The Relationship between Unemployment and Voting Outcomes Among Different Racial Groups in the 2020 Presidential Election

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Introduction

- Historically unemployment among working-class American voters generally correlates to increased support for **Democratic** candidates (Park & Reeves, 2020)
- However, Donald Trump's electoral outcomes have changed the popular narrative on unemployment's political influence, with his appeal among **unemployed working-class White voters** being frequently cited as an explanation for his electoral results (Griffin & Teixeira, 2017).
- Unemployment among working class White voters has been shown to strongly correlate with support for Trump, (Baccini & Weymouth, 2021), though the voting outcomes of unemployed working-class voters of other, **less studied racial groups** when Trump is on the ballot remains far less certain, and may be consistent with unemployment's historically studied electoral relationship among this economic demographic group.

Research Questions

- Is unemployment significantly related to voting outcomes in the 2020 Presidential Election
- Does the relationship between unemployment and voting outcomes among working-class voters vary by racial demographic groups; is the increased propensity for unemployed working-class White voters to vote for Trump shared by non-White voters

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=768) were participants in the ANES 2020 Time Series Study who reported being working-class voters recently or currently experiencing unemployment, who voted for either Joe Biden or Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election
- The ANES 2020 Time Series Study was a two-wave cross sectional national study of U.S. eligible voters conducted before and after the 2020 presidential election

Measures

- The **unemployment** status of respondents was measured by the question "Have you experienced unemployment in the past six months" to which respondents answered "yes" or "no".
- The **voting** outcomes of respondents were measured by the question "Who did you vote for? Joe Biden, Donald Trump, or someone else?"
- The respondents' **racial demographic** information self selected from the categories "White", "Black", "Hispanic", and "Other".
- Respondents' **economic** demographic information was self selected from the categories "Lower Class", "Working Class", Middle Class", and "Upper Class"
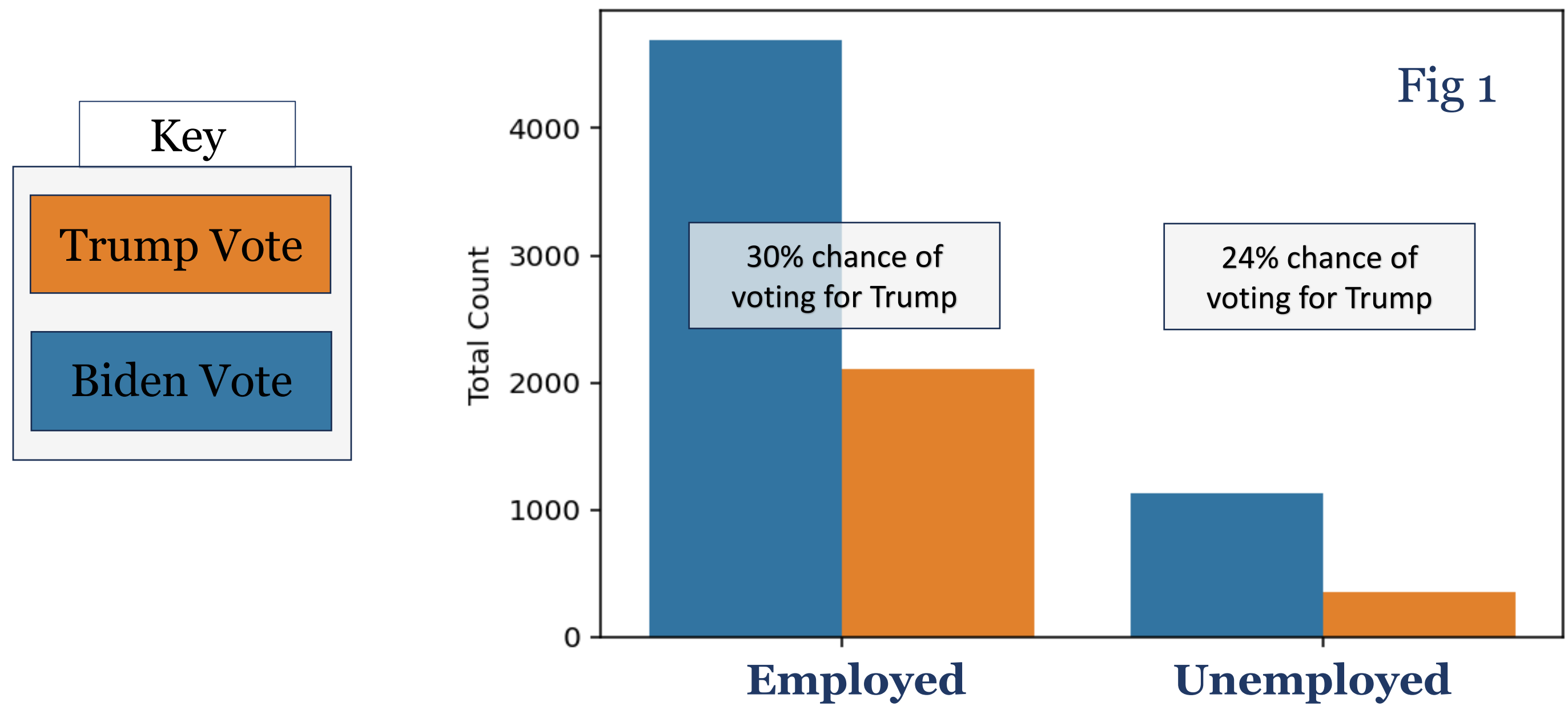
Results

Univariate – Share of Trump Voters

- 26% of the sample reported voting for Trump in the 2020 Presidential Election, compared with 30% of all ANES 2020 respondents

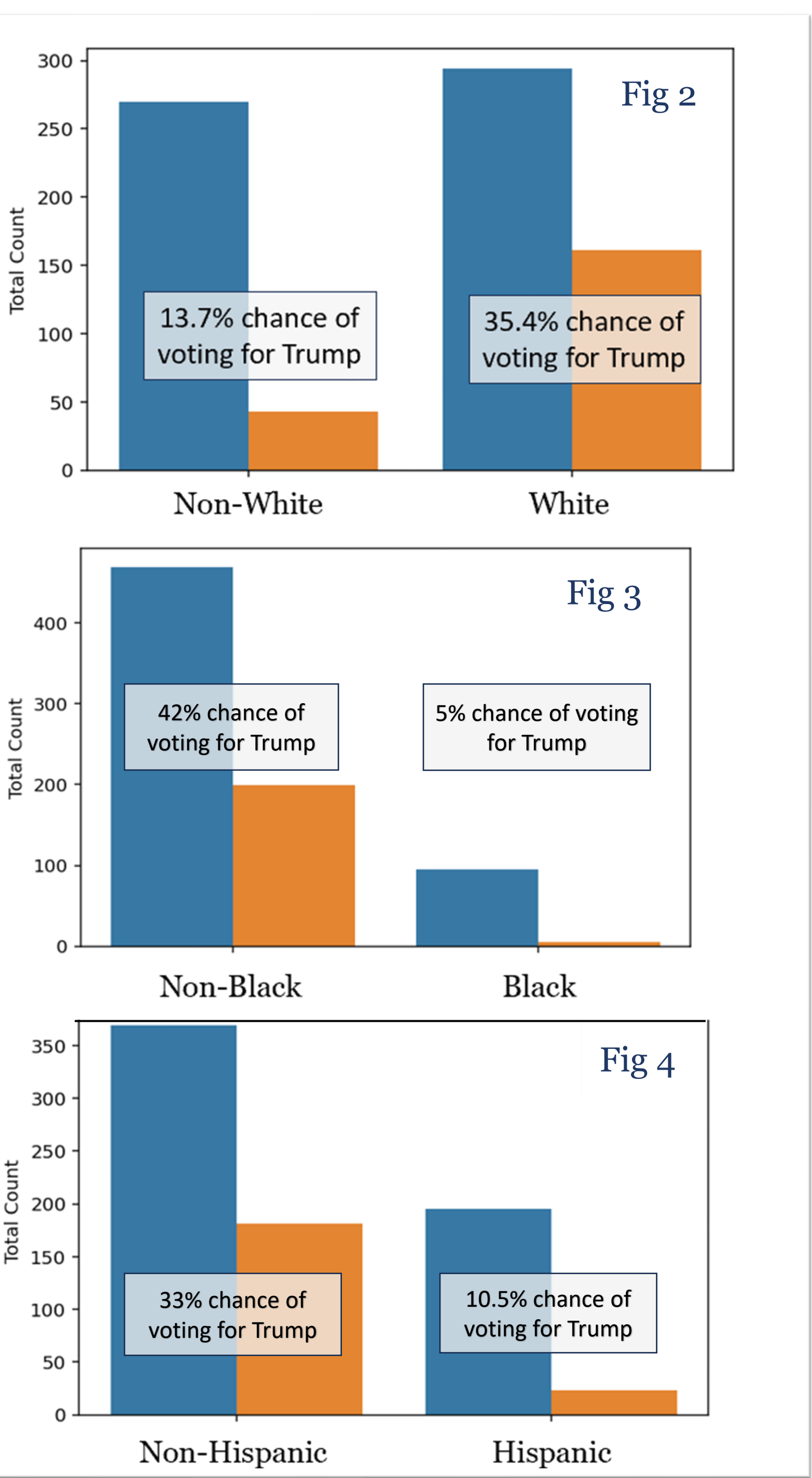### Multivariate - Economic Influences on Voting Outcome

(All P Values < 0.001)

- Multiple logistic regression showed the relationship between unemployment and the propensity for a respondent to vote for Trump to be significantly negative. Respondents who report experiencing unemployment have 20% lower odds of voting for Trump when moderating for race (Fig. 1).
- This relationship is strengthened among working class respondents, for whom unemployment is correlated with 25% lower odds of voting for Trump when moderating for race.

Figure 1: Voting Outcomes Among Employed and Unemployed Respondents

Key: Trump Vote, Biden Vote

30% chance of voting for Trump

24% chance of voting for Trump

Bivariate - Varying Voting Impact of Unemployment by Racial Group

(All P Values < 0.001)

- Among unemployed working-class voters, White respondents are the most likely to vote for Trump, with 3.4 times higher odds of voting for him in relation to non-White respondents (Fig 2).
- Black respondents in this category are among the least likely to vote for Trump, being 8 times less likely, and having 88% lower odds of voting for him than non-Black respondents (Fig 3).
- Within the same category of unemployed working-class voters, Hispanic respondents are 3.13 times less likely to vote for Trump than non-Hispanic respondents (Fig 4).

Figures 2-4: Voting Outcomes Among Unemployed Working-Class Respondents by race

Fig 2 — 13.7% chance of voting for Trump (Non-White); 35.4% chance of voting for Trump (White)

Fig 3 — 42% chance of voting for Trump (Non-Black); 5% chance of voting for Trump (Black)

Fig 4 — 33% chance of voting for Trump (Non-Hispanic); 10.5% chance of voting for Trump (Hispanic)

Discussion

- The correlational relationship between unemployment and propensity to vote against the Republican candidate and for the Democratic one displayed in this study is consistent with existing research, however the strengthening of this relationship among the working class is novel and not widely displayed in other findings.
- As is consistent with research in the field, White voters displayed the strongest propensity to vote for Trump among working class unemployed respondents.
- Findings among other racial groups proved vastly different however, with working-class Black and Hispanic respondents showing a far lower propensity to vote for Trump than their White counterparts.
- In uncovering the electoral relationships of unemployment on members of these understudied socioeconomic communities, it is hoped that this study will contribute to expanding the national dialogue on unemployment as a factor in elections from the well studied White economically struggling voters, to other racial groups also experiencing economic hardship; ensuring their issues are also prioritized by policymakers in American electoral politics.
- Further research into the influences of unemployment on the political dynamics of larger communities of non-White voters—like the extensive research of this type directed towards White Rust-Belt communities—would help advance the understanding of how economic strife among individual non-White voters extends to influencing politics on the local, county, state, and ultimately national levels.

References

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