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# The Nonmetro Vote and the Election of Donald Trump

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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# The Nonmetro Vote and the Election of Donald Trump

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## ABSTRACT

Securing an overwhelming majority of the rural vote was vital to Donald Trump's surprise win in the 2016 presidential election. This article provides an analysis of the relationship between rural/urban residence and 2016 voting patterns. The Trump campaign's unique emphasis on economic and racial issues attracted large numbers of voters from groups threatened by rapid cultural, economic, and demographic change occurring in the US. Prominent among threatened groups is the rural, white working class. The analysis reveals that rural counties where a large percentage of the residents were white, with low levels of education and working in the goods-producing industries, cast a proportionally large share of their votes for Trump. The analysis also makes it apparent that it is not rural residence, per se, but other characteristics (white, poorly educated, and working in the goods-producing industries) that resulted in the strong Trump vote.

## KEYWORDS

2016 election; Donald Trump; rural vote

## INTRODUCTION

Republicans have dominated nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) America in national, state, and local elections for years. This is especially true in areas such as Appalachia, the rural South, Great Plains, and Mountain West (Goetz et al. 2018; McKee and Teigen 2009; Monnat and Brown 2017; Scala and Johnson 2017). In the 2016 presidential election, the proportion of nonmetro voters choosing Donald Trump was even greater than the proportion voting for the Republican candidate in the past, and this domination was critical to his victory. The extent of Trump domination in some nonmetro counties was astounding. For example, in Harding County, South Dakota, Trump received 695 votes to 38 for Clinton; in Banner County, Nebraska, Trump was victorious 357 to 19; and in Campbell County, Wyoming, Trump received 15,778 votes to Clinton's 1,324. The nonmetro vote was especially significant in the vital swing states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

This article provides an empirical examination of the significance of the rural vote in the 2016 presidential election, examining voting patterns in counties arrayed along the rural/urban continuum. Other county characteristics such as race and industry of employment are also empirically considered. The perspective used in this manuscript is that when change threatens the social standing of individuals, threatened individuals strongly resist that change. Beginning with the work of Polanyi (1944), scholars have recognized that since the emergence of industrialization and market society, changes in the way the people make a living (economic structure) often have negative implications for entire categories of people, and impacted people resist these problematic changes (Hadjimichalis and Hudson 2014; McMichael 1997). From this perspective, recent economic structure changes have had significant negative implications for the white working class. A number of studies in the US have found that white opposition to minorities tends to increase when whites consider threats from minorities to be greatest. Perceived threats increase when minority numbers are increasing rapidly, when minority power appears to grow or when their relative position in the workforce improves (e.g. Blumer 1958; Bobo 1999; Gilens 1999; Wetts and Willer 2018).

Much of the research on reactions of threatened groups to change has focused on race. The perspective, however, can easily be expanded to account for any group threatened by any source of change. In recent years the economic standing of the white working class has declined considerably because of economic structure changes similar to those

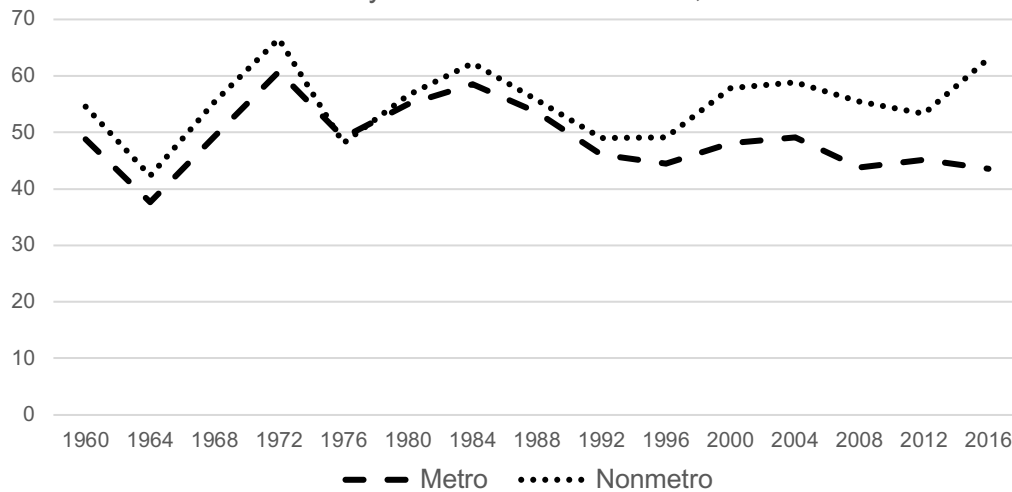
described by Polanyi. Further, many white working class individuals see growing minority populations threatening their position at what they consider to be the top of the social hierarchy. Many felt that the election of Barack Obama as president indicated growing minority power (Hochschild 2016; Wetts and Willer 2018), and Donald Trump's campaign message consisted of direct and veiled messages that appealed to these threatened groups. Trump promised to "Make America Great Again" by limiting immigration of non-whites and restoring working class jobs through restructured trade deals, reduced environmental regulation, and the implementation of tariffs. Not only did this stance help him win large shares of the rural and working class vote, but it is also expected that he received a larger proportion of this vote than Mitt Romney four years earlier who did not emphasize this same message.

In this article hypotheses are developed and tested to measure the extent to which rural counties with large proportions of white, working class residents were likely to vote for Trump in 2016 compared to Romney in 2012. To test these expectations, analysis of the 2012 and 2016 elections is provided, including a more detailed look at Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin because of their significance in the 2016 election.

#### REPUBLICAN DOMINATION OF NONMETRO AMERICA

The Republican Party has not always dominated rural America. Rural voters were supportive of Democrat President Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal" and Democrat President Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society." As recently as 1976, rural voters were more likely to vote Democrat than their urban counterparts, and in both 1992 and 1996 the Republican candidate did not receive a majority of rural votes (see Figure 1). In each election since 1980, however, a higher proportion of rural compared to urban residents voted Republican, and the gap has tended to steadily increase (Bartels 1998; Black, Black, and Black 2009; Morrill, Knopp, and Brown 2007). In 2000, 57.8 percent of rural residents voted for the Republican candidate compared to 48.1 percent of urban residents – a difference of 9.7. By the 2012 election, the rural/urban gap had increased to 13.15. Then in 2016, Trump received 66.6 percent of the rural vote while obtaining 45.8 percent of the urban vote – an incredibly large gap of 20.8 percent. Increasingly, it appears that voting behavior is based on identity politics, where votes are less a factor of social class and more a function of place and group identity (Fraser 1998). Several factors may be relevant, including cultural, economic, and demographic change.

Figure 1. Percent of Votes for Republican Presidential Candidate by Metro/Nonmetro Status, 1960 - 2016



### CULTURAL CHANGE

Writing more than three-quarters of a century ago, Wirth (1938) noted fundamental differences between urban and rural areas. The most obvious difference is that urban areas have more people and a greater population density. Largely as a consequence of size and density differences, urban areas also experience greater social heterogeneity. Rural interaction patterns therefore differ from those in urban areas, and rural residents tend to interact with fewer individuals who are different from them. The result tends to be more social conservatism in rural areas and less experience with and support for the diversity and multiculturalism that presently exist in urban America (Hochschild 2016).

In recent decades, rapid social and cultural changes have created significant discomfort among many rural Americans about the direction the US is going. Many rural people are uncomfortable with the Democrat vision of a diverse and multicultural America and desire the more homogenous communities of the past (Hochschild 2016). Rural residents also tend to have more conservative family structures (Married-Couple) and tend to be more religious (Albrecht and Albrecht 1996; Struthers and Bokemeier 2000). Since Republicans have taken the conservative stand on social issues such as abortion and same sex marriage, their support among rural voters has been enhanced (Frank 2004; Krugman 2007; McKee and Teigen 2009). It is thus expected that even when controlling for other factors, rural residents will be more likely to vote Republican than their urban counterparts.

## ECONOMIC STRUCTURE CHANGE

The economic structure of the United States has undergone profound transition in recent decades. Specifically, there has been a decline in the number of jobs in the goods-producing industries, which include the natural resource industries (farming, logging, mining, etc.), manufacturing, and construction. This transition has been especially pronounced in rural areas where the economy has traditionally been more dependent on these industries. At one time, many working class jobs provided by the goods-producing industries resulted in the historically unique opportunity for less-skilled workers to achieve relatively high levels of affluence (Albrecht and Albrecht 2008; Bluestone and Harrison 2000). Declining employment in these industries has had especially severe negative economic consequences for members of the working class with lower levels of education.

Examples of declines in the goods-producing industries include the number of hours required in farm labor being reduced by nearly 90 percent since 1930, resulting in dramatic declines in agricultural employment. In the past century, the number of coal mining jobs declined from about 800,000 to about 80,000. Similar declines are apparent in other mining and logging jobs. The number of jobs in manufacturing has declined by nearly 7 million since the 1970s (Albrecht 2014; Low 2017; Rasker 2017). Some manufacturing firms moved to foreign locations to take advantage of lower wages and weaker environmental standards in those countries. By far the most significant factor in these declines, however, was the development of machines that replaced human labor in the production process (Albrecht 2014; Hicks and Deveraj 2015; Powell and Snellman 2004). Using modern machines, production has greatly increased in all of the goods-producing industries despite a much smaller workforce.

At the national level, fewer jobs in the goods-producing sector was offset by increased employment in the service sector. In rural areas, the proportional increase in service jobs has been lower and service jobs in rural areas tend to pay less than the goods-producing jobs they replace. There are numerous high-quality service jobs in sectors such as health care, education, and finance. These jobs, however, tend to require an advanced education. Such jobs are also less prominent in rural areas (Albrecht and Albrecht 2008). Service jobs for persons without advanced training tend to pay lower wages than jobs in the goods-producing industries for workers with similar education and training. Consequently, nonmetro America has relatively fewer jobs and a decline in average pay

levels. As a result of these trends, rural areas have not recovered as quickly or as completely as urban areas from the Great Recession of 2007-2009 (Farrigan 2015).

The implications of these economic structure changes are significant. In constant dollars, incomes of the median male worker reached a peak in 1973 and have declined ever since. Wages of the average working class employee have declined by 25 percent since the 1970s (Albrecht 2013; DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2012; Levinson 2016). The gap between the wages of persons with a college degree and those without a college degree has increased steadily since the 1970s as a result of the changing economic structure (McCall 2000; 2001). The vast majority of economic growth in recent decades has gone to the elite, especially to the top 1 percent (Stiglitz 2012). Areas with the most extensive economic declines have experienced increased health problems and reduced life expectancy (Case and Deaton 2015; Monnat 2016).

Areas most impacted by these changes voted heavily for Trump in 2016 (Bor 2017; Goetz et al. 2018). The sources of these economic changes are major global transitions. The result, however, is that many workers feel anger and frustration because the skills and work ethic that once provided a livable wage are no longer relevant (Cramer 2016; Goldstein 2017; Vance 2016).

Historically, Democrats received the majority of votes from workers in the goods-producing industries, largely as a consequence of their support for labor unions. In recent decades, the strength of labor unions has diminished considerably, reducing the Democrat base (Piazza 2001). Many working class people then became Republicans as a result of the Republican stand on social and cultural issues (Levendusky 2009).

The message of Donald Trump was highly appealing to many American voters working in the goods-producing sector. His slogan "Make America Great Again" produced visions of a return to the day when working class jobs were abundant and paid a living wage. Trump promised to bring back these jobs by taking a tough stand on immigration, restructuring international trade agreements, and implementing tariffs intended to protect the American working class jobs. He promised to reduce environmental regulations that he argued are harmful to the goods-producing sector. Of course this message also appealed to urban residents employed in the goods-producing sector. It is thus hypothesized that as dependence on employment in the goods-producing sector in a county increases, the proportion of persons in that county voting for Republicans will also increase. It is also expected that this relationship will



be especially strong in the 2016 election relative to 2012 due to the unique message of Trump.

#### EDUCATION AND INCOME

Closely related to economic structure changes are the impacts these trends have on persons with different levels of educational attainment. Opposition to Roosevelt's New Deal generally came from advantaged persons with higher levels of education and income. Consequently, counties with higher proportions of well-educated and high-income persons tended to vote Republican. Recent changes have completely altered this relationship and there is now a strong relationship between being highly educated and the likelihood of voting Democrat (Pew Research Center 2016). The relationship between higher incomes and voting Democrat exists, but is generally not as strong as the relationship with education. Many high-income persons support the tax benefits for the wealthy advocated by Republicans (Pew Research Center 2016).

In recent years, highly educated persons are more likely to support the environmental platform of Democrats, which includes support for climate change (Dunlap, Van Liere, and Mertig 2000), and also the inclusive multicultural society emphasized by Democrats (Herring 2009). Republican support generally comes from persons who are threatened by these ideals and the changes they represent (Hochschild 2016). These persons fear that stronger environmental regulations will eliminate jobs and that minorities are given undeserved benefits that provide them advantages in the job market. It is thus hypothesized that as income and education levels in a county increase, the proportion of the residents voting Republican will decline. The strength of this relationship is expected to be stronger during the 2016 election than during the 2012 election.

#### RACE/ETHNICITY

Prior to the 1960s, race was not a significant factor in national elections, primarily because minority votes had largely been eliminated through a range of discriminatory policies (Kousser 1974). Franklin Roosevelt's support base did not include minority voters. Roosevelt was, in fact, dependent on support from white southern Democrats for his New Deal policies and thus did not pursue a Civil Rights agenda (Sears 1976).

During the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement became a major part of the platform of Democrat presidents Kennedy and Johnson. During this era, major legislation was passed including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Other policies were passed designed to

improve opportunities for and the economic standing of minority populations. Johnson declared a “War on Poverty” and programs enacted to combat poverty were especially beneficial to minority populations as a larger proportion of them were in poverty.

Since that time, Democrat platforms continue to emphasize policies supported by minorities such as affirmative action, fair housing, school integration, higher minimum wages, and the elimination of discrimination in the work force. Democrat programs typically have their basis in the federal government instead of state governments. Minorities tend to have less confidence that state governments will protect their rights (Hutchings and Valentino 2004). Since the 1960s, Democrats’ hold on the minority vote has been strong. In the 2012 election, for example, President Obama received 93 percent of the African-American vote, 71 percent of the Hispanic vote, and 73 percent of the Asian vote, but only 39 percent of the White vote.

With enactment of Civil Rights legislation, Republicans recognized an opportunity to pull away some white voters who had previously tended to vote Democrat (Dionne 2016). Beginning with the Nixon campaign of 1968, Republicans implemented a “Southern strategy” that made an appeal to racial conservatism (Aistrup 1996; Aldrich 2000; Black et al. 2009; Phillips 2015). Direct racism was no longer socially acceptable, so Republicans pursued a policy that Tesler and Sears (2010) defined as “symbolic racism.” Symbolic racism maintains that minorities no longer face discrimination and minority disadvantages are due to their poor work ethic. In addition, it is argued that government aid programs will result in entitlement that will only reinforce this poor work ethic (Murray 1984). At the same time, poor whites are told by Republicans that their circumstances are made worse because so many resources are diverted to programs that benefit undeserving minorities. Especially troubling to many white voters are programs that give minority persons advantages in college admission and employment (McKee 2008).

To a large extent, Republican plans have worked, and the Republican Party now has strong support from white working class voters (Scala and Johnson 2017). In 1960 and 1964, Democrat candidates (Kennedy and Johnson) received 55 percent of the vote from whites without a college degree. In 1968 and 1972, this number declined to 35 percent, and disadvantaged whites have tended to vote Republican ever since (Teixeira 2009). Evidence indicates that racial attitudes polarized during the Obama administration and resulted in segments of the white population becoming more overtly racist (Tesler 2016). Trump’s message

reached an even more responsive audience because minority populations were growing rapidly (Castles, de Haas, and Miller 2014). In 1980, 80 percent of the US population was white; by the 2016 election, this proportion was just over 60 percent. Several states are now majority minority, and minority populations are growing in areas where minorities were previously very rare. It is now expected that the US will become a majority minority country by about 2040 (Colby and Ortman 2015).

The white vote was vital to Trump's victory in 2016, especially in critical swing states such as Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The Deep South has become solidly Republican (Monnat and Brown 2017). Strong Republican support is apparent in predominantly white rural areas throughout the country (McKee 2008). Trump ran a campaign with clear racial undertones and studies show that this helped him receive a higher proportion of the white vote compared to previous elections (Sides et al. 2017). At the same time, it seems that rural counties with large minority populations tend to vote Democratic. It is thus hypothesized that as the proportion of the residents in a county that are white increase, the proportion voting Republican will also increase, and this tendency will be greater during the 2016 presidential election compared to the 2012 election.

## METHODS

The county is the unit of analysis for this study. Counties are relatively small geographic units for which data is available on voting behaviors as well as the independent variables utilized in this study. Concerns with using county data are recognized, but county data are the best choice. The percentage of votes for the Republican candidate is the dependent variable in this study. Only votes for Republican and Democrat candidates are considered. Votes for third party and other candidates are eliminated as their impact on the 2012 and 2016 elections were minimal. Voting data was obtained from David Leip's Election Atlas (Leip 2016).

The primary independent variable is the rural/urban continuum developed by the Economic Research Service (ERS) of USDA. Continuum scores range from 1 to 9. As the score increases, counties become progressively more rural and isolated. Categories 1-3 are metropolitan, while categories 4 through 9 are nonmetropolitan. The most metropolitan counties in Category 1 are the 432 counties in metro areas that have a population of 1 million or more. A majority of the US population lives in Category 1 counties alone. At the opposite extreme, Category 9 counties are the 423 counties that are completely rural, with the largest

community having a population of less than 2,500, and that are not adjacent to a metro area (see Table 1).

Other independent variables are obtained from the 2011-2015 American Community Survey. Employment in the goods-producing industries is measured by the proportion of the employed labor force in the county working in agriculture, logging, mining, construction, and manufacturing. The proportion of the population in a county that is non-Hispanic white is used to measure race/ethnicity. Educational attainment is measured by the proportion of people age 25 and older in the county with at least a college degree. Median household income in the county is used as the income measure.

Table 1. Overview of U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service Rural-Urban Continuum Categories

Category and Definition	# of Counties	Total Population	Average Population Per County
1. Metro-Counties in metro areas of 1 million	432	174,229,920	403,310
2. Metro-Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population.	378	67,262,832	177,944
3. Metro-Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population.	356	28,806,808	80,918
4. Nonmetro-Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area.	214	13,555,616	63,344
5. Nonmetro-Urban population of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to metro area.	92	5,013,724	54,497
6. Nonmetro-Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area.	592	14,689,296	24,813
7. Nonmetro-Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area.	433	8,218,773	18,981
8. Nonmetro-Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to metro area.	220	2,134,000	9,700
9. Nonmetro-Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to metro area.	423	2,582,415	6,105

The analysis consists of categorical comparisons to explore the relationship between the rural/urban continuum, the other independent variables, and voting behavior. This is followed by a set of OLS regression models for both the entire nation and for the states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. In these regression models, percentage of votes for the Republican candidate is the dependent variable, while the independent variables are the rural/urban continuum, percentage

employed in the goods-producing industries, percentage white, education, and income. In the regression models, the rural/urban continuum is used as an interval variable when it is clearly an ordinal variable. The other independent variables are near normally distributed.

## FINDINGS

The data in Table 2 provide strong support for the hypothesis that residence in rural communities is related to the likelihood of voting Republican. It is also clear that this tendency was greater in 2016 than in 2012. Trump received 40.9 percent of the votes in the most urban counties (Category 1). This was slightly lower than the proportion received by Romney in these counties four years earlier. As counties become more rural, the proportion of votes for Trump generally increased. In Category 9, the most rural counties, Trump received 73.7 percent of the votes. This is a substantial increase from the 65.4 percent that Romney received in these counties in 2012.

In the metro counties combined (categories 1-3), Trump received a slightly smaller proportion of the votes than Romney had received four years earlier (45.8 to 46.0 percent). Trump, however, received a substantially larger proportion of the nonmetro vote than Romney in 2012. Trump received 66.6 percent of the nonmetro vote, compared to Romney's 59.4 percent of the vote in these counties in 2012. Clinton received over 2 million more votes in Category 1 counties than Obama received in those counties four years earlier. She received nearly 13 million more votes than Trump in these most urban counties. However, she lost the other eight categories to Trump and received fewer votes than Obama had received in all eight of these categories. Even though Clinton won the popular vote by nearly three million votes, her failure to gain a higher proportion of the votes in rural counties, especially in key swing states, was clearly a primary factor in her loss (see Table 2).

Table 2. Rural-Urban Continuum and Votes in Presidential Elections of 2012 and 2016

	Rural-Urban Code Classification									
2012	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
<b>Romney</b>										
Total Votes	29,194,595	13,465,219	6,646,215	3,159,676	1,102,736	3,752,860	2,125,064	594,002	766,355	60,806,722
% of Votes	42.5	50.5	55.7	56.4	56.9	60.7	61.5	59.6	65.4	47.8
Counties Won	267	256	269	160	68	495	356	183	368	2,422
<b>Obama</b>										
Total Votes	39,439,630	13,193,364	5,287,656	2,446,998	834,803	2,426,740	1,327,925	402,616	405,952	65,765,684
% of Votes	57.5	49.5	44.3	43.6	43.1	39.3	38.5	40.4	34.6	52.2
Counties Won	205	139	100	57	24	102	78	37	57	799
<b>Difference</b>	-10,245,035	271,855	1,358,559	712,678	267,933	1,326,120	797,139	191,386	360,403	-4,958,962

Table 2 (cont'd). Rural-Urban Continuum and Votes in Presidential Elections of 2012 and 2016

2016	Rural-Urban Code Classification									Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
<b>Trump</b>										
Total Votes	28,867,018	14,211,274	7,024,836	3,490,278	1,181,178	4,209,203	2,323,709	672,847	846,188	62,826,531
Change from 2012	-327,577	746,055	378,621	330,602	78,442	456,343	198,645	78,845	79,833	2,019,809
% of Votes	40.9	52.4	59.9	63.1	61.9	68.7	68.2	67.5	73.7	48.9
Change from 2012	-1.6	1.9	4.2	6.8	5	8	6.7	7.9	8.3	1.1
Counties Won	275	282	301	184	73	540	383	196	387	2,621
Change from 2012	8	26	32	24	5	45	27	13	19	199
<b>Clinton</b>										
Total Votes	41,778,940	12,906,018	4,701,470	2,030,473	725,927	1,917,501	1,082,628	323,297	301,683	65,767,937
Change from 2012	2,339,310	-287,346	-586,186	-416,525	-108,876	-509,239	-245,297	-79,319	-104,269	2,253
% of Votes	59.1	47.6	40.1	36.8	38.1	31.3	31.8	32.5	26.3	51.1
Change from 2012	1.6	1.9	-4.2	-6.8	-5	-8	6.7	-7.9	-8.3	-1.1
Counties Won	197	113	68	33	19	57	51	24	38	600
Change from 2012	-8	-26	-32	-24	-5	-45	-27	-13	-19	-199
<b>Difference</b>	-12,911,922	1,305,256	2,323,366	1,459,805	455,251	2,291,702	1,241,081	349,550	544,505	-2,941,406

Table 3 presents data for the three vital swing states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Similar to national totals, Clinton easily won the Category 1 counties (57.2 percent to 42.8 percent). Trump then won the other eight categories of counties. Generally, as the county became more rural, Trump received a higher percentage of the vote. In Category 9, the most rural counties, Trump received over 66 percent of the vote. In 2012, Romney received 237,832 more votes than Obama in nonmetro counties (Categories 4-9) in the states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin combined. This was not enough to offset Obama's margin in urban areas, and Romney lost all three states. Critically, in 2016, Trump received 661,303 more votes than Clinton in nonmetro counties in these three states. This margin was enough to offset Clinton's victory in metro counties, and Trump was victorious in all three states. In the three states combined, Trump's margin of victory was only 77,711 votes. If Clinton had received an average of only about 150 more votes in each of the rural counties in these three states, she would be president (see Table 3).

Table 4 presents data to show the extent to which support for Trump in 2016 changed compared to support for Mitt Romney in 2012. To achieve this goal, an examination of the relationship between voting behavior, the rural/urban continuum, and the other independent variables is provided. For three of the independent variables (percentage employed in the goods-producing industries, educational attainment, and median household income), counties are divided into quartiles and comparisons made in votes for Romney vs. Trump along the rural/urban continuum. For the remaining independent variable (race/ethnicity), majority white counties are compared with majority minority counties. These categorical comparisons will allow the nature of relationships to be more apparent.

The data show a strong relationship between percentage employed in the goods-producing industries and an increase in the proportion of votes for Trump. In the highest quartile of counties, Trump received 10.8 percent more votes than Romney received in 2012. As employment in these industries declined, the percentage of change in the number of votes for Trump also declined. For the counties with the lowest levels of employment in the goods-producing industries, the percentage of change in the number of votes for Trump increased by only 0.4 percent. It should be noted that counties with a lower proportion of workers employed in the goods-producing industries tend to be urban.



Table 3. Rural-Urban Continuum and Votes in Presidential Elections of 2012 and 2016 in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin

	Rural-Urban Code Classification									
2012	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
<b>Romney</b>										
Total Votes	2,540,896	1,553,665	893,655	458,126	57,870	369,811	207,077	36,179	76,412	6,193,691
Percent of Votes	41.3	47	51.6	55.8	51.7	56.1	55.4	49.6	56.9	46.4
Counties Won	16	17	17	20	3	32	28	4	17	154
<b>Obama</b>										
Total Votes	3,605,983	1,753,504	838,080	363,056	54,121	289,300	166,526	36,761	57,879	7,165,210
Percent of Votes	58.7	53	48.4	44.2	48.3	43.9	44.6	50.4	43.1	53.6
Counties Won	10	17	12	4	1	8	6	7	3	68
<b>Difference</b>	-1,065,087	-199,839	-55,575	-95,070	-3,749	-80,511	-40,551	-582	18,533	-971,519

Table 3 (cont'd). Rural-Urban Continuum and Votes in Presidential Elections of 2012 and 2016 in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin

2016	Rural-Urban Code Classification									Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
<b>Trump</b>										
Total Votes	2,598,710	1,679,930	974,693	527,262	61,655	439,897	242,809	43,642	86,960	6,655,558
Change from 2012	57,814	126,265	81,038	69,136	3,785	70,086	35,732	7,463	10,548	461,867
Percent of Votes	42.8	50.3	57.9	64.9	55.5	67.5	65.9	62.1	66.2	50.3
Change from 2012	1.5	3.3	6.3	9.1	3.8	11.4	10.5	12.5	9.3	3.9
Counties Won	17	2.3	23	23	3	40	33	9	20	191
Change from 2012	1	6	6	3	0	8	5	5	3	37
<b>Clinton</b>										
Total Votes	3,466,604	1,657,517	709,804	285,609	49,461	212,036	125,781	26,660	44,375	6,577,847
Change from 2012	-139,379	-95,987	-128,276	-77,447	-4,660	-77,264	40,745	-10,101	-13,504	-587,363
Percent of Votes	57.2	49.7	42.1	35.1	44.5	32.5	34.1	37.9	33.8	49.7
Change from 2012	-1.5	-3.3	-6.3	-9.1	3.8	-11.4	-10.5	-12.5	-9.3	-3.9
Counties Won	9	11	6	1	1	0	1	2	0	31
Change from 2012	-1	-6	-6	-3	0	-8	-5	-5	-3	-37
<b>Difference</b>	-867,894	22,413	264,889	241,653	12,194	227,861	117,028	16,982	42,585	77,711

There was also clear support for the hypothesis about race/ethnicity and voting behavior. In majority white counties, Trump received 5.1 percent more votes than Romney received in 2012, while in majority minority counties, Trump received 4.1 percent fewer votes than Romney received in 2012.

There was a clear relationship between educational attainment and change in the number of votes for Trump. In counties in the highest quartile of educational attainment, Trump received 1.1 percent fewer votes than Romney received four years earlier. In comparison, where educational attainment levels are lowest, Trump received 12.2 percent more votes than Romney had received. The results were similar for median household income. In the wealthiest counties, the number of votes for Trump declined relative to Romney, while in counties in the lowest quartile of median household income, there was a significant increase in the number of votes for Trump compared to Romney.

To summarize, Table 4 clearly shows that, when compared to Romney, Trump was able to attract a much larger number of votes in counties with high proportions of workers in the goods-producing industries, where most residents are white and where educational levels and incomes are low (see Table 4).

Tables 5 and 6 show the results of regression analyses. The regression models for the entire nation is presented in Table 5, while the models for the three states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin are shown in Table 6. In all models, the percentage of votes for the Republican candidate is the dependent variable, while the rural/urban continuum, percentage employed in the goods-producing industries, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and median household income are independent variables. Preliminary analysis also included the interaction variables between the rural-urban continuum and each of the other independent variables. The interaction variable for the rural-urban continuum and employment in the goods-producing industries was statistically significant and so is included in the models presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Most significantly, the regression models explained a much higher proportion of variation in the dependent variable in 2016 than in 2012. This indicates that the already strong divisions in our country had become even more pronounced in 2016. Overall, the most important independent

variable was educational attainment. As expected, in counties with a lower proportion of college graduates, the percentage of votes for Republican candidates increased. This relationship was much stronger in 2016 than in 2012. Race/ethnicity was the next strongest variable, and as expected, as the percentage of residents who are white increased, the percentage of Republican votes increased.

At the national level, the other three independent variables (rural/urban continuum, percentage employed in the goods-producing industries, and median household income) were statistically significant, but not as strong as education and race/ethnicity. In each case the relationships were in the expected direction. That is, counties most likely to vote Republican were more rural, had high proportions of persons employed in the goods-producing industries, and had low incomes. The negative relationship for the interaction variable indicates that the importance of employment in the goods-producing industries declines in the most rural counties. For the three state (Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) regression model, the rural/urban continuum variable was not statistically significant, indicating that it is not rural residence per se, but the characteristics of rural counties that result in their overwhelming support of Republican candidates, and especially for Trump (see Tables 5 and 6).

Table 4. Votes in Presidential Elections of 2012 and 2016 by Rural-Urban Continuum and Independent Variables

Independent Variables	Rural-Urban Continuum Category									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
% in Goods Producing Industries										
<b>Highest Quartile</b>										
Romney	148,342	602,549	424,979	549,440	174,475	1,355,675	563,038	195,693	297,156	4,311,347
Trump	165,199	647,903	458,869	613,680	186,683	1,543,062	612,847	222,308	327,019	4,777,570
(% Change)	(11.4)	(7.5)	(8.0)	(11.7)	(7.0)	(13.8)	(8.8)	(10.0)	(10.0)	(10.8)
<b>Second Quartile</b>										
Romney	1,337,925	1,775,916	1,387,886	894,394	178,445	1,060,480	585,596	168,501	239,093	7,628,236
Trump	1,396,593	1,885,763	1,489,772	1,001,423	192,655	1,195,380	659,009	191,638	266,459	8,278,692
(% Change)	(4.4)	(6.2)	(7.3)	(12.0)	(8.0)	(12.7)	(12.5)	(13.7)	(11.4)	(8.5)
<b>Third Quartile</b>										
Romney	6,152,339	4,078,678	1,587,181	941,580	304,745	909,537	626,516	145,730	148,593	14,894,899
Trump	6,235,148	4,291,825	1,724,503	1,056,522	334,036	1,008,551	689,483	163,662	165,933	15,669,663
(% Change)	(1.3)	(5.2)	(8.7)	(12.2)	(9.6)	(10.9)	(10.1)	(12.3)	(11.7)	(5.2)
<b>Lowest Quartile</b>										
Romney	21,555,989	7,008,076	3,246,169	774,262	445,071	427,168	349,914	84,078	81,513	33,972,240
Trump	21,070,078	7,385,783	3,351,692	818,653	467,804	462,210	362,370	95,239	86,777	34,100,606
(% Change)	(-2.3)	(5.4)	(3.3)	(5.7)	(5.1)	(8.2)	(3.6)	(13.3)	(6.5)	(0.4)

Table 4 (cont'd). Votes in Presidential Elections of 2012 and 2016 by Rural-Urban Continuum and Independent Variables

Independent Variables	Rural-Urban Continuum Category									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
Race/ Ethnicity										
Majority White										
Romney	20,090,721	11,624,625	6,230,393	2,961,960	1,013,645	3,526,065	2,023,854	559,398	741,090	48,771,751
Trump	20,248,468	12,396,178	6,603,440	3,287,632	1,090,335	3,975,156	2,222,153	637,063	820,062	51,280,487
(% Change)	(0.8)	(6.6)	(6.0)	(11.0)	(7.6)	(12.7)	(9.8)	(13.9)	(10.7)	(5.1)
Majority Minority										
Romney	9,103,874	1,840,594	415,822	197,716	89,091	226,795	101,210	34,604	25,265	12,034,971
Trump	8,618,550	1,815,096	421,396	202,646	90,843	234,047	101,556	35,784	26,126	11,546,044
(% Change)	(-5.3)	(-1.4)	(1.3)	(2.5)	(2.0)	(3.2)	(0.3)	(3.4)	(3.4)	(-4.1)

Table 4 (cont'd). Votes in Presidential Elections of 2012 and 2016 by Rural-Urban Continuum and Independent Variables

Independent Variables	Rural-Urban Continuum Category									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
Educational Attainment										
Highest Quartile										
Romney	25,138,413	8,787,287	2,900,484	722,556	349,921	304,513	343,262	50,331	90,715	38,687,482
Trump	24,304,818	9,041,377	2,967,218	745,131	367,565	323,183	355,865	54,171	92,093	38,251,421
(% Change)	(-3.3)	(2.9)	(2.3)	(3.1)	(5.0)	(6.1)	(3.7)	(7.6)	(1.5)	(-1.1)
Second Quartile										
Romney	2,902,811	3,154,201	2,496,345	941,331	414,199	618,108	480,507	115,498	291,176	11,342,176
Trump	3,216,702	3,469,323	2,671,831	1,046,293	451,616	690,008	527,268	127,541	239,028	12,439,610
(% Change)	(10.8)	(10.0)	(7.0)	(11.2)	(9.0)	(11.6)	(9.7)	(10.4)	(9.1)	(9.7)
Third Quartile										
Romney	893,302	1,031,420	855,046	1,101,072	267,207	1,226,652	725,203	162,001	166,847	6,428,750
Trump	1,044,045	1,163,568	944,681	1,247,270	286,129	1,398,237	800,597	184,635	186,012	7,255,174
(% Change)	(16.9)	(12.8)	(10.5)	(13.3)	(7.1)	(14.0)	(10.4)	(14.0)	(11.5)	(12.9)
Lowest Quartile										
Romney	260,069	492,311	394,340	394,717	71,409	1,603,587	576,092	266,172	289,617	4,348,314
Trump	301,453	537,006	441,106	451,584	75,868	1,797,775	639,979	306,500	329,055	4,880,326
(% Change)	(15.9)	(9.1)	(11.9)	(14.4)	(6.2)	(12.1)	(11.1)	(15.2)	(13.6)	(12.2)

Table 4 (cont'd). Votes in Presidential Elections of 2012 and 2016 by Rural-Urban Continuum and Independent Variables

Independent Variables	Rural-Urban Continuum Category									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
Median Household Income										
Highest Quartile										
Romney	22,674,738	5,914,998	1,776,926	552,418	239,236	328,016	274,421	69,853	110,473	31,941,079
Trump	2,083,010	6,151,700	1,830,432	578,944	252,818	369,285	280,348	78,860	118,378	31,743,775
(% Change)	(-2.6)	(4.0)	(3.0)	(4.8)	(5.7)	(12.6)	(2.2)	(12.9)	(7.2)	(-0.6)
Second Quartile										
Romney	4,580,937	4,618,910	2,457,053	922,117	242,241	996,870	503,704	109,642	166,430	14,597,904
Trump	4,743,259	4,846,482	2,584,523	1,038,944	261,805	1,129,660	553,498	123,787	182,039	15,463,997
(% Change)	(3.5)	(4.9)	(5.2)	(12.7)	(8.1)	(13.3)	(9.9)	(12.9)	(9.4)	(5.9)
Third Quartile										
Romney	1,691,548	2,455,473	1,908,671	1,150,169	412,445	1,218,372	598,203	156,336	169,477	9,760,694
Trump	1,771,379	2,700,887	2,066,732	1,296,866	444,708	1,380,350	665,306	181,342	188,870	10,696,440
(% Change)	(4.7)	(10.0)	(8.3)	(12.8)	(7.8)	(13.3)	(11.2)	(16.0)	(11.4)	(9.6)
Lowest Quartile										
Romney	247,372	475,838	503,565	534,972	208,814	1,209,602	748,736	258,171	319,975	4,507,045
Trump	269,370	512,205	543,149	575,524	221,847	1,329,908	824,557	288,858	356,901	4,922,319
(% Change)	(8.9)	(7.6)	(7.9)	(7.6)	(6.2)	(9.9)	(10.1)	(11.9)	(11.5)	(9.2)



Table 4 (cont'd). Votes in Presidential Elections of 2012 and 2016 by Rural-Urban Continuum and Independent Variables

Independent Variables	Rural-Urban Continuum Category									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
	Total									
Romney	29,194,595	13,465,219	6,646,215	3,159,676	1,102,736	3,752,860	2,125,064	594,002	766,355	60,806,722
Trump	28,867,018	14,211,274	7,024,836	3,490,278	1,181,178	4,209,203	2,323,709	672,847	846,188	62,826,531
(% Change)	(-1.1)	(5.5)	(5.7)	(10.5)	(7.1)	(12.2)	(9.3)	(13.3)	(10.4)	(3.3)

Table 5. Regression Analysis Showing the Relationship Between Independent Variables and Percent Voting Republican 2012-2016 (N=3,110)

Independent Variables	2012			2016		
	Parameter Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	Standardized Beta	Parameter Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	Standardized Beta
Rural-Urban Continuum	.008*	.006, .010	.152	.009*	.007, .010	.151
Percent in Goods Producing Industries	.099*	.094, .102	.109	.095*	.092, .099	.100
Percent White	.270*	.247, .294	.360	.371*	.350, .391	.463
Educational Attainment	-.633*	-.701, -.566	-.387	-.951*	-1.010, -0.890	-.546
Median Household Income	.0027*	.002, .003	.221	.0024*	.002, .003	.188
Rural-Urban/Goods Producing Interaction	-.0014*	-.002, -.001	-.177	-.001*	-.002, -.001	-.161
Intercept	.363*	.366, .391	-	.396*	.372, .420	-
F-Value	226.54*	-	-	585.55*	-	-
Model R <sup>2</sup>	.305	-	-	.531	-	-

\* Statistically significant at the .05 level

Table 6. Regression Analysis Showing the Relationship Between Independent Variables and Percent Voting Republican, in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, 2012-2016 (N=222)

Independent Variables	2012			2016		
	Parameter Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	Standardized Beta	Parameter Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	Standardized Beta
Rural-Urban Continuum	.003	-.003, .009	.081	.004	-.001, .009	.089
Percent in Goods Producing Industries	.133	.006, .148	.026	.150	.136, .163	.072
Percent White	.457*	.338, .576	.489	.510*	.407, .613	.481
Educational Attainment	-.416*	-.612, -.219	-.340	-.848*	-1.018, -.689	-.613
Median Household Income	.0032*	.001, .005	.301	.0027*	.001, .004	.222
Rural-Urban/Goods Producing Interaction	.0010	.001, .001	.022	-.0012	-.002, .001	-.047
Intercept	.033	-.093, .158	-	.165*	.057, .273	-
F-Value	22.09*	-	-	64.36*	-	-
Model R <sup>2</sup>	.381	-	-	.642	-	-

\*Statistically significant at the .05 level

## CONCLUSIONS

Winning an overwhelming majority of rural votes was vital in Donald Trump's triumph in the 2016 presidential election. In the critical swing states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, Trump not only received a much higher proportion of the rural vote than his opponent, Hillary Clinton, but also received many more rural votes than Mitt Romney had received four years earlier. The increased rural vote was enough to assure his victory.

Regression analysis revealed that the most important independent variables in explaining voting behavior were educational attainment and race/ethnicity. As expected, the data revealed that counties with low levels of educational attainment and a high percentage of white residents had large proportions of their residents vote for Trump. The variables of median household income, percentage employed in the goods-producing industries, and the rural/urban continuum were statistically significant but not as strong. The weakness of the rural/urban continuum variable indicates that it is not rural residence per se, but the fact that rural counties tend to have lower levels of educational attainment, lower incomes, a higher percentage of white residents, and higher rates of employment in the goods-producing industries that result in their support for Trump.

It should also be mentioned that Clinton won a number of rural counties. Rural counties won by Clinton tended to be of two types. The first are predominantly minority counties, including counties in the South with large African-American populations and counties in the West with large Latino or Native American populations. The second group of counties won by Clinton is high amenity counties with high proportions of well-educated and wealthy residents, such as Teton County (Jackson), Wyoming and Pitkin County (Aspen), Colorado.

This analysis made apparent the extent to which there appears to be two Americas with a large and growing gap between them. On the one side are communities that are urban and diverse, where residents tend to be highly educated, have relatively high incomes, and are less dependent on employment in the goods-producing industries. These counties are well integrated into the modern economy. Hillary Clinton, and President Obama before her, received a large majority of the votes in these counties.

On the other side are rural counties and parts of urban areas where most residents are white, tend to be employed in the goods-producing industries, and have lower levels of educational attainment and lower

incomes. This includes counties in Appalachia dependent on the coal industry, Rust Belt counties where manufacturing employment is in decline, and counties in the Midwest and West that have been traditionally dependent on agriculture, logging, or mining. Individuals in these counties are experiencing severe economic distress, and as a consequence, tended to vote for Trump. These results support the framework that individuals who feel that their social standing is being eroded by change are likely to oppose that change. In their mind, a clear way of resisting change was to vote for Donald Trump who in effect vowed to make America great by making it like it used to be.

In many ways the Republican Party as defined by Donald Trump is not sustainable. His plans to restore working class jobs cannot succeed long-term because it does not address the primary reason for the decline in these jobs, which is technological change. Demographically, the proportion of the total population that is white will continue to decline. The continued relevance of the Republican Party depends on finding a way to attract non-white voters and voters with higher levels of education. At the same time, the opportunity exists for the Democratic Party to once again become relevant in the predominantly white communities of rural America. White rural America feels like Democrats have abandoned them. What Democrats need to do is develop and implement policies that benefit rural Americans, including policies that help these communities become a vital part of twenty-first century America.

The working class needs help, but this help must be of the type that effectively addresses the problem. The working class jobs in the goods-producing industries are not coming back in large numbers. Instead, continued technological changes will make an even greater segment of American jobs obsolete. We cannot address the problem by turning the clock back. Both parties could benefit from providing policies and programs that actually benefit persons currently experiencing economic distress. Most significant would be people-based programs that help individuals obtain the education and training necessary to succeed in a modern twenty-first century economy.

#### DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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