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## Immigration Threat Amplifiers and Whites' Immigration Attitudes in the Age of Trump

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### Abstract

*The US public's immigration attitudes have become more favourable in recent years, yet the Trump administration (2017-2021) was the most restrictionist on immigration of any modern US presidency. What key sociopolitical factors were associated with holding more exclusionary immigration attitudes and policy preferences among US whites, the ethnoracial group most likely to support Trump, at the beginning of his administration? Analyses of two waves of nationally representative US panel survey data for whites demonstrate that voting for Trump, consuming conservative news, being evangelical, and having a stronger white racial identity were linked with more exclusionary abstract immigration attitudes and/or support for one more Trump-era policies: the US-Mexico wall, the Travel Ban targeting majority-Muslim countries, and deportations of unauthorised immigrants. Together, our results emphasise the value of attending to multiple aspects of the national sociopolitical context, considering diverse potential sources that amplify immigration threat, and jointly examining abstract immigration attitudes and specific policy preferences of varying salience.*

**Keywords:** *Immigration Attitudes; Immigration Policies; Group Threat Theory; USA*

## Immigration Threat Amplifiers and Whites' Immigration Attitudes in the Age of Trump

The US public has shifted to more favourable immigration attitudes and policy preferences in recent decades. For example, in 2019, 66 per cent of US adults agreed that immigrants' contributions make the country stronger rather than as a burden, a sharp increase from the 31 per cent agreeing with this sentiment in 1994 (Budiman 2020). Although general immigration attitudes have become more favourable, there are sharp differences by political partisanship and religious affiliation (e.g., Baker and Bader, 2022; Budiman, 2020; Leon McDaniel et al., 2011; Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt, 2018). These differences became more polarised during the Trump administration (2017-2021). This administration prioritised building the wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, limiting immigration from Muslim-majority countries, and increasing deportations of undocumented immigrants (White House, 2019); actions with substantial negative social and financial consequences (Collingwood et al., 2018; Nowrasteh, 2019; Yoshikawa et al., 2017). Such priorities are not surprising, given that whites with more xenophobic views strongly supported Trump's election (e.g., Baker and Bader, 2022; Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018; Whitehead, Perry, et al., 2020). Nevertheless, Trump's

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efforts to restrict authorised and unauthorised migration yielded the most restrictionist immigration agenda of any modern US president (Pierce et al., 2017; also see Martin, 2020).<sup>3</sup> Given Trump's immigration agenda, its origins, and its implications, a rapidly growing body of scholarship has concentrated on immigration policymaking and immigration attitudes in the Trump Era (e.g., McConnell, 2022; Baker and Bader, 2022; Casellas et al., 2018; Hochschild, 2018; Hooghe and Dassonneville, 2018; Jardina, 2019; Saldaña et al., 2018; Wong 2018a, 2018b).

Group threat, a prominent theoretical framework in migration scholarship, explains what happens when members of a dominant group view minority group members as threats to their dominance over resources (e.g., Blalock, 1967; Blumer, 1958; Bobo, 1983; Sides and Citrin, 2007). As these threats are racialised, the dominant group—whites—engages in discriminatory practices intended to protect their status against racial minorities (Blalock, 1967). A second perspective, integrated threat theory, holds that threat perceptions can be symbolic, arising when in-group members perceive differences between themselves and out-group members in terms of morals, standards, beliefs, and attitudes (Stephan and Renfro, 2002; Stephan et al., 2005). Symbolic perceptions are closely tied to in-group members' sense of identity and may lead to prejudice towards out-group members, even if a realistic threat does not exist. These “false alarms” may still have real consequences, resulting in hostile expressions towards out-group members (Stephan and Renfro, 2002). Similarly, “situational triggers” such as migrant caravans or a refugee crisis can make anti-immigrant sentiments more salient and galvanise those who hold negative views (Kustav, Laaker, and Reller 2020).

Informed by these theoretical perspectives and recent scholarship, this study focuses on the immigration attitudes and policy preferences of US non-Hispanic whites, hereafter whites, immediately before and during the Trump administration.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on two waves of a nationally representative, dataset, the American Trends Panel (ATP), collected in November–December 2016 and February–March 2017, multivariate analyses jointly consider whether four sociopolitical factors in 2016 independently activated whites' perceptions of immigration threat, albeit “real” or symbolic, leading to more exclusionary immigration views and policy preferences. These factors are voting for Trump in 2016, exposure to conservative news, being evangelical, and the importance of whites' own racial identity. The four immigration attitudes examined were of varying salience during the period: holding the view that immigrants burden the country (rather than strengthen it), support for building the wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, favouring a national effort to deport unauthorised immigrants, and agreeing with the Travel Ban excluding migration from Muslim-majority countries. As the first multivariate analysis to use multi-wave US data to explicitly and simultaneously examine the relationship between these four sociopolitical factors, abstract immigration attitudes, and specific policy preferences in 2016–2017, our results provide insights for future scholarship regarding diverse influences on immigration attitudes in multiple national contexts.

### ***Voting for Trump***

Although US immigration attitudes scholarship has concentrated on political ideology or partisanship as key sociopolitical factors (e.g., Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010; Hopkins, 2010),

<sup>3</sup> Ironically, other work suggests that Trump's immigration rhetoric and agenda led sub-federal governments to enact more pro-immigrant immigration policies and provide a more positive climate for immigrants (Pham and Van, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Scientists and social scientists emphasize that races are socially constructed categories that are not based in biological differences.



voting for Trump, not simply identifying as Republican versus Democrat, is relevant for immigration attitudes.<sup>5</sup> Trump invoked virulently nativist and xenophobic metaphors about Mexican immigrants and routinely used racialised tropes and dog whistles (e.g., Gantt Shafer, 2017; Haney Lopez, 2015; Martin, 2017; Santa Ana, 2017; Saldaña et al., 2018) before and after the election. Studies suggest that Trump's communications were effective in hardening immigration attitudes among whites in the short term (e.g., Flores, 2018) and whites are the most likely to have supported Trump as president and to favour more restrictionist immigration policies (Collingwood et al., 2018; Suls, 2017).

Some immigration topics were more salient during Trump's administration than others. For instance, Trump's campaign platform, communications, and agenda dedicated extensive attention to the wall and less attention to other targets (e.g., Collingwood et al., 2018; McConnell, 2022; Pierce and Selee, 2017; White House, 2017a, 2017b).<sup>6</sup> Indeed, one of Trump's first acts as President was signing an executive order to build a fortified wall along the U.S.-Mexico border (White House, 2017a) despite evidence that Mexican migration is down dramatically (Sieff, 2019). Another executive order, the Travel Ban, banned migrants from certain Muslim-majority countries from entering the country using language identifying them as potential terrorists (White House, 2017b).<sup>7</sup> Although less of a focus in early 2017 relative to the wall, Trump also targeted people without criminal convictions for deportation (Pierce and Selee, 2017). Public opinion at the time varied regarding support for these policies.<sup>8</sup> Consistent with previous literature and specific to the first two months of the Trump administration (the time frame of our study), we expect that white Trump voters were more likely to support anti-immigrant policies than non-Trump voters, especially building the wall, the most prominent component of Trump's immigration agenda, controlling for political partisanship and other respondent characteristics.

### ***Conservative News Sources***

Elite discourse in the media shapes immigration attitudes (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). Most US media discourses about immigration are negative (e.g., Abrajano and Hajnal, 2015) and anti-immigrant messages circulated via the news media, irrespective of who makes them, are more impactful than positive immigration frames (Alamillo et al., 2018; Flores, 2018). US right-leaning media outlets employ negative frames about immigration topics more generally than left-leaning ones (Alamillo et al., 2018). Conservative news sources, including the most watched US channel, Fox News, use racialised messaging to favourably represent Trump's immigration views and policies (e.g., Gantt Shafer, 2017; Gertz, 2018; Johnson, 2017; Mayer, 2019). An example is a Fox News personality describing the Travel Ban as a way "to keep America safe."<sup>9</sup> Previous research suggests that people who frequently get news from

<sup>5</sup> Recent studies indicate that whites with more anti-immigrants views and/or higher levels of xenophobia were more likely to support Trump in the 2016 election (e.g., Baker and Bader, 2022; Hooghe and Dassonneville, 2018; Whitehead et al., 2018).

<sup>6</sup> For example, an analysis of Trump's recorded speeches in 2015-2016 reveal that Trump mentioned the wall 947 times and deportations only 168 times ( $\chi^2 = 5.422, p = .02$ ) (McConnell, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> The search term of "Muslim" on <http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/archive> indicates Trump references to the Muslim Brotherhood, existential threats to Christianity, and consequences of Muslim migration to the U.S. going back to 2011. Anti-Muslim sentiments was a predictor of voting for Trump (Lajevardi and Abrajano, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Interpretation based on <https://www.pollingreport.com/immigration.htm> compilation of U.S. polls, such as the CNN/ORC Poll of March 1-4, 2017, and Quinnipiac University Poll of 2/16-21/17. Although public opinion favored the Travel Ban in the time leading up to the signing of the order, support for the Muslim ban declined sharply in the months afterwards because of changing "information" environment that highlighted the ban as un-American (Collingwood et al. 2017).

<sup>9</sup> [https://video.foxnews.com/v/5300746295001/?playlist\\_id=930909813001#sp=show-clips](https://video.foxnews.com/v/5300746295001/?playlist_id=930909813001#sp=show-clips)

conservative outlets have more negative abstract immigration attitudes and express less support for Mexican immigrants than infrequent consumers of those outlets (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Saldaña et al., 2018).<sup>10</sup> In line with this work, the current analyses are expected to show that consumers of conservative news report more exclusionary immigration policy preferences, especially about the more politically salient topics (i.e. the wall) than less salient topics or abstract views.

### ***Evangelicalism***

Religion plays an important role in contemporary US politics, and evangelicalism has long been associated with anti-immigration views (e.g., Wong, 2018a). White evangelical Christians increasingly align with the Republican Party (Margolis, 2019) and interpret their support for the GOP and its leaders as a “critical expression of religious identity and conviction” (Wong, 2018a: 97). White evangelicals overwhelmingly supported Trump in the 2016 election and his administration’s priorities (e.g., Martínez and Smith, 2016a, 2016b; Schwadel and Smith, 2019).<sup>11</sup> Other groups of religiously affiliated whites, such as Catholics, are a large segment of the US electorate who similarly hold conservative political views; and most voted for Trump in 2016 (Martínez and Smith, 2016b). Although there is some overlap between white evangelicals and Catholics, white Catholics also report more progressive views, such as allowing unauthorised immigrants a chance to naturalise (Jones et al., 2016). This divergence might reflect, in part, the pro-immigrant public statements of Pope Francis, the leader of the Catholic Church, and prominent Catholic organisations’ sharp criticism of Trump’s immigration agenda (e.g., US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2017; Vatican, 2014).

Other than a few key studies (Collingwood et al., 2018; Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt, 2018; Saldaña et al., 2018), we know of no recent work that has directly investigated the relationship between specific religious affiliations and the diverse immigration policies that the present analysis explores. Regarding specific hypotheses, given white evangelicals’ traditionally restrictionist immigration views (e.g., Jones et al., 2016; Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt, 2018; Wong, 2018a, 2018b), we expect they are more likely to express exclusionary abstract attitudes than other religious groups. Moreover, we expect that evangelicals are more likely to support two of Trump’s policy options, the wall, and the Travel Ban, than non-evangelicals. Indeed, prominent white evangelical leaders in the US advocated for Trump’s priority of building the wall, typically framing it as a national security issue (Mooney, 2019).<sup>12</sup> Second, evangelicals have long perceived Muslims as a threat to Christianity and to the United States (Cimino, 2005) and have recently reported that Muslim immigration to the US is too high or should be stopped (Jones et al., 2016).

### ***Whites’ Racial Identities***

Consistent with group threat and integrated group theories, extensive research shows that whites hold more negative views about immigrants in general and are more likely to support

<sup>10</sup> Saldaña and colleagues’ (2018) operationalization of abstract immigration attitudes tap into views about whether immigrants threaten traditional American customs and values and if all immigrants should be welcomed.

<sup>11</sup> This support may be due to adherence to Christian nationalism, the belief that America has a divinely inspired mission (McDaniel et al., 2011; Whitehead et al., 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Prominent leaders, such as Dallas, TX pastor Robert Jeffress, have publicly supported the construction of the wall since before the 2016 election (Allen, 2016). Facebook posts by the Faith & Freedom Coalition, a conservative religious advocacy organization founded by the evangelical Christian, Ralph Reed, frame it as a border security issue: “If we want to protect families, we must protect our borders.” (<https://www.facebook.com/ffcoalition/photos/a.10150102409871705/10156427632186705/?type=3>).



exclusionary immigration policies than other groups (e.g., Bobo and Hutchings, 1996; Collingwood, et al., 2018; Jardina, 2019; Quillian, 1995; Suls, 2017; Valentino et al., 2013). For decades, whites' racial identity has appeared to be unassociated with political attitudes in the United States (e.g., Citrin and Sears, 2014; Wong and Cho, 2005). However, whites' subjective views about their own racial identity have become increasingly politically salient, following relatively high levels of Latin American and Asian immigration to the US since the 1970s and 1980s, projected changes in racial/ethnic demographics, President Obama's election in 2008, and the adoption of more anti-immigrant sentiments and policy preferences (e.g., Abrajano and Hajnal, 2015; Jardina, 2019; Wong, 2018a, 2018b). An analysis of recent cross-sectional survey data suggests that whites whose racial identity is salient are more likely to believe that immigration has negative national impacts and to support building a wall than those with weaker racial identifications (Jardina, 2019). Using a more multi-dimensional set of sociopolitical indicators than prior work and exploiting multi-wave survey data, we expect that whites with stronger racial identities perceive more immigration threat than those for whom their racial identities are less important, leading them to report more negative abstract immigration attitudes, and to support Trump's immigration priorities regarding the wall, increasing deportations, and Travel ban, controlling for other characteristics.

## Methods

The multivariate analyses draw on two waves of Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel, a probability-based national longitudinal survey of non-institutionalised US adults over 18 years old (Abt SRBI et al., 2016).<sup>13</sup> ATP's Wave 23 was collected between Nov 29- Dec 12, 2016 and is the primary source of independent variables in the analyses (Abt SRBI et al., 2016). A later wave collected between Feb 28-March 12, 2017 (Wave 24.5), is the source of the four dependent variables (Abt SRBI et al., 2017).<sup>14</sup> ATP Waves 23 and 24.5 data were merged, and the analytic sample was further reduced to respondents identifying as non-Hispanic white, US citizens in Wave 23 and who completed both waves, for a final sample of 2,730 respondents.<sup>15</sup>

The first dependent variable from Wave 24.5 ATP data is a commonly used indicator of general immigration attitudes (e.g., Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010; Saldaña et al., 2018). Three other dependent variables represent support for the wall, a national deportation effort targeting unauthorised immigrants, and the Travel Ban. The first focal independent variable from Wave 23 is whether the respondent voted for Trump in the 2016 presidential election. The variable about news outlets captures whether respondents regularly obtained information about the presidential campaigns and candidates from any of sixteen specific outlets.<sup>16</sup> Following Pew's categorisation of the ideological position of news sources' audiences

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<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, these specific waves of Pew's ATP data provided U.S. born African American, Latinx/Hispanic, and Asian samples that were too small to be included in the analyses.

<sup>14</sup> Wave 24.5 is a special mode study designed in part to determine whether survey mode (phone or online survey) affects opinions about President Trump. As Pew Research Center's analyses indicate that survey mode had small effects on respondents' immigration attitudes (Kennedy et al., 2017), the analyses include a control variable for Wave 24.5 survey mode, not reported in these results.

<sup>15</sup> More than 99 percent of white respondents in Waves 23 and 24.5 were U.S. citizens.

<sup>16</sup> These data offer a more comprehensive accounting of the range of news sources that respondents might use than previous research (e.g., Saldaña et al., 2018).



(Mitchell et al., 2014), most of these outlets were coded as conservative or liberal.<sup>17</sup> Following Wong (2018a, 2018b), an item about being evangelical or born again is used to differentiate evangelical from non-evangelical respondents; that and responses to a question about present religion are used to create four binary categories of religious affiliation. The final focal variable is about the perceived importance of whites' racial background to their identity.<sup>18</sup> The ordinal response categories to this indicator in the ATP, from not at all to very important, are identical to other survey-based analyses (Jardina, 2019: Table 3.2).

Respondent characteristics previously identified as shaping immigration attitudes are controlled in the analyses, including age, education, income, marital status, political affiliation, and geographic context (e.g., Abrajano and Hajnal, 2015; Casellas et al., 2018; Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007; Hainmuller and Hopkins, 2014; Saldaña et al., 2018).<sup>19</sup> One such indicator is that the respondent identifies as Republican/Republican leaning in Wave 23. The respondent's US census region of residence offers a macro-level indicator of larger racial/ethnic/immigrant/political context.<sup>20</sup> As immigration attitudes tend to be consistent over time (e.g. Kustov et al., 2019) and to address some of the endogeneity in the key focal variables, the analyses control for a count variable of Wave 23 opinions reflecting an exclusionary orientation vis-à-vis immigration (see Table 1), similar to previous operationalisations (Schildkraut and Marotta, 2018).<sup>21</sup> Table 1 provides more information about variables used in the study. Table 2 provides the unweighted means and standard deviations for the final sample of white US citizens from non-imputed data.

**Table 1.** Description of Variables

<b>Focal Independent Variables in Wave 23</b>	
Trump voter	Voted for Trump in the 2016 election =1, those who voted for other candidates or who didn't vote= 0.
Conservative News Sources	Regular source of news about the presidential campaigns and candidates leading up to the November 2016 presidential election was one or more of the following outlets with a consistently conservative audience: Rush Limbaugh radio show, Sean Hannity radio show, Breitbart website, Drudge report website, Fox News Cable Channel.
Liberal News Sources	Regular source of news about the presidential campaigns and candidates leading up to the November 2016 presidential election was one or more of the following outlets with a consistently liberal audience: National Public Radio, <i>Washington Post</i> , <i>New York Times</i> , Huffington Post website, BuzzFeed website, CNN, and MSNBC.

<sup>17</sup> The Rush Limbaugh radio show, Sean Hannity radio show, Drudge Report website, Breitbart News website, and Fox News Cable Channel are categorized as conservative news sources. National Public Radio, The Washington Post, The New York Times, Huffington Post website, BuzzFeed website, CNN, and MSNBC are categorized as liberal news sources. Mitchell and colleagues (2014) identify the *Wall Street Journal*, Yahoo News, Google News, and *USA Today* as having audiences that are more balanced between conservatives and liberals; these outlets were excluded from the analyses. This operationalization draws on Waves 23 data about news sources "regularly get news from." The majority (69.6 percent) of Non-Hispanic white respondents in Wave 24.5 follow the news "all or most" of the time, suggesting that the respondents reporting using conservative and liberal news sources in Wave 23 could be consuming quite a bit of information from these sources. The two variables are negatively moderately correlated ( $r = -0.2087$ ).

<sup>18</sup> Previous analyses of survey data relying on a single measure find that this item is a valid and stable measure that likely offers a "conservative test" of the associations between their racial identity and attitudes (Jardina, 2019: 59).

<sup>19</sup> To maintain respondent confidentiality, ATP data released to the public aggregates continuous responses to some survey questions into larger categories, including respondent age, education, and income data. Identical analyses using a Wave 23 indicator for self-identified conservatism (1-5, 5=very conservative) instead of identifying as Republican leaning in Wave 23 suggests that conservatism is a less robust predictor of these immigration views than being Republican.

<sup>20</sup> Although controlling for more detailed geographic context would be preferable (e.g., Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014; Quillian, 1995), regional variables do offer some control for respondents' larger spatial context.

<sup>21</sup> Measures of internal consistency for this scale is  $\alpha = 0.737$ .



**Table 1.** *Continued...*

Religion	
Evangelical Christian	Identifies as born again or evangelical Christian
Protestant	Present religion is Protestant, not born-again or evangelical Christian
Catholic	Present religion is Roman Catholic/Catholic, not born-again or evangelical Christian
Other/no religion	Present religion is Other (e.g., Mormon, Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu) or no religion (atheist, agnostic, something else) and not born-again or evangelical Christian
Importance of racial identity	Respondent's racial background is important to "how you think about yourself". Values range from 0-5; 0= not at all important and 5= extremely important.
<b>Control Variables in Wave 23</b>	
Age	Age categories calculated from date of birth: Age 18-29, 30-40, 50-64, 65 and over (65 and over as reference)
Education	Categories of highest level of school completed: High school graduate or less, some college, college graduate or more (high school as reference)
Female	Respondent sex. 1=female, 0=male.
US region	US region of residence: Northeast, Midwest, South, West (Use South as reference)
Married or cohabitating	Marital status. 1= married or living with partner, 0=other.
Income	Total family income from all sources, before taxes, for previous year: Less than \$10,000, \$10,000-19,999, \$20,000-29,999, \$30,000-39,999, \$40,000-49,999, \$50,000-74,999; \$75,000-99,999; \$100,000-149,999; \$150,000 or more.
Exclusionary immigration views	Count variable based on 8 variables where each is recoded into binary categories where 1= more exclusionary views, 0=other. Value of the count variable ranges from 0-8. Responses that increasing deportations of immigrants currently in the country illegally; preventing immigrants currently in the country illegally from receiving any government benefits they do not qualify for; establishing stricter policies to prevent people who enter the country legally from overstaying their visas and remaining in the US illegally; building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border are "somewhat important goal" or "very important goal" are coded as 1. Responses that taking in civilian refugees from countries where people are trying to escape violence and war; encouraging more highly skilled immigrants to immigrate; establishing a way for most immigrants currently in the country illegally to stay here legally, and allowing immigrants who came to the country illegally as children to remain and apply for legal status are "not too important goal or not at all important goal" are each coded as 1.
Republican	Republican or Republican-leaning independent=1, Democrat/Democrat leaning=0.
<b>Control Variable in Wave 24.5</b>	
Web mode	Wave 24.5 administered online=1, via phone=0.
<b>Dependent Variables in Wave 24.5</b>	
Immigrants burden country	Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs, housing, and health care (=1). Immigrants today strengthen our country because of their hard work and talents or Neither (=0).
Support National Deportation Effort	Do you think there should be a national law enforcement effort to deport all immigrants who are now living in the US illegally (=1); Should not be national law enforcement effort to deport (=0).
Favor the wall	All in all, would you favor or oppose building a wall along the entire border with Mexico? Favor wall =1, oppose=0
Approve Travel Ban	Donald Trump recently issued an executive order that would temporarily prevent people from entering the US from a number of majority-Muslim countries. Do you approve or disapprove. Approve=1, 0 Disapprove.

**Table 2.** Unweighted Descriptives of Wave 23 and Wave 24.5 Variables

	Percent or Mean (SD)
<b>Focal Independent Variables in Wave 23</b>	
Trump voter (%)	40.8
Conservative news sources (%)	44.0
Liberal news sources (%)	68.8
Religion (%)	
Evangelical Christian	25.7
Protestant	20.3
Catholic	16.5
Other/no religion	37.3
Mean importance of white racial identity	2.283 (1.160)
<b>Controls in Wave 23</b>	
Age (%)	
18 - 29	9.1
30 - 49	25.5
50 - 64	32.5
65 and over	32.9
Education (%)	
High school graduate or less	12.9
Some college	29.6
College graduate or more	57.5
Female (%)	50.0
US region (%)	
Northeast	18.8
Midwest	24.0
South	32.8
West	24.4
Married/cohabitating (%)	68.2
Mean Income category	6.040 (2.248)
Mean exclusionary immigration views	3.795 (2.379)
Republican (%)	49.1
<b>Dependent Variables in Wave 24.5</b>	
Immigrants burden country	28.8
Favor the wall	42.0
Approve Travel Ban	48.5
Support National Deportation Effort	32.6
N	2,730

*Source:* American Trends Panel. Authors' analyses of non-imputed data with White U.S. citizen sample. Note: 54.9 percent of the sample took the web mode version of the survey.

### **Analytic Plan**

Using merged Wave 23 and 24.5 data, logistic regression analyses regress the four binary dependent variables on the focal independent variables and controls. All multivariate analyses rely on imputed data. Stata 14's multiple imputations for chained equations algorithm is used to address missing data for variables in the analytic models with any missing data ( $m=25$  imputed data sets).<sup>22</sup> As respondents from Wave 23 are followed over time, the multivariate analyses use weights provided in the Wave 23 ATP data created to address differential probabilities of selection into the ATP and non-response (Abt SRBI et al., 2016). Diagnostics

<sup>22</sup> The variables with most missing data are immigrants burden country and approval for the Travel Ban, with both having less than 1.6% missing. Multiple imputation can provide unbiased estimates at any proportion of missing data (Madley-Dowd et al., 2019).





indicate a mean Variance Inflation Factor for the models below 1.59, suggesting that multicollinearity is not affecting the results.

**Multivariate Results**

Table 3 shows the partial results of the four specifications with the US white sample, controlling for the full set of covariates. The first specification supports with our hypotheses for two of the four focal variables. For instance, as expected, evangelicals had the most negative general immigration attitudes. Catholics and those of other/no religion were less likely than evangelicals to view immigrants as a burden on the country (Odds ratios of 0.588 at the .10 level of significance and 0.572, Model 1). Moreover, respondents for whom their white racial identity was more important were significantly more likely to see immigrants as a burden on the country than those whose racial identity was less important (Odds ratios of 1.346). However, contrary to expectations, neither voting for Trump nor consuming conservative news sources independently predicted this abstract attitude, controlling for being Republican, previously expressed exclusionary immigration attitudes, and the full set of variables.

**Table 3.** Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression Models Predicting Exclusionary Immigration Attitudes and Policy Preferences

Variable	Model 1 Immigrants Burden the Country		Model 2 Favor the wall		Model 3 Support National Deportation Effort		Model 4 Approve Travel Ban	
	Odds Ratios	SE	Odds Ratio	SE	Odds Ratio	SE	Odds Ratio	SE
Trump voter	1.391	0.370	5.129***	1.631	1.496	0.391	8.366***	2.709
Conservative News	1.278	0.313	2.773***	0.693	0.982	0.235	3.031***	0.860
Liberal News	0.897	0.189	1.569†	0.429	1.606*	0.339	1.010	0.318
<b>Religion</b>								
Evangelical	---		---		---		---	
Catholic	0.588†	0.144	0.559†	0.197	0.764	0.228	0.811	0.370
Other Protestant	0.773	0.197	1.054	0.322	1.254	0.343	1.017	0.406
Other/none	0.572*	0.147	0.731	0.231	0.727	0.195	0.817	0.311
Importance of racial identity	1.346***	0.113	1.010	0.102	1.185*	0.090	0.906	0.109
Constant	0.039***	0.024	0.023***	0.015	0.009***	0.005	0.073***	0.053

†p < .10. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001 Note: Specifications also include variables for age, education, female, married/cohabitating, U.S. region, income, Republican, previously expressed, exclusionary attitudes and Wave 24.5 survey mode.

The results for the other three immigration attitudes also supported our hypotheses, with some variation. Taken together, each of the four focal variables independently and significantly increased support among whites for one or more of Trump’s immigration priorities in early 2017 (Table 3). There is most consistent evidence regarding views about building the wall, the most salient immigration policy option at the time. For example, Trump voters had 5.1 times higher odds of favouring the wall than non-Trump voters; those consuming conservative news sources were 2.8 times more likely to favour it than those who did not; and Catholics had about half the odds of evangelicals (at the .10 level) of favouring the wall, all else equal (Odds Ratios of 5.129, 2.773, and 0.559, respectively, Model 2). Similarly, for every 1 unit increase in the strength with which respondents identified with a white racial identity, there was a 19% increase in the odds of supporting a national deportation effort than those with weaker racial identities (Odds ratio of 1.185, Model 3). Controlling for such variables, neither voting for Trump, exposure to conservative news, nor religious affiliation had independent effects on views about deportations (Model 3). Turning to support

for the Travel Ban, white Trump voters and those consuming conservative news sources have higher odds of supporting the Ban than whites without these characteristics (Odds ratios of 8.366 and 3.031, respectively, Model 4). Neither evangelicalism nor the importance of racial identity independently predict approval of the Travel Ban, net of controls. Finally, the analyses reveal an unexpected finding, that whites consuming *liberal* news outlets were between 57 and 61 percent higher odds of favoring the wall and supporting deportations (Odds ratios of 1.569 and 1.606, respectively).<sup>23</sup>

## Discussion

This study employs nationally representative multi-wave data collected immediately after the 2016 US Presidential election to focus on US whites' views about immigrants in general and three specific and timely policies at the beginning of the Trump administration. Each of the focal variables predicts two or more of the four attitudinal outcomes, net of other characteristics.

Indeed, consistent with the group threat and integrated threat perspectives and in line with our hypotheses about these sociopolitical factors, being a Trump voter, consuming conservative news, identifying as evangelical, and attributing more importance to a white racial identity amplified perceptions of immigration threat early in his term, as measured via more negative abstract attitudes and/or support for Trump's exclusionary immigration agenda.

More research about US immigration attitudes is needed. For example, additional analyses that directly explore the influence of mainstream media outlets' framing of immigration themes (a la Haynes, Merolla, and Ramakrishnan 2016) and the dynamics of the information environment and political communication in shifting public opinion (e.g., Collingwood et al., 2018; Oskoi et al., 2021) would be useful. Analyses of a wider range of specific immigration views such as about family separations at the U.S.-Mexico border or restrictions on asylum seekers—two issues receiving extensive national attention since 2017—would help us understand more about how sociopolitical factors shape contemporary US exclusionary immigration preferences. Studies with large samples of racially diverse respondents are critical for understanding whether these sociopolitical factors amplify immigration threat among people of colour. Finally, studies with longer-term panel data could help further understand immigration attitudes over the Obama, Trump, and Biden presidential administrations.

These results offer three points for immigration scholars in the United States and other national contexts to consider. *The first* is the value of simultaneously attending to diverse aspects of the national landscape (e.g., mainstream media outlets, religious affiliation, and shifts in whites' racial identity) to situate immigration attitudes and preferences, particularly during policy-active moments such as the Trump administration (Pierce et al., 2017). As an example, our results indicate that consuming conservative *and* liberal news sources in 2016 increased whites' support for the wall, consuming conservative media increased approval of the Travel Ban, and consuming more liberal sources increased support for the national deportation effort. Scholarship in other national contexts may similarly reveal that mainstream

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<sup>23</sup> Table 3 shows that consuming liberal news sources *increases* support for the wall and for a national deportation effort at the .10 or .05 levels of statistical significance (Models 2 and 3) but has no independent effect on the other two outcomes (Models 1 and 4). Previous research finds that even left-leaning outlets devote extensive coverage to immigration, with often negative themes such as crime, drugs, and rape (Abrajano and Hajnal, 2015; Flores, 2018), which could heighten some anti-immigration views among whites.



news sources along the ideological spectrum operate as threat amplifiers shaping public opinion about immigration. *Second*, this study underscores the value of investigating if, how, and under what conditions overtly xenophobic and populist leaders such as Trump affect immigration attitudes. We find that voting for Trump in 2016 had an outsized independent effect on favouring the wall and approving of the Travel Ban in 2017, controlling for many other characteristics, but was unassociated with supporting a national deportation effort or believing that immigrants burden the country. As populism is on the rise around the globe (Algan, Guriev et al., 2017; Fraser 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2017; Kenny 2017; Stefancik, Némethová, and Seresova, 2021), understanding authoritarian leaders' influence on public opinion and policymaking, and the length and impact of those effects is essential. *Third*, we see the need for additional quantitative studies that simultaneously examine the determinants of abstract immigration attitudes and specific immigration policies. As this study shows, the sociopolitical factors associated with support for exclusionary immigration policies can vary. As migration remains a top perceived threat among citizens in Africa, Europe, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Koca, 2019; Davidov et al., 2020), more studies of the varied sociopolitical factors that inform immigration attitudes and policy preferences around the world are necessary.

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## APPENDIX

**Table A.1** Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression Models Predicting Exclusionary Immigration Policy Attitudes

	Immigrants Burden the Country		Favor the wall		Support National Deportation Effort		Approve Travel Ban	
	Odds Ratios	SE	Odds Ratio	SE	Odds Ratio	SE	Odds Ratio	SE
<i>Focal Variables</i>								
Trump voter	1.391	0.370	5.129***	1.631	1.496	0.391	8.366***	2.709
Conservative News	1.278	0.313	2.773***	0.693	0.982	0.235	3.031***	0.860
Liberal News	0.897	0.189	1.569†	0.429	1.606*	0.339	1.010	0.318
Religion (Evangelical is ref.)								
Catholic	0.588†	0.144	0.559†	0.197	0.764	0.228	0.811	0.370
Non-Evangelical Prot.	0.773	0.197	1.054	0.322	1.254	0.343	1.017	0.406
Other/none	0.572*	0.147	0.731	0.231	0.727	0.195	0.817	0.311
Importance of racial identity	1.346***	0.113	1.010	0.102	1.185*	0.090	0.906	0.109
<i>Control Variables</i>								
Age								
18 – 29	1.258	0.421	0.670	0.259	2.132*	0.712	0.506	0.240
30 – 49	1.712*	0.427	0.973	0.315	2.566***	0.668	1.244	0.459
50 – 64	1.477	0.406	1.177	0.384	0.841	0.230	1.081	0.451
Education								
Some college	0.679	0.170	0.634	0.203	0.647†	0.169	0.530†	0.190
College grad.	0.406**	0.103	0.321***	0.105	0.429***	0.108	0.456*	0.175
Female	0.950	0.177	0.671†	0.148	1.093	0.204	0.774	0.193
US region								
Northeast	0.845	0.219	0.930	0.289	0.933	0.248	0.554	0.204
Midwest	0.659†	0.165	0.443**	0.132	0.867	0.213	0.440*	0.158
West	0.518*	0.135	0.856	0.257	0.964	0.259	0.405**	0.136
Married/cohab.	1.215	0.269	1.096	0.309	1.351	0.291	0.980	0.279
Income	0.894*	0.040	0.934	0.052	0.918*	0.042	0.986	0.066
Exclusionary imm. attitudes	1.594***	0.092	1.943***	0.137	2.004***	0.118	1.836***	0.149
Republican	2.526***	0.741	4.761***	1.535	1.698*	0.459	8.246***	2.692
Constant	0.039***	0.024	0.023***	0.015	0.009***	0.005	0.073***	0.053

