

**RESEARCH PAPER****Navigating the Nexus: Exploring the Interplay of Populism, Trump's Electoral Base, Climate Change Pessimism, and Immigration Skepticism****Muhammad Awais**

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates how Donald Trump leveraged pessimistic views on climate change and immigration to garner widespread support, and how his backing intensified these perceptions among his supporters. Various social and economic factors are attributed to the rise of populism while pessimistic views on climate change and immigration are often linked to ideological and structural reasons. A closer examination reveals that these pessimistic views align closely with support for Trump. Employing qualitative methods, the study delves into how Trump adeptly harnessed these views to build a strong support base. The findings indicate that Trump supporters typically hold pessimistic views on these key issues, and he effectively capitalized on sentiments to secure electoral victories. The study suggests that understanding the correlation between populist support and pessimistic views on climate change and immigration can provide valuable insights for political leaders to address these sentiments and foster a more positive public discourse.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Electoral Support, Non-Traditional Security, Pessimist Views, Right-Wing Populism

Introduction

With the election victories of Narendra Modi in India, Donald Trump in the US, Viktor Orban in Hungary, and Jair Bolsanaro in Brazil, the second decade of the 21st century is characterized by the rise of right-wing populism. The term Populism was first used in the 19th century. In the US, it was associated with the People's Party in the late 19th century. Populism has been defined by different scholars in different dimensions. Populism is defined as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, '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" (Mudde, 2004, p. 541).

Furthermore, populism performs exclusionary politics when it claims a moral position of representing the right people and is seen as a form of anti-pluralism (Müller, n.d.). Populism is based on three key pillars; anti-plurality, rejection or denial of complexity, and anti-elitism (Velasco, 2020). Right-wing Wing Populism incorporates extreme nationalist feelings, strict immigration controls, anti-elite and conservative views, nativism, anti-environmentalism, anti-globalization, and Neo-nationalism (Right-Wing Populism - ECPS, n.d.).

In the 21st century, nation-states witnessed a tectonic shift in their face-offs with new challenges. This century marked the rise of new non-state actors, environmental deterioration, mass migration from the global south to the global north, and intrastate conflicts. All of these are called non-traditional security threats (Srikanth, 2014, p. 60). Immigration – particularly undocumented illegal immigration in this case – and Climate Change are the key non-traditional security challenges that are focused on in this study. Migration and climate change are both interrelated and both affect each other.

Donald Trump's victories in the elections of 2016 and 2020 highlight interesting research areas, notably regarding his support base and their views on climate change and immigration. Data shows that specific demographics constantly supported Trump, who also tend to have pessimistic views on specific non-traditional security issues. As Trump prepares for the 2024-25 presidential election, it becomes important to study how he will address public sentiments on these topics, given historical patterns, particularly with global attention on non-traditional security challenges.

The paper is divided into two broader categories: 1) Donald Trump and his anti-immigration politics and 2) Climate Change and Populist politics. The first category further discusses how Trump's rhetoric on immigration helped him to win and brings public surveys and poll results to support it. The second category discusses survey results, and Trump's rhetoric to present unreal simplified results and brings the case study of a County where Trump won with a majority.

Literature Review

Andrés Velasco considered those people who didn't get enough benefits from globalization and lacked the deserved economic opportunities, they were considered to be the ones voting for populists (Velasco, 2020b). The existing literature discusses two approaches, the structural approach and the ideological approach, to understanding the hostility and skepticism toward climate change.

The structural argument builds its case on political and economic marginalization because of technological advancements and globalization. The ideological arguments believe that nationalism, conspiracy theories, and hostility towards liberal and cosmopolitan elite propagating climate agenda, as some of the reasons for right-wing populists being climate skeptics (Lockwood, 2018). Populists usually preach an anti-elite and an anti-expert narrative and climate agenda being propagated and formulated by experts and scientists is rejected by the populists calling it a conspiracy or hoax (Guriev & Papaioannou, 2022).

On immigration, populists exploited both two angles of the issue; the economic and cultural angle (Nagel, 2019). When Trump came to the White House, he was very clear and bold in linking crimes, terrorism, and US internal problems with particular religious and ethnic communities. Trump's travel ban act which temporarily banned the entry of people from seven Muslim-majority countries. Critics described it as a "Muslim Ban" (Muslim Travel Ban, 2019). Securitization of US-Mexico borders and the slogans of 'Build the wall' became a dominant agenda of Trump's narratives (Nagel, 2019).

The working-class whites in rural and semi-rural counties where manufacturing jobs were mainly destroyed by outsourcing and technological changes that Globalization brought were Trump's main target to propagate his message (Nagel, 2019). Trump evoked nostalgia for America's past greatness which was destroyed by the immigrants (De la Dehesa, 2019). Hundreds of ads were run on social media, which were exclusively about immigration and mostly used the word 'invasion' (Julio Ricardo Varela, 2019). Syrian refugees were called potential ISIS terrorists (Trump, 2015).

Existing literature discussed the reason behind the widespread acceptance of populists' messages. Although existing literature extensively discussed the individual orientation of the populist leaders, parties, and their supporters regarding particular issues. However, there exists a significant lack of literature on populists' response towards non-traditional security threats collectively and how the particular extreme response toward an issue is connected to electoral gains and public support. Moreover, existing literature lacks a comprehensive understanding of how skeptical views about a particular non-traditional security threat shape the public's political and electoral voting trends.

Material and Methods

Qualitative methods of research were applied in this research. Both primary and secondary sources were used in data collection, data analysis, and to present and elaborate results. Primary Data sources include speeches, social media posts, and interviews of people. While, the secondary data sources include research articles, books, survey results, and credible internet sources like journals, magazines and news articles, and blogs. Content and Discourse Analysis was used in the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Trump and Anti-Immigration Politics

Rhetoric's Edge: Winning with Anti-Immigration

In countries like the US, where the population is divided half-half along the party lines it is the MARS – Middle American radicals – that make the difference. Through populist discourse, they can be drawn towards any party by providing a scapegoat for their social and economic problems. In recent times, it's the immigrants who are considered to be the problem in capturing their economic opportunities.

Trump's anti-immigration stance was not limited to just banning and reducing illegal immigration. Rather, emphasizing his populist narrative and combining it with religiopolitical hate he introduced an act in 2017, that aimed to ban and reduce legal immigration by 50% from selective Muslim-majority countries (Anderson, 2020). The late 19th and 20th century debates on immigration find echo in the Anti-immigration rhetoric of Trump (Sartori, 2002). Samuel P. Huntington's ideas of a clash of civilizations are predominant in Trump's ideas of anti-immigration.

Donald Trump consciously and selectively used euphemisms and metaphors to link the undocumented immigrants trying to enter and get asylum and climate scientists and experts to security threats, poisoning the American blood (Layne, 2023) and people with political agenda (BBC, 2018) respectively. Critical Discourse Analysis explains how micro-level observation of language, when Trump calls immigrants trying to enter the US as invaders, interacts with macro-level concerns like election victory, politics, and power.

Power is acquired through coercion based primarily on force or consent, and "ideology is the prime means of manufacturing consent" (Fairclough, 2013). Trump's connotation of climate scientists as anti-people and immigrants as rapists and criminals hit the people's sense of security and manufactured an artificial consent. It ultimately made people consider Trump a guardian of their economic and social security. Trump in particular and populists in general are successful in deploying the KISS principle - that is keep it simple and stupid (DW, 2018). He presented understandable and simple but wrong and skeptical stories about the complex issues of immigration and climate change.

Trump had created a blend of extreme nationalism and conservatism to promote his political agenda. His narrative of regaining American prestige and making America great again had two stages; the well-being and development of Americans and the anti-globalization stance. The well-being of Americans required secure economic opportunities for the people. On this exact point, Trump targeted the immigrants for taking the economic opportunities that the Americans could take (Centro de Investigación de Política Internacional, 2019).

"The future does not belong to the globalists. The future belongs to patriots. The true good of the nation can only be pursued by those who love it, by citizens who are rooted in its history. Wise leaders always put the good of their people and their own country first"

(Shehadi, 2020). Trump's anti-globalization narrative is similar to his anti-immigration narrative which he promoted while his political campaigns.

Surveying Narratives: Trump, Politics, and Immigration

We have to analyze the results of Trump's elections to analyze Trump's political narrative and its connection with the skeptical view of non-traditional security threats. Following are statistics and results of elections and surveys conducted by different organizations.

Around 53 percent of men and 42 percent of women supported Trump while 45 percent of men and 57 percent of women voted for Biden in the 2020 presidential election. On an economic scale, most of the lower and lower-middle-income people did not vote for Trump. Only one out of three people aged 18-25 voted for Trump while less than half of the voting population aged 25-50 voted for Trump. At the same time, more than half of the voting-eligible population aged 50+ voted for Trump. The eligible voting population of 58 percent whites, 12 percent blacks, 33 percent Latinos, and 36 percent Asians voted for Trump. Out of this, 60 percent of white men, and 55 percent of white women voted for Trump as compared to 79 percent of black men and 90 percent of black women who voted for Biden. Similarly, less than 1/3 of the voting population of other religions voted for Trump while some 60% of protestant Christians voted for Trump. Most important of the statistics, around 57 percent of the rural, 48 percent suburban, and 38 percent of the urban voting population voted for Trump. On the other hand, 42 percent rural, 60 percent of the Urban, and 50 percent of the Suburban voting population voted for Biden (CNN, n.d.). More college graduates and people of color voted for Biden while half of the people with no college degree voted for Trump.

These statistical factors are of immense importance to understand because these are directly related to how the voting trends compel political policymakers to adopt a certain narrative and policy on specific issues. At the same time, these are important to understand because they show how the political narrative of a particular presidential candidate and party affects the voting trends of specific groups.

According to a 2018 Pew Research survey, 24 percent of men and only 14 percent of women believe that strict border security should be the priority while 27 percent of men and 40 percent of women say that it should be the priority to create a legal way to become the citizens for all those illegal immigrants who entered the US. Around 23 percent of whites, 6 percent of blacks, 11 percent aged 18-25, 19 percent aged 50-64, 29 percent aged 65+, 14 percent of college graduates, 21 percent of people with no college degree, 38 percent of Republicans and 5 percent of Democrats say that priority for dealing with illegal immigration in the US should be better border security strong law enforcement ("2018 Midterm Voters: Issues and Political Values," 2018).

According to another Pew Research Survey of 2019, out of those interviewed, 70 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning people said increasing security along the US-Mexico border is very important while only 15 percent of Democrats and Democrat-leaning were said the same. While 51 percent of Republicans and 10 percent of Democrats were in favor of the increased deportation of illegal immigrants (Daniller, 2019).

This trend had skyrocketed till 2022. The ratio of people from both parties supporting a specific narrative rose significantly however still, Republicans led the percentage point. On immigration issues, Republican's stance is more strict and tough than Democrats. Republicans are in favor of the deportation of all those immigrants who entered the United States illegally in the hope of getting asylum or legal later and supporting strict border security. According to a Pew Research survey, nearly 91 percent of the Republicans and Republican-leaning independents believe that border security should be an important

goal as compared to only 59 percent of Democrats and Democrat-leaning independents saying the same. Around 79 percent of Republicans believe that the deportation of illegal immigrants is important and some 49 percent believe it is a very important step. Only 13 percent of Democrats believe that it is very important to deport illegal immigrants only 39 percent of Democrats believe deportation of illegal immigrants is somewhat important (Oliphant & Cerda, 2022).

Perceptions about undocumented immigrants living in the US also vary between the two parties. Nearly 80 percent of Democrats believe that undocumented immigrants in the US are not more likely to commit a serious crime whereas in comparison 46 percent of Republicans believe so (Pew Research Center, 2018). More so, 70 percent of the democrats say racial and ethnic diversity make America a better place to live while 47 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning people say so (Hartig, 2018). 86 percent of Democrats and Democrat-leaning people believe that American openness to the people all over the world is essential to who we are as a nation while only 37 percent of Republicans think so (Brockway & Doherty, 2019).

The Impact of Trump's Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric on Electoral Success: Case Study of Robestown City

Donald Trump selectively and carefully propagated the anti-immigrant message in election campaigns. It is planned anti-immigrant rhetoric that attracts the conservative Republicans to rally behind Trump because of the constructed fear of immigrants. This is more clearly visible in states that are historically Republican strongholds, share international borders, or have a significant percentage of legal and illegal immigrants living in these states.

Before the mid-term election, Trump while speaking at a rally in Robstown city of Nueces County Texas, openly spoke and warned about the immigrants coming to the US-Mexico border. He described them as an invading army storming the US (TIME, 2022). The election results of the mentioned county showed an expected result. The Republican candidate won a 53.3% clear majority in the county.

According to estimates, Texas is home to the third-largest number of undocumented immigrants in the United States. Additionally, Texas has the second-highest overall immigrant population, trailing only California (Budiman, 2020). Texas is among the first few border states where illegal immigrants usually cross the border and enter the US. With a large section of legal and undocumented immigrants living in Texas, Texans have to face more competition in achieving white and blue-collar jobs, problems in service delivery, and an impact on social structure. That's why Republicans in general and particularly Trump's populist but polarizing anti-immigrant rhetoric and slogans find more space among Texans. Texas remained a stronghold of Republicans in presidential elections for years and Donald Trump won the elections in both 2016 and 2020 Texas ("5 States with the Highest Percentage," 2023).

When thousands of migrants were standing on the border waiting to enter the US, Trump posted on X, "This is an invasion of our Country and our Military is waiting for you!" Trump has been criticized because of his criticism and efforts to stop people from legally getting asylum and refuge and calling them invaders and criminals (Arce, 2019).

Climate Change Skepticism and Populist Politics

From Surveys to Politics: Trump's Populism and Climate Change Skepticism

Climate change issues have often been exploited for political narrative building. In a Pew Research survey, the Republicans and Republican-leaners showed varied responses.

Around 58 percent said that America should prioritize exploration in oil, gas, and coal while 42 percent said that the US should go for alternative renewable energy sources. Around 67 percent of Republicans under 30 are supportive of adopting alternative energy sources as compared to 75 percent of Republicans above 65 who are supportive of expanding oil, gas, and coal exploration.

Nearly 78 percent of Democrats consider climate change a major threat whereas only 23 percent of Republicans believe so. Furthermore, political affiliation and partisan divides also affect the perceptions and beliefs about climate change. People living in Oregon, Alaska, California, Hawaii, and Washington are more likely to hold the perceptions that climate change is affecting locally but only democrats living in these Pacific regions are likely to say that they're seeing the climate change effects locally compared to Republicans (Tyson et al., 2023).

Compared to Gen-x and Boomers, Gen-Z and Millennials are more likely to engage in climate discussions, consider it a top priority, and take personal actions (Pew Research Center, 2021). Within the party, more young supporters of the Republican party are supporting complete phase-out or use of mixed energy sources as compared to Gen-X and boomers (Nadeem, 2021). On climate proposals, compared to a smaller share of Republicans, a large majority of Democrats support these climate proposals.

When it comes to trust in scientists and experts, there are great partisan divides between the Democrats and the Republicans. According to 2019 and 2020 Pew Research Surveys, the ratio of Democrats who believe in scientists increased while the ratio of Republicans remained stagnant (Funk et al., 2020). Around 65 percent of Democrats or Democrat learners as compared to 23 percent of Republican or Republican learners are very/somewhat confident that actions taken by the global community will reduce the climate change effect (Poushter et al., 2021).

To understand how Trump's support is interrelated with the pessimistic and skeptical views about non-traditional security threats following the few takeaways from Trump and his aide's speeches, public interviews of Trump supporters, and the views of his opponents.

Trump called the global warming and climate change that Obama is talking about a hoax (Trump, 2015). In state-to-state verity, Texas and Pennsylvania still have a large share in the production of oil and natural gas. A lot of people in these states, who are conservative and mainly Republican supporters, are associated with these oil and gas industries. Any regulation to limit the oil and gas industries would risk their jobs and Trump exploits this fear for his political gains. In a presidential debate Trump, while particularly addressing Texans and Pennsylvanians said, "He [Biden] wants to destroy the oil industry, will you remember Texas? Will you remember Pennsylvania?" (CNBC, 2020).

Simplifying Complexity: Trump's Populist Twist on Climate Change

A day after announcing his candidacy for GOP, Trump in an interview criticized Obama and said, "It's just madness to call climate change our No.1 problem" (News, 2015). Speaking to young conservatives in Palm Beach Florida, Trump criticized the windmills as ugly, noisy, destroying the beauty of farmland and a graveyard of birds. "I never understand wind. Windmills kill more birds than you have seen all your life. Whether the Windmills are being produced in China or Germany, they will eventually affect the environment all over the world." Later he called himself an environmentalist and claimed that environmentally American numbers are better than others (Guardian, 2019). He tried to connect the Chinese factor with renewable sources of energy in front of young conservatives. It shows how Trump tactically used his anti-China and anti-renewable resources narrative to exploit the young audience's views.

While observing Trump's climate agenda, another interesting fact that comes to the highlight is that it seems like for Trump environment conservation is limited to just clear crystal water and air. In two of his presidential debates, while speaking about climate change he connected a clean conserve environment with crystal clear water and clean air. Reasserting his claim that he knows more about the environment than most people, at a G7 news conference Trump said: "America is the number one energy producer, LNG and being sought after around the world, it's a wealth and I am not going to lose it on dreams, on windmills which aren't working too well" (C-SPAN, 2019).

Climate Change and Global Warming are complicated issues with complicated consequences. But the populists like Trump, posit the complicated issues as the simple ones providing simple and general solutions. It generates a "seductive clarity" providing a simple and general understanding of which reality is not the genuine understanding of the issue (Nguyen, 2022). This molds the people's views about a specific issue and attracts political and electoral support.

"Windmills got a lot of problems" Trump retreats his narrative in another presidential debate. Resembling the Republicans' general view of not believing the scientists and experts, Trump claimed that Scientists have political agendas and can be politically motivated. Moreover, he said he does not consider climate change a hoax but he believes that its impacts would not be long-lasting (Guardian News, 2018).

Coal Votes and Trump's Climate Skepticism: A Case of McDowell County

McDowell County in West Virginia is among the poorest counties in the US. Trump won more popular votes in Republican primaries than anywhere else in the US (CNN, n.d.-b). When one of the elderly residents was asked about what he thinks of Donald Trump. He hoped that Trump would win because Hillary would shut down coal mines and risk their jobs while Trump would reopen all the shutdown mines (Guardian, 2016). In his Charleston West Virginia speech, Trump stood among the Dig Coal slogans, cleverly using the perfect stage to take a selective passage of Hillary Clinton's speech and misquoting her saying she is going to put minors and mines out of business (FOX, 2016). In reality, she said, "she knew how to bring economic opportunities using clean renewable energy in coal country because we are gonna put all lot coal miners and coal companies out of business". Five days after that speech, Trump won more than 91 percent of votes in the Republican primaries which shows how successfully he exploited skeptical views about clean energy.

West Virginia's case study shows how successfully Trump utilized political rhetoric to exploit his opponent's views, which instilled fear and skepticism about climate change and related policies in a specific age and economic class resulting in the electoral victory for Trump. The rhetoric of political leaders, people's views, and election results manifest how the fears and skepticism regarding climate change and policies, political rhetoric, and election results are interrelated in an intricate way.

Conclusion

Donald Trump's election victory was a surprising turn of events for many political scientists and scholars. Trump - who was considered an outsider to US politics - came to the White House with a blow to many traditional narratives of American Politics. Trump's rise to power forced scholars and political scientists to study the underlying forces that brought him to power. On the other side, despite being called a nation of immigrants and a leading actor in climate negotiations, in the US, there exists a deep skepticism about climate change and immigration - particularly undocumented immigration. When studied carefully, it becomes evident that a similar group of people who support Trump's populist narrative were also the leading skeptics of the mentioned non-traditional security challenges.

This research found that Trump's populist support base usually has skeptical views of the mentioned non-traditional security threats. Those who have skeptical views of the mentioned non-traditional security threats have a general electoral and political inclination toward Trump. Both are vice-versa. Populists – Donald Trump in this case – use the public fears and skepticism of these security challenges to win, for example, in the cases of McDowell County of West Virginia and Robestown in Texas. This research draws a linkage between Donald Trump's pessimistic portrayal of non-traditional security challenges and his election victory. Moreover, it helps to understand the relationship between people's pessimist views of non-traditional security challenges and their support for Populists

Recommendations

Donald Trump is running in Republican primaries to win the Republican nomination for the 2024-25 presidential elections. In the first state primaries, he won a clear majority in Iowa state caucuses leaving behind the other Republican candidates. Polls conducted by different news outlets show that for a majority of Iowan Caucus-goers immigration was a very important issue despite sharing no direct international border.

Based on the findings provided in this research, it becomes an interesting unexplored area of study for future research to study how the election campaign of Trump is unfolding and what the election results of a particular state can be. Further, for policymakers, workings on non-traditional security, this research provides an interesting gateway to understanding how the political factors affect the people's response towards non-traditional security issues. The US being the leader of climate initiatives and a nation of immigrants can change the global dynamics with its decisions regarding both issues. That's why the global community and policymakers can get a sense and prepare for the consequences if Trump comes to office again in 2025, keeping in mind his previous stance on these issues explained in this research.

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