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# **Immigrants or Elites? : Contextualizing the Motivation of the Rural American Vote in the Trump Era.**

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## **Abstract**

The rural American vote was central to Donald Trump's presidential victory in 2016. In an attempt to unpack the strongest motivators for rural Americans who voted for Trump, analyses explored the importance of anti-immigrant and anti-elite sentiment using a subset of rural participants in the 2016 American National Elections Study. Through a combination of quantitative data work, qualitative case studies and an extensive literature review, it was found that both anti-immigrant and anti-elite sentiments are indicators of a vote for Trump. However, the research and analyses suggest anti-immigrant sentiment is a stronger indicator.

## **Introduction**

As the United States entered the 2016 presidential election, there was a palpable uneasiness among the American people; an undertone of rebellion that was about to come to the surface. Prior to the 2016 election, “Americans were said to be angry, anxious [and] fearful. ‘They were said to be poised for a major reset’” (Sides, Tesler and Vavreck 2018, 12). On November 8, 2016, the final electoral votes came in with Donald Trump winning the presidency, to the surprise of many Americans. This outcome was fueled by narrow victories in the states of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan which ultimately proved to be the difference in electoral votes for the two primary candidates. Another state that received a lot of attention was Minnesota, a historically very blue state, with Democratic candidates tending to win by large margins, that almost went red for the first time in over three decades. Outside of the South, white rural places have always been rather Republican. However, the 2016 election saw these rural places going even further to the right (McKee, 2018). This was particularly true in the Upper Midwest states.

Two of the biggest themes of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign were his stance on immigration and his appeal to the common, blue collar individual. Many political commentators concluded that Trump’s strong anti-immigrant and/or anti-elite sentiment motivated his strong showing in rural areas. Now, even in his third year in office, the Trump Administration continues to focus on the topic of immigration above most other issues. This, combined with consistently low approval ratings, creates a question as to whether or not Trump is actually following through with what the voters wanted. Perhaps the heart of his base, rural voters, were rather uninformed about who exactly they were voting for which would explain higher levels of dissatisfaction today. In their timely book, *Identity Crisis*, Sides, Tesler and Vavreck also note that, “views of

racial inequality, Muslims and immigration, as well as more politicized white identity, not only were strongly related to whether Americans voted for Clinton or Trump but were also more strongly related to how people voted in 2016 than in other recent presidential elections” (2018, 156). My research question then asks, was the sentiment in rural America during the 2016 presidential election more strongly about being anti-immigrant or anti-elite? I hypothesize that while both factors came into play, voting behavior in rural America was more strongly correlated with pushing back at the establishment of Washington and the political elite class than it was about opposing immigrants.

### **Plan of the Paper**

I will begin with two case studies on the states of Wisconsin and Pennsylvania in order to demonstrate the shift that happened among rural voters in 2016. After that, I will outline the scholarly literature surrounding public views towards immigrants, elites in Washington as well as how these ideas specifically correlate with identity and perception among people who live in rural communities. Through these connections, it is clear that the literature varies in conclusions as to which factor, anti-immigrant or anti-elite, is more prominent in influencing voting behavior. Upon assessing the literature I will then present my own quantitative research as well as the results that I gathered. This was done through logistic regressions using 2016 American National Election Studies (ANES) data which allows for a pool of rural respondents and contains variables addressing both anti-immigrant and anti-elite sentiment. As presented in the discussion section, the results are interesting, showing anti-immigrant attitudes being a stronger indicator of a Trump vote, but they also leave a lot of room for further research, which is where this paper concludes.

### **A Closer Look at Two States**

In order to create a foundation for this research, the 2016 elections in the states of Wisconsin and Pennsylvania will be discussed. While neither of the following examples address anti-immigrant or anti-elite sentiment, they do show how the rural vote was strongly for Trump in 2016, particularly in the Upper Midwest. This voting shift is central to understanding the relevance of the rest of the research.

Donald Trump's victory in the state of Wisconsin was the first time that the state's electoral votes had been for a Republican presidential candidate since 1984, with Trump receiving 27,000 more votes than Clinton (Jones 2016). Interestingly, Trump received about the same number of votes as Romney did in 2012 when Obama won the state. However, the difference was that Clinton received 240,000 less votes than Obama did with third party candidates drawing a larger vote in 2016 (Jones 2016). In some areas of Wisconsin this can be attributed to the fact that voter turnout was higher in many rural places but down quite significantly in urban areas (Jones 2016). In looking at the break down by county of this vote, it can be seen that from 2012 to 2016, twenty two counties shifted from blue to red, eighteen of which were considered rural counties (Meyers 2016). This means that, statistically speaking, Trump won the rural vote by twenty seven points whereas Bush won by ten back in 2004, with Obama's highest rural victory being by a margin of eight points. (Meyers 2016). Clearly, there has been a shift in what motivates this rural vote.

The state of Pennsylvania has a rather similar story, although the favorable outcome of Trump was even more decisive than it was in Wisconsin, with Trump winning 73,254 more votes than Clinton (Kraus 2016). Historically speaking, Democrats have done well in Pennsylvania as long as they tallied large vote margins in the majors cities of Pittsburgh and

Philadelphia, and then padded the vote a little in the some of the former industrial power house, big union counties (Kraus 2016). While Clinton dominated in the southeast corner of the state as well as the urban parts of the state, she failed to appeal to the rest of the state including the blue collar counties such as Luzerne and Wilkes-Barre (Kraus 2016). Another swing county, so to speak, is Buck County, which tends to swing blue, but went strongly red in 2016 (Panaritis, Purcell, Brennan and Couloumbis 2016). Back in the 1980's Ronald Reagan was an incredibly popular politician and President who appealed to voters on both sides of the aisle. This meant that in his landslide presidential victories many Democratic voters crossed the aisle and cast a ballot for him instead of Carter in 1980 and Mondale in 1984. Many of these same Reagan Democrats in Pennsylvania went back to the GOP in 2016, and that made all the difference for this state.

### **Literature Review**

People have a complex set of motivations when making voting choices. This means that it is hard to break down voting behavior to have it be predominantly explained by one sole factor such as immigration or attitudes towards elites. For these reasons it makes sense that the literature is rather divided, and in many cases shows traces of negative attitudes towards both immigrants and elites as key factors in understanding rural voting. For the purpose of this discussion and comparison, immigration attitudes will be talked about first, then elite attitudes, closing with how both of these factors impact a person's identity, particularly among rural citizens.

*Immigration*

When looking at immigration attitudes, it's important to first start by understanding the crucial roles that the media, as well as the rhetoric used by the President at the time, play in impacting the lens through which the public understands immigration in the United States. Arthur and Woods point out in their article about the "Contextual Presidency" that the "most important problem" the president faces is the economy, which tends to also be the factor that is most directly tied to how Americans view immigrants (2013). This link between economics and immigration means when the economy is doing poorly, Presidents have a tendency to talk about immigration in more negative terms in order to distract people and keep their approval ratings up. Additionally, this means that social as well as economic context are highly influential in how immigration is discussed. Jones-Correa and Graauw also argue that history is impactful, often times without people noticing. One must understand past laws, reforms, treatment and attitudes of immigration in order to fully grasp where we are at today (2013). When there is a lack of background knowledge, ideas and terms are not able to be fully understood in a more modern context. This means that when things, such as birthright citizen or building a wall on the southern border are discussed, people are unable to comprehend the implications of such actions or why certain aspects of the immigration system are necessary, or for that matter, unnecessary. History is also important in that presidents are forced to act within the set of laws and rules as established by their predecessors (Arthur 2013).

Such discussions and attitudes surrounding immigration lead to a wide variety of conclusions and opinions by scholars as to what a general feeling is among Americans. There are also many stances as to what information Americans deem the most influential in determining immigration opinions. For example, there is a lot of negative rhetoric surrounding crime that ties

it to immigration (Zats and Smith 2012). This, in large part, stems from media portrayal which places an emphasis on non-whites committing crimes. Wuthnow deepens this argument in his book *The Left Behind*, and found that some “people feel frustrated, helpless and angry [...] and so undocumented workers get blamed for everything--crimes, drugs, no matter what, it’s the immigrants” (Wuthnow 2018, 146). In her work, Fussell found that despite what the media may say, American attitudes towards immigration are actually improving, and they are becoming more open to diversity (Fussell 2014). Interestingly enough, Wuthnow also interviewed some people who said, “In the past five years we’ve seen that [Hispanic immigrants] are here, they’re staying, they’re part of the community. We’ve gotten used to each other” (Wuthnow 2018, 148). This suggests that the length of stay impacts the attitudes of the non-immigrants.

Overall, “issues like immigration, racial discrimination, and the integration of Muslims boil down to competing visions of American identity and inclusiveness” (Sides, Tesler, Vavreck 2018, 10). Going further than conclusions based on media portrayal or longevity of stay, Hero makes the argument that negative attitudes aren’t just about the topic or label of “immigrant,” but rather are more about ideas and perceptions that are held about race and ethnicity (2010). These types of beliefs or feelings about race and ethnicity are usually tied to the concept of identity. Garcia and Davidson make a similar argument that immigration is seen as a threat to American beliefs about cost of living, political ideology, labor market competition and demographic characteristics (2013). Gimpel and Ley agree with this immigrant threatened feeling for adults in particular. In rural America specifically, adults feel as though immigrants are taking from the already narrow income distribution and changing the cultural norms which are important to small towns (Gimpel and Ley 2008).



Gimpel and Ley get more specific with the idea of feeling threatened by breaking it down by age; young people, they say, have more positive views towards immigrants because of their high levels of interaction (2008). In her article, “Spaces of Encounters: Immigration, Race, Class and the Politics of Belonging in Small-Town America,” Leitner helps us understand this idea of ‘disruption of cultural norms’ through the term “spaces of encounters.” This term captures the idea that rural communities have historically been, and are still largely, made up of long-term white residents who are now being faced with growing diversity (2012). Whiteness, she says, has a “historical and geographical contingency” which creates a “racialized production of space” (Leitner 2012, 831). In recent years, as diversity has been growing in rural areas, white residents may perceive this change as a threat to their identities as predominantly white, European communities.

This growing diversity in rural areas is largely due to the growth of the meat and poultry processing industries as well as availability of entry level jobs farming and working construction (Wuthnow 2018). Immigrants are willing to work manual labor-intensive jobs as well as jobs that, in general, pay less. Based on her research in rural Arkansas, Hallet found that immigrants were accepted into the community as long as they worked lower-wage jobs only and presented themselves as hard working, which is a key American value (2012). This phenomenon leads to the creation of in-groups and out-groups as immigrants are made to feel as though they must meet certain stereotypical criteria in order to be deemed as accepted. In this way, fully integrating into the community does not seem to be a feasible option for many immigrants. Garcia and Davidson push back against Leitner and Hallet in that they acknowledge there is plenty of documented homogeneity in rural America, but changes in economic restructuring, population loss, improved transportation and communication in recent years have made rural

Americans' voting behavior less distinct from more urban areas (Garcia and Davidson 2013).

This means that a distinct American identity does not have a relationship to immigration attitudes (Garcia and Davidson 2013). Hero looks at this idea of the impact of movement as well, saying that indeed concentration or dispersion affect perception and identity. This, then, influences how outgroups feel about themselves and how ingroups address diversity in their communities (2010).

### *Elite Resentment*

As mentioned above, identity, some believe, is influenced by social class standing and economic indicators such as income. Gest makes the argument that Trump represents the American dream, and what many lower income, rural, people aspire to (2016). In addition, Gest states that Americans are less inclined to resent the rich because they're "job creators," "innovators," and "engineers of economic growth" (2016). This makes Trump more like "one of them" (Gest 2016). Interestingly enough, "on average, Trump did a bit better among those with lower incomes than those with higher incomes" which could support these notions (Sides, Tesler, Vavreck 2018, 74). Ball adds to Gest's argument by saying that although blue-collar workers are very different from Trump, they view him as believable and different from the norm of Washington DC (2018). Trump is shaking things up, as well as pushing back at established politicians. It can be said that factors such as these contributed to why rural people, who previously felt like they did not have a voice, voted for him. Rural Americans casted ballots that they felt was going against the elite of Washington. Wuthnow also echos the scholarly assessment that government is not listening to how rural Americans are feeling (Wuthnow 2018). This evidence suggests that a more anti-elite or anti-establishment vote could very well be what we saw in rural America in 2016.

An anti-elite motivation can also be created from rural individuals with less education who in turn have disdain for those with higher education degrees. Through her field work, Cramer found that many rural Wisconsin residents could not understand why someone would spend the money on a bachelors, masters or doctoral degree when technical school training takes less time, is less expensive and lends itself to high paying jobs (2016, 119). These ideas about education are also tied to social class as often times it is middle and higher class people who have the funds to attend universities. People in rural areas tend to be in a lower social class which would in turn explain a belief in a vocational school following high school.

Not only is the importance of education level something that is persistently debated, an individual's education level also tends to be an indicator of partisanship and voting behavior. As Sides, Tesler and Vavreck found, “Trump’s strength among white voters without college degrees [...] helped explain why a relatively small but important fraction of Obama voters ended up voting for him” (2018,155-156). In 2016 it was found that level of education was particularly important for white voters. In fact, those with a high school degree or less were 24 percentage points more Republican than Democratic and those with some college education or a technical school degree were 19 percentage points more Republican than Democrat (Sides, Tesler and Vavreck 2018, 26). The correlation between education level and Party ID in 2016 shows an attitude that pushes back against higher education which is associated with many politicians and the upper, elite class of society.

### *Rural Identity*

Despite conflicting views of how immigration and elite sentiment impacts identity, there seems to be a general consensus of the role identity plays in influencing how rural people in particular vote. Katherine Cramer, in her well known book *The Politics of Resentment* coins two

important terms to unpacking rural identity, “rural consciousness” and a “politics of resentment.” Rural consciousness is “an identity as a rural person that includes much more than an attachment to place. It includes a sense that decision makers routinely ignore rural places and fail to give rural communities their fair share of resources, as well as a sense that rural folks are fundamentally different from urbanites in terms of lifestyles, values and work ethic” (2016, 5-6). A politics of resentment is “the way social identities, the emotion of resentment and economic insecurity interact” (2016, 9). In 2016 this political identity became particularly important as feelings, which translated into votes tended to center around “which groups [individuals] identified with and how they felt about other groups” (Sides, Tesler, Vavreck 2018, 2). To clarify, these groups “were defined by the characteristics that have long divided Americans: race, ethnicity, religion, gender, nationality, and, ultimately, partisanship” (Sides, Tesler, Vavreck 2018, 2).

Given how Cramer’s research was done prior to 2016, and the fact that immigration was a topic left out, there is room to expand upon her work while still using her findings and terminology as a basis of understanding. However, Fussell would agree with this Cramer’s approach in leaving this topic out as she believes that theories surrounding immigration as a threat to one’s identity are becoming obsolete (2014). Ball takes on identity much in the same lane as Cramer, when he talks about Pennsylvania blue-collar steel workers who feel as though Trump is believable and appreciate the fact that he understands their concerns as white men (2018). No matter what argument is made for most important influences on identity, Cramer reminds us all that “identities are perceptions, [and are] not necessarily consistent with objective circumstances” (2016, 15).

In order to better understand what is going on with negative attitudes or feelings in rural America, conversations have to start happening and interactions between more diverse groups need to become the norm. While Garcia and Davidson believe that rural areas are just as well connected as urban places thanks to technology, Gimpel and Ley still believe there is a lack of exposure to more diverse experiences in rural areas. With more interaction between longtime residents of rural towns and immigrants who are new to the country, negative stereotypes and attitudes can be broken down (Gimpel and Ley 2008). The fact that many of these authors such as Wuthnow, Cramer and Hallet, to name a few, sat down face to face with rural Americans also shows the importance of these types of interactions to make meaningful connections and grow deeper understandings.

### **Research Design/Methodology**

To quantitatively test my hypothesis, 2016 ANES data was used to create a basis of comparison about voting motivations across rural parts of the country as a whole. With the independent variables being anti-immigrant and anti-elite attitudes, the dependent variable is voting support for Trump. Another key factor to note is that the focus here is on rural America and not the country as a whole. This demographic was chosen for two primary reasons. The first is that the rural vote was particularly important to Trump's eventual victory in the Upper Midwest states. Secondly, there is a growing urban-rural divide, which has led to what scholars, such as Cramer, are calling rural resentment, stemming from a politics of resentment. Understanding what is at the core of this divide is crucial to understanding the core future of GOP support.

Model 1 serves as the primary source of my quantitative analysis. In order to create an anti-immigrant variable for this model, three pre-election questions from ANES are combined that best captured immigration attitudes. These questions are (1) favor or oppose birthright citizenship (2) strength of agreement in building a with Mexico and (3) how important it is to speak English in the U.S.. For questions one and two, a response of one is in favor, two is oppose and a three is neither in favor or oppose. For the third question respondents are given a feeling thermometer ranging from one, very important, to four, not at all important. Given the different scales used, response scores were averaged after confirming the items were highly correlated. In the scale created, a lower numerical score is equivalent to a stronger anti-immigrant sentiment. There are not many questions that had clear ties to anti-elite sentiment, so my variable for this attitude is comprised of just one question; “how often does the respondent trust the government in Washington to do what is right?”<sup>1</sup> Participants are then given a feeling thermometer to score their response on with a one being always and a five being never. This measurement means that a lower numerical response lends itself to a lower anti-elite attitude. These scales are then tested as predictors of whether the respondents voted for either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump in order to look at the impact of strong attitudes in these areas in relation to which candidate respondents voted for.

Additionally, these data scales are crossed with rural identifying variables. Congressional districts identified as either pure rural, rural-suburban mix or sparse suburban by GitHub are selected as the a qualification for respondents to be included in the above analysis. After selecting responses that only came from rural-like congressional districts and only responses who indicated either voting for Trump or Clinton, there were 1,090 responses that were able to be

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<sup>1</sup> One can ask whether anti-Washington is the same thing as anti-elite. In the pre-election ANES this question was best seen to capture this concept.

used for analysis. As an essential control variable, a seven point political party ID scale was used in order to ensure that party and anti-immigrant attitudes or party and anti-elite attitudes do not mean the same thing.

Model 2 aims to address the same anti-elite and anti-immigrant sentiments as Model 1, but uses post-election ANES question instead of pre-election questions. Given the fact that the questions are different and were asked at a different time, it is a useful comparison to Model 1 in order to see the impact of time (pre vs post) on attitude, specifically when looking at anti-elite bias. Specifics for this model will be addressed later on.

## **Results**

I ran two separate bivariate, logistic regressions using the 2016 ANES polling data. The first model includes questions that were asked prior to the election (pre) and the second model uses questions that were asked after (post). The models and explanations are as follows.

***Table 1: Model 1 Summary***

### **Model Summary**

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	597.492 <sup>a</sup>	.551	.742

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Table 1 explains the overall strength of the model which is in Table 3. The Cox & Snell R number suggests that Model 1 explains about half of the variance in whether a respondent said they voted for Trump or for Clinton.

**Table 2: Cases Classified by Model 1**

**Classification Table<sup>a</sup>**

Observed		Predicted		Percentage Correct	
		Clinton	Trump		
Step 1	Who did R Vote for (2 cat)	Clinton	381	66	85.2
		Trump	56	568	91.0
Overall Percentage					88.6

a. The cut value is .500, NOTE: Correct classification assuming all Trump = 58.2

The data pool was modified so that only respondents who voted for one of the two primary candidates, Clinton or Trump, were included in the final regression. Table 2 shows just how strong the model is at predicting how a respondent voted based on their responses to the questions selected for the three independent variables, anti-immigrant, anti-elite and party ID. In fact, the prediction accuracy is 88.6 percent. Without these independent variables, the accuracy is 58.2 percent.



**Table 3: Logistic Regression Model 1****Variables in the Equation**

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	AntiMigrantPre	-1.431	.117	149.025	1	.000	.239
	PRE: REV How often trust govt in Wash to do what is right	.419	.130	10.367	1	.001	1.521
	Party ID 3 Cat	2.242	.167	180.205	1	.000	9.414
	Constant	-.824	.683	1.454	1	.228	.439

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: AntiMigrantPre, PRE: REV How often trust govt in Wash to do what is right, Party ID 3 Cat.

From this table it can be concluded that all three variables, anti-immigrant, anti-elite and party have a significant relationship with which candidate the respondent voted for. This is because of what direction the coefficients (B values) are showing. A coefficient moving in a positive direction shows a prediction of a vote for Trump and a coefficient moving in a negative direction is a prediction of a vote for Clinton. From Table 3, party ID has the strongest correlation with a vote for Trump. The anti-immigrant variable has the second strongest correlation and is more significant than anti-elite ( $p < .001$ ). Despite the results not fully supporting my hypothesis, the data still makes sense given the direction the B values are moving.

**Model 2**

Model 2 uses post-election questions as the 2016 ANES data seems to have items that create anti-elite and anti-immigrant variables. To measure anti-immigrant sentiment, the questions that were most strongly correlated were whether American culture is generally harmed by immigrants, if immigrants increase the crime rate, as well as three questions about if being truly American means to have been born in the U.S., to have American ancestry and to speak English. Respondents were asked to give a response on a scale of one to five for each question with one being agree strongly and five being disagree strongly. This scale means that a lower score shows a stronger anti-immigrant attitude. For anti-elite attitudes, the questions that were most strongly correlated were whether or not most politicians care, are politicians the main problem in government and whether or not most politicians only care about the rich and powerful. Again, participants were asked to respond on a scale from one to five with one being agree strongly and five being disagree strongly. This scale means that a higher score shows a stronger anti-elite attitude.

**Table 4: Model 2 Summary**

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	712.602 <sup>a</sup>	.499	.672

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Table 4 of Model 2 explains the strength of the overall model which is depicted in Table 6. The Cox & Snell R Square show that Model 2 explains just under half of the variance in whether or not a respondent said they voted for Trump or Clinton.

**Table 5: Cases Classified by Model 2**

Observed		Predicted		Percentage Correct	
		Clinton	Trump		
Step 1	Who did R Vote for (2 cat)	Clinton	364	82	81.6
		Trump	74	548	88.1
Overall Percentage					85.4

a. The cut value is .500. NOTE: Correct classification assuming all Trump = 58.2

After incorporating the post-election independent variables, the overall prediction percentage goes up to 85.4 percent. Although this is slightly less than using the pre-election independent variables in Model 1, it is still shows a strong predictive capability.

**Table 6: Logistic Regression Model 2**

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	Anti Elite Scale 3 item (lower=anti)	-.039	.110	.125	1	.724	.962
	Anti Immigrant Scale (lower=anti)	-1.389	.138	101.562	1	.000	.249
	Party ID 3 Cat	2.622	.161	265.081	1	.000	13.769
	Constant	-.984	.455	4.685	1	.030	.374

a. Variable(s): Anti Elite Scale 3 item (lower=anti), Anti Immigrant Scale (lower=anti), Party ID 3 Cat.

The negative coefficients for the anti-elite and anti-immigrant variables is surprising given the results of the pre-election data in Model 1. These results for the anti-elite variable in particular are likely impacted by the fact that Trump had already been elected to the presidency at the time these questions were asked. This means that the anti-elite variable created using the post-election questions did not create a variable that accurately accounts for anti-elite sentiment. This idea will be further expanded upon in the discussion. Not surprisingly, the strongest variable remains the Party ID variable. The fact that this is true of both Model 1 and Model 2 makes it an important comparison among the other two variables; anti-elite and anti-immigrant sentiment.

### **Discussion**

My hypothesis is in large part based off of Katherine Cramer's book as her work broke the ground for political science research on rural America. Cramer's findings are centered around resentment towards urban areas. This includes those in power and positions of authority, such as government officials, who are centered in those big city spaces. In trying to expand her findings from Wisconsin, it makes sense to assume that anti-elite sentiment would be a stronger indicator of a Trump vote. That is why this research predicted that anti-elite sentiment would be a stronger indicator of a vote for Trump. However, Cramer did not ask any questions about race or immigration in her work, so perhaps these negative sentiments about such topics were present, and even strong, they just didn't happen to come up in conversation.

The results of this research show that anti-immigrant sentiment was more prominent in rural voters who supported Trump. However, I don't entirely believe that the quantitative results of my research can be generalized across the country or taken as entirely accurate as there are some internal validity issues. The questions selected in order to create the variables do not

necessarily address the the desired sentiments as well as they could due to subjectivity in question selection as well as limitations in the question pool based on what was asked by ANES. This is particularly true within the anti-elite variable as there is a difference between political elite resentment based on partisanship and negative attitudes towards the elite social class as a whole. In addition, the responses are not necessarily equally dispersed across all rural parts of the country. In fact, some congressional districts were heavily represented and others not at all. This means that further data work from different sources is necessary in order to confirm the accuracy of my findings. When looking at Model 2 specifically, the post election results are somewhat problematic as responses were given following the election which skews how people respond. For example, if they voted for Trump, who was ultimately elected, respondents are more likely not to have as strong of an anti-elite feeling towards government because, in their mind, the favorable candidate, who to them is anti-elite, is the one who was elected.

Despite the potential internal validity discrepancies of my quantitative work, my research is still valuable because it is an original measure within rural America as well as expansion of Cramer's ideas. Sides, Tesler and Vavreck looked at similar sentiments in their work, however their measure was of the country as a whole, all types of counties included, and one of their variables was more centered around race rather than immigration. While rural is gaining momentum in political science conversations, there is still little discussion about implications on a national scale or in relation to specific events such as national elections which in this case is the 2016 presidential election. Using the variables conceptualized in this research is also a new approach to thinking about the rural vote. This is an important lens to apply not only because it is specific to the 2016 election, but also because it addresses voting motivation rather than political attitudes or feelings of identity more generally.

## **Conclusions**

Through quantitative measures this research aimed to look at whether an anti-immigrant or an anti-elite sentiment was a stronger indicator of a rural vote for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election. The results showed that anti-immigrant bias was a stronger indicator of a vote for Trump, but that naturally Party ID was overwhelmingly the strongest indicator for rural votes. A point of uncertainty is that there is much debate among scholars about rural attitudes and rural voting behavior. There is no doubt that voters are very complex, with many factors influencing their choices. While the literature is clear about the importance Party ID plays in predicting voting outcomes, other indicators or heavy influences on rural votes are unclear at this time. This is still an incredibly timely subject. Having a better understanding of voting behavior starts with conversations and comparisons such as the one being proposed. It is important to understand voters not only from a political strategy standpoint, but also because politics should really be about the constituents. That is how the U.S. can remain a democracy run by the people and for the people. We live in a political climate that is out of tune with the people, so that is where the focus of study and understanding needs to shift back to: the people.

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