

To what extent has race in the US played a role and been affected by Trump's presidency? Dorothy Zhang

Donald J Trump was elected as the 45th president of the United States of America in 2016. His campaign, "Make America Great Again" has created strong divisions among the views of American citizens, taking populist, nationalist, and white supremacist positions. Trump supporters argue that Trump's presidency has cut taxes, bolstered the economy, and protected the overall welfare of all American citizens no matter race; however, while Trump may have shown nominal support towards ethnic minorities for the sake of artifice, in reality, Trump has both taken advantage of and perpetuated racism towards all minority ethnic groups, worsening race relations particularly for Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Muslim/African Americans.

Critics argue that in addition to not being a racist person, Trump also has the best intentions of all Americans in mind. After all, Trump himself announced to White House reporters in July 2019 that "I'm the least racist person there is anywhere in the world."¹ While others like African American politician Ben Carson went on to claim at the Republican National Convention that "many on the other side love to incite division by claiming that President Trump is a racist. They could not be more wrong."² Clearly, had Trump been racist towards African Americans, Ben Carson would be a representative spokesman for such discrimination. On the contrary, Republican National Committee chair Ronna McDaniel revealed that: "The truth is, there's only one person who has empathized with everyday Americans, and actually been fighting for them over the past four years, and that is President Donald Trump."³ These claims made by powerful political figures mirror those of 39% of Americans.⁴ They believe Trump to be a nondiscriminatory president or the defender against white genocide, protecting the race that needs advocating for. After all, Trump has passed policies like the 2018 First Step Act, improving the criminal justice system which has historically targeted African American and Latino communities, or the Trump Tax Break, which aimed to turn distressed areas to opportunity zones. The policies mentioned above show Trump's regard for not just white Americans, but also colored minorities.

Nevertheless, as unbiased professor of sociology, Stephanie L Canizales, and associate professor of sociology, Jody Agius Vallejo claim, the Trump administration was not the origin of Latino racialization, but instead, took advantage of xenophobic tendencies. By seizing preexisting anti-Latino sentiment and using moments of crisis to propose new ones, Trump used a xenophobic campaign to paint himself as the defender of those fearing demographic change, or that Whites are under siege by the growing racial diversity. After being elected, Trump proceeded to reinforce these sentiments. Trump's racist rhetoric and policy actions have increased Latinos' experiences of

¹ Jordan Fabian, "Trump says he is the 'least racist person anywhere in the world,'" The Hill, last modified July 30, 2019, accessed April 24, 2023, <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration>

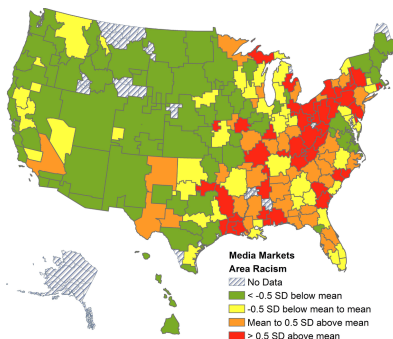
² Reuters, "Ben Carson says Trump isn't racist," news release, August 27, 2020, accessed April 24, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8CenzijjBY>.

³ Reuters Staff, "Quotes from Trump, supporters at U.S. Republican Convention," news release, August 24, 2020, accessed April 24, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-election-convention-quotes>

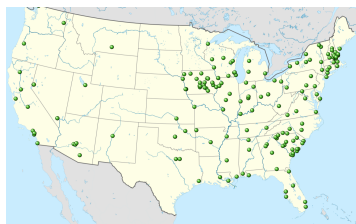
⁴ Domenico Montanaro, "Don't call them 'witch hunts.' Most Americans say investigations into Trump are fair," NPR KQED, last modified March 27, 2023, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023>

racialized violence.⁵ Additionally, unbiased professors at the University of California Riverside, Benjamin Newman, Jennifer L. Merolla, Sono Shah, Danielle Casarez Lemi, Loren Collingwood, and S. Karthick Ramakrishnan states that there is an emboldening effect of explicitly racial speech by political elites on citizens in a society where individuals possess ingrained prejudices. Results of their study demonstrate that in the absence of prejudiced elite speech, prejudiced citizens constrain their expression; however, in the presence of prejudiced elite speech, similar to Trump's political presence, citizens are emboldened to both express and act upon their prejudices.⁶

Trump utilized the country's ingrained racism and xenophobia in order to win the 2016 presidential election, because concerns over Mexican immigration and white genocide were widespread. Firstly, Trump's overall campaign took advantage of the backlash against the Obama presidency. While the election of an African American president may have seemed like a huge step in the right direction for an equal America, many people thought the opposite. Millions of white Americans were threatened over his victory as a representation of whites losing their majority status in the US. Feelings of white genocide arose, or as republican Robert Whitaker wrote in "The Mantra" that "anti-racist is a code word for anti-white."⁷ Thus, Trump, a white supremacist who promised to restore the great America, was their savior. Throughout his 2016 presidential campaign, Trump promised to cut taxes, repeal Obama care, create jobs, and reshape the judiciary,



but another significant part of his campaign focused on America's xenophobic sentiment – Trump emphasized the building of a wall on the US Mexico border, a Muslim ban, as well as bombing ISIS. Trump took advantage of xenophobia of Mexican immigration in particular, proclaiming in 2015 when he announced his candidacy that "they're [mexicans] are rapists...some, I assume are good people."⁸ This statement is one of many false stereotypes characterizing Mexican immigrants as a danger to America. By feeding the "white genocide" myth that many white Americans may possess or come to possess from Trump's hateful rhetoric, the bans and walls that Trump proposes are the only legislation made to protect the white population. Many white supremacist organizations found a champion and spokesman in Trump, while others reactivated racist sentiments as a result of Trump emphasizing the waning white dominance. Additionally, Trump hosted considerably more rallies in states with higher rates of racism. To the left is a map of the states colored by racism titled, "Graph 1: Association between an Internet-Based Measure of Area Racism and



⁵Stephanie L. Canizales and Jody Agius Vallejo, "Latinos & Racism in the Trump Era," *Daedalus* 150, no. 2 (Spring 2021): accessed April 6, 2023, <https://direct.mit.edu/daed/article>.

⁶Benjamin Newman et al., "The Trump Effect: An Experimental Investigation of the Emboldening Effect of Racially Inflammatory Elite Communication," *British Journal of Political Science*, accessed April 6, 2023.

⁷Ibram K. Kendi, "The Mantra of White Supremacy," *The Atlantic*, last modified November 30, 2021, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas>

⁸Donald Trump's Comments On Immigrants: They're Rapists. They All Have AIDS | Velshi & Ruhle | MSNBC. Performed by Ari Velshi. MSNBC, 2018.

Black Mortality.”⁹ Racism was measured by Google searches containing the N-word. This aligns with “Graph 2: Locations in the United States where President Donald Trump visited during the primaries of his 2016 presidential campaign.”¹⁰ Trump clearly tactically targeted racist states, mainly in the north and south west, appealing to their internalized racist ideas, in order to gain a majority in the 2016 presidential election.

Trump’s inflammatory language has encouraged more racist conversation and racism as a whole, because of the emboldening effect, white supremacist groups, and overall American sentiment. A randomized controlled experiment by professors at the University of California Riverside, found that exposure to racially inflammatory communication from Trump can have an emboldening effect on individuals’ expression of prejudiced attitudes and behavior, particularly among those who are already predisposed to hold such attitudes. A sample of 600 white Americans were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: one group read a racially inflammatory Trump statement, while the other read a non-racially charged Trump statement. Afterward, participants completed a series of measures assessing their attitudes towards minority groups as well as their willingness to express those publicly. The study found that participants who were exposed to racially inflammatory language expressed more prejudiced attitudes towards minority groups, were more willing to express those publicly, and had higher levels of implicit bias compared to those who read the non-racially charged speech.¹¹ As seen, Trump’s constant barrage of blatantly racist remarks towards non-whites has substantial effects on peoples’ willingness to showcase racism. Additionally, white supremacist groups are encouraged and legitimized by Trump, allowing their influence to expand. In the Trump vs Biden 2020 presidential debate, similar to the 2017 Charlottesville incident, when moderator Chris Wallace asked “are you willing, tonight, to condemn white supremacists and militia groups and to say that they need to stand down?” Trump refused to explicitly condemn those groups, instead proclaiming, “Proud Boys, stand back and stand by! But I’ll tell you what, somebody’s got to do something about antifa and the left.”¹² The Proud Boys perpetuate misogynistic, islamophobic, transphobic, anti-immigration, white supremacist, and anti-Semitic ideologies. Trump’s response legitimized Proud Boys and helped them recruit – Trump’s “stand back and stand by” was printed on their T-shirts and logos. With the president of the United States of America, the highest representation of all the people of the US, supporting their organization, the Proud Boys are encouraged to continue perpetuating their ideals. Furthermore, Trump is endorsed by many white supremacist groups including the KKK, David Duke, and countless Neo-Nazis bloggers. After Trump was elected, leader of the National Policy Institute, Richard Spencer gathered for a conference, saying “Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail victory!” along with Nazi salutes.¹³ Clearly, Trump’s racist rhetoric and inexplicit encouragement of white supremacists, has increased the power of white supremacist organizations at the expense of non-whites living in America. Finally, Americans themselves believe the Trump presidency has worsened racial tensions. This

⁹David H. Chae et al., "Association between an Internet-Based Measure of Area Racism and Black Mortality," *Plos One*, April 24, 2015, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0122963>.

¹⁰List of rallies for the 2016 Donald Trump presidential campaign," map, Wikipedia, May 5, 2023, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

¹¹Newman et al., "The Trump," [Page 1].

¹² *Trump tells Proud Boys: 'Stand back and stand by'*. Produced by Commission on Presidential Debates. Associated Press, 2020.

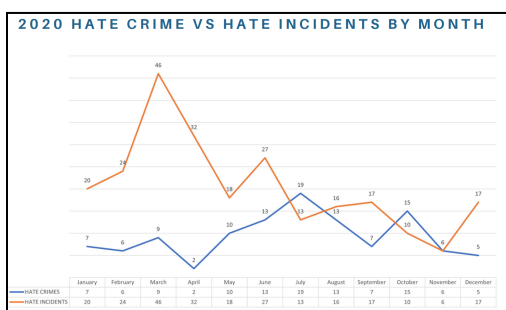
¹³"Hail Trump!": Richard Spencer Speech Excerpts," video, Youtube, posted by The Atlantic, 2016, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1o6-bi3jlxk>.

2017 report details surveys of Americans that poll their opinion on how Trump's presidency has worsened racial tensions. 60% of Americans say his election has led to worse race relations.¹⁴ Thus, even without hard data, there is a consensus among US citizens that Trump has not improved race relations, if not worsened.

Trump's racist language and discriminatory policies worsened Hispanic Americans' experiences in the US, because of Executive Order 13767 and his anti-Hispanic slander. Trump has spread racist tropes and populist language such as "Make America Great Again", slandering Mexico for "not sending their best", or equating immigrants with "drug lords" and "bad hombres." During his candidacy, Trump used anti-latino sentiment to enforce the Latino Threat Narrative and gain popularity as a white protector. Moreover, not only has Trump worsened the image of Hispanic Americans, he has enforced anti-Hispanic discrimination into law. During his first week of presidency, Trump signed two executive orders – the building of the wall along the US-Mexico border, and expansion of Border Patrol and DHS, which increased civil immigration arrests by 38 percent. Trump proposed Executive Order 13767 to build a wall on the Mexico-US border, arguing that illegal immigration from Mexico has been a threat to national security, from criminal drug operations, to overwhelming federal resources.¹⁵ This bill mandated that a physical wall be built on the southern border of the US, where law enforcement detain those illegally crossing. This bill proposed by Trump further fuels racism and xenophobia in the US; not only the contents but also the rhetoric around the bill scapegoats Latinos for America's problems. It indoctrinates citizens to believe false security risks from Mexico, further increasing racial tensions. Trump's racist rhetoric and policies have increased Latinos' experiences of institutionalized violence from the expansion of the detention and deportation, while encouraging racial violence directed at Latinos. So not only does the wall do nothing to protect public safety, it paints a target on the backs of Latino immigrants.

Trump's rhetoric around COVID-19 has worsened the Asian American situation, by increasing hate crimes and validating the expression of racism online. There have been many examples of Trump's rhetoric against Asian Americans, such as calling the COVID-19 virus the "Chinese virus" and "kung flu."¹⁶ Such rhetoric has increased the hate surrounding the AAPI

community, such as in Orange County. A report written by the Orange County Human Relations Commission during 2020 in response to the increase in anti-asian hate crimes informed residents of the definition of hate crimes, trends in data, and information on ways to address this violence. The "2020 Hate Crime vs Hate Incidents by Month" chart on the tenth page of this report shows a spike in hate incidents during March of 2020, from twenty-four in February to forty-six in March.¹⁷ Coincidentally, this spike is the same time as Trump's March 16th tweet of COVID-19 being the



¹⁴ "Most Americans Say Trump's Election Has Led to Worse Race Relations in the U.S." *Pew Research Center*, December 19, 2017. Accessed April 19, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2017/12/19/>.

¹⁵ Exec. Order No. 12767, 3 C.F.R. (2017). Accessed April 19, 2023. <https://www.federalregister.gov/>

¹⁶ German Lopez, "Donald Trump's Long History of Racism, from the 1970s to 2020," *Vox*, last modified August 13, 2020, accessed April 20, 2023, <https://www.vox.com/2016/7/25/12270880/donald-trump-racist-racism-history>.

¹⁷ County of Orange. *2020 Orange County Hate Crimes Report*. 2020. Accessed April 19, 2023. <https://www.occommunityservices.org/sites/occs/files/2021-09/Hate%20Crime%20Report%202020.pdf>.

“chinese virus.”¹⁸ While it may have been expected that the number of hate incidents in January and February of 2020 were increasing due to the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic originating in China, the direct correlation with number of hate incidents in Orange county to Trump’s clear scapegoating show that Trump’s blatant racism does motivate his audience to perpetuate those ideals – in other words, the emboldening effect is at work. Similarly, professors at various universities created a study to explore the extent to which phrases, “COVID-19” and “Chinese virus” were associated with anti-Asian comments. They used Twitter’s Application Program Interface to evaluate the effects of Trump’s March 16 tweet. The study concluded that after March 16th, “Both hashtags [#covid19 and #chinesevirus] together climbed from about 53 000 to 1.2 million.” Second, “the mean number of daily users from the #covid19 group rose by 379%, compared with an increase of 8351% for the #chinesevirus group.” Finally, “the number of anti-Asian hashtags rose by 17400%.”¹⁹ This finding aligns with previous studies that suggest a rise in prejudicial language by the president, in this case attaching location or ethnicity to a disease, encourages and validates hate in others to further strains race relations. Not only were twitter users more inclined to vocalize their hate towards Asians, but also prompted to act on those sentiments and commit hate crimes.

Finally, Trump’s rhetoric and policies have also worsened the situation for Muslim American and other minorities by increasing overall hate crimes, because of Executive Order 13769 and Trump’s false stereotypes. In 2017, Trump proposed Executive Order 13769 to prevent Muslims terrorists from entering the US. Trump argued that in order to protect Americans from terrorists, the United States should not admit those who engage in acts of bigotry or those who would oppress Americans of any race, gender, or sexual orientation. Although this reasoning seemed sensible, his bill suspended the entry of Syrian refugees, and seven predominantly Muslim countries: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.²⁰ Not only does the logic of Trump’ argument show no connections between terrorists and Muslims, his anti-Muslim sentiment has real effects on the American population. There was a 91% increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes in the first half of 2017, compared to 2016.²¹ Trump has also proposed countless other bans such as the 2020 Asylum Ban, Immigrant Visa Ban, and Refugee Ban, which restricted the immigration of mainly non-European citizens into the US. Trumps rhetoric around banning tailored to great replacement theory and white genocide sentiments, while perpetuating racist beliefs. By sustaining and spreading the xenophobic ideals, Trump was able to garner consistent support from uneducated US citizens. Trump has also made many other incendiary racial remarks – in this video created by the news station MSNBC, reporter Ari Velshi compiled examples of Trump saying that the “1500 Haitian immigrants who received visas in 2017 all have AIDS”, as well as “Nigerian immigrants won’t go back to their huts”, or that African nations were “sh*thole countries” during the white house immigration meeting.²² These hateful comments prove that Trump’s presidency has further increased racial tensions by spreading false stereotypes. They’ve caused a direct increase in overall hate and hate crimes –

¹⁸ Lopez, "Donald Trump's," Vox.

¹⁹ Hswen, Yulin, Xiang Xu, Anna Hing, Jared B. Hawkins, John S. Brownstein, and Gilbert C. Gee. "Association of '#covid19' Versus '#chinesevirus' With Anti-Asian Sentiment on Twitter: March 9–23, 2020." *American Journal of Public Health*, April 7, 2021. Accessed April 19, 2023.

²⁰ Exec. Order No. 13679, 3 C.F.R. (2017). Accessed April 20, 2023.

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/02/01/2017-02281/protecting-the-nation-from-foreign-terrorist-entry-into-the-united-states>.

²¹ Benjamin C. Ruisch and Melissa J. Ferguson, "Did Donald Trump's Presidency Reshape Americans' Prejudices?," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 27, no. 3 (March 2023): accessed May 10, 2023.

²² Donald Trump’s.



annual hate crimes remained around 20% higher during his administration.²³ Evidently, Trump's incorrect and discriminatory rhetoric around race as well as his legislative actions have substantially worsened race relations in the US.

Ultimately, Trump has not only taken advantage of ingrained racism to win the 2016 presidential election, but has also increased overall racial hate in the US, especially for Hispanic, Asian, and Muslim/African Americans. And despite memories of the January 6th insurrection, double impeachment, indictment on 34 accounts of fraud, and liability for sexual assault still fresh in mind, Trump has launched his 2nd term 2024 campaign while proving himself to be a favorite among the Republican candidates. Trump's new "Agenda 47" builds off the same foundation of his 2016 candidacy. From waging war on the cartel, to placing aggressive new restrictions on China, and cracking down on domestic censorship, his promises follow the same pattern – spreading misinformation in order to take advantage of citizens' ingrained racism, and exacerbating the race relations already worsened from his previous presidency. Trump has also promised a second term sought with vengeance and payback, stating "I am your retribution" during the March 2023 Conservative Political Action Conference.²⁴ He essentially promised to restore "power" to white Americans, which has proved detrimental towards discrimination in America. Ultimately, as seen by his 2017 term, Donald Trump's influence on US citizens' viewpoints, actions, and race relations is powerful and destructive— make America great again may not be so great.

²³Ruisch and Ferguson, "Did Donald" *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*

²⁴Donald J. Trump, "I am you Retribution," speech presented at Conservative Political Action Conference, video, On Demand News, posted March 2023, accessed May 16, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qG0ko3rMWig>.

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