
| 2000 | Bush 9% | Gore 90% |

Source: CNN Exit Polls; ROPER Center for Public Opinion Research

Black Voter Project. “Blacks for Trump: Is Trump “Pulling” Black Votes, or Are We Just Returning to Politics as Usual?” October 17, 2020.

Table 5 provides a visual of Trump’s Black voters compared to past Republican leaders. The numbers also illustrate that it is not entirely out of character for a Republican president to obtain 10% of the Black vote.

It is also normal for a Republican leader to experience increased Black support. For example, table 5 shows George W. Bush’s increase in Black support from 2000 to 2004, from 9% to 11%. The support of Black Republicans for Bush is similar to the support Trump garnered in 2016 (8% according to Table 5) and Trump’s 2020 standings which is about 11 or 12% depending on the polling or survey agency (see Collins 2020 for more details). As such, Trump’s increase in Black support is not unprecedented, and nor is Trump’s proportion of Black support uncommon.

Though the increase of Trump’s Black support in his second election is similar to past leaders, it is also explained, in part, by the racial makeup of the 2020 election. The voter turnout record of 2016 of 137 million Americans increased to 156 million in 2020 (Montanaro 2020), but Black and Hispanic American voters made up much of this additional 19 million (Montanaro 2020). Black voters also made up about 30 million (Budiman 2020) out of the country’s

approximate 150 million (*BBC* 2020) in 2020 – about 12.5% of the total voting population (Budiman 2020). As Black voters made up more immense proportions of the electorate than in 2016, it is plausible that some additional voters cast Republican votes. Where Trump’s White vote remained unchanged in 2020 (Igielnik, Keeter and Hartig 2021), the increase of Black voters in the 2020 election likely helped increase his share of Black voters, despite still losing the election.

The Obama Anomaly

The Republican and Democratic support of Black voters in 2008 and 2012 in Table 5 are noticeably distinct from other years. A study from the Pew Research Center elaborates on this phenomenon, writing that “2008... [saw] a relative high point in Democratic affiliation” (Pew Research Center 2016b). The BVP also concludes that “both Black Democrats and Republicans showed historical levels of solidarity during the Obama years” (BVP 2020a).

The higher levels of Democratic support in 2008 and 2012 are greatly explained by Obama’s historical runs for office. The BVP summarizes:

what appears to be growing Black support for Donald Trump is more of a regression to the historical mean rather than a new phenomenon. It turns out, Donald Trump is actually garnering similar levels of support from Black people as past Republican Presidents, and it is more likely that the “growing” support is mostly from Black Republicans who decided to buck their part loyalty during 2008 and 2012 in support of our nations [*sic*] first Black President, Barack Obama. In other words, with Black support for Trump hovering right around 10 percent, both nationally and in important Battleground States, *it is reasonable to think that a significant number of Black Republicans who felt the need to support Obama’s historical presidency have simply returned to their party* (2020, italics added for Many of the Black Trump voters of 2016 and 2020 are those returning to their preferred party after switching to Obama in 2012 (2020a)

Further data continues to illustrate this pattern. For example, data on voting rates in the US, when looking at race and age, as demonstrated by figure 9 below, is taken from the United States Census Bureau and highlights the changes in voting rates by generation and race from 2012 to 2016 (2017). The image illustrates that the turnout for Black American voters in 2016 decreased

significantly across each generation compared to 2012. Similar findings are concluded by Brookings, which finds that the 2016 vote count for Black Americans returned to 2004 presidential election numbers (Frey 2017). emphasis).

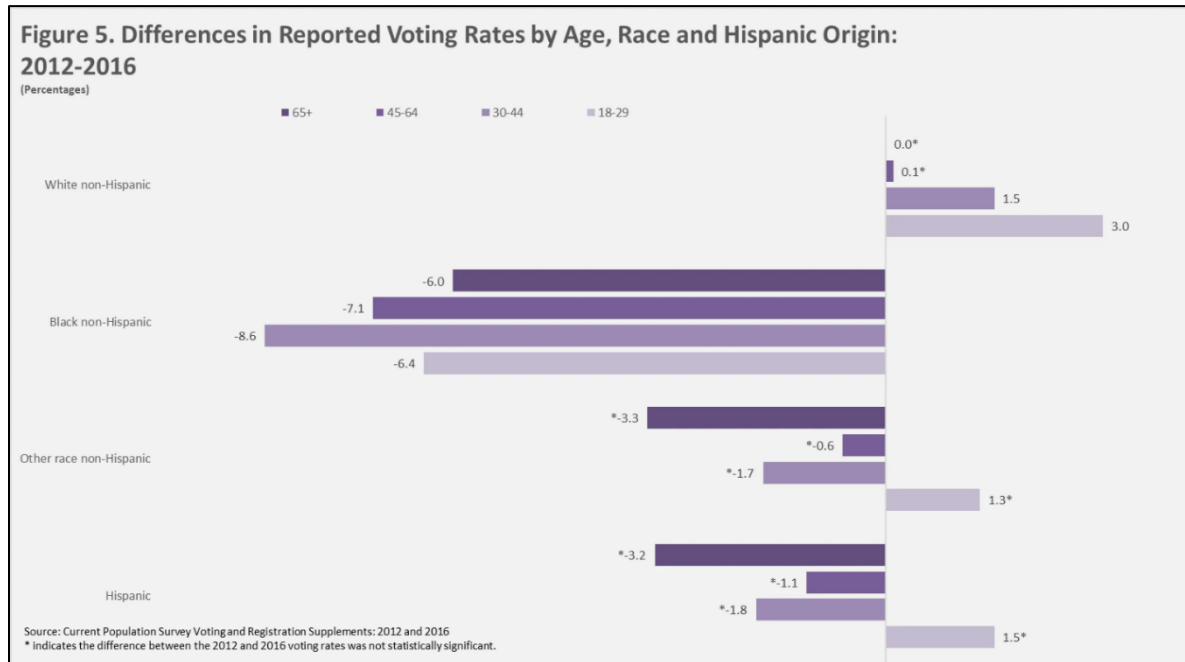


Figure 9. File, Thom. “Voting in America: A Look at the 2016 Presidential Election.” *United States Census Bureau*. Mar. 10, 2017.

Across the board, Black turnout lowered the greatest in 2016 in comparison to other races. Factoring in Obama, it is plausible to assume that many Black voters who did not vote regularly, or regularly vote Republican decided to participate solely to propel Obama.

Summary

In summary, analyzing the history of Black support for the GOP and the exceptional Obama years, alongside breaking down the 2016 and 2020 Black turnout, it is clear that some of Trump’s Black support is simply a continuation of historical trends. Moreover, ten percent of the country’s African American voters tend to affiliate with the Republican Party, making Trump’s Black supporters less unique. At the same time, however, this thesis has illustrated the importance

of Trump’s populist nature and methods in gaining new members and retaining Republicans. As such, the findings of this section do not overwrite the importance of populism but provide additional context to the story of the Trump movement and the Black supporter.

8.2 THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM, SWING STATES AND BLACK REPUBLICAN VOTERS

This portion explores the case of Black Trump voters and their impact in 2016 swing states. This is explored by examining how the electoral system impacts swing states’ outcomes through its racial compositions in districts and cities. The last segment also investigates how much the racial compositions of swing state voters and districts are explored to give context to Trump’s “increase” of Black support in 2020.

The Electoral System and Swing States: An Overview

Trump’s victory meant he won more votes in the Electoral College than Clinton. There are 538 Electoral College (EC) votes, and 270 are needed to secure the presidency (USA Government n.d.). Excluding Maine and Nebraska (which use a proportional system to split EC votes), each state has a designated number of EC votes or “electors” (United States Government n.d.). Key states for politicians to win are those with high numbers of EC votes, such as Florida (29) or Texas (38) (National Archives n.d.c.).

Swing states are those in which it is unclear how they will vote in the election because they have similar levels of support for the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates (Merriam-Webster n.d.d.). In 2016, the swing states were Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin. Of the 2016 swing states, Mahtesian writes that “[t]ogether, the 11 battleground states will deliver 146

electoral votes — more than half of electoral votes necessary to win the presidency” (2016).

Thus the 2016 swing states were significant for Trump and Clinton as they could significantly increase the likeliness of their presidential success.

In 2016, Trump won the states of Florida, Iowa, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin – most of the 11 swing states. States such as Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania were notable gains for Trump since they had been reliable blue states (Schleifer 2016).

Racial Composition and Turnout in Swing States:

How much did Trump’s Black voters impact the outcome in swing states? This question is explored below. The importance of the vote-switching in districts within swing states and turnout levels of Black and White voters are explored to understand how much Black Trumpers helped secure his victories in these swing states. Research indicates:

[i]n most battleground states, a majority of Black Americans live in metro areas. In Pennsylvania, 65% of Black people live in Philadelphia and nearly 15% in Pittsburgh. Over 70% of Black people live in the Detroit area as well as the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, area (R. Ray 2020).

Furthermore,

[i]n the Northeast, people reporting as Black were concentrated in a band of counties extending from Philadelphia to Providence, R.I. and along the Hudson Valley northward from New York city (United States Census Bureau 2001)

This means that most Black Americans living in some 2016 swing states lived in metropolitan areas. Metropolitan areas tend to be more ethnically and racially diverse than rural areas (United States Department of Agriculture n.d.) As a result, black voters make up a higher composition of city populations than in rural areas. In 2018, Blacks made up 13.1% of Americans living in urban areas and only 7.8% of those in rural regions (US Department of

Agriculture n.d.). Porter also explains that Blacks (as well as Asians and Hispanics) are more likely to live in metropolitan areas (2016). Cities also tend to vote Democratically, partly due to increased ethnic diversity since non-Whites tend to lean more Democrat (Pew Research Center 2016b). This suggests that many Black voters in swing states live in metropolitan areas, where most citizens vote blue.

Most Blacks within Northeastern swing states live in areas that vote Democrat and are a demographic already exceptionally likely to vote Democrat. The ability of Trump to radically alter such voting patterns is complicated, if not impossible. Thus, it is more strategic to create confusion or doubt amongst Black Democratic urbanites about Clinton and the Democratic Party, hoping Black voters turn out less. This would increase the threshold of votes he would need in swing states to overtake Clinton using predominantly White rural voters. As previously mentioned, this is the strategy the Trump campaign used with the support of Cambridge-Analytica and Facebook data.

On the surface, this implies that the outcome significance of Trump's Black supporters is low. It is not that an overwhelming number of Black Trumpers pushed Trump forward; instead, Black Democrats turned out less. To decipher how true this is, the example of Michigan is explored in depth below.

The Example of Michigan

Michigan was a critical Rust Belt state for Trump in the 2016 election as it had consistently voted Democrat since 1988 (Mahtesian 2016). Trump won Michigan by 10,704 votes (Bump 2017) - a meagre margin. Research shows that "Michigan's voting electorate in 2016 was 13 percent black" (Griffin, Teixeira and Halpin 2017). This is higher than the national

average of Black support for Trump which was 8% in 2016, according to the Roper Center (n.d.) and the Pew Research Center (Igielnik, Keeter and Hartig 2021).

Black Michigan voters made the biggest shift to the Republican Party of any other race in the state (Griffin, Teixeira and Halpin 2017). However, this shift is not necessarily indicative of vote-switching. Instead, this is partly explained by the lower turnout of Black Democratic voters. Issues with voter turnout explain a lot of Trump's success in Michigan. There were various concerns about the Black communities' lack of voter turnout leading up to the 2016 election. For instance, "Demas and Williams said worry about turnout in Michigan cities with the highest percentages of black voters surfaced most in recent days" (Fonger 2016). Even after the election results were calculated, this lowering in Black voter turnout became apparent. For instance,

In Wayne County, which is 39 percent black and includes voters from the city of Detroit, Clinton won 66 percent of the vote -- less than the 80 percent Obama won over Romney and the result was more than 10,000 fewer votes for the top of the Democratic ticket there. "That is a huge difference," said Susan Demas, editor and publisher of Inside Michigan Politics. *"African American turnout (was) down, rural white turnout for Trump was up, and that was enough to put the state in play or win it for Trump."* (Fonger 2016, italics added for emphasis).

This is also important when factoring in the fact that Whites are much more likely to support Trump than Blacks (Igielnik, Keeter and Hartig 2021).

Did Dense Black Communities Voting Republican Contribute to Trump's Success?

Bump finds that predominantly Black neighbourhoods saw more Republican votes in 2016 than 2012 (Bump 2017). Below, figure 10 illustrates the trend in communities with higher Black concentrations and Trump support in 2016.

The following figure illustrates the sharp decrease in Black voter support for the Democrats between 2012 and 2016. It also depicts increased White Republican support between Mitt Romney (2012) and Trump (2016).

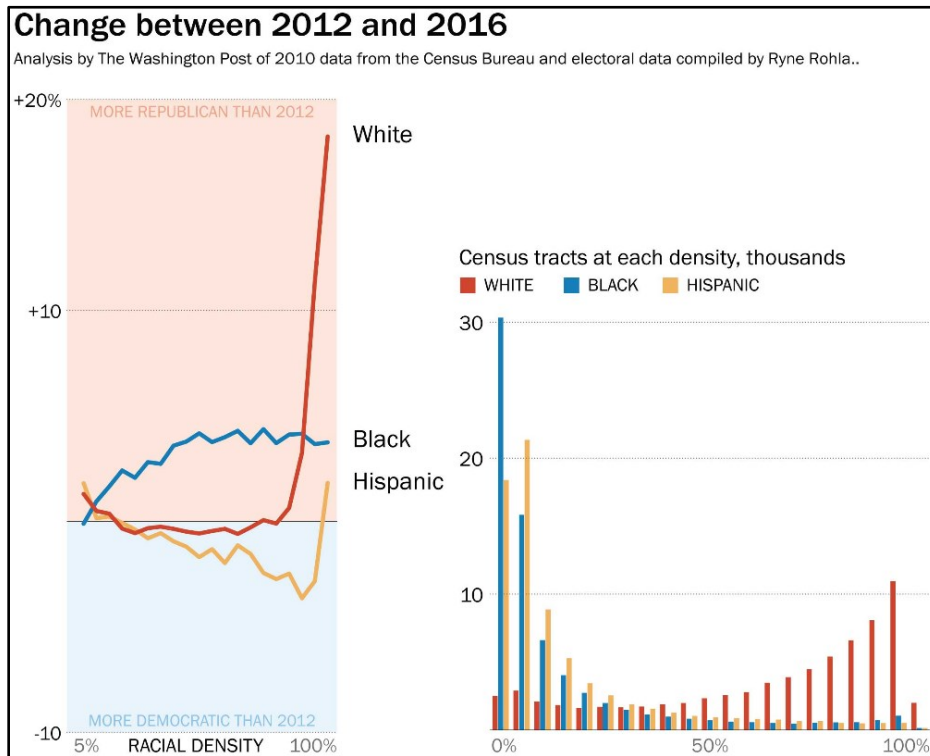


Figure 10. Bump, Phillip. “Mostly black neighborhoods voted more Republican in 2016 than in 2012.” *The Washington Post*, Sept. 25, 2017.

In this figure, tracts¹⁵ with higher concentrations of Blacks are voting for more often for Trump than they did for Romney in 2012. In the first graphic in figure 10, the Blue line representing Black voters, peters out at around 50% racial density. Meanwhile, Trump support skyrockets for Whites comprising close to 100% of the tract’s diversity. Bump explains that there is an important reason why this is the case.

¹⁵ The United States Census Bureau defines a census tract as a “small, relatively permanent statistical subdivisions of a county or statistically equivalent entity... [that] generally have a population size between 1,200 and 8,000 people, with an optimum size of 4,000 people (n.d.a).

The first is a change in support among black voters that favors the Republican. The second is a decrease in black turnout, meaning that the white voters in those neighborhoods who were more likely to back Trump carried more weight in the results.” (Bump 2017).

In figure 11 below, the radical changes in turnout among Black Democrat voters is clear.

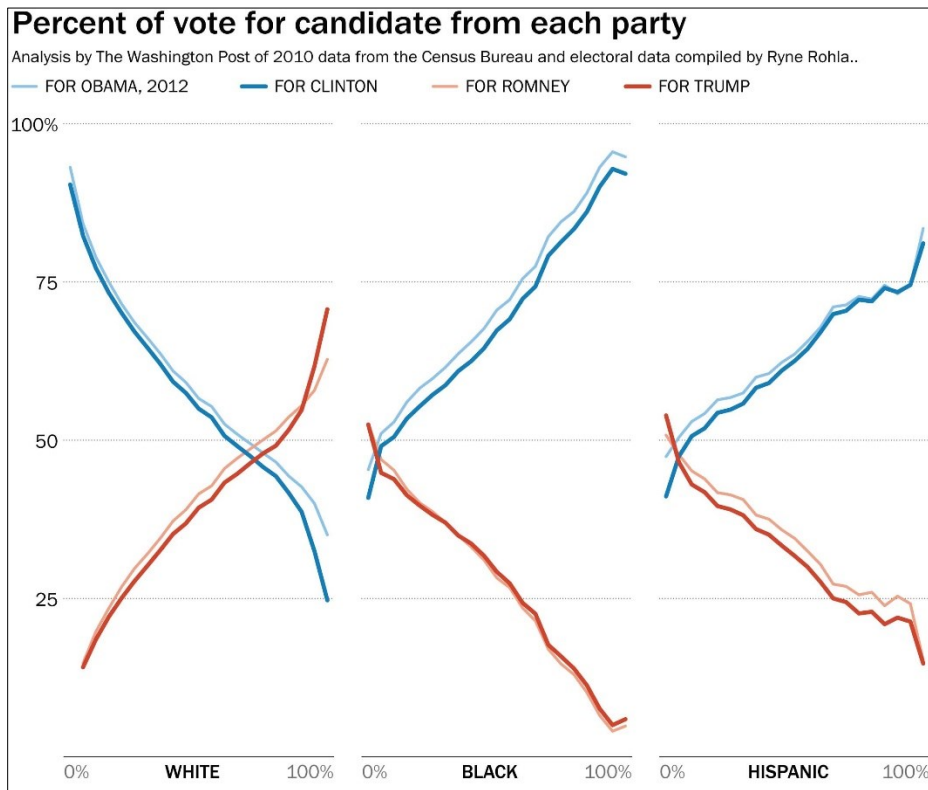


Figure 11. Bump, Phillip. “Mostly black neighborhoods voted more Republican in 2016 than in 2012.” *The Washington Post*, Sept. 25, 2017.

There are some critical takeaways from Figure 11 regarding the Black and White census tracts. First, there is a striking increase in the support for Trump than Romney in higher dense White tracts. There is also a consistent fall across all ranges of Black density tracts from Obama support to Clinton support. Meanwhile, Black support for Trump and Romney was broadly consistent.

Some of the dense Black tracts are likely to come from some of the 2016 swing states, as according to Black Demographics, “the [N]ortheast and [M]idwest are the most segregated areas

in the United States” (n.d.b.). Here, “[i]n the large urban cities of the [N]orth, African American populations remain mostly in the neighborhoods that were left to them as a result of “white flight” that took place after the civil rights movements and the riots of the 1960s ”(Black Demographics n.d.b.) (White-flight is a phenomenon that occurs when large numbers of Whites move away from communities in which African Americans have gained a foothold (Ellen 1997)). So, in this case, we can presume that some of these Black dense tracts include those in the metropolitan areas in swing states.

What this means is that there was a dramatic fall in the turnout of Black Democrats between 2012 and 2016 and this took place in some of the swing states, particularly those in the Northeast like Pennsylvania, Michigan or Wisconsin and the Midwest, which includes Ohio. Another of Bump’s analyses also finds a correlation between lower turnout and levels and the lower densities of Black Americans in the Rust Belt regions (and most of the country that is not the South) in the swing states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin (2016).

Did Black Republican Voters Provide a Substantial Impact?

Though much of Trump’s support was attributed to historical trends, a decrease in voter turnout from Black Democrats and an overwhelming outpouring of White rural supporters, does suggest the outcome significance is likely low. How low exactly is impossible to determine using the methodology of this thesis, but the analysis conducted points away from Black Trump voters having a significant influence on the success of Trump. A lack of outcome significance does not negate the importance of Black Trump supporters, however. Black Trump supporters still supported Trump and every vote contributed to his success, regardless of their ‘significance’.

Does Turnout Help Explain Trump's 2020 Increase in Black Support?

To also help understand why there is an increase in the turnout of racial minorities (including African Americans) in 2020, we can consider whether White voters defected in 2020, particularly in swing states.

This is important to answer because if the White swing state voters who supported Trump in 2016 defected in 2020, this 'rise' may be that Black Republican supporters make up a more significant percentage of Trump's swing state supporters in 2020; if Trump's White voters defected and his Black voters did not, the Black Trump electorate takes up a larger portion of his electorate.

Research indicates that the "Republican party saw continued attrition with whites throughout Trump's tenure in office" (Al-Gharbi 2020). However, Bacon also explains that "Black, Hispanic and college-educated [W]hite voters who backed him in 2016 are largely still with him, particularly in key swing states" (2020). Furthermore, most of Trump's 2020 votes come from cities and suburban areas. Specifically, "[t]he 11 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. gave Trump more total votes than all of rural America combined" according to Van Dam (2020). However, state-level analysis is vital for determining the true impact of rural and urban voters on Trump's 2020 rise in Black support.

Another Michigan Example

Between 2016 and 2020, "Trump added some 365,000 voters to his totals in Michigan" (Spangler 2020). However, Biden was successful because he overcame the 2016 support Clinton received by a more considerable margin (Spangler 2020). Suburban voters also shifted considerably towards Biden in the state (Spangler 2020), and "he swamped Trump's advantage in rural and older industrial areas with massive turnout" (Spangler 2020). Where much of

Trump's 2016 success in Michigan was aided by White rural voters (Fonger 2016), it appears that Biden's greater numbers of urban and suburban votes overtook rural supporters of Trump.

It is thus important to note that it may not necessarily be that an excessive number of voters defected from Trump but that more voters participated than in the previous election. As Matheny and Jackson explain, about Michigan 5.5 million people voted in the state in 2020, while the previous record turnout year was 2008 with 5 million (2020). Part of this increase can be explained by the greater use of mail-in ballots (Matheny and Jackson 2020); however, there are many possible ideological, personal, and experiential reasons to explain why people turned out more.

Conclusion

With the methods of this thesis, it is not always easy to discern how many 2016 White Trump voters defected or remained in Michigan and other swing states. However, the data collected provides some vital information. For example, Biden overtook Trump in Michigan by 150,000 votes (Matheny and Jackson 2020). However, this and the increase in the turnout in Michigan do not indicate how many of Trump's 2016 voters defected or how many new voters supported Trump and Biden.

To Al-Gharbi's point, many White 2016 Trump supporters remained with Trump (2020). In this case, it is entirely possible that some White Trump voters defected though it is just as likely that many remained loyal. However, despite the unclear results, it is important to acknowledge the possibilities of both realities for Michigan and other swing states.

In the case of the Black Trump support increase, examining how much White voters defected or remained committed does not act as a good measure using the methods of this thesis. An ideal study may look deeper and use other quantitative forms of data to establish connections.

However, as the previous paragraph pointed out, it is essential to recognize that Trump's increase in Black support in 2020 could be explained by White voter defection or an actual increase in Black supporters.

Summary

As section 8.1 above has outlined, much of the increase in Republican Black votes in 2016 is partly explained by a return to historical voting trends: the Black Republican bloc is returning to their party. However, it is crucial to recognize that the decrease in Black voter turnout in swing states and across the country and the increase in White rural support gave Trump a vital advantage in 2016. Both realities can exist without undermining the truth of one another.

Additionally, though data indicates Trump's Black supporters are often located in neighbourhoods with higher concentrations of Black Americans, it is likely many of these communities are in the metropolitan areas of swing states (where most Black swing state voters live (Black Demographics n.d.b) and are likely the result of involuntary segregation (see Ellen 1997). Coupled with the fact that Black voter turnout significantly declined among Democrats (Bump 2017), this indicates that the relationship between Black racial density and Trump support is more representative of the impacts of vote suppression and a distaste for Clinton. For Black Republican voters in swing states, this suggests their overall impact on the outcome of the 2016 election was minimal. However, each vote must still be recognized for contributing to his success.

8.3 ADDITIONAL INFLUENCES

Ribke's work makes the critical point that voters are exposed to an abundance of information and cannot process all of it (2015). The sections below provide additional information and acknowledge additional influences Black Trump voters may have encountered outside of populist ones. These additional influences include other endorsements, social media

and misinformation, and foreign state actors. This list does not cover all the possible influences a voter experiences, but it allows us to acknowledge the role of non-populist factors on voters' decisions. This further illustrates some of the limitations of populism in explaining the Black Trump vote as they are not the entire range of influences voters experience to come to their decisions.

Celebrity Influences

Though Trump embraced and promoted endorsements from Black celebrities to appeal to Black voters, it is important to recognize the influence endorsements can have without Trump's involvement. This includes celebrities and figures who are not African American. Notable celebrities that also supported Trump were Gene Simmons, Clint Eastwood, Loretta Lynn and Dana White (Gottlieb, Oswald, and Lynch 2018).

The influence of celebrities on voters has been studied and is known to have some effect on voters in guiding political partisanship. Polling has also found that younger are more likely to show positive attention to a candidate endorsed by celebrities they admire" (Green 2008). One study on young voters also concludes that "[a]t this point in their lives, celebrities function as elite beacons for navigating political and social issues (Nisbett and DeWalt 2016, 154). However, "they are also cultivating stronger political convictions [and] [t]he factors of identification, intentions, credibility, and medium are all incredibly important in stoking this political development" (Nisbett and DeWalt 2016, 154). Celebrities can have an impact on political leanings outside of the impact of a politician's accompaniment. Thus, the celebrities that endorsed Trump may have influenced some Black Trump voters.

Social Media, False Information and Echo Chambers

Social media encourages the spreading of ideas and information, especially controversial and false points. Studies have also found that false information spreads faster than the truth (Vosoughi, Roy and Aral 2018). Silverman reports that “[a] BuzzFeed News analysis found that top fake election news stories generated more total engagement on Facebook than top election stories from 19 major news outlets combined” (2016). Populist rhetoric often goes hand in hand with “fake news,” as Cantarella, Fraccaroli and Volpe’s study finds (2023).

False information has had real-world impacts. O’Connor and Weatherall open their discussion of social media with the example of Edgar Maddison Welch, who brought a rifle to a Washington D.C. pizzeria in September of 2016 because of false information. Welch was a conspiracy theorist who believed the pizzeria “was the staging ground international child prostitution ring headed by none other than Hillary Clinton, the former Democratic nominee for President” (2019, 147). Conspiracy theories circling online about this pizzeria – particularly concerning its owner and his ties to Clinton and other political elites, motivated Welch to take matters into his own hands (O’Connor and Weatherall 2019, 149-50).

Of false information and false memories, Walsh explains that

[b]oth are hard to detect and control. Both are devoid of any warning flags, leading to unconscious flawed decisions. These flawed decisions are rooted in inaccurate premises, layered into our belief systems over time, making us vulnerable to error, delusion and regret. This is amplified when we are busy, cognitively overloaded or distracted” (Walsh 2020).

False information thus contributes to flawed decisions: flawed in that they are not based in truth.

Furthermore, people tend to

accept at face-value any data that echoes our existing beliefs, especially if congruent with ideological, political or religious beliefs. Motivated reasoning plays a major role. And confirmation bias makes intuitions more compelling. Contrary opinion is not what we want to hear so we ignore it. Few want to admit mistakes when invested in subjective beliefs, ideas or projects (Walsh 2020).

The inability or aversion to questioning our own beliefs and preconceptions also makes people congregate in spaces (in-person and frequently online (GCF Global n.d.) where others affirm confirmation biases. These have become known as Echo Chambers (GCF Global n.d.) and often include an ignorance of facts and provision of incomplete evidence (GCF Global n.d.) In the rise of the populist era, alternative right-wing media sites and platforms have become popular with many Americans. For instance, S. Ray reports that Gab, “a right-wing alternative to Twitter” (2021), has seen a drastic increase in those who support Trump, believe in conspiracy theories or are other right-wing extremists (S. Ray 2021).

Misinformation can have an impact on political attitudes, according to the findings from Thijssen (2017). Predominantly, Thijssen finds that “exposure to fake news can lead to a different view on politics, which is far from desirable in a fair democratic process” (2017, 31). It is thus essential to acknowledge the impact of fake news and its possible influence on the political attitudes of Black Trump voters.

Foreign State Actors

There is evidence to suggest Russian intelligence services meddled in the 2016 election. Chiefly,

Over the course of the election, a wide-ranging group of Russians probed state voter databases for insecurities; hacked the Hillary Clinton campaign, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and the Democratic National Committee; tried to hack the campaign of Sen. Marco Rubio and the Republican National Committee; released politically damaging information on the internet; spread propaganda on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram; staged rallies in Florida and Pennsylvania; set up meetings with members of the Trump campaign and its associates; and floated a business proposition for a skyscraper in Moscow to the Trump Organization” (Abrams 2019).

O’Connor and Weatherall suggest this may have been to create confusion, distrust and concern about the election and America’s political infrastructure (2019, 169-70). Consequently, Russia’s

likely contributed to confusion and misinformed decision making in the election. This is another influence that Black Trump voters may have also encountered.

CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION

As this thesis has illustrated, there is some essential evidence relating populism and Black support for Trump.

This project aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of Black Trump voters. This project sought to explore the question: Why did some African Americans seek to support Trump, even though he, and many of the voters he represents, act negatively towards various racial minorities? In this thesis, I adopted four narratives to examine Black Trump supporters. Two of these approaches, the ideological and interest approaches, provided a voter-centric framework to examine the motivations of Black Trump supporters. The remaining frameworks, the strategic and discursive lenses, focused on how Donald Trump may have persuaded and influenced Black Americans to support his movement through his strategies and discourses. Below are a set of discussions about the extent to which each of the four methods was of use in examining Black Trump supporters.

9.1 REFLECTING ON THE FOUR APPROACHES

Ideology

As a refresher, the ideational approach to populism explores how ideologies motivate voters to support populist movements and leaders. Sandru emphasizes that the ideologies occurring within populist movements are not inherent to populism (2013, 53). Instead, these ideologies are typically “thin” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, 6) in that they are not as structured as typical ideologies (Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2017, 514). This lack of rigidity is what allows populism to intertwine a variety of philosophies.

The use of the ideational approach in this thesis highlighted some fundamental ideologies within the Black Trump electorate. These included social and economic conservatism, anti-

establishment and anti-elitist philosophies, and racism. These ideologies were influential to different extents for various kinds of Black Trump supporters. However, there were limitations with the research design and the information available both as a field and due to the thesis' methods that limited the ability of the thesis to draw concrete conclusions about the effect ideologies have in motivating Black Trump voters. The usability of the ideological approach and the correlations between Black Trump voters and ideologies are discussed below.

Anti-Establishment Ideology

For younger Black voters and Black men, anti-establishment and anti-elite ideologies of Trump and the populist correlate with their growing dissatisfaction with politics and the Democratic Party. The recognition of younger voters of the flawed system of politics was an important characteristic of the young Black Trump voter. It separated them from their older counterparts, who were less questioning of American politics and the Democratic Party (Conroy and Bacon 2020). This is also true for Black males, who are more likely than Black females to support the GOP and feel especially ignored by the Democratic Party. Overall, there was a significant association between younger and male Black American Trump supporters and distrust of the Democratic Party and its growing elitism.

Conservatism

Of the Black Republican conservative bloc, which has existed for decades in the US (Wright Rigueur 2020; 2015; Johnson and Wright Rigueur 2016), the social and economic conservative perspectives they already held were likely crucial in solidifying their commitment to the GOP and Trump. The influence social and economic conservative ideologies had in bringing in new members to the GOP is thus limited by this fact. However, conservative ideologies likely

played a role in encouraging Black Republicans to support Trump and reaffirm their Republican partisanship.

At the same time, the ability of conservative ideologies to bring in new members should not be ignored. Though the research design limitations prevented the thesis from identifying how many Black Trump supporters could have been new to the party, it is possible it was a motivational factor for some.

Religion, Politics and Conservatism

Identifying Christianity as an explicit motivator for Black Trump voters is difficult. However, there were essential associations between some of the Black Christian Republican groups and social and economic conservatism. The denominations of Black Christian Republicans were essentially like Black Democrats and suggested that denominations are not associated with Trump support. This was also true of the frequency Black Republicans attended church.

However, when looking at the ethnic makeups of church congregations and the issues sermons were based on, there does appear to be a correlation between conservative and liberal political leanings and religious perspectives. Explicitly, Black Republicans are more likely to attend churches with mixed congregations that are less focused on social justice, race and criminal justice reform (Pew Research Center 2021). This correlates with the political scopes of Black Republicans (and Republicans overall) in that they prioritize individualism and personal responsibility and perceive issues of race differently than most Black voters.

Other groups of Black Republican Christians could have impacted the political decisions of Black Trumpers; for instance, those belonging to PG, which emphasizes tenets of individualism (Gaskins and Jacobs 2022, 1), align with the social values of the Trump movement. However, the

extent to which this holds is unclear without more in-depth breakdowns of the religious affiliations of Black Trump voters.

A Summary of the Ideational Approach

Overall, the ideational approach to examining Black Trump voters helped highlight the range of ideologies and sentiments among African American Trump voters. The approach effectively guided the analysis to explore the connections between specific demographics of Trump supporters. It highlighted the ideologies that might explain why some demographics were more likely to support him than others. The approach also illustrated how populist leaders and movements combine ideologies, as the literature has insisted populist movements and leaders do. Finally, it affirmed some of the things we already knew about how ideologies work in populist movements and how this is a vital way to gain membership from all sorts of groups. Within the community of Black Trump voters, there was a broad scope of perspectives, beliefs and world views that influenced their political choices.

For the case of examining a demographic of voters who supported a populist leader and movement that has been scarcely examined in this way, the ideological approach proved to help highlight ideologies and their impacts on voters. However, simultaneously, the approach is limited because it can overlook the relationship between partisanship and ideology in political parties used by populist leaders, such as Black Republicans. This, therefore, means that ideologies are somewhat limited in the extent to which new Black members are brought into the movement.

Interest

The interest approach to examining voters explores the way voters vote with their interests in mind. This perspective assumes that voters prioritize political issues based on their level of personal involvement (Young et al. 1987, 64). Voters may also draw upon their own experiences

to help evaluate what political issues they have the most personal involvement in (Young et al. 1987, 64).

Economic Experiences and Interests

There are a variety of regards in which personal interest may have been an essential factor in the decision-making of Black Trump voters. This is particularly plausible for Black voters who may have experienced economic hardships and insecurities. For example, the data on Black males suggests that 36% have blue-collar occupations (Black Demographics n.d.a). With the recent shifts away from manufacturing and production in the US in recent decades, alongside the fact that studies have shown correlations between Trump support and areas with higher concentrations of blue-collar workers (Esri n.d.), it is possible that Black Trump voters in blue-collar sectors relied upon occupational experiences to reason Trump's isolationist economic appeals were in their interests (mainly his 2016 appeals) to promote their industries and their jobs.

The same may also be true of other Black voters, Republican or Democrat, who were experiencing hardships with employment and income or financial instability and saw Trump's radical economic ideas as a chance risk to better financial and career interests.

Though these are possible experiences of some of Trump's Black electorate, it is essential to acknowledge that the thesis cannot determine the extent to which this was true for Trump's Black electorate. For instance, in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, the thesis proposes that Black Trumpers may have experienced complex economic challenges because of the changing economy and culture in the US and voted for Trump as a solution to such experiences. However, the conclusions are restricted without more numbers to back the connections between the

experiences and interests of Black Trump voters. The thesis thus relies upon anecdotal evidence, which is valid in describing the experiences of Black Trump voters but not the most reliable.

Political Experiences and Interests

The experiences of Black men with the Democratic Party may be meaningful in encouraging Black men to support Trump. As Johnson and Wright suggested, Black males have experienced the consequences of Bill Clinton's 1990s welfare and criminal-justice politics (2016). Their political experiences of having their beliefs and interests ignored by the Democratic Party were also enough for some to reconsider which political parties and leaders would be best for supporting their self-interests. These experiences likely influenced the decisions of some of Trump's Black male supporters.

The different generational experiences of younger and older Black voters were also a possible explanation for their higher likeliness to support Trump. Since younger Black voters did not experience the Civil Rights era and the significant impact the Democratic Party had on securing the rights of Black Americans, they are likely more critical than their elders, making them more susceptible to Trump and the populist movement's influence, but also influencing them to have different perspectives about the Democratic Party's ability to advance their interests. Additionally, Schneider and Barrón-López, in reporting on the results of survey data commissioned by the BVP, interviews with young Black voters revealed that their political experiences incentivized them to question their political loyalties (2020).

Though these political experiences are influential in explaining some of the differences between various Black voters and Black Trump voters, it is difficult to determine the significance of personal political experiences and self-interest without using quantitative methods or first-hand data. Moreover, combining the thesis' methodology and a scarcity of

survey information on Black Trump supporters makes it challenging to discern the top political issues for African American Trump supporters. As such, the thesis can only infer what Black Trump voters believe to be in their interest using the ideas underpinning the Trump movement and the experiences known to motivate Trump supporters.

The Overlap of Interests and Ideologies

It became more evident as the thesis' exploration of Black Trump voters continued that interests and ideological positions are exceptionally intertwined and, at times, difficult to distinguish. This is partly because personal interests and ideological stances embolden one another. For example, Black conservatives who believe the struggles faced by the African American community are best advanced through personal responsibility and hard work (Johnson and Wright Rigueur 2016) and limited government intervention (Asumah and Perkins 2000, 52) also believe these principles provide financial success (Johnson and Wright Rigueur 2016), thus helping the Black community. There is also the belief that following conservative ideologies are in their best interest and the interests of their racial community. Furthermore, Christian Black Republican voters are also likely to see their conservative principles reflected in their religious teachings. Black Republicans are less likely to attend churches promoting liberal political stances (Pew Research Center 2021) and are more likely to belong to religious streams like PG because of their conservatism. Thus, the religious beliefs they are taught and believe in reflect their ideas about what is in their self-interests. Trump's actions, such as cutting the taxes for corporations and businesses, also align with conservative economics and possibly appealed to Black voters who believed such acts help bring occupational and economic opportunities.

A Summary of the Self-Interest Approach

The explicit extent to which interests influenced Black Trump voters is unclear using the methods of this study. However, interests appear throughout the analysis and play a role for some Black Trump voters and disenfranchised Black Democrats.

The use of an interest-based analysis helped present how voters use experiences and interests to strengthen their political attitudes. It also effectively provided a range of interests – religious, political, economic, and cultural – that Black Trump voters may consider.

Trump’s Strategies and Discourses

The strategic approach to populism focuses less on the ideologies and interests of voters, and more on the operations and tactics of populist leaders to mobilize people to support them (Kenny 2021, 1-3). Additionally, the success of populist movements relies on the charisma and “personalized authority” of the populist leader to make connections with voters, largely through rallies and the use of media (Kenny 2021, 4).

Anti-Elitist and Anti-Establishment Tactics

Trump’s strategies in attracting Black voters or, at the very least, discouraging many from voting for Clinton were abundantly clear (such as through his use of social media and Cambridge-Analytica). His use of anti-elitist rhetoric and othering was crucial in painting the Democratic party as ignorant and corrupt. This was especially clear in the case of Black men and some younger Black Americans who are increasingly distrustful of the Democratic party (Johnson and Wright Rigueur 2016; AU Media 2020). The tactics of Trump to encourage doubt around Clinton and the Party correlates directly with the beliefs, experiences, and feelings of some younger or male Black Americans.

Though it is unclear how effective Trump's strategies were in bringing in new Black supporters, it is still essential to recognize that his strategies play to the perspectives of various Black Americans. This correlation provides grounds for a relationship to be considered an option.

Conservative Tactics

Trump's conservative tactics were also crucial in relating to the conservative views of the Black Republican bloc. Research suggests Black Republicans likely make up most of Trump's Black support (BVP 2020a; Johnson and Wright Rigueur 2016; Wright Rigueur 2015, 2020).

His personality and character attributes also depicted him as masculine (Logan 2020) and as a "strong man" (Inglehart and Norris 2016, 7). In this thesis, this was clear in Trump's low agreeableness (Nai, Martínez i Coma and Maier 2019 634) and low affability (Nai, Martínez i Coma and Maier 2019, 624). For voters who like traditional gender roles (like Black Republican males (Wright Rigueur 2020; Logan 2020)), this is an essential method of appealing to their views. Trump's actions and rhetoric were also hypermasculine. For instance, he was unafraid to say and promote radical ideas like banning Muslims (ACLU of Washington 2017), showing resolve against those criticizing him.

A Blend of Sentiments

The ideas Trump chose to run on were also essential in figuring out his success. By employing a blend of ideologies, he gained membership from a range of American and Black American voters. For instance, Trump resembled anti-elitist and anti-establishment views to appeal to politically frustrated Black voters and used social and economic conservatism to secure the Black Republican vote. His use of conservative Christian sentiments also encouraged religious conservatives to join his movement. His aims at jobs, manufacturing and economic isolationism appealed to Black Americans who were economically insecure or experiencing economic

hardship. These, of course, are not all of the possible ideas making up the Black American population, but these demonstrate the breadth of perspectives Trump promoted and his ability to attract a wide range of voters.

Trump, His Actions and Populism

The strategic approach was paramount in helping to contextualize Trump as a true populist leader. His scoring on the Dark Triad and Big Five tests conducted by Nai, Martínez i Coma and Maier (2019) helped demonstrate how Trump was akin to other leaders and perhaps more populist than most of the other leaders. His personality was a vital outlier in distinguishing him from other populist leaders. However, he was mainly in line with the personality and behaviours of other populist leaders. For instance, Trump was ideologically inconsistent. This was apparent in his messaging about bringing manufacturing jobs to Michigan, which suffered a decrease in said jobs (Kaufman 2020). This does align with the known behaviour of populist leaders to fulfil their own interests once in office (Illing 2017). In this way, Trump also relates to the populist literature.

A Summary of the Strategic Approach

The strategic approach to populism was overwhelmingly effective in understanding Trump's role in the populist movement. However, it was also just as essential in helping to illustrate why Trump is a populist leader and why this matters in the case of Trump's Black electorate. Primarily, without Trump, it is likely that GOP politicians would have engaged in the voter suppression tactics he did. Though Trump's populist nature and tactics did resemble many of those of previous Republican politicians, like the use of Black celebrities and racism pointed out in Chapter Five, Trump also went above and beyond, as the Cambridge Analytic scandal illustrates.

Part of this crucial difference in Trump's strategies from other populist and political leaders is the intensity and lengths he went to. This is an integral part of what differentiates political leaders in democracies and populist leaders in democracies. This is how Trump differs from past Republican leaders.

Discourse

The importance of discourse in studying populist movements is the acknowledgement of Laclau's position that rhetoric provides "conceptual structures" (such as populist movements) their stability (2005, 67). Rhetoric is thus necessary for building and developing populist movements. Without Trump's discourses his political successes would have been impossible. In the case of the Black electorate, discursive lens was effective and important for a few reasons.

Discourse Is Necessary for Communication

Firstly, Trump's messaging correlated with ideas known to exist within his Black electorate, especially social and economic conservatism and anti-establishment. This messaging was necessary in letting Black Trump voters know what issues Trump reflected so they could make the decision to support him or not.

The Mechanics of Discourse and Rhetoric

Secondly, the mechanics of Trump's speech is vital in examining his Black support. For instance, Golshan explains that Trump mobilizes people with the emotion he expresses in his speeches (2017). Additionally, his casual speaking style also draws in American voters (Goldhill 2017). Though a lack of field data and the thesis' methodologies limited the thesis' ability to discern how much Trump's speeches impacted his Black electorate, the past research provides a

necessary foundation to consider that his emotionality was important in appealing to his Black voters.

Additionally, Trump's words and phrases are crucial in promoting him. Phrases like "Crooked Hillary" are short and to the point, allowing people to remember them and the feelings they invoke easily. This phrase is especially important considering that many Black Americans are frustrated with the Democratic Party. The word "crooked" is also important as it is synonymous with corrupt or fraudulent (Merriam-Webster n.d.a.), bringing those synonyms to mind when people think about Hillary or hear someone else use the phrase.

Examining the structure of Trump's messages is a critical way future research can evaluate how specific phrases and keywords help appeal to his Black electorate. Some research exists for this in the whole of Trump's electorate (see Quigley and his research on anti-establishment rhetoric (2018)). In the case of Trump's Black voters, it is possible that the structure of some messages was more critical than others. Future studies could consider adding more quantitative analyses. For instance, a possible research design might consider drawing from the anti-establishment messages Quigley (2018) explored and determining whether the structure of phrases or specific keywords correlate with support among Trump's Black electorate.

A Summary of the Discursive Lens

The thesis' consideration of the discursive approach focused heavily on Trump's language, speech, and style. Examining his language and speaking style was important in highlighting the strategic elements of his discourses and the way he constructs the ideas he seeks to push. Whether or not all of Trump's rhetoric is consciously built is hard to determine, as his speech greatly reflects his personality (Golshan 2017). However, there are areas where the discursive lens overlaps with the strategic lens.

There were also cases when the discursive lens overlapped with the ideational lens, mainly because discussing discourses without recognizing ideas can be challenging. This is expected, however, as speech and communication are necessary vehicles to spread ideas. There were also some limitations in identifying exactly how much the mechanics of Trump's discourses were important in appealing to his Black supporters. Nevertheless, this was not a consequence of the approach itself but of the thesis research design.

9.2 EVALUATING THE USE OF MULTIPLE APPROACHS

As the above discussion makes clear, the multiple approaches showcased an essential range of factors that Black Trump voters encountered. In this case, using multiple lenses provided a better understanding of Black Trump supporters. Developing voter-centric and leader-centric substructures allowed both sides of the Trump-voter relationship for the Black Trump electorate. This helped to provide a more realistic sense of the relationship populist leaders and their supporters enter. Additionally, the thesis' use of multiple approaches in populist studies demonstrates that important information and considerations can be determined with a research design using more than one theoretical framework.

At the same time, this does not mean there were no shortcomings with using the four populist approaches in this project. For one, the use of multiple perspectives limits the depth the thesis was able to get into about any one of the issues (ideologies, interests, Trump's strategies, or his discourses)

Another issue was the frequent overlap of theories. This has pros: it provides a great example of how the things we study as researchers are not often as isolated in real life. In this case, this helps to provide a more realistic image of how influences intersect in voters' lives. In some instances, this was a con, particularly when analyzing Black Trump voters and Trump's influence. In

examining the ideologies and interests of Black voters, there they are connected and may reinforce one another. In this case, it is hard to determine what motivates Black Trump voters more – their ideologies or interests.

In the case of Trump's strategies and discourses, it was clear that rhetoric was a strategy encompassing discourses. In these cases, it is also hard to determine whether Trump, the things, or the rhetoric's discourse (subject matter) that impact people more. For these two cases, some of these limitations are also methodological. A different research design might determine which one influences people more often.

CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION

As many reports have made clear, the “2020 presidential election has drawn renewed attention to how demographic shifts across the United States have changed the composition of the electorate” (Igielnik and Budiman, 2020). This thesis has also demonstrated the new and intricate ways the Black voting demographic has taken place within the Trump era. The four approaches guiding this inquiry have illustrated this to be true. In saying this, however, it is just as important to recognize the limitations of this study and the areas in which researchers can move forward with the ideas in this thesis. The limitations of this work and possible ways the study of Black Trump supporters can be continued are presented below.

10.1 LIMITATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis stresses the importance of looking outside the box of the expected populist voter. Trump’s electorate teems of White Americans who have been studied tremendously. The literature on the Trump phenomenon has thus become abundantly focused on explaining the White Trump voter and less often conducts an in-depth study of non-White Trump voters. Though much of the established research provides crucial information for understanding Trump and the populist movement, studying African American Trump voters (and other populist supporters of racial minorities) is essential for two reasons. Firstly, such a study is crucial for testing preconceived notions about Trump’s populism and populism in general, especially how well they explain the motivations of populist supporters who do not fit the mold. This tests the legitimacy of previous theories to explain other forms of populist supporters. Secondly, studying non-traditional populist voters is essential in obtaining new information about populism, particularly populism under Trump. However, recognition of the project’s limitations is essential to any study. Though not all limitations are included below, the primary limitations are highlighted.

Research Design Limitations

This study's design does include the conduction of its quantitative analysis. The design of the methodology, in correspondence with the research philosophy, was to balance the quantitative and qualitative means of assessing Black Trump voters. As such, the thesis' lack of statistical analysis means the study's findings are limited in scope. Using sources such as the ANES and the statistical methods needed to examine and relate variables deeply would be essential to exploring the relationships between Black voters of 2016 and 2020. The use of the ANES or other statistics could illustrate how Black Trump voters are related to the variables explored in this thesis and additional variables.

This leads to the thesis's second design limitation, its bivariate approach. This thesis uses a bivariate approach to studying how Black Trump voters relate to variables. This means that the relationship between Black Trump supporters is tested against age, gender, education level, income, employment, religion, and geography separately. The limitation of this approach is that voters are typically impacted by a variety of interests, ideologies and persuasive methods simultaneously, and thus a multivariate approach could illustrate the realities of this; For instance, there is much to explore about the relationship between younger Black voters and gender – particularly the case of younger Black men who reports have shown are growing increasingly pessimistic about the Democratic Party (Nichols 2022). As such, future research can consider a multivariate approach to fully explore how the demographic variables of Black Trump voters connect and interweave to explain their political choices and highlight the factors that explain voting behaviours.

An additional limitation to consider is that the focus of this thesis was predominantly on demographics and less so on attitudes. The thesis was designed to test the explicit extent to which

the characteristics and related experiences of African American Trump supporters explain their vote choice. However, attitudes and demographic factors influence voters, and exploring how these factors intersect with attitudes is another avenue for future research to consider. Consideration of attitudes could provide additional information to understand Black Trump voters better.

Personal Limitations

Finally, one of the most important limitations to recognize is the role of the perspectives, experiences and biases I bring as the author of this work. I, as the author, am not a member of the Black community, nor am I American. Thus, the exploration of Black Trump voters conducted in this thesis is from an outside perspective. As such, the findings and conclusions of this project are the results of the author's perceptions on how to approach this project and other experiences that have shaped these perspectives. Someone from the Black community would likely design and conduct a research project differently than I and contribute essential perspectives and ideas I may not have considered. Therefore, the ideas and works I have collected and analyzed here serve the purpose of a springboard for researchers who want to take this inquiry in other directions, especially those with different and innovative ideas to take this study. In addition, researchers who identify as Black and wish to study this subject area further have a unique ability to provide a Black perspective in answering the research question. Thus, in this sense, the thesis is limited in not providing a Black perspective on the research question.

As the thesis has mentioned, there are many important takeaways from the study of African American Trump supporters and the lenses used to view these voters. Additional work can provide additional and more secure footing for future studies on African American Trump voters.

Field Limitations and Future Considerations

Demographic breakdowns of the Republican African American voting population should be conducted more frequently. Much of this study's demographic information relies upon the assessments of a few conducted studies and polls, such as those by the Pew Research Center, Gallup, CIRCLE, and others. Much of this research was exclusive of Black Trump voters and Black Republican voters. Much of the surveys about Trump voters' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions are conducted examining White Trumpers explicitly or Trump voters as an entirety (of which the number of Black Respondents is still likely to be few as almost 9 out of 10 Trump voters are White (Pew Research Center 2018b)). Asking these same questions to Black Trumpers can help researchers see where this electorate compares them to the views of other Trump voters and better establishes where they fit regarding the Trump movement's ideologies and interests. As such, though these sources provide essential data, increasing the number of surveys and polling done with Black Trump voters or Black Republicans would help further research in this field. With additional studies, future researchers studying Black Trumpers in-depth can say with greater confidence what motivates Black Trump voters and how demographic factors contributed to their political decisions.

This is also limiting in that it restricts the scope of the conclusions drawn by this thesis. More research could fill some of the gaps in this project. For instance, how much Trump persuaded Black voters to support him is unclear from the thesis. Trump was likely critical to helping grow the number of Black voters who joined the Republican Party; however, how much Trump helped can still be more strongly concluded with additional data.

Furthermore, research on the concerns of minority voters may be less evident at times or even difficult, but this can be improved by further analysis of the political motivations of Black

voters overall. As such, studying Black American voters' motivations, patterns, and perceptions is of immense importance. In addition, this provides an important baseline from which to evaluate Black voters who vary from most individuals in their racial community – such as Black Trump voters.

Finally, scholars within the field of populist studies must explore populist voters who do not fit the mold. The four frameworks used in this study could be used to evaluate Black Republicans and Black Trump voters (in combination with additional future research) to provide additional conclusions about their usefulness and how Black Trump supporters think. The more Black Trump supporters and other populist voters who do not fit the mold are studied within the existing field of populist studies, the more accurate findings about populism and populist voters become.

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