Commerce and Campaigns

Thomas M. Flaherty[1] **Duy Trinh**[2] **Changlip Kim**[1] **Olivia Hundley**[1]

[1]Texas A&M University [2]Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Usually, trade = "conducted in the shadows" by special interest groups
(Grossman & Helpman 1994, Frieden 2022)

Usually, trade = "conducted in the shadows" by special interest groups
(Grossman & Helpman 1994, Frieden 2022)

"We've lost 600,000 manufacturing jobs...we're going to make ***trade*** *work for us."*

—Mitt Romney, Oct. 12, 2012

Usually, trade = "conducted in the shadows" by special interest groups
(Grossman & Helpman 1994, Frieden 2022)

*"We've lost 600,000 manufacturing jobs...we're going to make **trade** work for us."*

—Mitt Romney, Oct. 12, 2012

*"One million jobs have been lost because of **NAFTA**, including nearly 50,000 jobs here in Ohio"*

—Barack Obama, Feb. 24, 2008

Usually, trade = "conducted in the shadows" by special interest groups
(Grossman & Helpman 1994, Frieden 2022)

*"We've lost 600,000 manufacturing jobs...we're going to make **trade** work for us."*

—Mitt Romney, Oct. 12, 2012

*"One million jobs have been lost because of **NAFTA**, including nearly 50,000 jobs here in Ohio"*

—Barack Obama, Feb. 24, 2008

Research Question: *Why do presidential campaigns raise public salience of trade?*

Contradictory evidence

- Open Economy Politics (OEP) view = democratic accountability:

Contradictory evidence

- Open Economy Politics (OEP) view = democratic accountability:
  - voter-driven responsiveness (interests → voting → campaign trade messaging) (Lake 2009, Rickard 2025, Feigenbaum & Hall 2015, Margalit 2011; Jensen, Quinn, Weymouth 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018, Autor et al 2020).

Contradictory evidence

- Open Economy Politics (OEP) view = democratic accountability:
  - voter-driven responsiveness (interests → voting → campaign trade messaging) (Lake 2009, Rickard 2025, Feigenbaum & Hall 2015, Margalit 2011; Jensen, Quinn, Weymouth 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018, Autor et al 2020).
- Elite-driven messaging (i.e., blaming migrants)

Contradictory evidence

- Open Economy Politics (OEP) view = democratic accountability:
  - voter-driven responsiveness (interests → voting → campaign trade messaging) (Lake 2009, Rickard 2025, Feigenbaum & Hall 2015, Margalit 2011; Jensen, Quinn, Weymouth 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018, Autor et al 2020).
- Elite-driven messaging (i.e., blaming migrants)
  - trade policy = complicated/"hard issue" (Carmines and Stimson 2014, Rho and Tomz 2017, Guisinger 2009)

Contradictory evidence

- Open Economy Politics (OEP) view = democratic accountability:
  - voter-driven responsiveness (interests → voting → campaign trade messaging) (Lake 2009, Rickard 2025, Feigenbaum & Hall 2015, Margalit 2011; Jensen, Quinn, Weymouth 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018, Autor et al 2020).
- Elite-driven messaging (i.e., blaming migrants)
  - trade policy = complicated/"hard issue" (Carmines and Stimson 2014, Rho and Tomz 2017, Guisinger 2009)
  - Public doesn't hold legislators accountable on trade (Guisinger 2009).

Contradictory evidence

- Open Economy Politics (OEP) view = democratic accountability:
  - voter-driven responsiveness (interests → voting → campaign trade messaging)
    (Lake 2009, Rickard 2025, Feigenbaum & Hall 2015, Margalit 2011; Jensen, Quinn, Weymouth 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018, Autor et al 2020).
- Elite-driven messaging (i.e., blaming migrants)
  - trade policy = complicated/"hard issue" (Carmines and Stimson 2014, Rho and Tomz 2017, Guisinger 2009)
  - Public doesn't hold legislators accountable on trade (Guisinger 2009).
  - Policy preferences driven by elites
    (e.g., Zaller 1992, Guisinger and Saunders 2017, Mutz 2018, De Vries et al. 2021)

  ↪ elites raise salience of "easy issues" **(migrant cultural concerns)** to placate economically vulnerable
  (campaign speech → voting ≠ interests)
  Hopkins 2010, Rodrik 2018, Margalit 2019, Walter 2021, Baccini and Weymouth 2021, Katitas 2022

Contradictory evidence

- Open Economy Politics (OEP) view = democratic accountability:
  - voter-driven responsiveness (interests → voting → campaign trade messaging)
    (Lake 2009, Rickard 2025, Feigenbaum & Hall 2015, Margalit 2011; Jensen, Quinn, Weymouth 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018, Autor et al 2020).
- Elite-driven messaging (i.e., blaming migrants)
  - trade policy = complicated/"hard issue" (Carmines and Stimson 2014, Rho and Tomz 2017, Guisinger 2009)
  - Public doesn't hold legislators accountable on trade (Guisinger 2009).
  - Policy preferences driven by elites
    (e.g., Zaller 1992, Guisinger and Saunders 2017, Mutz 2018, De Vries et al. 2021)

  ↪ elites raise salience of "easy issues" **(migrant cultural concerns)** to placate economically vulnerable
  (campaign speech → voting ≠ interests)
  Hopkins 2010, Rodrik 2018, Margalit 2019, Walter 2021, Baccini and Weymouth 2021, Katitas 2022

Contradictory evidence

- Open Economy Politics (OEP) view = democratic accountability:
  - voter-driven responsiveness (interests → voting → campaign trade messaging)
    (Lake 2009, Rickard 2025, Feigenbaum & Hall 2015, Margalit 2011; Jensen, Quinn, Weymouth 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018, Autor et al 2020).
- Elite-driven messaging (i.e., blaming migrants)
  - trade policy = complicated/"hard issue" (Carmines and Stimson 2014, Rho and Tomz 2017, Guisinger 2009)
  - Public doesn't hold legislators accountable on trade (Guisinger 2009).
  - Policy preferences driven by elites
    (e.g., Zaller 1992, Guisinger and Saunders 2017, Mutz 2018, De Vries et al. 2021)

    ↪ elites raise salience of "easy issues" **(migrant cultural concerns)** to placate economically vulnerable
    (campaign speech → voting ≠ interests)
    Hopkins 2010, Rodrik 2018, Margalit 2019, Walter 2021, Baccini and Weymouth 2021, Katitas 2022
- Our paper: both correct, but depends: (political geog) × (economic geog).

Overview

1. Original data:
   trade & immigration content in the universe of campaign speeches in US presidential elections (2008-2024).

Overview

1. Original data:
   trade & immigration content in the universe of campaign speeches in US presidential elections (2008-2024).

2. Findings:

Overview

1. Original data:
   trade & immigration content in the universe of campaign speeches in US presidential elections (2008-2024).

2. Findings:

Overview

1. Original data:
   trade & immigration content in the universe of campaign speeches in US presidential elections (2008-2024).

2. Findings:
   1. Responsiveness: campaigns increase trade salience in manufacturing areas

Overview

1. Original data:
   trade & immigration content in the universe of campaign speeches in US presidential elections (2008-2024).

2. Findings:
   1. Responsiveness: campaigns increase trade salience in manufacturing areas
   2. Responsiveness only where races = competitive.

Overview

1. Original data:
   trade & immigration content in the universe of campaign speeches in US presidential elections (2008-2024).

2. Findings:
   1. Responsiveness: campaigns increase trade salience in manufacturing areas
   2. Responsiveness only where races = competitive.
   3. Outside of competitive races, campaigns:
      - ★ *decrease*/avoid trade policy where voters have a material interest
      - ★ *increase* immigration messages, despite no change in local migrant impacts.

Basic Theoretical Setup

1. Define voters' trade interests (Jensen, Quinn, & Weymouth 2017)
   = location of manufacturing industries

Basic Theoretical Setup

1. Define voters' trade interests (Jensen, Quinn, & Weymouth 2017)
   = location of manufacturing industries

2. Define informational environment (Carmines and Stimson 2014)
   1. **trade** = "hard issue"—technical & weak-partisan priors (Rho&Tomz 2017,Guisinger2009)
   2. **immigration** = "easy issue"—symbolic & strong partisan priors
      (Hajnal & Rivera 2014, Kinder & Kam, 2010, Schildkraut 2011, Burns & Gilbel 2000, Hainmueller & Hangartner 2013, Valentino, Brader & Jardina 2013, Mutz 2018)

Basic Theoretical Setup

1. Define voters' trade interests (Jensen, Quinn, & Weymouth 2017)
   = location of manufacturing industries

2. Define informational environment (Carmines and Stimson 2014)
   1. **trade** = "hard issue"—technical & weak-partisan priors (Rho&Tomz 2017,Guisinger2009)
   2. **immigration** = "easy issue"—symbolic & strong partisan priors
      (Hajnal & Rivera 2014, Kinder & Kam, 2010, Schildkraut 2011, Burns & Gilbel 2000, Hainmueller & Hangartner 2013, Valentino, Brader & Jardina 2013, Mutz 2018)

3. Strategies of office-motivated campaigns:

Basic Theoretical Setup

1. Define voters' trade interests (Jensen, Quinn, & Weymouth 2017)
   = location of manufacturing industries

2. Define informational environment (Carmines and Stimson 2014)
   1. **trade** = "hard issue"—technical & weak-partisan priors (Rho&Tomz 2017,Guisinger2009)
   2. **immigration** = "easy issue"—symbolic & strong partisan priors
      (Hajnal & Rivera 2014, Kinder & Kam, 2010, Schildkraut 2011, Burns & Gilbel 2000, Hainmueller & Hangartner 2013, Valentino, Brader & Jardina 2013, Mutz 2018)

3. Strategies of office-motivated campaigns:
   1. **top-down**: ignore trade interests & cheaply rally support using "easy" immigration
      Gonzalez-Rostani, Invio&Lezama 2025, Schmidt-Catran&Czymara 2023, Reny&gest, 2024

Basic Theoretical Setup

1. Define voters' trade interests (Jensen, Quinn, & Weymouth 2017)
   = location of manufacturing industries

2. Define informational environment (Carmines and Stimson 2014)
   1. **trade** = "hard issue"—technical & weak-partisan priors (Rho&Tomz 2017,Guisinger2009)
   2. **immigration** = "easy issue"—symbolic & strong partisan priors (Hajnal & Rivera 2014, Kinder & Kam, 2010, Schildkraut 2011, Burns & Gilbel 2000, Hainmueller & Hangartner 2013, Valentino, Brader & Jardina 2013, Mutz 2018)

3. Strategies of office-motivated campaigns:
   1. **top-down**: ignore trade interests & cheaply rally support using "easy" immigration Gonzalez-Rostani, Invio&Lezama 2025, Schmidt-Catran&Czymara 2023, Reny&gest, 2024
   2. **bottom-up**: invest in costly trade info campaign in mfg CZs Feigenbaum&Hall 2015

Basic Theoretical Setup

1. Define voters' trade interests (Jensen, Quinn, & Weymouth 2017)
   = location of manufacturing industries

2. Define informational environment (Carmines and Stimson 2014)
   1. **trade** = "hard issue"—technical & weak-partisan priors (Rho&Tomz 2017,Guisinger2009)
   2. **immigration** = "easy issue"—symbolic & strong partisan priors (Hajnal & Rivera 2014, Kinder & Kam, 2010, Schildkraut 2011, Burns & Gilbel 2000, Hainmueller & Hangartner 2013, Valentino, Brader & Jardina 2013, Mutz 2018)

3. Strategies of office-motivated campaigns:
   1. **top-down**: ignore trade interests & cheaply rally support using "easy" immigration Gonzalez-Rostani, Invio&Lezama 2025, Schmidt-Catran&Czymara 2023, Reny&gest, 2024
   2. **bottom-up**: invest in costly trade info campaign in mfg CZs Feigenbaum&Hall 2015
   3. **Institutional moderator:** electoral college moderates payoff of bottom-up strategy

Hypotheses

H1: (bottom-up) On average, increases in mfg interests → *increases* **trade** speech proportion.

Hypotheses

H1: (bottom-up) On average, increases in mfg interests → *increases* **trade** speech proportion.

H2: (top-down) On average, increases in mfg interests → *increases* **immigration** speech proportion (holding migrant exposure constant).

Hypotheses

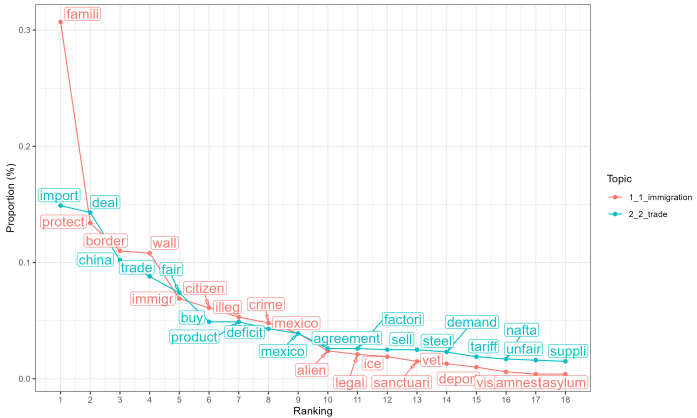
H1: (bottom-up) On average, increases in mfg interests → *increases* **trade** speech proportion.

H2: (top-down) On average, increases in mfg interests → *increases* **immigration** speech proportion (holding migrant exposure constant).

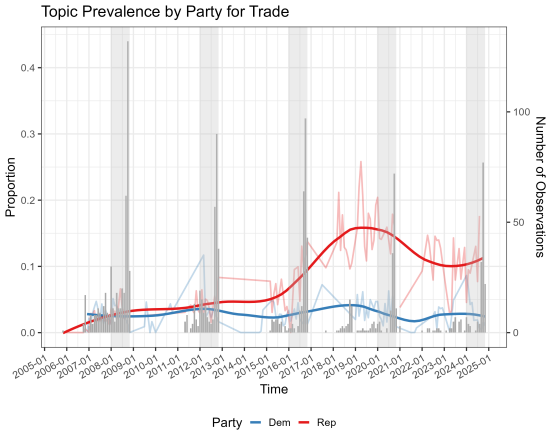
H3: Moderation: ↑ electoral competition increase campaign responsiveness to mfg interests (↑ **trade**, ↓ **immigration**).

Data: 1,922 campaign speeches in US presidential elections

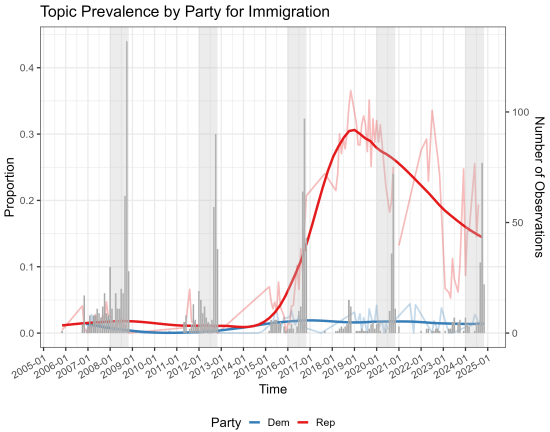
- 2008-2024 election cycles; Source American Presidency Project
- Each speech geocoded to CZ-level.
- Measure trade and immigration content:
  Keyword-Assisted Topic Model (KeyATM) Eshima, Imai & Tomoya Sasaki 2024



Stylized Fact 1: rising trade and immigration salience after 2016

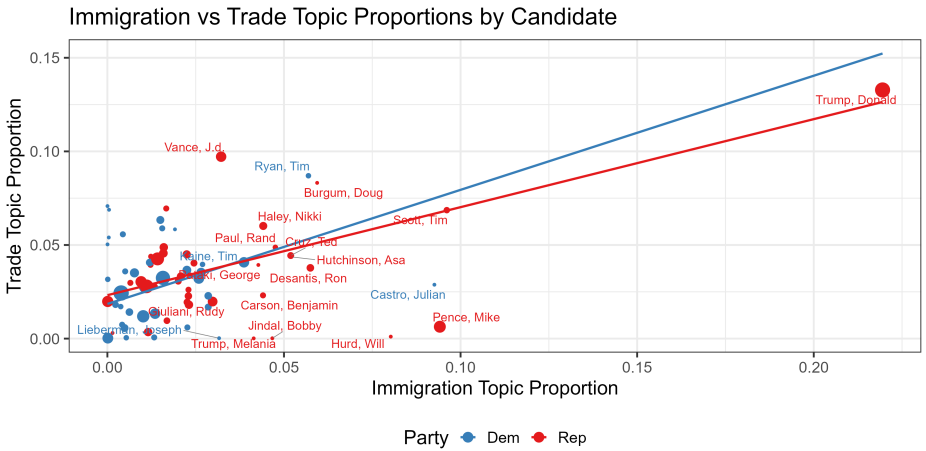


(a) Trade Speech



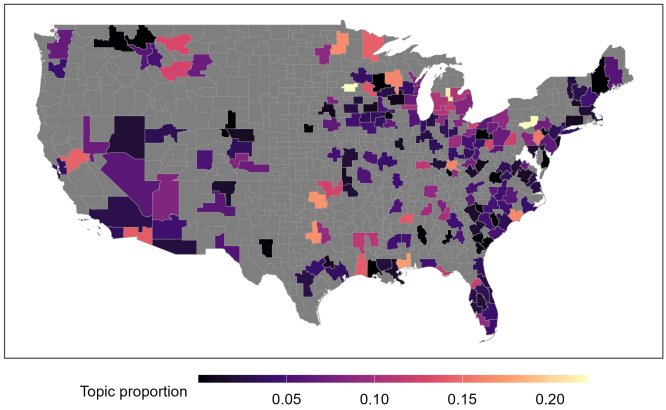
(b) Immigration Speech

Stylized Fact 2: trade and immigration salience correlated at the *national* level.



Stylized Fact 3: wide variation in trade salience at *CZ* level

Geographical distribution of trade topic



Highest trade salience: cities in Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania.
Compared to immigration: Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia, Kentucky, and Arizona.

Empirical Analysis

$$\hat{TopicY}_{prt} = \beta \mathbf{mfgSpecialization_{rt}} + \mathbf{X}\psi + \tau_t + \epsilon_{prt}$$

- Controls $\mathbf{X}$:

Empirical Analysis

$$\hat{TopicY}_{prt} = \beta \mathbf{mfgSpecialization_{rt}} + \mathbf{X}\psi + \tau_t + \epsilon_{prt}$$

- Controls $\mathbf{X}$:
  - High and low-skill immigrant share in a CZ (IPUMS ACS)

Empirical Analysis

$$\hat{TopicY}_{prt} = \beta \mathbf{mfgSpecialization_{rt}} + \mathbf{X}\psi + \tau_t + \epsilon_{prt}$$

- Controls $\mathbf{X}$:
  - High and low-skill immigrant share in a CZ (IPUMS ACS)
  - Electoral Competitiveness (MoV) (Leip, 2025)
    - state presidential election
    - two-party margins across: presidential; House (t, $t-1$ midterm); Senate (t, $t-1$)

Empirical Analysis

$$\hat{TopicY}_{prt} = \beta \mathbf{mfgSpecialization_{rt}} + \mathbf{X}\psi + \tau_t + \epsilon_{prt}$$

- Controls $\mathbf{X}$:
  - High and low-skill immigrant share in a CZ (IPUMS ACS)
  - Electoral Competitiveness (MoV) (Leip, 2025)
    - ⋆ state presidential election
    - ⋆ two-party margins across: presidential; House (t, $t-1$ midterm); Senate (t, $t-1$)
  - Local Ideology (Warshaw & Tausanovitch, 2022)

Empirical Analysis

$$\hat{TopicY}_{prt} = \beta \mathbf{mfgSpecialization_{rt}} + \mathbf{X}\psi + \tau_t + \epsilon_{prt}$$

- Controls $\mathbf{X}$:
  - High and low-skill immigrant share in a CZ (IPUMS ACS)
  - Electoral Competitiveness (MoV) (Leip, 2025)
    - ⋆ state presidential election
    - ⋆ two-party margins across: presidential; House (t, $t-1$ midterm); Senate (t, $t-1$)
  - Local Ideology (Warshaw & Tausanovitch, 2022)
  - log(population) (IRS SOI)

Empirical Analysis

$$\hat{TopicY}_{prt} = \beta \mathbf{mfgSpecialization_{rt}} + \mathbf{X}\psi + \tau_t + \epsilon_{prt}$$

- Controls $\mathbf{X}$:
  - High and low-skill immigrant share in a CZ (IPUMS ACS)
  - Electoral Competitiveness (MoV) (Leip, 2025)
    - ⋆ state presidential election
    - ⋆ two-party margins across: presidential; House (t, $t-1$ midterm); Senate (t, $t-1$)
  - Local Ideology (Warshaw & Tausanovitch, 2022)
  - log(population) (IRS SOI)
  - Days to election

Empirical Analysis

$$\hat{TopicY}_{prt} = \beta \mathbf{mfgSpecialization_{rt}} + \mathbf{X}\psi + \tau_t + \epsilon_{prt}$$

- Controls **X**:
  - High and low-skill immigrant share in a CZ (IPUMS ACS)
  - Electoral Competitiveness (MoV) (Leip, 2025)
    - ⋆ state presidential election
    - ⋆ two-party margins across: presidential; House (t, $t-1$ midterm); Senate (t, $t-1$)
  - Local Ideology (Warshaw & Tausanovitch, 2022)
  - log(population) (IRS SOI)
  - Days to election
  - Candidates' party ID

Empirical Analysis

$$\hat{TopicY}_{prt} = \beta \mathbf{mfgSpecialization_{rt}} + \mathbf{X}\psi + \tau_t + \epsilon_{prt}$$

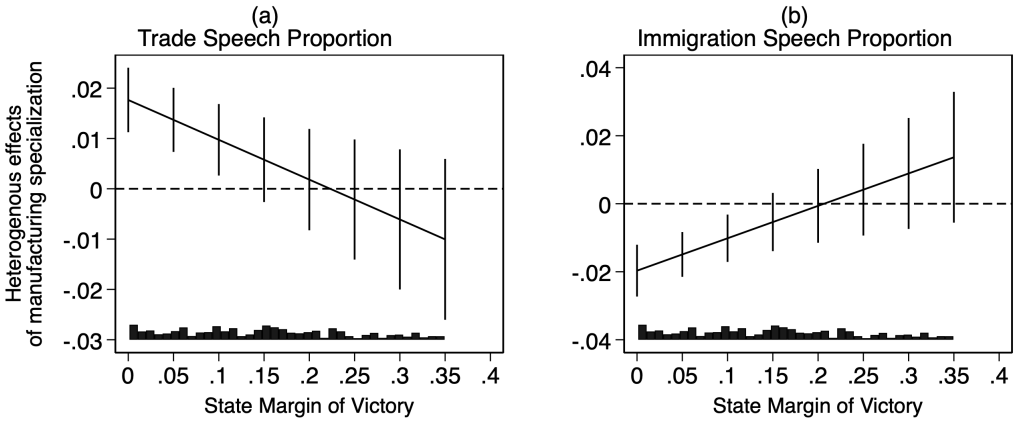
- Controls $\mathbf{X}$:
  - High and low-skill immigrant share in a CZ (IPUMS ACS)
  - Electoral Competitiveness (MoV) (Leip, 2025)
    - ⋆ state presidential election
    - ⋆ two-party margins across: presidential; House (t, $t-1$ midterm); Senate (t, $t-1$)
  - Local Ideology (Warshaw & Tausanovitch, 2022)
  - log(population) (IRS SOI)
  - Days to election
  - Candidates' party ID
- SE: clustered at state level: (party-party dependencies, CZ-CZ dependencies)

(Support H1) Campaigns = Responsive, *on average*

	Dependent Variables:					
	Trade Topic			Immigration Topic		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Mfg specialization	0.012***	0.014***	0.020***	0.002	-0.016***	-0.023***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)
State MoV			-0.026			0.008
			(0.026)			(0.036)
Mfg specialization × State MoV			-0.089***			0.103***
			(0.026)			(0.035)
N	609	413	413	609	413	413
R2	0.204	0.625	0.632	0.331	0.740	0.743
Controls		X	X		X	X

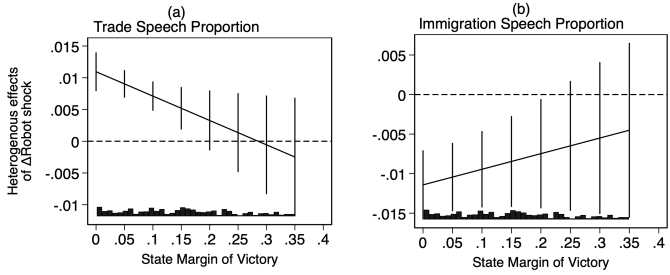
Notes: State clustered standard errors in parentheses. All continuous covariates are z-score standardized except for the moderator, State Margin of Victory (MoV), so that the treatment variables in models (3) and (6) estimate the theoretically-relevant effect of interests where the MoV equals zero. All specifications include election period fixed effects and weight observations by the number of campaign visits. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

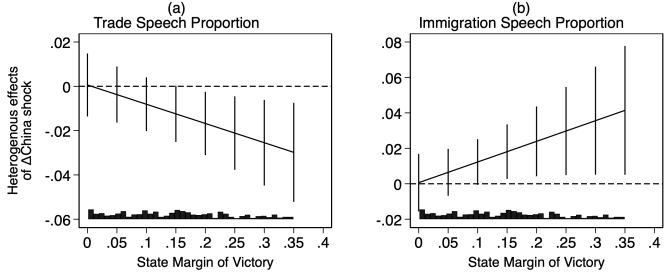
Bottom-up in swing states; Top-down in safe states



Notes: Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals calculated from state-clustered standard errors. The histogram along the x-axis shows the distribution of the State MoV moderator where we observe variation in speech content and manufacturing specialization.

Exogenous measures: industrial robot shock & China shock





Other Robustness Checks

✓ Republicans and Democrats behave similarly in swing states.

Other Robustness Checks

- ✓ Republicans and Democrats behave similarly in swing states.
- ✓ Insensitive to alternative Text classifiers

Other Robustness Checks

✓ Republicans and Democrats behave similarly in swing states.

✓ Insensitive to alternative Text classifiers

- Campaign effects:

Other Robustness Checks

✓ Republicans and Democrats behave similarly in swing states.

✓ Insensitive to alternative Text classifiers

- Campaign effects:
  - ✓ selection into geographies
  - ✓ election timing

✓ placebo test of low-info assumption (trade="easy issue")

Takeaways

- Why do presidential campaigns raise the salience of globalization?

Takeaways

- Why do presidential campaigns raise the salience of globalization?
- New campaign speech data.

Takeaways

- Why do presidential campaigns raise the salience of globalization?
- New campaign speech data.
- Evidence: campaigns use two strategies:

Takeaways

- Why do presidential campaigns raise the salience of globalization?
- New campaign speech data.
- Evidence: campaigns use two strategies:
  - Competitive races: voter-driven

Takeaways

- Why do presidential campaigns raise the salience of globalization?
- New campaign speech data.
- Evidence: campaigns use two strategies:
  - Competitive races: voter-driven
  - Non-competitive races: elite-driven.

Takeaways

- Why do presidential campaigns raise the salience of globalization?
- New campaign speech data.
- Evidence: campaigns use two strategies:
  - Competitive races: voter-driven
  - Non-competitive races: elite-driven.

Takeaways

- Why do presidential campaigns raise the salience of globalization?
- New campaign speech data.
- Evidence: campaigns use two strategies:
  - Competitive races: voter-driven
  - Non-competitive races: elite-driven.
- Bigger picture:

Takeaways

- Why do presidential campaigns raise the salience of globalization?
- New campaign speech data.
- Evidence: campaigns use two strategies:
  - Competitive races: voter-driven
  - Non-competitive races: elite-driven.
- Bigger picture:
  - If public matters, likely small subset of interests in swing states.