

ABSTRACT

Make America Populist Again: Examining the Causes and Effects of Populism in the 2016 Presidential Election

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This paper examines American populism in its historical context and in relation to the current political landscape. Populism has a long history in the United States, taking multiple forms and pursuing manifold goals at different points in time. In an effort to discern the contemporary influence of populism, this paper studies the effects that variables related to demographics, education, economic strength, and local population had on voting patterns in 2016. Using county-level data gathered from private and government sources, it analyzes primary election data from South Carolina and general election data from every state with the exception of Alaska. Overall, the results indicate that populism is on the rise once again across the country. However, the results also contradict several common explanations for the recent populist phenomenon.

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OF POPULISM IN THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Populism has recently become a subject of much debate around the world because of several recent events. The success of the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, in which its voting population voiced its desire to leave the European Union, took many people by surprise. Britain had always been somewhat distant from its continental compatriots, but most experts had agreed that the EU did far more good than harm for the UK. In the following months, it became clear that a populist wave was sweeping the Western world. From the anti-establishment Five Star Movement in Italy, to Marine Le Pen's nativist National Front in France, to the rise of strongman Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, populism spread like wildfire. The election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States continued the global populist trend, showing that the US was not immune.

During the course of the presidential campaigns and in the aftermath of Trump's election, many journalists and academics tried to make sense of the world's shifting political landscapes. The populist uprisings seemed to hold several elements in common. They were nationalist and rejected globalization, whether in economic or political concerns. This trait manifested itself in support for trade barriers among populists and European populist parties' disdain for the EU. Many populists blamed free trade for causing well-paying jobs to be outsourced to developing countries. The movements also seemed to be anti-immigrant in nature, especially causing backlash against Syrian migrants in Europe and undocumented immigrants in the US. Populist parties and

leaders yearned for earlier times of coarser politics, lamenting the modern culture of “political correctness.”

In a study on populism using data from the European Social Survey, Inglehart and Norris (2016) propose two theories to explain the recent populist surge. The “economic insecurity” theory focuses on the effects of economic changes on society in post-industrial countries, while the “cultural backlash” theory explains the rise in populism as a counter-reaction against “progressive value change” by traditionally stronger elements of society. They find more evidence consistent with the second theory. Among their findings is that “populist support in Europe is generally stronger among the older generation, men, the less educated, the religious, and ethnic majorities.” Furthermore, they find inconsistent results when analyzing the economic insecurity theory.

While Inglehart and Norris (2016) focus on Europe, my own analysis utilizes data exclusively from the United States in order to examine populist effects on presidential election voting patterns. While much of my analysis of the primary elections is inconclusive, my analysis of general election voting yields exciting results. Rather than providing supporting evidence for the economic insecurity theory, my results contradict it by showing that counties with stronger economies showed higher support for Trump, the populist candidate. Additionally, it lends further support to the “cultural backlash” theory by showing that more college education is negatively correlated with support for Trump. Social change often originates or finds the most support among colleges and the highly educated. However, the results of my analysis also provide a possible contradiction to the “cultural backlash” theory by showing that states with higher levels of international migration exhibited lower levels of support for Trump.

The empirical methods I use for my analysis are an ordinary least squares regression and another OLS regression with state fixed effects and clustered standard errors. The first allows me to measure variations between states, while the second allows me to measure variations within states at the county level. In all, my regression utilizes data from 3112 counties across the entire US with the exception of Alaska.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review and History of Populism in the US

The phenomenon of populism has been felt around the world at different points in history. In 2011, a conference called “Transformations of Populism in Europe and the US: History, Theories and Recent Tendencies” took place at Buffalo State College. Inspired by the conference, Abromeit, Chesterton, Marotta, and Norman (2016) compiled a volume of works from various experts in order to understand the nature of populism. According to Abromeit et. al (2016), populism can shelter many different ideologies under its roof. For example, populist movements often differ in their views on the state, geographic concentration, and economic outlook. However, populist ideas “must be combined with an appeal to local traditions in order to be successful” and resonate with their target audience. Beyond local appeal, there are several unifying factors that identify populism.

The first identifying factor of populism is a “belief in popular sovereignty and its full political realization,” with political legitimacy originating only from “the people,” a virtuous majority of the population that resides in the “heartland.” The goal of politics is to express the people’s will. Often, the will of the perceived majority comes into conflict with the power of a “foreign and/or immoral minority” and must be reasserted (Abromeit et. al 2016). In this vein, populism is anti-elitist due to its portrayal of minorities as taking advantage of the majority. There are many examples of populist groups claiming the mantle of the majority over the years. During President Obama’s time in office, groups on both sides of the political spectrum attempted to portray themselves as populist

majorities. Conservatives within the Tea Party movement called themselves the “silent majority” while fighting against big government. On the opposite end of the political spectrum, the progressive Occupy Wall Street movement asserted itself as an uprising of the common people against the rich “1 percent” with its slogan, “We Are the 99 Percent.” Appeals to the “silent majority” originated in 1969 during President Nixon’s attempt to strengthen support for the Vietnam War and marginalize those who opposed it. Since that time, American politicians and leaders have often used populist appeals to the silent majority in efforts to gain legitimacy with the American people. From President Clinton’s attentiveness to the “quiet, troubled voice of the forgotten middle class” to televangelist Jerry Falwell Sr.’s claim that “God is calling millions of Americans in the so-often silent majority to join in the moral-majority crusade to turn America around,” political leaders have attempted to convince supporters that they are on the side of the majority (Lassiter 2011). Ultimately, most populist movements push strongly to give more power to majorities, real or perceived. In doing so, they gain validation and promise to enact their own policies as the will of the people.

With respect to the political process itself, populist groups do not support pluralism, the compromise and negotiation between multiple legitimate political factions. Instead, they operate on a “stark friend-enemy distinction in which the stigmatized minority or alien oppressor must be completely assimilated, suppressed, or eliminated.” Members’ identity as part of “the people” takes precedence, while class, occupation, and other conventional divisions fall by the wayside. “The people” are indistinguishable from the entire political community, which stands in opposition to the “enemies of the people” or the “corrupt elite” (Abromeit et. al 2016). This can result in populist political

candidates attacking members of their own party who are seen as part of the established elite. The Tea Party exemplified this kind of behavior early in President Obama's tenure as it declared war on moderate Republicans that were willing to compromise with Democrats on legislation. Promising to take on the establishment and stand firmly on conservative principles, Tea Party-backed candidates flooded into office after the 2010 midterm elections, often defeating Republican incumbents in the primaries. Populist groups' refusal to compromise with other political factions can force opposing groups to adopt certain populist positions as their own in order to appease them or prevent sympathetic supporters from defecting to the populist group. It can also cause political gridlock if the other parties refuse to bow to the populists' pressure, contributing to the populists' message of government dysfunction and out-of-control elites.

Populism requires a real or perceived crisis to respond to, often involving out of control politics and delegitimized ruling elites. It promises to solve the crisis and return society to its "true" or "natural" state by restoring "the people" to power (Abromeit et. al 2016). During his recent Inaugural Speech, President Trump reflected this idea when he promised that "we are transferring power from Washington, D.C. and giving it back to you, the people" (Trump 2017). Implicit in his statement is that the current political elites in Washington are exercising their power in illegitimate ways that do not represent the people who elected them. Trump vows to resolve the crisis with one of his campaign slogans, "Drain the Swamp." Once the people accept that the country is in crisis, they are likely to look to the populists for a solution.

Beyond the unifying characteristics, populist movements often fit into one of two categories: reactionary and progressive. Reactionary populism is highly concerned with

morality and authority. It depends on a charismatic leader who embodies the “general will.” The movement coalesces around the leader, whose “political demands remain vague and subject to change.” It is emotional, often channeling resentment against certain groups and seeking symbolic compensation. The movement draws in participants who are usually suspicious of politics, legitimizing the power of the leader’s organization. Reactionary populism holds “strong anti-intellectual tendencies,” appealing to group leaders instead of experts for guidance. It views “the people” as a collective whole without internal distinctions, but also discriminates based on certain permanent historical, cultural, or even biological distinctions. In effect, members must have certain innate traits in order to join the movements. Reactionary populism blames its members’ perceived problems on specific outside individuals or groups who must be defeated. Furthermore, it “emphasizes the maintenance of ‘natural’ hierarchies and the acceptance of inequalities of wealth and power,” including inequality between men and women. This often leads to xenophobia and paranoia. Finally, reactionary populism proposes eliminating corruption and inefficiency by replacing democratic politics with “authoritarian and/or technocratic rule” (Abromeit et. al 2016). In the context of the 2016 US presidential elections, both the Trump and Sanders campaigns shared similarities with reactionary populism. Supporters of both movements united around their respective candidates, giving the candidates success that took the Republican and Democratic parties by surprise. Sanders was famously popular with college males and young people usually disinterested in politics, while Trump’s base of support was white working-class voters. Reflecting the ever-shifting demands of a reactionary populist leader, Trump’s statements on different political issues, from immigration to military strategy to foreign policy, lacked

consistency and cohesion. Instead, he offered vague platitudes about “winning,” fixing the government by running it like a business, and restoring America to prominence. Spurning conventional wisdom and input from experts, he was disdainful of the existing military leadership and experts. At a rally, he declared, “I know more about ISIS than the generals do, believe me” (Cillizza 2015) Leaders of reactionary populist groups usually profess to have the solution to every problem they face. As supporters rally around the personality at the center, they often lose sight of exactly what they want to accomplish.

In contrast, Progressive Populism focuses on rational interests of its member groups. The movement coalesces around goals rather than leaders, making the leaders replaceable. It supports education and accepts intellectuals whom it sees as allies. It is “informed by analysis and critique rather than simply vilification of a personalized ‘enemy.’” “The people” are viewed as living individuals that are part of a “historical achievement and ongoing project, subject to redefinition in the future.” This aspect makes it inclusive, seeking new groups to incorporate into its movement. Its aims and political goals are plainly stated and emphasize justice and equality, including wealth and power redistribution. Progressive populism also favors greater roles for women in society and leadership. Finally, it favors direct democracy as a way to stamp out corruption and increase egalitarianism (Abromeit et. al 2016). Although the Sanders campaign of the Democratic primaries displayed reactionary characteristics, it also shared elements of progressive populism. Sanders decried the growing gap between the rich and the poor in the United States, making the redistribution of wealth a major element in his campaign platform. Additionally, his supporters fought to remove the influence of superdelegates, an unelected group of party members comprising about 15 percent of convention voters,

from the Democratic National Convention where the nominee would be chosen. Ultimately, most populist movements share similarities with both branches of populism. However, over time, numerous populist movements have shifted from progressive to reactionary. The movements become more repressive, or new reactionary groups incorporate ideas from earlier progressive ones. Overall, the proportion of reactionary populist movements has risen over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries compared to the more progressive movements of the nineteenth century (Abromeit et. al 2016).

According to Ronald Formisano (2016), the William T. Bryan Chair of American History at the University of Kentucky, populism is prevalent in American political culture because of the conflict between the ideal of rule “by the people” and the reality of rule by elected officials. The framers of the US Constitution drew the document’s legitimacy from the people, but also placed severe restrictions on voting eligibility. In effect, they embraced “populism without egalitarianism.” Andrew Jackson became the first “outsider” president in 1829, couching himself in populist rhetoric and declaring himself the champion of the “common man.” He defeated John Quincy Adams with the kind of anti-intellectual approach that is characteristic of reactionary populism. His followers painted the election as a race “between J.Q. Adams who can write and Andy Jackson who can fight.” Years later, the Know Nothing movement of the 1850s combined hostility towards Irish Catholic immigrants with progressive policies such as economic and social welfare reform. According to Charles Postel (2016), an American political historian, true American populism began in 1891 with the People’s Party. Also known as the Populist Party, it was filled with farmers and laborers. Although its time as

a significant political force lasted less than a decade, the Republican and Democratic parties adopted several of its ideas into their own platforms. These ideas included progressive tax and currency reforms, the expansion of women's rights, federal farm subsidies, and other policies. Although most of its members shared a belief in white nationalism, they held differing views on the proper rights that should be protected for African Americans. The Populist Party also advocated for greater majoritarian control over state power through measures such as the secret ballot and direct election of US Senators. According to Formisano (2016), the populism of the 1880s and 1890s reached a point where it was similar in most respects to modern progressive movements that focus on rationalism and scientific advancement. The primary exception is that it rejected social equality for African Americans, especially in the South.

The progressive populism of the People's Party in the 1890s gave way to the reactionary populism of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. In his article "Historical Interpretations of the 1920s Klan," Moore (1990) states that the KKK drew support from a cross-section of white Protestant society in addition to "concerns about race and the growing influence of Jews, Catholics, and ethnic groups." Furthermore, it grew from concerns about law enforcement, public morality in relation to Prohibition, challenges to traditional gender roles, "and even popular demands for public services such as modern schools, paved roads, and new sewer lines." Several progressive populist movements occurred after the 1920s that contrasted with the KKK and recruited members from a range of faiths and ethnicities, including the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the 1930s. However, populism began a shift from left to right in the late 1940s as populist rhetoric was appropriated by conservative groups exemplified by anti-

Communists such as George Wallace and the campaigns of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. Michael Kazin (1991), a historian and professor at Georgetown University, posits that “[t]he vocabulary of grassroots rebellion now served to thwart and reverse social and cultural change rather than to promote it.” Exceptions to the shift include the term limits movement that gained support from both sides of the political spectrum.

In modern times, populism continues to exist on both sides of the political aisle. In 1992, businessman Ross Perot harnessed populist anger against career politicians and “business as usual” to mount an independent presidential run. He attracted independents and marginal party identifiers of the middle and working class who were unhappy with “elite” policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). His message was both progressive and reactionary, focusing on economic and political issues rather than cultural ones (Formisano 2016). However, the culture wars figured prominently in the reactionary populist Tea Party groups that emerged during Barack Obama’s tenure as president. Combining grassroots cultural concerns with “Astroturf” economic concerns funded by corporate donors, the Tea Party fought to shrink the role of the state. It also advocated for enacting social policies favored by the Religious Right and anti-undocumented immigrant affiliates. While the reactionary Tea Party movement turned its ire against the government causes of the 2008 economic crisis, the progressive Occupy Wall Street faction blamed corporate and financial entities for the downturn. Although short-lived, Occupy Wall Street brought awareness to economic inequalities within the US and hearkened back to populist movements of past eras.

The vast numbers of populist movements that have existed over the years, including many little-known local organizations, show that populism is a wide-open

ideology that is available for use almost anywhere along the political spectrum.

According to Cas Mudde, a political science professor who studies populism at the University of Georgia, populism is a “thin ideology” that concentrates on only a small number of political issues (Friedman 2017). Unlike ideologies such as fascism, which prescribe solutions for all of society and the economy, the political goals of populism mostly focus on eliminating the political establishment. For this reason, populism is often paired with more comprehensive ideologies like socialism or nationalism. In the 2016 United States elections, both Donald Trump on the right and Bernie Sanders on the left paired an isolationist nationalism with their populist styles as candidates. Trump made it the center of his campaign with his “Make America Great Again” slogan and promises to put “America first” when renegotiating trade deals with other nations. Despite his status as a self-proclaimed socialist, Sanders shared Trump’s negative views on free trade agreements, preferring instead to raise protective barriers for American industry against foreign competition. Ironically, both candidates came out against increased immigration to the US and tried to paint the other side as advocating for “open borders.” In an interview with Vox’s Ezra Klein, Sanders (2015) stated that “[The concept of open borders is] a right-wing proposal, which says essentially that there is no United States,” later adding his belief that immigration from poorer countries drives down wages and employment levels for native workers in the United States. While campaigning for the general election, Trump attacked his opponent, Hillary Clinton, for the same reason. During a debate, he declared, “We have no country if we have no border... She wants to have open borders,” despite her statements to the contrary (Trump 2016a). First as a candidate and later as President, Trump’s populism has seized upon nationalistic themes

to unite his supporters and cast suspicion upon his opposition. In his campaign against “globalism,” he has attacked international institutions such as NATO and the UN, fostering doubt as to whether the United States would honor its international commitments and agreements (Vinograd 2016). In order to win and place “America First,” Trump’s actions lead to the conclusion that other countries must lose.

Jan-Werner Müller (2016), a professor who has written about populism at Princeton, adds that populists do not accept defeat in most situations due to their division of the population into the “silent majority” and the “corrupt elites.” They will often claim that their own candidates and measures fail because the majority has been prevented from expressing itself or has not been given the chance to speak. This often leads to the spread of conspiracy theories among populists to explain why the elites have not been defeated. This aspect of populism featured prominently in the 2016 elections as Trump fanned the flames of conspiracy theories among his followers. He exemplified paranoid behavior when he questioned the veracity of outgoing President Obama’s birth certificate and linked primary opponent Ted Cruz’s father to Lee Harvey Oswald and the John F. Kennedy assassination (McCaskill 2016). The month before the general election, Trump casted doubts on the integrity of the American electoral infrastructure, tweeting, “The election is absolutely being rigged by the dishonest and distorted media pushing Crooked Hillary – but also at many polling places – SAD” (Trump 2016b) The perception of populist victimization by corrupt elites is so important that populist leaders often find ways to portray themselves as victims of the national or global establishment even after ascending to power. For example, former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez placed the blame for his country’s faltering economy upon the United States government in 2007,

claiming that “the imperialist plan of the moment” was economic sabotage (Fox News 2007). When effective, positioning themselves as the one true opposition group to the ruling elites helps populists gain sympathy and legitimacy.

The re-emergence of populist factions on the left and right in American politics is a fairly recent development, but several authors argue that events going back several decades have led to this moment. In his essay, “Ideologies of Economic Populism in America and their subversion by the right,” Peter Briner (2016) examines Thomas Frank’s argument that the Republican Party “successfully convinced a large part of the working population that it is the party of the productive members of society, the authentic Americans, while portraying the Democratic Party as the party of the liberal ‘elite’ parasitically living off the hard productive work of the heartland.” In this view, the right has managed to co-opt the traditional populist view of class conflict and turn the people’s ire against cosmopolitan liberalism. Defining “reform liberalism” as an ideology that embraces government intervention to bring about economic equality, Briner accepts Frank’s view. Going further, he argues that the forces of economic populism in the US were vulnerable to a takeover from the right because of reform liberalism’s “distrust of populist ideology,” which it in many ways agreed with along the lines of income and wealth equality. The distrust was due to populism’s nativist views and image of nonnatives as parasites and enemies. These same views allowed the right to engineer a fictional “class struggle” against liberal cosmopolitanism that only has to provide “symbolic revenge” against outside groups, not a reduction in inequality, in order to be successful.

R. R. Reno (2016), the editor of the ecumenical religious journal *First Things*, goes beyond politics and reasons that the recent rise of populism can be attributed persistent “cultural dissolution.” He believes that economic and immigration grievances and other ideas articulated by populists are merely smokescreens covering a deeper problem: that “there’s no longer something greater than utility or some other bloodless good capable of binding us together strongly enough that the rich and powerful remain accountable.” In a quickly changing world, nationalism becomes an attractive tether holding holding groups of people together and promising to give their lives deeper meaning. The sense of shared community in the developed world has declined as politicians placed emphasis on the technocratic means of increasing national utility while neglecting traditional forms of cultural cohesion. As Mainline Protestantism, once at the forefront of social leadership, cohesion, and progressive movements in America, has declined, the now secular ruling class has become detached from the people it represents in meaningful shared community.

CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical Considerations, Data, and Results – South Carolina Primary Election

Economic theory suggests that incentives are inextricably linked to behavior and decisions. In the case of elections, voters have an incentive to vote for the candidates that they believe will benefit them most. The high number of differing characteristics between voters ensures that incentives vary widely among the electorate. In my research, I will search for variables that are linked to populist voting patterns. For the South Carolina primary elections, I expect voters in areas of higher poverty to show higher support for populist candidates who campaign on promises to bring prosperity back to the United States. Bernie Sanders promises to accomplish this goal by raising taxes on individuals with high incomes, while Donald Trump wishes to do so by bringing back manufacturing jobs and negotiating “fair trade” deals, commonly understood to include trade restrictions, with other countries.

Method and Data

I will employ four different regression models using different dependent variables and common independent variables. Three of the dependent variables are the voting percentages received by primary candidates Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump, and Ted Cruz. The fourth regression uses a dependent variable comprised of a combination of vote percentages for Trump, Cruz, and the other candidates except for Marco Rubio and Jeb Bush in an effort to consolidate the outsider candidates. Studying the outsider

candidates as a group reveals the differences between voting patterns that are populist and voting patterns that merely reject the establishment political candidates.

Independent variables are measurements of income, demographic, and education levels. Per capita income; unemployment rate; and percentage of people below the poverty line, which was \$23,834 for a family of four in 2013, are included as economic variables because satisfaction with the economy is expected to have a major effect on voting preferences. The relationship may not be linear, so per capita income squared is also included to account for unusually high income levels. Additionally, one variable measures the percentage change in people living below the poverty line from 2010 to 2013. This is included because it measures broad increases in well-being or lack thereof for each county.

Each variable has 46 observations corresponding with South Carolina's 46 counties. Most of the income, poverty, and demographic data were gathered from the website of the South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office. Most of the data are from 2010, 2012, and 2013. Election data were collected from CNN's 2016 Election Center website. Delegate numbers were found on FiveThirtyEight.com's Endorsement Primary webpage.

Hypothesis and Expectations

Because there are only two relevant candidates in the Democratic primaries, Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton, analyzing vote shares for one candidate will give insight into preferences related to both candidates. Sanders and Clinton have the added bonus of being easily distinguishable as a populist candidate and an establishment candidate, respectively. In contrast, analyzing voting patterns in the Republican primaries

is more complicated. The Republican primaries pit several viable establishment, outsider, and populist candidates against each other. In determining which candidates to consider outsiders, I use endorsements from other politicians. Although several outsider candidates may be perceived as populist, I consider Donald Trump to be the most populist candidate on the Republican side due to his rhetoric and views on various issues. His shifting political views, enthusiastic followers, and aggressive rhetoric position him as a consummate reactionary populist leader. In the Democratic primaries, I consider Bernie Sanders to be a populist candidate of a different sort from Donald Trump. He shares reactionary populist tendencies such as channeling resentment against the rich and seeking compensation through higher taxes. However, his populist movement also resembled certain elements of progressive populism, including its favorable stance towards education and intellectuals. Although Trump and Sanders offer radically different policy ideas, both promise to return power to “the American People” and fix the corruption and partisanship endemic in Washington. Additionally, both candidates make appeals to economic nationalism through proposals to reign in “big business” and impose trade restrictions on foreign countries perceived to be taking advantage of American openness.

Per capita income, per capita income squared, unemployment rate, and poverty percentage are all included as variables in order to measure the effects of economic strength on populist voting patterns. In addition, the change in poverty percentage from 2010 to 2013 is included in order to measure the economic trends of each county. During his campaign, Donald Trump drew attention to his success as a businessman in order to promote his plans to restore the economy to full strength. His stated weapons of choice to

accomplish this goal were deregulation, rolling back globalization, lower taxes, and “fair trade” with other countries (Jackson 2016). Bernie Sanders also promised economic revival through taxation of the rich and trade barriers with other countries (Potter 2016). I propose that voters with high incomes and satisfaction with the economy will be more likely to vote for an establishment candidate because of the success they have already achieved under the status quo. Conversely, voters who are dissatisfied with the economy may be more likely to support an outsider or populist candidate who promises to shake up the system and deliver relief, whether in the form of social programs or protectionism. Furthermore, I expect populist appeal to be greater in counties which have experienced an increase in poverty percentage, even if their citizens have relatively high incomes. If voters sense that their economic fortunes are declining, it is quite possible that they will seek solutions from unconventional sources.

The demographic variables of white population, African-American population, and Hispanic or Latino population are added because each group has slightly different voting concerns. While these voting differences are usually viewed in relation to the general election, they may also occur within primary elections. In the 2016 elections, Donald Trump called for a wall to be built along the US-Mexico border in order to halt illegal immigration, smuggling, and trafficking from Latin America. Additionally, he called for mass deportations of illegal immigrants, many of whom are Hispanic (Pramuk 2016). I expect these developments to alienate Trump from many Hispanic and Latino Voters. This is similar to most reactionary populist movements, which often limit their concept of “the people” to certain groups. In contrast, Republican candidates like Jeb Bush and others have taken positions that may appeal more to minority demographics.

For example, Bush emphasized his Hispanic family and Spanish language skills during an interview with Spanish-language television station Telemundo in an effort to win over Hispanic votes (Diaz 2015). Bernie Sanders, in contrast to Trump, did not target specific countries or groups of people during his campaign, with the exception of China and other trading partners. His views on immigration include a negative stance towards foreign workers and increased immigration, but he also favors a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants (Preston 2016). With populism's focus on majority rule by "the people," I expect support for the populist candidates to be higher among whites, the majority racial demographic. I expect the effect to be larger for Trump than for Sanders, whose populism is not as reactionary. Conversely, I expect support to be lower among racial and ethnic minorities who may not believe they stand to benefit as much as the majority from the election of a populist candidate.

Finally, percentage of population with a college degree is included as a measurement of education levels in each county. Highly educated people may think differently about elections or consider different issues than people who have not been through college. Sanders (2016) has incorporated plans for free tuition at public universities, lower student debt interest rates, and increased work study funding into his presidential platform. While Clinton has also revealed plans to eliminate public university tuition for most students, this did not occur until months after the South Carolina primary (Levingston 2016). I expect Sanders to be popular among the well-educated because of his acceptance of intellectuals and emphasis on expanding college affordability. In contrast, Trump has focused his message on blue-collar workers such as coal miners and promised to restore high-paying manufacturing jobs that typically do not require more

than a high school diploma. Additionally, Trump has taken positions, such as his positions on trade and immigration, that are less popular among educated Republicans. For example, Republicans with a college degree are more favorable towards immigration than those without one (Smith and Doherty 2016). I expect Republican counties with higher levels of education to vote more strongly for moderate, non-populist candidates, such as Marco Rubio or John Kasich.

Table 1. Summary statistics, general election.

VARIABLES	(1) N	(2) mean	(3) sd	(4) min	(5) max
Sanders	46	0.207	0.0924	0.0800	0.440
Trump	46	0.360	0.0572	0.230	0.490
Cruz	46	0.228	0.0452	0.120	0.340
GOP Outsider	46	0.436	0.0557	0.340	0.570
Per Capita Income	46	20,839	4,082	14,361	32,725
White Pop	46	70,943	83,963	2,512	365,497
African American Pop	46	28,946	32,597	4,898	186,991
Hispanic Pop	46	5,539	8,051	121	41,096
Unemployment Rate	46	6.615	1.589	4.500	10.10
Poverty Pct	46	22.30	6.153	12.70	42.40
Pov Pct Chg 2010-2013	46	4.967	9.479	-19.50	24.40
Degree Percentage	46	0.190	0.074	0.083	0.400
PCIsq	46	4.506e+08	1.815e+08	2.062e+08	1.071e+09

Table 2. Regression results, primary election.

VARIABLES	(1) Sanders	(2) Trump	(3) Cruz	(4) GOP Outsider
Per Capita Income	-2.11e-05** (9.53e-06)	1.88e-06 (1.54e-05)	-9.46e-07 (1.94e-05)	2.15e-07 (1.30e-05)
White Pop	1.55e-06*** (1.59e-07)	3.66e-07 (2.61e-07)	1.21e-07 (2.53e-07)	3.13e-07 (2.06e-07)
African-American Pop	-1.26e-06*** (3.48e-07)	-1.31e-07 (1.69e-07)	2.50e-07 (2.85e-07)	-1.25e-07 (2.73e-07)
Hispanic Pop	-1.02e-05*** (1.74e-06)	-1.42e-06 (2.26e-06)	-1.14e-06 (2.71e-06)	-1.19e-06 (2.13e-06)
Unemployment Rate	-0.00738** (0.00337)	0.0214*** (0.00617)	-0.00461 (0.00728)	0.00513 (0.00488)
Poverty Percentage	-0.00584*** (0.00163)	0.00164 (0.00176)	-0.00506* (0.00285)	-0.00134 (0.00200)
Pov Pct Change 2010- 2013	0.00204** (0.000780)	0.000400 (0.000677)	0.000353 (0.000672)	0.000465 (0.000588)
Degree Percentage	0.953*** (0.306)	-0.869*** (0.249)	-0.241 (0.312)	-0.739** (0.274)
Per Capita Income Squared	1.72e-10 (1.99e-10)	1.70e-10 (3.14e-10)	-1.36e-10 (3.79e-10)	6.41e-11 (2.73e-10)
Constant	0.541*** (0.137)	0.215 (0.219)	0.487* (0.284)	0.808*** (0.179)
Observations	46	46	46	46
R-squared	0.912	0.735	0.395	0.578

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Results

For each dependent variable, a linear regression is run using Ordinary Least Squares. The first regression, observing effects on voting percentage for Bernie Sanders, has the highest number of significant independent variables. It also has the highest R-squared (.912), indicating that about 91% of the variation in Sanders' support is explained by the regression. Per capita income has a negative effect on Sanders' percentage that is significant at the 5% level, indicating that wealthier people are less likely to vote for Sanders. However, this effect does not continue to the squared per capita income, which has a coefficient that is not statistically significant. This result is expected because wealthy people have an incentive to preserve the status quo that has allowed them to become successful. However, unemployment rate and poverty rate also have significant negative effects on voting percentage for Sanders. Change in poverty percentage has a positive coefficient that is relevant at the 5% level, indicating that areas with rising poverty are more likely to vote for Sanders. Demographic variables also have significant effects on Sanders' voting percentage. White voters are significantly more likely to vote for Sanders, while both minority groups are significantly less likely to vote for him. Finally, the college degree percentage has the largest significant effect on Sanders' voting percentage, raising his percentage almost a full point for each college degree percentage. This suggests that Sanders is extremely popular with people who are highly educated.

On the Republican side, the results of the regressions are mostly inconclusive. For Donald Trump, only unemployment rate and college degree percentage are significant. Voters in counties with high unemployment rates are more likely to vote for him,

suggesting that they believe Trump's argument that his business background will enable him to create jobs as President. On the other hand, people with college degrees are significantly less likely to vote for him. There are many potential reasons for this, but it seems likely that people with more education are less affected by economic disruptions, and therefore less likely to support Trump's message of protectionism. As previously stated, they also disagree with his stance on immigration at higher rates than less educated Republicans.

The regression measuring support for Republican outsider candidates also has a low R-squared and only one significant variable, college degree percentage. This variable has a negative coefficient, indicating that people with degrees are much less likely to vote for a Republican outsider. However, the lack of other significant variables shows that reasons for voting for an outsider candidate do not always align. Although outsider candidates have distance from the establishment in common, they often have very different ideologies and proposals.

The regression results for Ted Cruz have the lowest R-squared (0.395) of the specifications, suggesting that several important explanatory variables for his support are missing. The only significant variable in this regression is poverty rate, which is statistically significant at the 10% level. Its coefficient shows a negative correlation with support for Cruz, indicating that higher-poverty were unreceptive to his platform. Comparing his results to Trump's results shows the difference between a populist outsider and an ideological outsider. The variables that are significant for Trump are not significant for Cruz, and vice-versa. Unfortunately, the low number of significant

variables makes it difficult to infer more about the differences between outsider candidates and populists.

CHAPTER FOUR

Theoretical Considerations, Data, and Results – U.S. General Election

The analysis of populist voting patterns in the general election utilizes two main regressions to find results from cross-sectional data pertaining to every state except Alaska, plus Washington, DC. In total, there are 3,112 counties and county equivalents between these states. The first linear regression utilizes ordinary least squares to analyze the data across all states. The second regression is similar, but it uses state fixed effects and clustered standard errors to analyze variance within each state, omitting variance across states. Using state fixed effects helps to correct for endogeneity in the form of omitted variable bias that can occur when comparing interstate rather than intrastate variations. Additionally, clustered standard errors account for the heteroskedasticity that can occur across states.

For the general election regression, I sought to include explanatory variables related to populism as well as more traditional election-related variables. The dependent variable is the voting percentage received by Donald Trump, whom I designate as the populist candidate. Independent variables include median income, white percentage of the population, Hispanic percentage of the population, population density per square mile, net international migration percentage, percentage of population holding at least a bachelor's degree, and the unemployment rate.

Median income and unemployment data from 2015 come from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Local Area Unemployment Statistics program. Data on 2015 race and ethnicity (white and Hispanic percentages) come from the Census Bureau's American

FactFinder website. Population density per square mile measures the effect of geographical concentration on voting preferences. The data comes from the Census Bureau's 2010 US Census. I gathered international migration percentage data for 2015 from the USDA's Economic Research Service website. The data are based on population estimates. I retrieved data on bachelor's degree percentages from the USDA's 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-yr average. It applies to adults age 25 and over and represents education levels among the electorate.

Table 3. Summary statistics, general election.

VARIABLES	(1) N	(2) mean	(3) sd	(4) min	(5) max
Trump 2016	3,112	0.631	0.157	0.0409	0.946
White Percentage	3,112	0.838	0.162	0.0501	1
Hispanic Percentage	3,112	0.0887	0.136	0	0.987
Unemployment Rate	3,112	0.0550	0.0195	0.0180	0.240
Median Household Income	3,112	48,488	12,298	22,894	125,900
International Migration Percentage	3,112	0.0121	0.0183	-0.00857	0.225
College Education Percentage	3,112	0.204	0.0902	0.0190	0.788
Density per Square Mile	3,112	261.5	1,733	0.100	69,468

Hypothesis and Expectations

Economic grievances are often cited as a reason for populist discontent, with several recent populist candidates promising economic revival if they were elected.

Donald Trump has reached out to economically disadvantaged people, promising to look out for the common worker and make changes to the status quo. In his inaugural address,

Trump (2017) stated, “We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength.” His appeals to economic nationalism are often cited as a reason for support among former manufacturing workers and others who lost their jobs due to outsourcing and globalization. Therefore, I predict that populism and support for Trump will be higher in counties with lower median income and higher unemployment.

I predict that support for Trump will be higher among the white population, which has comprised a reliable voting block for the Republican Party in recent decades. Additionally, as a dominant majority population, white voters may be more susceptible to a populist message that emphasizes majority rule, outside threats, and a nostalgic past. In contrast, I suspect that the Hispanic population will be less supportive of Trump’s populist platform. A major talking point within the Republican Party in recent years has been the downsides of illegal immigration from South and Central America, especially Mexico. Candidate Trump amplified this rhetoric with his talk of criminal aliens from Mexico and “build[ing] a wall” on the US-Mexico border (Pramuk 2016). Anti-immigrant ideas play into one of populism’s main ideas – asserting the will of the majority against a minority that is perceived to be taking advantage of them.

Due to reactionary populism’s antipathy towards highly educated “elites” and experts, I predict that support for Trump will be lower among populations that are more highly educated. Less educated voters may be more inclined to trust appeals to “common sense” that go against the opinions of experts. Additionally, people with greater educational attainment generally have access to more economic opportunity, potentially

reducing the draw of populist economic appeals. When the economy shifts due to globalization, eliminating certain jobs and creating others, workers with more education may have an easier time adjusting to new roles in the job market.

Population density data delve into the urban-rural divide in modern politics. During the twenty-first century, large cities and rural areas have become increasingly polarized, with large cities voting for Democrats and small towns voting for Republicans. Social and economic changes often start in major cities before emanating out into the rest of the country. Many of the changes can be unwelcome in certain areas. Additionally, cities have become economic behemoths within their states as the population shifted from rural to urban areas and the service economy benefitted from highly educated, concentrated populations. I suspect that residents view their smaller, more homogenous towns as the “heartland” of populist lore. They associate the trends of recent years, such as freer trade and increasingly flexible social norms, with decreasing standards of living and the decline in their local economies. People living in these areas, I suspect, will place more credence in Trump’s promise to “Make America Great Again” through economic nationalism and returning to the ways of the past. Therefore, I predict that rural areas will allocate significantly more votes to Trump in the 2016 presidential election.

I chose international migration percentage as an explanatory variable because immigration has become such a polarizing issue in recent elections. As previously stated, Donald Trump’s presidential campaign featured immigration reform as a major promise. Specifically, he promised a hardline stance against illegal immigration and undocumented immigrants who are already in the United States. During a speech in Phoenix, Arizona, Trump stated his intentions to create a “deportation task force” in

addition to a wall along the border with Mexico. However, he has also targeted other forms of immigration, stating his opposition to foreign worker visas during a GOP primary debate in Miami. Speaking of the H1-B Visa program, Trump stated, “When we have American citizens and those living in the United States legally being pushed out of high paying jobs so that they can be replaced with ‘cheaper’ labor, something is wrong” (Paden 2016). This kind of rhetoric plays into the populist narrative of a “foreign minority” taking advantage of the country’s majority. Polling data from Pew Research shows that Trump’s stance towards immigration is likely to be popular with Republicans; in a March 2016 survey, Pew found that only 35% of Republicans agree with the statement that “immigrants today strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents,” compared with 78% of Democrats (Jones 2016). However, I suspect that much of the anti-immigrant attitudes among Republicans is due to a lack of contact with immigrants themselves. Most immigration to the US, documented and undocumented, is to cities and urban areas. Another Pew Research study shows that over 60% of documented and undocumented immigrants live in just 20 metro areas within the United States (Passel and Cohn 2017). I predict higher immigration numbers will have the effect of decreasing support for Trump and populism. Immigration may also affect voting outcomes if immigrants themselves vote differently from the native population. However, if immigration causes the existing population to decrease support for immigration, I expect this effect to overcome the pro-immigration voting patterns of the immigrants.

Table 4. Regression results, general election.

VARIABLES	(1) OLS	(2) State Fixed Effects
Median Household Income	6.75e-07*** (2.23e-07)	2.12e-06*** (3.40e-07)
White Percentage	0.389*** (0.0130)	0.580*** (0.0486)
Hispanic Percentage	-0.140*** (0.0144)	-0.373*** (0.0868)
Density per Square Mile	-2.80e-06** (1.15e-06)	8.47e-07 (1.03e-06)
International Migration Percentage	-0.462*** (0.132)	0.136 (0.166)
College Education Percentage	-1.003*** (0.0315)	-0.946*** (0.0604)
Unemployment Rate	-1.844*** (0.117)	-0.993** (0.421)
Constant	0.597*** (0.0181)	0.321*** (0.0639)
Observations	3,112	3,112
R-squared	0.578	0.783

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 5. Correlations between independent variables, general election.

	White Pct	Hispanic Pct	Unemployment Rate	Med Income	Migration	College Ed	Density
White Pct	1.0000						
Hispanic Pct	-0.0869	1.0000					
Unemployment Rate	-0.3826	0.0301	1.0000				
Med Income	0.1906	0.0481	-0.5111	1.0000			
Migration	-0.2436	0.2987	-0.1149	0.3051	1.0000		
College Ed	0.0013	0.0068	-0.3840	0.6865	0.4990	1.0000	
Density	-0.1706	0.0819	-0.0158	0.1434	0.3773	0.2370	1.0000

Results

One concern when selecting data is multicollinearity, which occurs when multiple predictor variables are highly correlated. In order to check for multicollinearity in this regression model, I calculate the variance inflation factors (VIF), which estimate the extent to which explanatory variables move together. I am unable to find evidence of substantial multicollinearity. However, there are a few variables that exhibit pairwise correlation (see Table 5). Unemployment rate is negatively correlated with median income because unemployed workers have an income of zero. In contrast, median income is correlated with college education due to the generally greater skills of educated populations. Migration is also correlated with college education, possibly due to the greater economic opportunity that exists in more highly educated areas.

The first key regression, run using ordinary least squares, reports that every independent variable is statistically significant at the 1% level except for density per square mile, which is significant at the 5% level. The regression has an acceptable R-squared of .578, indicating that the independent variables account for over half of the variation in the dependent variable across all counties.

The second ordinary least squares regression, which incorporates state fixed effects and clustered standard errors, reports similar results to the first regression. However, the results of the regression with fixed effects contain two key differences: neither international migration percentage nor population density per square mile are statistically significant as they were in the first regression. The explanation for the difference in results is that these variables explain variation across states, but not within states.

Median household income has a positive coefficient while unemployment rate has a negative coefficient, showing that voters in areas with stronger local economies for a given unemployment rate were more likely to vote for Trump. Median income is statistically significant at the 1% level in both regressions, but unemployment rate is slightly less significant in the fixed effects regression than in the first regression. This shows that states with higher unemployment rates for a given level of income were less likely to vote for Trump. This is an unexpected result, running counter to the perception of Trump voters as out-of-work, down on their luck members of the working class whose livelihood has been stolen by the forces of globalization. One possible explanation is that Trump's promises to enact business-friendly deregulation plans, pass tax cuts, eliminate government waste, and invest in infrastructure caused wealthier members of society to gravitate towards Trump and away from the more government-friendly Clinton.

The demographic variables are highly significant in opposite directions, as expected. Counties with a higher percentage of white population voted more heavily for Trump, while counties with higher Hispanic populations voted more strongly against Trump. This is in line with recent voting trends for Republicans. It also reflects the majoritarian aspects of populism. White voters may find it easier to identify with the populist concept of "the people" as a monolithic majority. In contrast, many Hispanic voters were likely driven away by real or perceived bias against them by the Trump campaign and its supporters.

Population density in the first OLS regression is not as significant as the other predictor variables, but it still influences the outcome. Counties with more dense populations show lower vote shares for Trump. This result matches the evidence, as

shown by county level election maps, that support for Clinton was concentrated in urban areas while support for Trump was spread across less populated counties in most states. However, a surprising result occurs from the fixed effects regression wherein population density is not statistically significant. Taken together, these results show that denser states such as New Jersey, Massachusetts, and New York voted more strongly for Clinton, but density itself was not a contributing factor to support within states.

Additionally, international migration percentage is highly significant in determining Trump support in the first regression, but not in the fixed effects regression. In the country as a whole, counties with higher levels of immigration experienced lower support for Trump. Due to the aforementioned fact that most immigrants to the United States settle in urban areas, and given the low support for Trump in those same urban areas, this result is not surprising. Once again, however, the lack of significance in the fixed effects regression shows that immigration does not affect voting patterns within states. Overall, states with a higher rate of immigration show less support for Trump.

Finally, the percent of the population with a college education is highly significant and inversely related to support for Trump. This result holds true for both key regressions, indicating that better educated populations vote more heavily for Clinton. This result is in line with expectations that anti-intellectual tendencies within Trump's brand of populism drive away more educated voters. It may also be that well-educated voters view established politicians such as Clinton with more legitimacy than do populists. To them, the populist urgency to bring change to Washington does not hold as much weight.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Ultimately, the results from analyzing the general election proved more conclusive than the results from analyzing the primary election in South Carolina. This is unsurprising considering the significantly larger dataset gathered for the general election. Results from both studies confirm the importance of education and economic strength on determining levels of populist support. Education reduces support for right-wing populist candidates, a finding that is consistent with Inglehart and Norris' (2016) study of European populism and polling data. However, higher education levels increased support for populism on the left in South Carolina. Results from economic performance were less clear, but indicated that populism on the right finds success in more prosperous regions. On the left, economic malaise boosted the populism of Bernie Sanders.

Empirical results from both studies validate the majoritarian characteristics of populism. Both Sanders in the primary and Trump in the general election drew high support from white populations and low support from minority racial demographics. Surprisingly, race and ethnicity did not show any significant effect on right-wing populism in the South Carolina primary. This could be a function of the self-selection of certain types of voters into the Republican Party or the low number of observations. Although Abromeit et. al (2016) consider location in the "heartland" to be an important aspect of populist groups, my fixed effects regression did not find significance in county population per square mile. Even if the "heartland" holds a special place in the populist

mythos, I conclude that it has little practical impact on voting patterns. Differences in voting patterns between cities and rural areas are better explained by other factors.

This approach could be improved by including data from additional states in my analysis of the primaries. Primary elections in several other states had significantly different results from the election in South Carolina, and including their data might give additional insights to factors that influence voting for populist candidates. However, this approach would be difficult because of the rapidly shifting political landscape that accompanies primary season. An alternate method could be to gather data from past South Carolina primaries in order to perform time series analysis. It would also help to examine additional variables not related to economic strength in order to form a more complete picture.

Further study is required to gain insights into the future of populism and determine whether it is likely to continue spreading or recede back into the fringes of politics. It is likely that Trump will continue to pull the Republican Party in a populist direction, leading to the possibility of a more populist future in America. The visibility and global leadership of the US could lead other countries to follow suit. In Europe, populist leader Marine Le Pen has a legitimate chance of winning the French Presidency as populist and nationalist parties across the continent make themselves known. A win by Le Pen could lead to the demise of the EU, leaving nationalist forces across Europe to pick up the pieces in the disorder that would follow. This study has focused on populism in the US, while other studies have dedicated their analysis to European populism. Future studies could discern greater knowledge about populism by studying it on a global scale and concentrating on regional similarities and differences.

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