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Permission vs. Persuasion: To what extent did Donald Trump change minds, and to what extent did he legitimize action?

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**Permission vs. Persuasion:**
**To what extent did Donald Trump change minds, and to what extent did he legitimize action?**

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**INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, presidential rhetoric's impact on public opinion and societal dynamics has become more salient than ever. Specifically, the question of how political leaders' language shapes public attitudes about marginalized groups has become a subject of intense scrutiny. This paper delves into this complex relationship, specifically examining the case of Donald Trump and its implications for immigrant communities in the United States. Despite an intense increase in anti-immigrant sentiment during Trump's presidency, marked by a surge in hate crimes (defined as illegal activities that are motivated by prejudices against particular groups) targeting immigrant populations, public opinion remains divided on the extent of his responsibility. This raises the crucial research question: to what extent did Trump's rhetoric play a role in shaping public attitudes towards immigrants and subsequently influence hate crime rates in the United States?

Through rigorously investigating the effects of presidential rhetoric, this paper aims to contribute to understanding about the impact of political speeches on public opinion and hate crimes. The key motivation lies in identifying the underlying mechanisms that differentiate between *persuasion* and *permission* effects—whether Trump's language served to persuade individuals towards negative attitudes or simply granted permission for latent prejudices to manifest in harmful behaviors. Addressing this question has important implications for policymakers, social scientists, and advocates seeking to mitigate the negative consequences of inflammatory political discourse.

The motivation behind this research is the importance of understanding the consequences of rhetoric and political discourse on societal attitudes, behaviors, and actions, specifically pertaining to immigration. Trump's publicized perspective on immigration is characterized by

inflammatory, derogatory rhetoric attacking religions and ethnic groups—particularly those examined in this study: Arabs, Hispanics/Latinos, Asians, and Muslims. Some have suspected that as a leader in a powerful position, Trump's rhetoric has played a key role in fueling prejudice, discrimination, and violence against immigrant communities. Through examining the relationship between Trump's rhetoric, hate crime incidents, and public opinion regarding immigrants, this paper aims to highlight the part political discourse has in shifting societal perception surrounding immigration.

A review of existing literature reveals a body of research studying rhetoric and political discourse, hate crimes, and public opinion in the context of immigration, albeit mostly in isolation of each other. However, scholars have documented ways in which political leaders' language and framing of immigration issues can shape public perceptions of immigrant groups. For example, studies have shown how the use of inflammatory language by politicians can contribute to the stigmatization and marginalization of certain immigrant communities, fostering an environment conducive to hate-motivated violence.

Empirical studies have also explored the relationship between political rhetoric and hate crime trends targeting immigrant populations. Analyzing hate crime data alongside political discourse, researchers have identified correlations between periods of heightened anti-immigrant rhetoric and spikes in hate crimes against specific ethnic or religious groups. These findings underscore the potential influence of political leaders' speech on immigrant-targeted hate crimes.

To explore the impact of Trump's rhetoric on hate crime trends and public opinion, this paper employs a mixed-methods approach. Hate crime data collected from the U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation are analyzed alongside quantitative measures of public opinion obtained from polls conducted during Trump's campaign and presidency.

Analysis of hate crime statistics reveals notable spikes in incidents targeting Arab, Hispanic, and Muslim immigrant communities during Trump's heavy anti-immigrant mention periods. Examination of public opinion poll data does not exhibit the same spikes correlated with speech-mention data. Trump's considerably more discernible impact on hate crime rates than public opinion suggests that his influence is more closely tied to permission than persuasion. His power and strategy likely lie mostly in mobilizing individuals who already hold strong anti-immigrant prejudices rather than altering perceptions of the general American public against immigrants. Additionally, the relationship between anti-Asian speech mentions, anti-Asian hate crimes, and anti-Asian public opinion presented a more inconclusive result than the other three studied immigrant groups. Because Trump refrained from giving speeches at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the data available for analysis was sparse, yielding an indeterminate outcome.

First, this paper will review the existing literature pertaining to presidential influence on public opinion and hate crimes in the United States. Then, I will provide the context of my argument and delve further into the concepts of persuasion and permission, and how they interact in my research. Next, I describe the methods of my experiment, which includes variable specification, case selection, and research design. Then, I explain the results of my study and graphs associated with my datasets. Finally, I conclude with a summary of my findings, my final thoughts, the implications of my research, and recommendations for potential future research.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Before examining presidential effects of permission and persuasion, I will address the foundational question of whether powerful elites influence public opinion. Scholarship largely

contends that elites do impact public opinion, but there are subsidiary debates within this literature to be further explored. Gabel et al investigates the specific case of European integration employing changes in political institutions to determine if elites influence public opinion. The study found that a higher volume of negative elite messages regarding European integration did indeed decrease public support for Europe, and they believe their findings underestimate the magnitude of the effect of elite messages by 50%.

A point of contention in debates about elite influence center around politically aware individuals, specifically whether or not elites' attempts to shape public attitude have equal impact on politically aware individuals and relatively unaware individuals. Gabel et al find no evidence to support that the impact of influence is any greater or less for politically aware individuals than others. John Zaller—one of the major voices in public opinion debates—alternatively asserts that when many elites agree on an issue, support for that position will increase with levels of political awareness. John Bullock's work similarly contradicts Gabel et al's findings: His study finds that when the public has even a very small amount of knowledge or information about policies, their attitudes seem to be affected at least as much by the information as by elite influence.

Given that elites influence public opinion, I further researched whether those findings held for United States presidents—particularly Trump—on issues of immigrants and immigration. I found that scholarship similarly contends that presidents hold the power to influence public opinion on immigrant groups. First, Lajevardi and Oskooii found in a study involving 1,044 participants that many of those who expressed support for Trump made outwardly racist evaluations and rated Muslim Americans as the least "evolved." René Flores's work investigates attitudinal effects of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign

announcement speech, in which he referred to Mexican immigrants as "rapists" and "criminals." The study determined that public opinion is shaped by presidential influence, finding that Donald Trump's rhetoric did negatively impact public perspectives on Mexican immigrants, and additionally crystallizes another significant finding. The study determined that presidents do not have stronger influence on public opinion than non-elites, which may suggest that the media accounts for a vast portion of elite influence, a perspective not widely considered in related scholarship. A final study investigated 59,337 tweets related to Covid-19—starting with Trump's first tweet referring to Covid-19 as the "Chinese virus"—to analyze how Trump's anti-Asian rhetoric affected online hate speech towards Asian groups. The researchers, Kim and Kesari, concluded that Trump significantly increased the presence of anti-Asian hate speech circulating on Twitter.

Given that Trump was able to alter public opinion, I wondered if he also led Americans to take tangible action against immigrant communities in the form of hate crimes. I found that most immigrant communities and racially diverse groups experienced elevated hate crimes during Trump's campaign and presidency. Feinberg, Branton, and Martinez-Ebers researched the 300 rallies that took place during Trump's campaign, and measured white-supremacist propaganda, anti-semetic incidents, extremist behaviors, and hate motivated events before and following the rallies. They found that counties that hosted Trump rallies experienced an increase in hate-motivated events and a significant rise in the likelihood of hate and bias incidents. A second study noted that despite some commentators' description of the United States as "post-racial" following Obama's election, there was a "dramatic increase" in immigrant and race-based hate crimes after Trump's election.

I then focused more specifically on Trump's impact on hate crimes associated with the immigrant groups of interest in this study. Hodwitz and Massingale discovered that Trump's anti-islamic statements were correlated with elevated hate crime rates against Arab and Muslim individuals. Another study assessing Trump's impact on Latino communities reported that racial violence directed towards Latinos skyrocketed in the Trump era, noting specifically that Latino and Hispanic targeted hate crimes increased over 21 percent in 2018. Lastly, Cao, Lindo, and Zhong found that spikes in Asian-targeted hate incidents were associated with Trump's anti-China tweets and racist rhetoric surrounding Covid-19. Essentially, Trump's rhetoric seems to have a traceable effect on immigrant and race-related hate crimes.

Most of the research methodology examining Trump's association with hate crime statistics was centered around selecting specific inflammatory quotes and assessing the prior and following hate crime rates. I located no studies that used every one of Trump's anti-immigrant mentions within an extended timeframe and analyzed them in conjunction with hate crime statistics. Through my study, I sought to gain a more comprehensive view of Trump's rhetoric's impact on hate crime statistics, ranging the majority of his campaign and presidency. Using every anti-immigrant mention within a 2016-2020 timeframe would allow me to assess trends across the data and draw more generalizable conclusions. On the other hand, I also sought to detect more immediate impacts for a broader range of data. Many studies found that Trump may have caused hate crimes to increase in the span of his presidency, but coding speeches for individual anti-immigrant mentions would allow me to investigate short term effects spanning across five years of data. Comparing the hate crime statistics to the most extensive rhetoric dataset possible would provide me the most valuable short and long term impacts.

Through reviewing scholarship on political elites, public opinion, and hate crime statistics, I conclude that presidents do influence public opinion and action, specifically regarding immigrants and immigration policy. However, the aforementioned scholarship does not provide a standard definition of "influence" regarding public opinion. Most articles characterize "influence" as a "persuasion" effect; a president changing a person's mind on a particular issue. Contrastingly, another important area of scholarship within public opinion research contends that the recent shift in public "opinion" that has occurred in the United States is not a product of persuasive influence, but rather a manifestation of longstanding anti-immigrant sentiments that Americans have been taught and socialized to repress.

Kinder, Sanders, and Schuman—in agreement with scholarship at a mass level— expressed that prejudice has been relatively limited in the post-Civil Rights United States largely due to an awareness of social norms and widespread desire to confine to these norms. Mendelberg acknowledges in *The Race Card* that the present norms have not always existed; racial inequality was the norm into the early 20th century, but transitioned to racial equality in the 1930s, where it has since remained. However, Newman at al describes how inflammatory statements targeting racial and ethnic minorities by a presidential candidate, including those directed at immigrants, could mark the corrosion of these social norms. Newman et al suggests that racist, anti-immigrant values were never actually gone; they were instead merely buried, awaiting confirmation of legitimacy and social acceptability by a respected figure. During his campaign and presidency, Trump took on this role, "emboldening" individuals with previously hidden racist beliefs and tendencies to express them through anti-immigrant speech and even hate crimes. Newman et al utilized a survey experiment embedded within an online panel study to examine the impact of Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric, specifically toward Latinos, during

his 2016 campaign for the presidency. The study found that exposure to Trump's negative speech towards Latino immigrants led prejudiced individuals to feel socially validated and reaffirmed in their beliefs, which the authors suggested was due to the emboldenment—or for the purposes of this paper, "permission"—effect.

The authors' assertions that prejudices expressed by participants in their study were caused by the participants feeling permitted to express anti-immigrant beliefs underscores the central knowledge gap that I address in this study. Newman et al, along with the vast majority of scholarship examining presidential influence and public opinion uses survey data to conclude its findings. However, survey data cannot reveal the full picture; through solely examining survey responses, a researcher cannot identify the source of a participant's change in opinion. Researchers can detect that a participant's opinion changed, but there is no viable way to examine the data to determine *why* a participant changed their opinion. Investigating survey data provokes the question: were survey participants actually persuaded by the president to change their mind, or did the president's use of rhetoric instead permit them to express a sentiment they already held? This study will attempt to differentiate between permission and persuasion effects to understand the true nature of opinion changes.

**ARGUMENT**

Ultimately, poll responses about the public's changing attitudes of immigrants and immigration policy conflate persuasion and permission effects. Poll responses cannot offer reliable insight on whether an individual sincerely changed their perspective on immigration due to Trump's persuasiveness, or whether Trump's negative rhetoric toward immigrants empowered the individual to take action fueled by a hidden yet longstanding anti-immigrant perspective. It is

almost certain that Trump's speeches have some level of both persuasion and permission effects. However, prior literature has not yet analyzed these impacts in isolation, likely due to an absence of quantifiable methods to measure persuasion and permission effects. I attempt to combat this discrepancy of information by introducing a second metric: data on hate crimes that target immigrant-associated groups in the United States. The study examines opinion poll data in order to detect changes in public opinion on immigrants, which likely result from persuasion tactics, but will also consult hate-crime data to examine possible permission effects.

This research design is based on two main assumptions. The first is that it is highly unlikely that a person who Trump persuades to adopt an stronger anti-immigrant perspective than previously held would immediately commit a hate crime targeting an immigrant, whereas someone who already holds long standing anti-immigrant beliefs and then digests Trump's severe anti-immigrant rhetoric could plausibility commit an anti-immigrant hate crime in a short time frame. Therefore, while public opinion poll data will primarily show persuasion effects of Trump's rhetoric, hate crime data will reveal permission effects.

The second assumption is that because there are far more Americans who fall into the "persuadable" group than the extremist "permission-seeking" group, the vast majority of poll responses will represent persuadable people rather than permission-seekers, allowing the poll data to represent levels of persuasion among that group.

This study tests the arguments that when Trump speaks negatively about particular immigrant groups, public opinion of those groups will fall, and when the public is influenced through permission, hate crimes against those groups will rise. Examining poll data alongside hate crime data will provide a clearer picture about presidential rhetoric's influence on public opinion, and will allow me to make a contribution that has been difficult to quantify due to the

general population's unwillingness to express hateful anti-immigrant sentiments in poll collection settings.

To study persuasion and permission effects, I examine the impact of Trump's rhetoric, quantified through his mentioning of specific immigrant groups in speeches, on United States hate crime statistics and on public opinion polls. Each of the three metrics—speech mentions, hate crimes, and opinion polls—underwent a rigorous data collection and analysis process in order to draw comparisons.

First, a timeframe was selected for analysis. I originally chose to focus on the years between January 2016 and December 2020, when Trump won and left office, but eventually expanded some aspects of the analysis to include 2015, the start of Trump's campaign, to yield a higher volume of data. Four immigrant populations were selected for comprehensive study: Arab, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and Muslim groups. The first dataset I had access to in my research was the United States hate crime statistics, because it was the only previously compiled and synthesized dataset I used (as opposed to the speech mention and poll data, which I collected and synthesized). To determine which immigrant groups to focus on, I assessed each of the groups reported on in the hate crime statistics, and then used my previous knowledge of Trump's speeches and presidential goals to decide which groups would likely be most relevant in my research. As I began collecting speech-mention data, I noticed that the majority of Trump's anti-immigrant sentiments were targeted at the four previously selected groups, so I proceeded with data collection.

After establishing a timeframe and selecting the immigrant groups, I extracted data from each of the three metrics. To gather Trump's mentions of immigrant groups, I used a non-biased database website that provided access to each of Trump's speeches. For each speech I coded all

mentions of the four immigrant groups. I collected hate crime data from the official U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation's statistics. I gathered public opinion poll data assessing perspectives on Arab/Musli, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian immigrant groups through the Roper Center Website. Then, I compared the hate crime and public opinion data with Trump's anti-immigrant speech-mention data to analyze potential correlations between spikes in opposition to immigrants and immigrant-targeted hate crimes.

It is highly likely that Trump both persuaded some individuals to change their perception on topics such as immigration and permitted others to openly express and act on values that were once considered unacceptable. The purpose of this study was to determine which case was more common—individuals truly adopting harsher perceptions of immigrants, or individuals revealing anti-immigrant opinions they already held. The study's results assert that the latter characterizes Trump's rhetoric's impact on Americans more plausibly; individuals who became open about disliking immigrants likely already held those perspectives prior to Trump's candidacy, and his rhetoric sometimes emboldened them to harm immigrant communities. I arrived at this conclusion because overall, spikes in hate crimes against immigrant communities were more directly correlated with Trump's negative mentions in speeches than spikes in opposition to those groups assessed in public opinion polls. Because public opinion of immigrants did not plummet in conjunction with anti-immigrant speech mentions, it cannot be concluded that Trump was persuading Americans at large to adopt harsher anti-immigrant philosophies. However, the smaller population of individuals who already resented immigrants was receptive to Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric, as some felt compelled to commit hate crimes against immigrant groups following Trump's speeches. Although future research could further hone aspects of this study

with methodological improvements, there is sufficient evidence to at least imply that Trump's rhetoric was more successful in permitting individuals than persuading.

The information that provides the strongest correlation between Trump's anti-immigrant speech mentions and hate crime statistics are the Arab and Muslim data, indicating that Trump's targeting of Arab and Muslim immigrants permitted individuals to commit hate crimes. There are spikes in hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims closely following spikes in Trump's anti-Arab and anti-Muslim speech mentions. The validity of these cases are strengthened by the fact that when Trump stops mentioning Arab and Muslim immigrants, hate crimes against those groups noticeably diminished. Although permission effects likely linger after heavy-mention periods, they lose impact over time, further suggesting correlation between Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric and hate crimes.

The Hispanic/Latino (Hispanic) data is also fairly strong because 2015 and 2016 spikes in hate crimes against Hispanic individuals are similar to heavy speech-mention periods in a similar timeframe. Contrasting with the Arab and Muslim datasets, the public opinion data surveying Americans about their perceptions of Hispanic individuals reveals potentially similar spikes in opposition to Hispanic individuals and anti-immigrant mentions. Increase in opposition to Hispanic individuals near heavy anti-immigrant mention periods could imply persuasion effects, but the correlations are not statistically significant.

Also contrasting with the Arab and Muslim data, hate crimes do not seem to rise and fall in relation to anti-immigrant mentions. However, there are multiple reasonable explanations as to why hate crimes targeting Hispanic individuals continue to rise despite periodic decreases in Trump's anti-Hispanic mentions. First, "Mexicans," the blanket-term Trump used to refer to all Hispanic and Latino ethnicities, were a cornerstone target of Trump's campaign and presidency

from the start. Because his anti-Mexican immigrant emphasis was so prevalent early on, consistent speech mentions attacking Mexicans throughout his presidency were likely not necessary to continue sparking hate crimes. It was already established that Trump supported—or at least turned a blind eye—to anti-Mexican permission-seekers, so they did not require repeated confirmation of his rhetoric to justify those opinions and actions.

Second, effects (especially permission effects associated with increased hate crime rates), are consistently clearer in the data at the start of Trump's campaign and presidency. This is likely because Trump's blatant, unapologetic anti-immigrant rhetoric was shocking and new to the American public. Prior to Trump, the country had not witnessed a president so openly and harshly disparaging of immigrants, so the impacts of his words were particularly strong in the first years after the start of his campaign. This could explain why the Hispanic/Latino hate crime impacts are noticeable in 2015 and 2016, but seem to veer from Trump's anti-immigrant mentions in following years.

Although Asian-targeted hate crimes and public opinion data offer some valuable insight, it was the most inconclusive group. Because Covid-19 halted Trump's speeches and he was more reliant on other communication strategies, such as Twitter, anti-Asian speech-mention data did not capture the most accurate representation of Trump's rhetoric at that time. My examination of speeches showed that Trump first began heavily berating Chinese groups in May 2020, but I learned from reviewing literature that he actually tweeted about the "Chinese virus" on March 16, 2020. I first thought that a significant March 2020 hate crime spike occurred prior to Trump's heavy disparaging of China, potentially suggesting that in this case, permission effects were flowing bottom-up instead of top-down. Because Asian targeted hate crimes spiked before Trump's heavy anti-Asian mention period, I theorized that Trump may have noticed Americans

turning on Asians and decided to strategically join the bandwagon to distract the public from his leadership duties as president during the pandemic. However, due to Trump's constant activity on Twitter in the absence of his speeches, it was not possible to confidently make such a conclusion. The data revolving around Asian groups was also comparatively difficult to analyze because the timeframe of Trump's heavily anti-Asian immigrant period was much shorter than the other groups' five/six year periods. For these reasons, it is difficult to determine the trajectory of permission and persuasion in this case.

Ultimately, access to higher volumes of reliable public opinion polls may have allowed stronger comparisons and conclusions. Yet, my research asserts that while Trump did not have a consistent effect on public opinion, his rhetoric is correlated with increased hate crime rates. Although Trump's impact was low on individuals holding more mild opinions, he had a significant impact on those who already harbored prejudice against immigrants. It seems that Trump didn't largely change people's minds; he justified what some already believed.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Variable Specification**

This study contains two dependent variables and one causal independent variable. The first dependent variable, "Change in Attitude Toward Immigrant Groups," measures shifts in public perceptions regarding immigrant groups in the United States. The second dependent variable, "Spikes in Hate Crimes Against Immigrant Groups," measures spikes in hate crime incidents targeting immigrant groups. The causal independent variable, "Trump's Rhetoric," represents the various forms of rhetoric and discourse Trump uses pertaining to immigration issues in speeches during his campaign and tenure in office. These variables establish a

framework for examining the hypothesized relationships between Trump's rhetoric, public attitudes towards immigrant groups, and hate crime statistics.

**Hypotheses**

There are two main hypotheses addressed in this study: When Trump speaks negatively about particular immigrant groups, public opinion of those groups fall, and when Trump speaks negatively about particular immigrant groups to individuals who experience permission effects, hate crimes against those groups rise. Trump's negative speech is the cause, and plummeting of public opinion and spikes in hate crime related incidents represent the effects. Additionally, I predict that persuasion techniques more directly impact public opinion data, while permission tactics correlate with hate crimes spikes. The study addresses multiple secondary hypotheses that attempt to distinguish between permission and persuasion techniques and explains how those mechanisms relate to public opinion and hate crime data.

The first secondary hypothesis seeks to understand how speech elements differ when presidents attempt to permit certain anti-immigrant behavior and when they attempt to persuade people to change their perception of immigrants. I hypothesize that permission tactics are more heavily based in ethos appeals that emphasize the superiority and legitimacy of the president's position, while persuasion tactics are more dependent on pathos and logos appeals, which include fear-evoking anecdotes and provable data. Often those who are "permitted" to act already subscribe to anti-immigrant beliefs, but have refrained from action because they do not feel their sentiments are shared by others. For those whose anti-immigrant perspectives have lied dormant due to assumed unpopularity, seeking confirmation from a legitimate figure, the soundness of the president's argument–especially as a highly respected information

source—would not matter as much. Conversely, truly persuading a person might require a more empathetic and fact-based approach.

Other secondary hypotheses address the potential impacts of partisanship and political knowledge. I hypothesize that people in the center of the partisan spectrum require stronger persuasion tactics, while people on opposite poles of the spectrum require permission tactics. Similarly, I hypothesize that people with less developed opinions about politics require more persuasion tactics, while people with more developed opinions require permission tactics. People in the political center and those with less developed opinions would be more susceptible to speeches that focus on empathy and fear-evoking stories and factual evidence, but these tactics would have a weaker impact on Americans who already hold strong partisan opinions and have formed opinions on immigration issues through consumption of media. Additionally, I hypothesize that permission and persuasion techniques do not prove equally successful in changing opinions. It is likely that Americans are more susceptible to influence regarding issues they are generally uneducated about, and are less easily swayed about issues they often hear about in media coverage and therefore consider themselves comparatively knowledgeable about. For example, Muslim immigration to the United States is not as widely discussed or covered in the media as Mexican immigration, so persuasion effects may be stronger on Muslim immigrant issues than Mexican immigrant issues.

**Research Design**

**Case Selection**

Trump was selected as the primary subject of analysis due to his inflammatory and polarizing rhetoric regarding immigration issues throughout his campaign and presidency. His

frequent provocative statements on immigration policy and immigrant groups provide extensive data for examining the potential causal effects of political rhetoric on public attitudes and behaviors towards immigrants. Trump's unapologetic, anti-immigrant rhetoric will allow for the clearest possible inspection of the ways political discourse shapes public perceptions of immigration and contributes to spikes in hate crimes. Additionally, Trump's staunch disdain for immigrants and immigration is unparalleled by any previous United States president; analyzing the communication strategies of a more moderate or less polarizing leader in American history may not provide the same distinct causal effects. Ultimately, focusing on Trump exclusively will enhance the clarity and specificity of the causal relationships I am investigating, and help facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics between political rhetoric, public opinion, and hate crime occurrences in the context of immigration discourse.

**Analysis Strategy**

This study employs a regression analysis strategy. This method was chosen because it is used to analyze different factors—in this case persuasion and permission techniques in Trump's rhetoric—that might influence an objective—public opinion on immigration. Regression analysis allows for isolation of factors that are most impactful in influencing public opinion on immigration, and which do not have a strong effect.

In order to determine if there is a correlation between Trump's negative mentions of immigrant groups and fluctuations in public opinion data and hate crime rates, I first tallied the mentions of the immigrant groups "Arab," "Hispanic/Latino," "Asian" and "Muslim" in each of Trump's speeches between January 2016 (the year he won office) and December 2020 (the year he exited office). I then compared the amount of speech mentions with the changes in public opinion data and hate crime rates in the United States to analyze possible correlation.

**Data Collection: Speeches**

To study Trump's anti-immigrant mentions' impact on public opinion of immigrants and hate crime statistics, each of Trump's speeches between 2016 and 2020 was coded. The data assessed was collected using the online database Factba.se, which houses the full collection of Trump's (and Biden's) interviews, speeches, and tweets. The website displays the content with no commentary, so all speech content assessed for the study is entirely free of bias.

First, the Factba.se engine was used to search "immigration," which generated every piece of accessible media in which Trump mentioned immigration, including debates, testimonies, interviews, op-eds, position papers, press conferences, press gaggles, remarks, speeches, tweets, and deleted tweets. To narrow the search, I selected "speeches," which generated 570 total mentions of immigrant groups in speeches between July 18, 2015 and the present. By default the immigrant group mentions were sorted by "Most Relevant," so the search was changed the search to "Oldest First" in order to more easily record the data chronologically. Then, for each speech in which Trump mentioned an immigrant group, starting in 2016 (1/7/2016), the day, month, and year of the speech, the city and state, the number positive, negative, and total mentions of each immigrant groups (Arab, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and/or Muslim), and the total immigrant group mentions were noted. In total, there were 301 speeches between 2016 and the end of 2020 in which Trump mentioned one of the four immigrant groups. To simplify comparison between the collected speech data and the public opinion and hate crime data, the data was then separated into categories (Arab, Hispanic/Latino/Muslim) and collapsed from mentions by day/month/year to month/year using Google Sheets. Collapsing the speech-mention data also allowed for clearer inspection of the month-to-month changes of Trump's mentions of each immigrant group. To analyze these changes and compare the

speech-mention data with the other two metrics, public opinion and hate crime data, the results were converted to bar graphs using Google Sheets.

Trump often refers to immigrant populations as "illegal immigrants" instead of referencing specific racial or ethnic groups directly. For the purposes of this research, "illegal immigrant" mentions are categorized as Hispanic/Latino mentions, because the majority of "illegal immigrant" mentions allude to Hispanic/Latino populations without directly mentioning them. This research also assumes that when many Americans hear Trump speak about "illegal immigrants" without specification of an immigrant group, they assume he is referencing Hispanic/Latino populations (more specifically Mexican immigrants). This is not to say that Trump does not often mention other immigrant groups—he often does—but when he speaks about non-Hispanic/Latino groups, he almost always mentions them by name, or at least by a strong indicator (such as "terrorist" for Arab mentions). Ultimately, whether or not Trump actually refers to Hispanic/Latino immigrant groups every time he speaks of "illegal immigrants" does not matter to this research as much as how his speech is received by the American public. This study assumes that (partially due to Trump's influence) Americans generally associate "illegal immigrants" with Hispanic/Latino groups, so the impact on public opinion polls and hate crime statistics would likely fall on that population regardless of Trump's true intent.

This research analyzes "Arab" and "Muslim" separately for the sake of specificity and the increased opportunity for precise results. For mentions categorized as "Arab," Trump directly mentioned Arab ethnicity or race. For mentions categorized as "Muslim," he directly mentioned the terms "Muslim," or "Islam." Trump often mentions Arab ethnicity and Islam in the same speeches, and in these cases, the mentions were logged separately.

Additionally, searching the term "Asian" within Trump's speeches did not yield results, as he almost exclusively used the blanket-term "China" when referring to Asians groups. The speech-mention data used was collected through the key-word search "China."

**Data Collection: Hate Crimes**

The hate crime data assessed was collected from the U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation's online database. The specific dataset used includes all officially recorded hate crimes that occurred in the United States between 1991 and 2021, and categorizes the crimes by the date they were committed and which specific identity (including race/ethnicity/ancestry/religion/gender/sexual orientation/disability) was targeted. This study specifically investigates hate crimes against Arab, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and Muslim populations, identities which are commonly associated with immigrants in the United States. The isolation of each specific group in the dataset and inclusion of the exact date of each incident allowed for precise analysis of potential correlation between Trump's targeted mentions of the aforementioned immigrant groups in speeches and spikes in hate crimes against these groups.

To simplify comparisons between the collected speech data, the hate crime data was separated by category (Arab, Hispanic/Latino/Muslim) and collapsed from day/month/year to month/year using Google Sheets. Collapsing the hate crime data also allowed for clearer inspection of patterns and changes month-to-month of hate crime statistics in the United States. To compare the hate crime data with the speech-mention data, the hate crime statistics were also converted to bar graphs using Google Sheets.

**Data Collection: Public Opinion**

To collect data on Americans' perspective on immigrants and immigration, public opinion surveys were searched for and accessed using the Roper Center For Public Opinion

Research website. The Roper Center is a repository of survey data that houses an extensive collection of public opinion polls conducted in the United States. The data analyzed in this study was accessed and collected through the Roper Center's iPoll feature, its online database.

In order to locate the most relevant surveys, the "Additional Search Filters" feature was first used to apply the filter "immigration" to the search results. The "immigration" filter was applied to ensure that the polls selected directly pertained to opinions of immigrants. After filtering the search, polls inquiring about each of the immigrant populations of interest: Arab/Muslim, Hispanic, and Asian were searched. (Due to limited public opinion poll data, Arab and Muslim impacts are analyzed together, contrary to hate crime statistics.) For each poll, the approximate month and year the poll was conducted, the percentage of respondents who responded favorably about the immigrant group, the percentage of respondents who responded negatively about the immigrant group, the percentage of respondents who responded "unsure" or abstained, the poll source, and the poll's question wording were noted. For polls that spanned two months, the number of days the poll ran in each of the two months were counted, and ultimately the poll was categorized under the month in which it ran longer.

To collect poll data, I first located a "baseline" or "control" poll question for each immigrant group. In order to analyze potential changes in public opinion of immigrants during Trump's presidential campaign and term as president, it was necessary to establish how the public perceived each immigrant group before he began giving speeches and his impact began taking effect. In order to accomplish this, I located the most highly relevant question possible near the start of Trump's campaign speeches in July 2015 for the Arab/Muslim and Hispanic/Latino groups, and near February 2020—when he started speaking negatively specifically about Asian immigrant populations—-for the Asian group.

The poll inquiring about Arabs/Muslims closest to the start of Trump's campaign was conducted in March 2015 by Abt SRBI and asked respondents "Do you think the impact of immigrants from...Middle East on American society has been mostly positive, mostly negative, or neither negative nor positive?" (59% of respondents answered favoring Arabs, 39% answered opposing Arabs, and 3% were unsure/abstained. For this question, those who answered "neither negative nor positive" were categorized as "favoring" because the neutral perspective did not suggest ill regard of Arab immigrants.)

For Hispanic/Latino opinion poll data, the closest poll was conducted in July 2014 by Opinion Research Corporation and asked participants: "As you may know, in recent months, tens of thousands of children from Central American countries have been detained by the US government at the Mexican border after illegally entering the United States without their parents or other guardians…Generally speaking, which one the following statements comes closer to your view about these children? A) Most of them are refugees who are fleeing violence and poverty in their countries. B) Most of them are illegal immigrants whose parents are trying to exploit a loophole in the US immigration system." (51% of respondents answered favoring Latinos, 45% answered opposing Latinos, and 3% had no opinion.)

The closest poll before Trump's mentioning of Asian immigrant groups occurred in November 2018 and was conducted by Selzer & Co. and asked "The Congress is considering changing United States immigration laws. For each part of the world I mention, please tell me whether you would like the law to allow the number of immigrants entering the United States to increase, decrease, or stay about the same: China." (79% of respondents answered favoring Arabs, 19% answered opposing Chinese, and 7% were unsure/abstained.)

After locating a control question for each group, I searched for relevant keywords within the immigrant filter, and noted the aforementioned information for each poll taken within the frame of research (2015 through the end of 2020). For the Arab/Muslim group, I searched "Arab," "Middle Eastern," "Middle East," "Muslim," and "Islam," which produced 72 polls in total between 2015 and 2020. For the Hispanic/Latino group, I searched "Mexico," Mexican," "Hispanic," and "Latino," which produced 24 polls. For the Asian group, I first searched "Asian," "China," and "Chinese," which produced very few results, so I expanded my search to include "Covid-19" and "pandemic," which still generated only five applicable polls.

When crafting the original research design, I planned to assess the data by examining a poll directly before Trump gave a speech and a poll directly after Trump gave a speech to capture the speech's casual impacts. However, upon beginning my research, I found that due to the extremely high volume of speeches and contrastingly small number of polls conducted within the same time periods, this level of comparison would not be possible. I also planned to stay consistent with the poll source, and if that was not possible to at least use similar question wording, but this level of control was not possible given the small amount of opinion poll data.

To analyze the public opinion poll data and detect potential comparisons with the speech-mention data, the data were converted to bar graphs using Google Sheets. I determined that the most important factor of the public opinion data to investigate was the metric evaluating "opposition" to each immigrant group, so the x-axis represents the month the poll was taken and the y-axis represents percentage of respondents who answered negatively regarding the specific group.

**RESULTS**

**Speech Impact on Hate Crimes**

When designing the study, I assumed I may have to analyze data from various subnational angles to avoid weak results that did not produce insight. However, inspecting hate crime results on a national level unveiled meaningful conclusions involving each immigrant subgroup. This section breaks down Trump's speech mentions and hate crime rates by each group and further discusses effects.
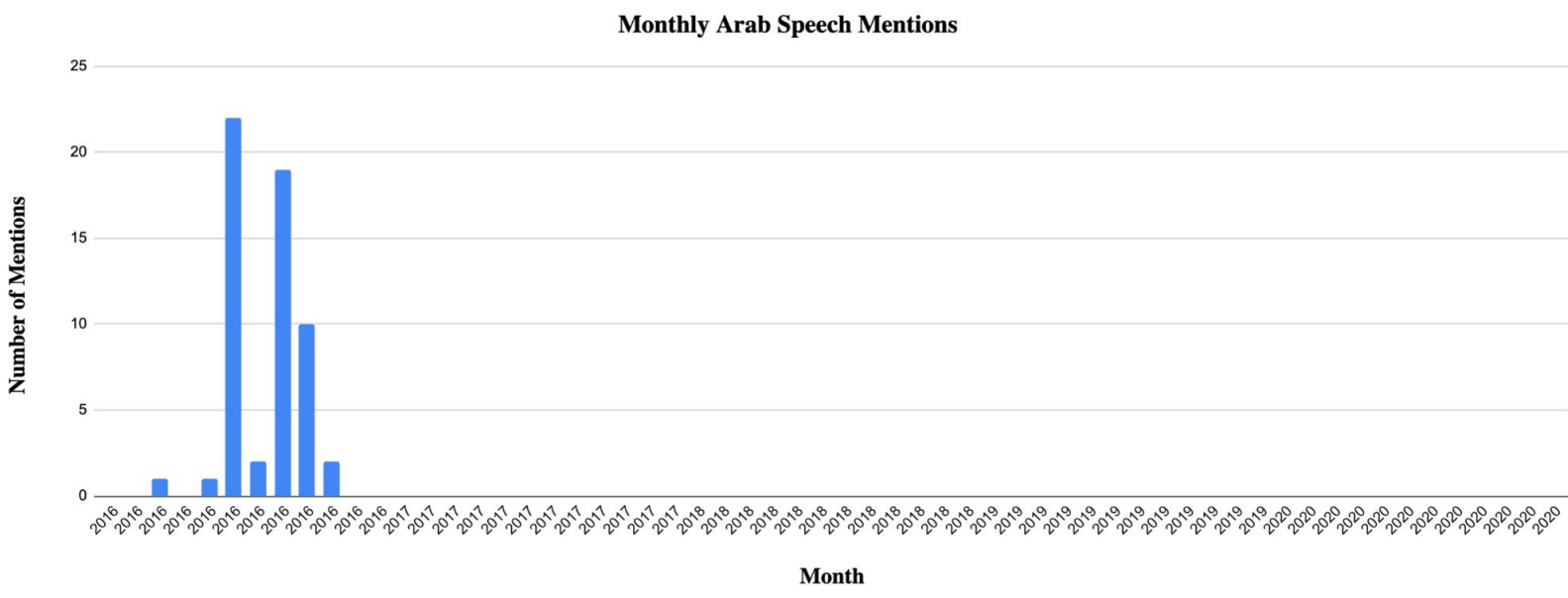
## 1. Arab Targeted Rhetoric and Hate Crimes

**Monthly Arab Speech Mentions**



**Figure 1.1:** Figure shows number of Trump's anti-Arab speech mentions from January 2016-December 2020

**Monthly Arab Hate Crimes**
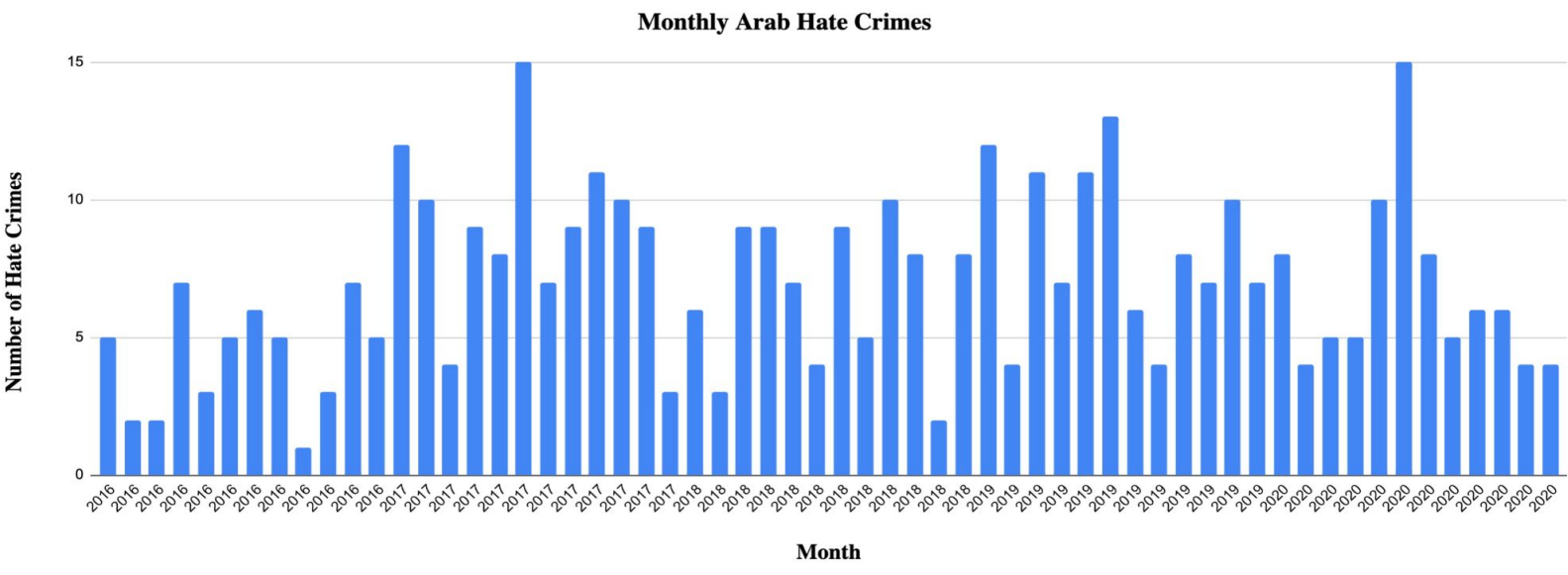


**Figure 1.2:** Figure shows number of Arab-targeted hate crimes from January 2016-December 2020

As shown in Figure 1.1, Trump began speaking about Arab groups in March 2016 (First

documented mention: "...the Syrians coming in. Now that's not going to happen anymore. We

don't know who they are. They're undocumented. We don't know. Are they Isis? Are

they…where are they from? You saw what happened in San Bernardino, two people. Two

people. Young people that worked with the people they killed. They killed 14 people, many in

the hospital. They killed 14 people. And these are people that just…young married couple. And

now we're taking in thousands of people, and we don't know where, we have no idea where,

some of these people come from. Probably where almost all of them come from. There's no

documents, there's no paperwork"), with heavy mentions beginning on June 13th 2016 following

the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida on June 12th. In Trump's first speech following

the shooting in Manchester, New Hampshire, he said: "This shooter in Orlando was the child of

an immigrant father who supported one of the most repressive regimes on Earth. Why would we

admit people who support violent hatred?" and added "The Boston bombers came here through

political asylum. The male shooter in San Bernardino again, whose name I will not mention, was

the child of immigrants from Pakistan and he brought his wife, the other terrorist from Saudi

Arabia through another one of our easily exploited visa programs," and "The Senate

Subcommittee on Immigration has already identified hundreds of immigrants charged with

terrorist activities inside the United States since September 11th." Trump continued to centralize

anti-Arab rhetoric in his campaign for the remainder of summer 2016, with high mention rates

continuing into September. Trump's rhetoric focused mostly on the Pulse Nightclub shooting and

other occurrences linked to terrorism in the United States. His mentions of Arab immigrant

groups trailed off in October 2016, with only two speech-mentions occurring that month.

However, the two mentions were particularly inflammatory and fear-inducing. On October 5th in

Henderson, NV, his last recorded speech to directly target Arab immigrants, Trump said: "Our country is being infiltrated by terrorists. Just two days ago an immigrant from Bangladesh in yet another ISIS plot. Hundreds of immigrants from high-risk regions have been implicated in terrorism inside the United States since 9/11."

Directly following Trump's heavy period of mentions, as shown in Figure 2, there is a notable spike in hate crimes against Arabs in the United States, specifically between November 2016 and February 2017, and extending until November 2017. In 2016 there were 3.9 hate crimes committed against Arabs a month on average prior to the spike in November, and during the spike (November 2016-2017), that number increased to 8.9 hate crimes. Although the spike in hate crimes began after Trump's period of heavy mentions, there still seems to be correlation. A t-Test of the data reveals the two-tailed P value equals 0.0013, which is considered very statistically significant.

When Trump began to antagonize other immigrant groups in October 2016 and shifted his focus away from Arabs, hate crimes against Arabs still continued at higher rates than before the anti-Arab mentions began. Continued elevated rates could be attributed to a variety of factors. One possible explanation is that Trump's rhetoric surrounding Arab groups was particularly severe and fear-invoking, so impacts of his speech could have reasonably extended beyond his original mentions.

In order to compare the severity of Trump's rhetoric across the various immigrant groups, a "mention severity" test was conducted. Heavy mention periods for Arab, Muslim, and Hispanic/Latino immigrant groups occurred within approximately one year, so these three groups were selected for analysis. The timeframe of June through August 2016 had the most immigrant speech mentions overall, so this period was chosen for further inspection. Within this time frame,

the 10 speeches with the most overall mentions were selected for analysis. For each of the ten speeches, each of Trump's immigrant mentions were recorded verbatim. Then, each mention was rated either a 1, 2, or 3 on a "mention severity scale," 1 representing least severe mentions and 3 representing most severe mentions. Many of the mentions that received a 3 referenced murder or rape cases associated with immigrants, or terrorist activity. Mentions that received a 2 mostly portrayed immigrants as dangerous, but not to the same extent as 3 mentions. "2" mentions also included those that referenced illicit substances and drugs in conjunction with immigrants. Mentions that received a 1 were least disparaging of immigrants and mostly referenced admission of too many into the country and their "stealing" of American jobs.

After each mention was scored 1, 2, or 3, the scores were tallied for each group (Arab, Muslim, and Hispanic/Latino). In total there were 36 Hispanic/Latino mentions, 29 Arab mentions, and 5 Muslim mentions. It was determined that there were comparatively too few Muslim mentions to properly analyze, so those results were omitted from final analysis. Averaging the total Arab and Hispanic/Latino mentions yielded a 2.6 total severity score for Arab mentions and a 1.9 total score for Hispanic/Latinos mentions. A higher severity score for Arab immigrant mentions suggests that Trump's language was most intensely vilifying for those groups, and provides possible explanation for continued elevated hate crime rates after Trump shifted focus away from Arab immigrants. Additionally, as Trump won the presidency and continued to gain legitimacy, his previous anti-Arab remarks likely gained traction and credibility, continuing to fuel existing hate against Arabs in the United States.

Although hate crimes against Arabs remained elevated after Trump stopped mentioning Arab immigrant groups than before he began mentioning Arabs in mid-2016, they decreased following the extensive November 2016 to November 2017 spike, as shown in Figure 1.2. The

average number of hate crimes committed against Arabs between December 2017 was 7.4, demonstrating a notable decrease after Trump shifted his focus to other immigrant groups.

Ultimately, a rise in hate crimes against Arabs following Trump's heavy mention period of Arab immigrant groups and the hate crimes' eventual decrease suggests that Trump's mentions had a direct impact on increased hate crime rates against Arabs in the United States.

## 2. Muslim Targeted Rhetoric and Hate Crimes
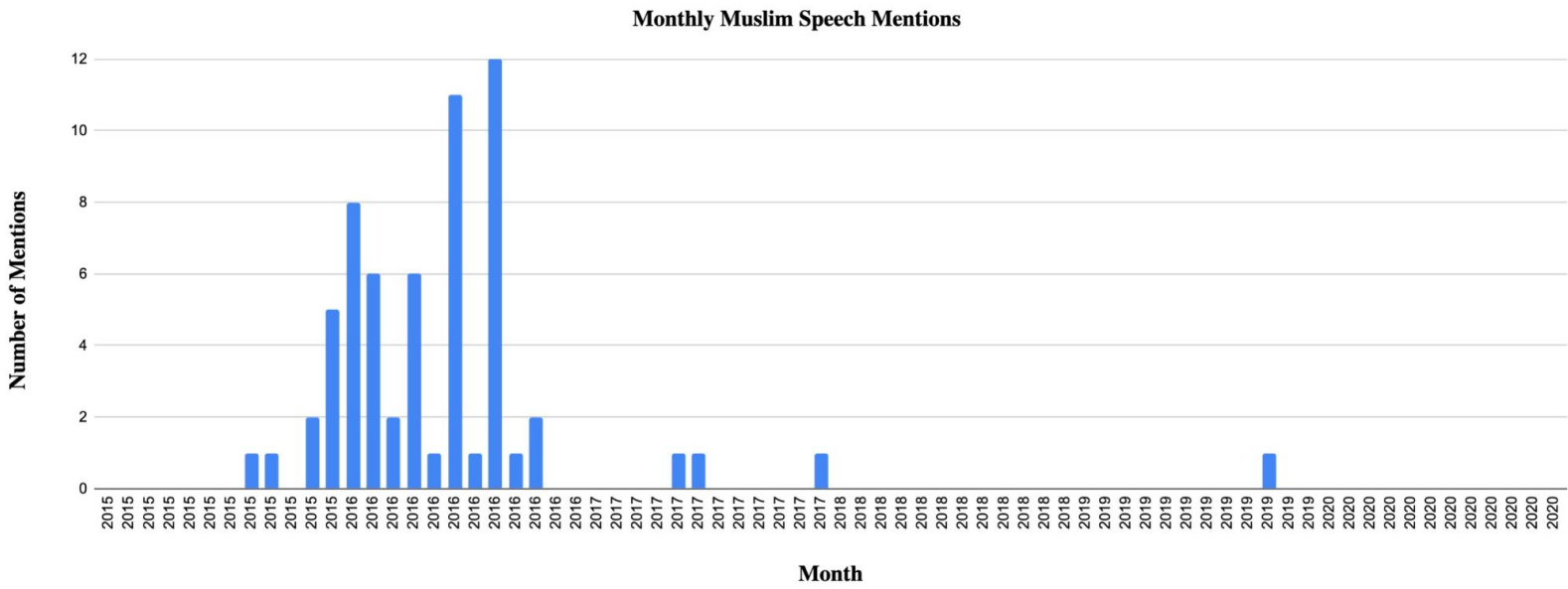
**Monthly Muslim Speech Mentions**



**Figure 2.1:** Figure shows number of Trump's anti-Muslim speech mentions from January 2015-December 2020

**Monthly Muslim Hate Crimes**
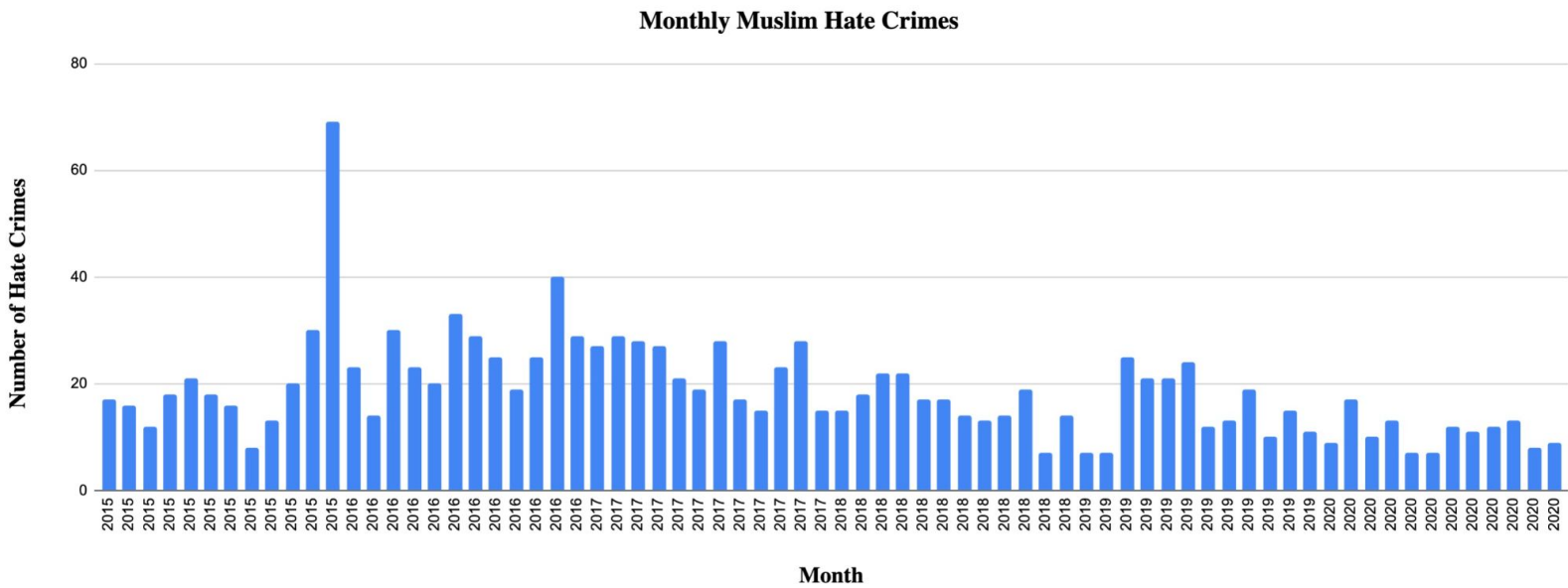


**Figure 2.2:** Figure shows number of Muslim-targeted hate crimes from January 2015-December 2020

I originally selected a 2016-2020 analysis timeframe because Trump campaigned heavily and won office in 2016 and left office in 2020. However, when analyzing comparisons between the speech-mention data and hate crime data for Muslim groups between those years, I found no clear correlation between the data. In order to obtain a broader scope of information, I extended the timeframe to include 2015, the start of Trump's campaign. Expanding the timeframe to include 2015 revealed a more notable correlation between Trump's mentions of Muslim immigrants and hate crimes against Muslims.

As opposed to "Arab" speech-mentions (mentions where Trump specifically referenced Arab nationalities or ethnicities), "Muslim" speech-mentions are those in which he explicitly mentioned "Muslim" or "Islam." Expanding the speech-mention and hate crime datasets to include 2015 revealed that rising rates of Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric occur simultaneously with spiking hate crimes against Muslims in the United States.

As shown in Figure 2.1, in the first ten months of 2015 Trump did not frequently mention Muslim immigrants, with only two recorded speech mentions. The first recorded mention occurred in Derry, New Hampshire, where Trump remarked: "Frankly, the Muslims have to help us, because they see what's going on in their community. We don't see it. They have to help us…And if they're not going to help us, they're to blame…in San Bernardino, they saw bombs laying around the apartment." The second mention occurred in Boone, Iowa: "Do you know that if you're a Christian from Syria it's almost impossible to come into the United States. If you're a Muslim from Syria, the easiest thing to do is to come into the United States, it's one of the easiest places to get in." During this ten month low-mention period, Muslim targeted hate crimes were also low, averaging 15.9 per month, as shown in Figure 2.2.

In the remaining months of 2015 and up to August 2016, Trump began heavily targeting Muslim populations in speeches. In November 2015, he began to increasingly use fear-invoking and isolating rhetoric, including "Radical Muslims" and "Muslim extremists" to characterize Muslim groups. As Trump shifted his focus toward Muslim immigration during his campaign, hate crimes immediately began to rise. 20 recorded hate crime incidents occurred in October 2015, which rose to 30 in November, and then skyrocketed 130% to 69 in December as Trump's anti-Muslim speech mentions continued to rise. On average, hate crimes rose to 29.6 during Trump's high mention period from November 2015 to August 2016. A paired t-Test comparing the hate crime rates of the low-mention period (January 2015-October 2015) to the rates of the high-mention period (November 2015-August 2016) yields a two-tailed P value of 0.0232, a difference which is considered statistically significant.

After Trump stopped heavily mentioning Muslims at the end of 2016, hate crime rates against Muslims remained higher than those before Trump. In the 15 month period between September 2016 and November 2017, hate crime occurred at an average rate of 28.1 per month. There are multiple possible explanations for continued elevated hate crime rates against Muslims. Like Trump's rhetoric targeting Arab populations, his language surrounding Muslim groups was often particularly fear-invoking and inflammatory, so impacts of his speech also likely extended beyond his original mentions. Additionally, as Trump won the presidency and continued to gain legitimacy, his previous statements could have also gained credibility, continuing to fuel hate against Muslims in the United States.

Aside from a few small spikes, hate crimes against Muslims generally decrease after November 2017. For the second half of 2019 (July-December) and all of 2020 combined, hate crimes per month averaged 11.6, which is closest to the 15.9 average of the first ten month

low-mention period in 2015. It can be concluded that low rates of hate crimes occurred during these periods because Trump was not targeting Muslim immigrants.

Ultimately, hate crimes against Muslims in the United States can be reasonably mapped to Trump's anti-Muslim speech mentions. At the same time he was heavily using anti-Muslim rhetoric, hate crimes against those groups increased. Unlike the hate crime rates against Arab groups, there was very little delay in hate crime spikes following Trump's anti-immigrant remarks. The most significant spikes in hate crimes occurred during the highest mention periods in 2015 and 2016. Additionally, there is a clear overall decrease between the first half of the graph, when Trump was frequently mentioning Muslim immigrants, and the second half, where he stops mentioning Muslim groups.

### 3. Hispanic/Latino Targeted Rhetoric and Hate Crimes

**Monthly Hispanic/Latino Speech Mentions**
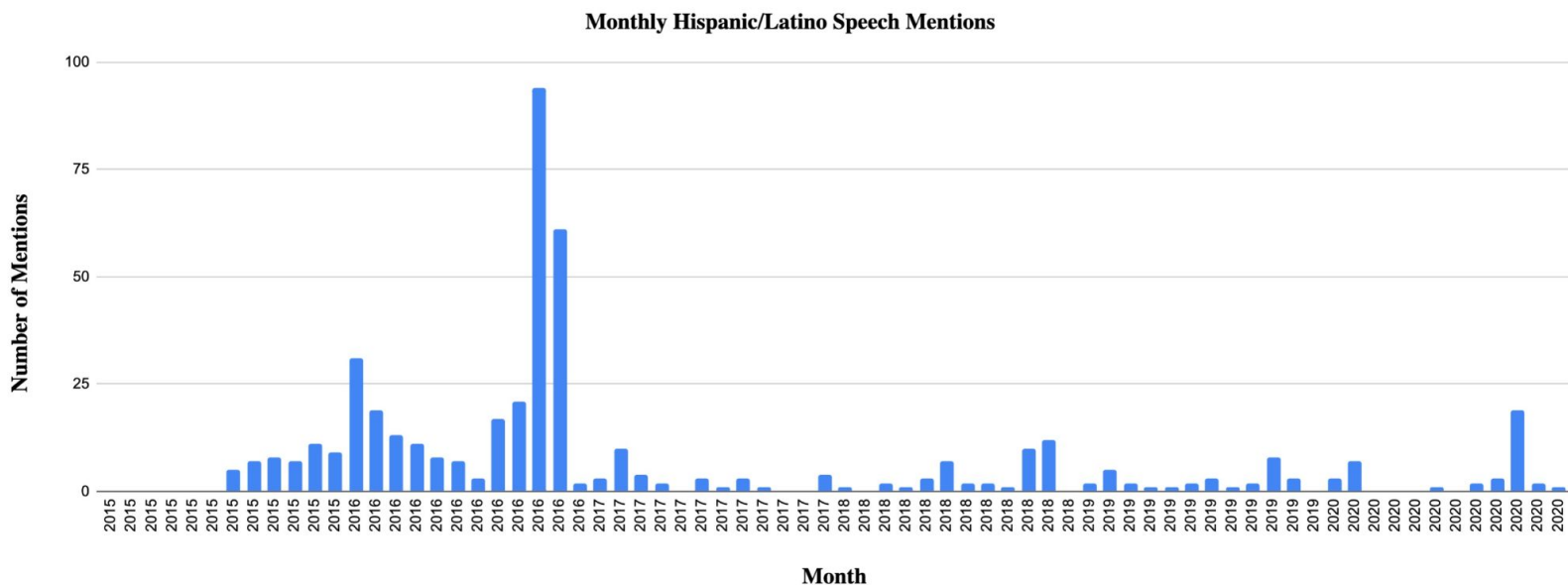


**Figure 3.1:** Figure shows number of Trump's anti-Hispanic/Latino speech mentions from January 2015-December 2020

**Monthly Hispanic/Latino Hate Crimes**
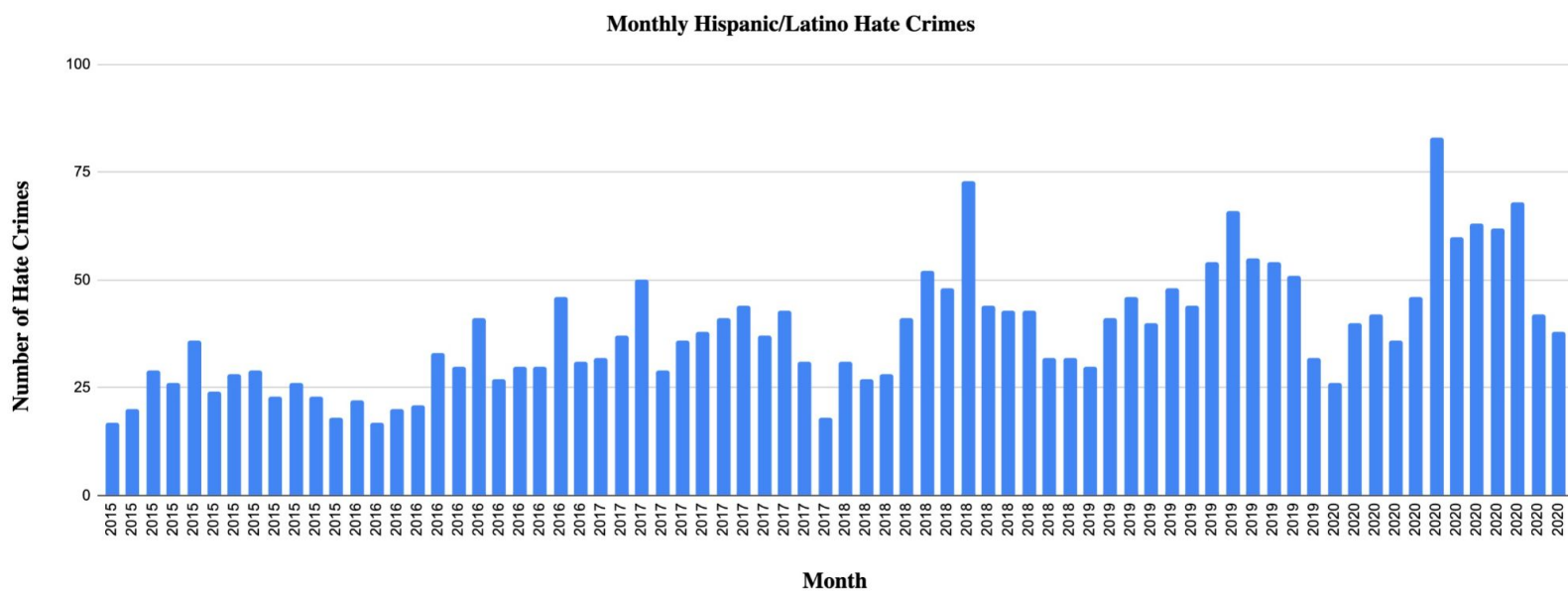


**Figure 3.2:** Figure shows number of Hispanic/Latino-targeted hate crimes from January 2015-December 2020

Of any immigrant group, Trump was most notorious for consistently targeting Hispanic/Latino (Hispanic) populations, as demonstrated by his anti-Hispanic speech mentions. Often Trump used the terms "Mexican" immigrant and "illegal" immigrant interchangeably. As shown in Figure 3.1, he started off his campaign in July 2015 targeting Hispanic immigrants, later crescendoing in late 2016 as his campaign picked up. The first recorded mention in Ames, Iowa, on July 18th, 2015 was the first of a long series of campaign speeches where Trump highlighted Americans who were killed by "illegal immigrants." In Ames, he mentioned Kate Steinle for the first time: "[Kate's killer] was a man that came over, was pushed over from Mexico…he shouldn't have been here, an illegal immigrant." (Other Americans who were murdered by illegal immigrants frequently highlighted in Trump's campaign speeches include Jamiel Shaw and an unnamed 66-year-old female veteran.)

Paralleling Trump's many anti-Hispanic speech mentions that often painted Mexican immigrants as dangerous killers, hate crimes were fairly steady in 2015 and began to rise significantly in 2016, with notable spikes beginning in May, as shown in Figure 3.2. In 2015, there were 24.9 hate crimes committed against Hispanic individuals in the United States on average. In 2016, Trump's highest mention period, that average increased to 29 hate crimes per month.

The anti-Hispanic speech mentions and hate crime data contrast from the anti-Arab and Anti-Muslim results because there is not a clear decrease in hate crimes due to a reduced number of speech-mentions. The case that rises in speech-mentions and rising hate crime rates are correlated is stronger when both decrease simultaneously, however, Trump never stopped targeting Hispanic immigrant groups. It is not possible to evaluate if Trump were to stop mentioning Hispanic immigrants for a substantial time period, there would be a noticeable

decrease in hate crimes against those groups. Although the total number of speech mentions per month decreased drastically after Trump won office in 2016, he consistently targeted these populations in speeches throughout his presidency and centralized them in his anti-immigrant rhetoric. Trump's attack against Hispanic immigrants is strongest in 2016, but it holds strong momentum throughout his time in office. In addition to Trump's usual slander of Mexican immigrants, his introduction of the border wall as a cornerstone goal of his presidency further vilified and alienated Mexican immigrants. A culture of permission to commit hate crimes against Hispanic people likely built over time, irrespective of anti-Mexican mentions, as Americans came to recognize Trump's hostile view of Mexicans and immigrants in general. Average hate crime rates per month against Hispanic individuals rose every year since Trump's initial campaign: in 2017 to 36.3, in 2018 to 41.2, in 2019 to 46.8, and in 2020 to 50.5. An elevation of hate crimes over time regardless of specific speech mentions is logical because the impact of Trump's mentions likely compounded throughout his presidency.

Ultimately, it can reasonably be concluded that Trump's emphasis on anti-immigrant rhetoric throughout the bulk of his campaign is correlated with higher hate crime rates during that period in 2016. Continued rising hate crime rates against immigrants could be linked to the anti-Hispanic—particularly anti-Mexican—climate Trump sought to perpetuate in the United States throughout his presidency.
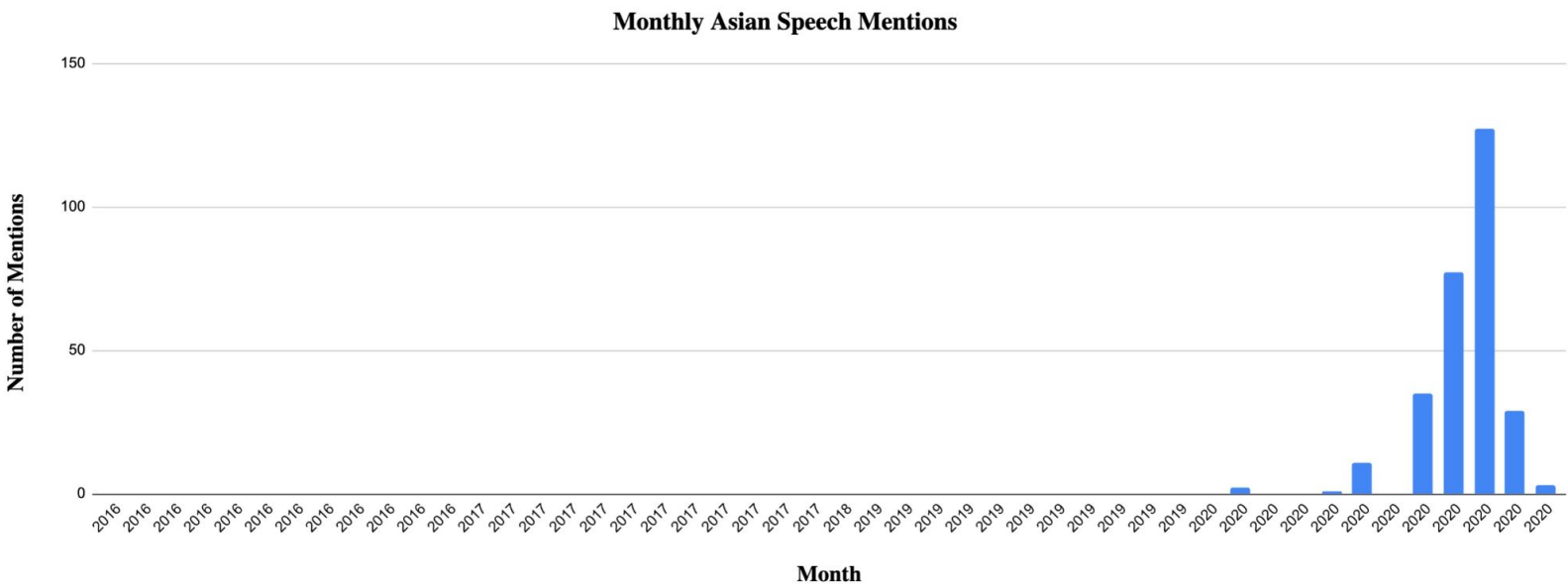
## 4. Asian Targeted Rhetoric and Hate Crimes



**Figure 4.1:** Figure shows number of Trump's anti-Asian speech mentions from January 2016-December 2020
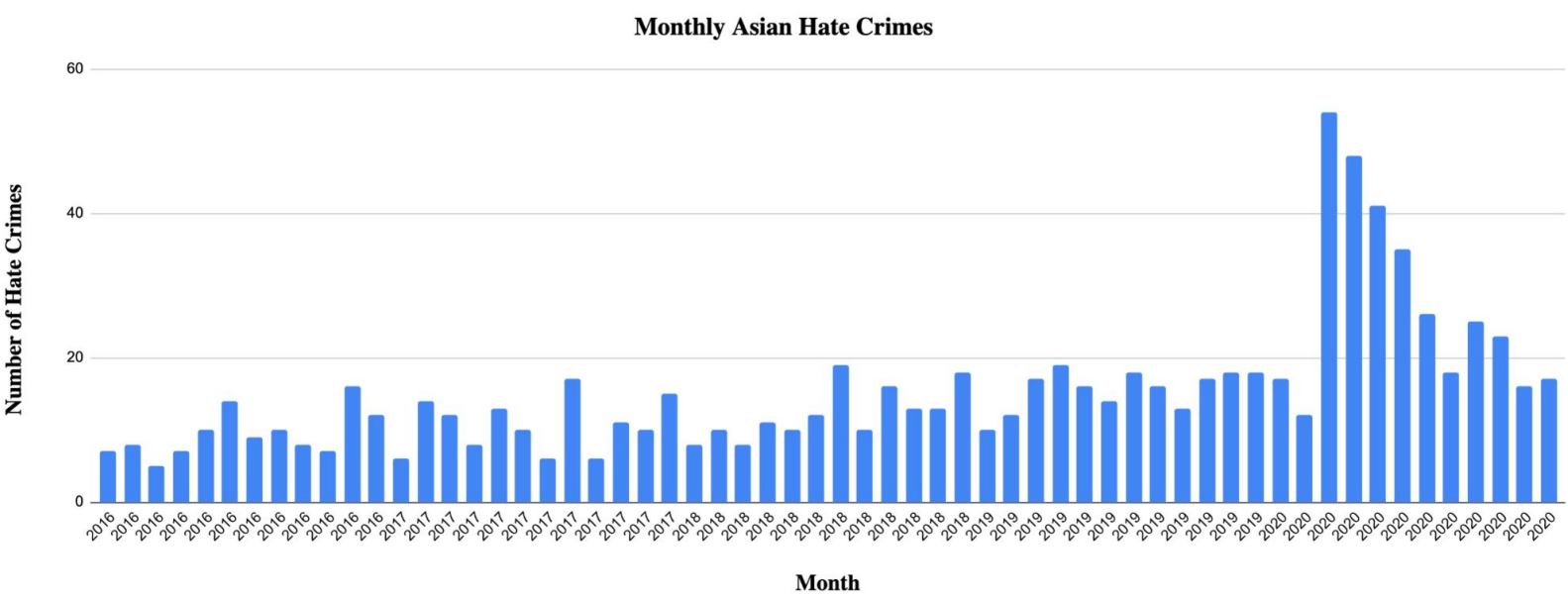


**Figure 4.2:** Figure shows number of Asian-targeted hate crimes from January 2016-December 2020

Anti-Arab, Muslim, and Hispanic speech-mention and hate crime data paint a similar picture of Trump's fueling of hate towards immigrants in the United States. However, the relationship between anti-Asian speech mentions and hate crimes against Asians depicts a different, challenging case. When strictly assessing the anti-Asian speech-mention and hate crime data, as shown in figures 4.1 and 4.2 respectively, it seems that instead of Trump likely contributing to hate crime spikes, the anti-Asian hate crimes occurred first. At the onset of Covid-19, anti-Asian hate crimes jumped from 12 total crimes in February 2020 to 54 in March 2020 (a 350% increase) as the origins of the virus became more widely-known to the public. In February, March, and April 2020, Trump was still speaking favorably—or at least neutrally—regarding China and the pandemic in speeches, reassuring Americans that the United States and China were collaborating to stop the virus. On February 4th in Washington D.C. Trump said: "We are coordinating with the Chinese government and working closely together on the coronavirus outbreak in China" and on February 10th in Manchester New Hampshire said "China, I spoke with President Xi, and they're working very, very hard. And I think it's going to all work out fine."

In speeches specifically, Trump did not blame China for Covid-19 until May 2020, considerably after hate crimes against Asians had spiked. By May, 34.4 hate crimes per month were committed on average against Asians as compared to 15.7 hate crimes on average in the year 2019. At first, it seemed plausible that as Americans began committing mass hate crimes against Asian groups and individuals, Trump saw an opportunity to use Asian immigrants as a scapegoat to shield himself from certain Covid-19-related blame. It wasn't until May 21st that he first blamed China for Covid-19 in a speech "[Covid-19] came in from China, and it should have been stopped in China. They didn't stop it. They should have stopped it" in Ypsilanti, Michigan,

which began his months-long verbal attack on Asians, where relied on phrases like "Kung-Flu" and "China plague."

However, I learned from reviewing scholarship that even though Trump halted speeches during Covid-19, he was already using the term "China virus" on Twitter in March 2020. This complicates the comparison between Trump and the public, because it is unclear if Americans felt permitted by Trump's racist tweets to harm Asian communities, or if Trump noticed the hate crime spike and decided to use it to his advantage. In order to determine the nature of this relationship, more research must be conducted analyzing specifically March 2020 and the months immediately following.

**Speech Impact on Public Opinion**

I confronted two obstacles while collecting and analyzing data on public opinion about specific immigrant groups. The first challenge was an overall deficit of public opinion polls to investigate. In general, the public is not polled on issues related to immigrants and immigration as often as I assumed, which left me with limited data as compared to well-documented hate crime statistics. Additionally, polling is more subjective than raw statistics. The public opinion polls used in this study were conducted by many different agencies, many of which have political affiliations, which could have possibly skewed results. Furthermore, many polls did not offer information about the population surveyed, and although the Roper's Center website is considered a trusted and reliable source, it was not possible to personally assess the quality and demographic of the sample.
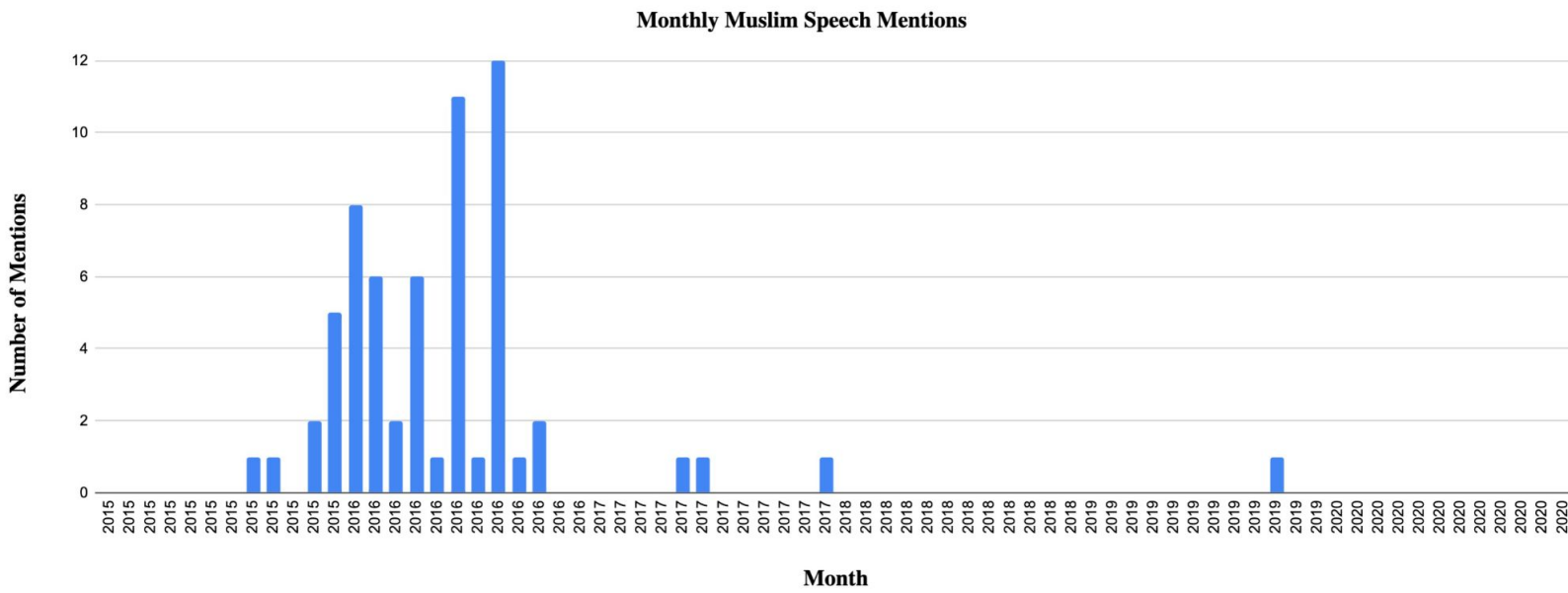
The second challenge was a lack of consistency in polling timeframes as polls revolve around current events. Often a high volume of polls would be conducted asking about a specific issue or group in a short time frame. For example, directly after Trump introduced the travel ban

targeting Muslims, there were many polls asking about that issue specifically, but before and after that period there was a lack of polls inquiring about Muslims. This resulted in highly condensed poll data and long periods with few polls to analyze. Due to this lack of consistency, it was more difficult to analyze speech-mentions' impact on public opinion and draw conclusions about possible effects. However, despite limited and inconsistent data, some results could still be investigated to obtain insights about Trump's anti-immigrant speech mentions and Americans' public opinions.
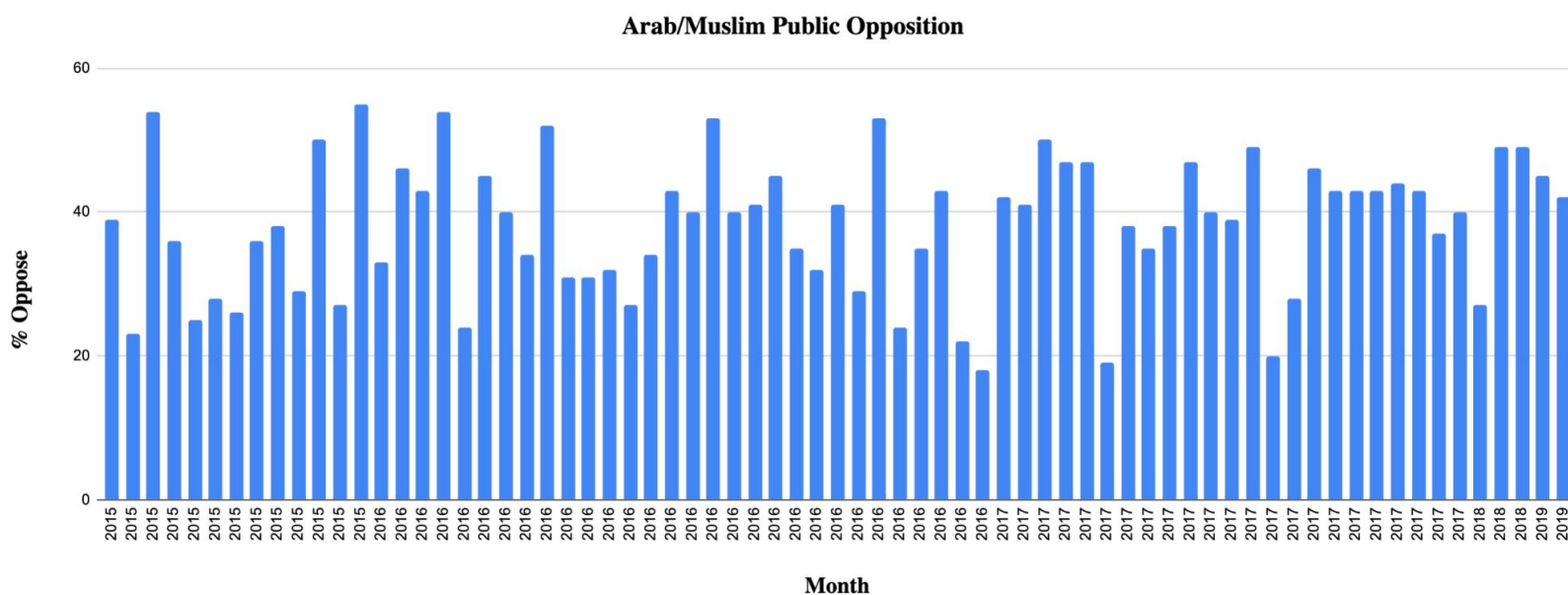
# 1. Arab/Muslim Targeted Rhetoric and Public Opinion
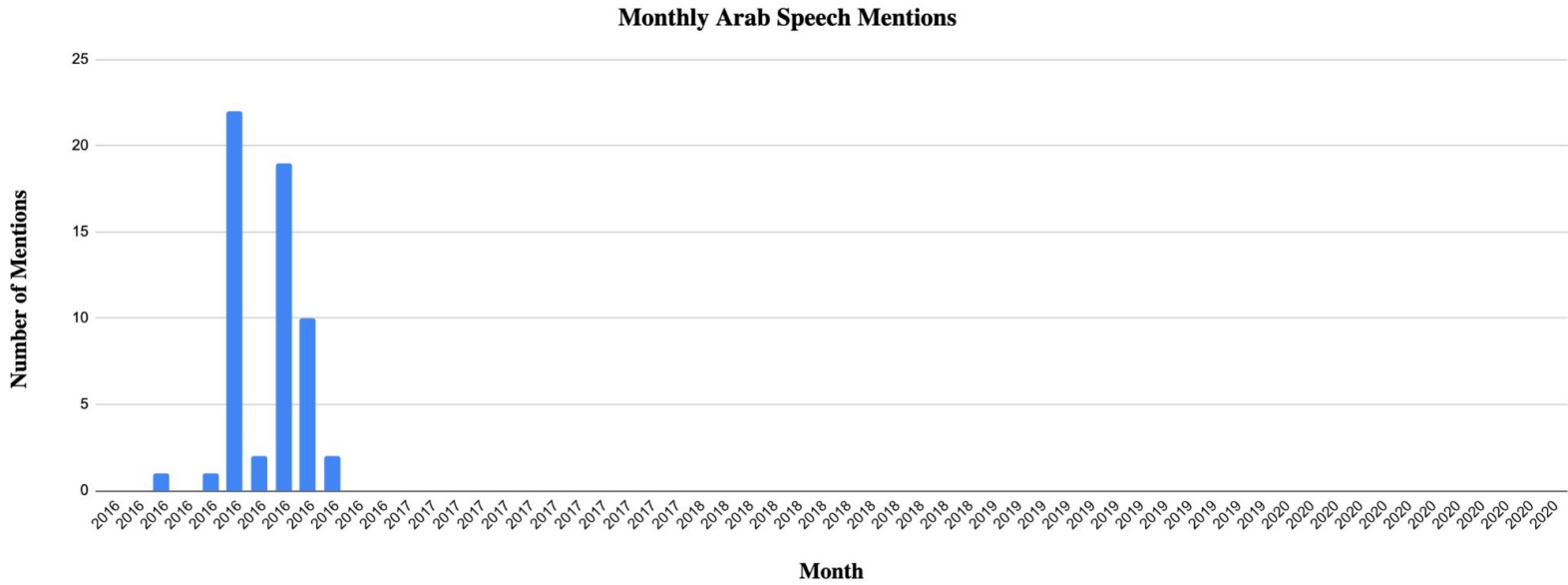
**Monthly Arab Speech Mentions**



**Figure 1.1:** Figure shows number of Trump's anti-Arab speech mentions from January 2016-December 2020

**Monthly Muslim Speech Mentions**



**Figure 2.1:** Figure shows number of Trump's anti-Muslim speech mentions from January 2015-December 2020

**Arab/Muslim Public Opposition**



**Figure 5.1:** Figure shows percentage of survey respondents who opposed Arabs/Muslims by month between 2015 and 2019

Due to limited public opinion poll data, Arab and Muslim immigrant groups were combined for analysis. As shown in figure 1.1, 2.1, and 5.1, public opposition to Arab and Muslim immigrants did not change along the same timescale as anti-Arab/Muslim speech mentions or hate crime statistics. In the charted data there are no clear spikes in the public opposition, and there are no clear statistically significant variations in the data by time period as seen in the Arab and Muslim hate crime statistics.

The absence of trackable patterns in the public opposition to Arab and Muslim groups and the datas' lack of similarity to the speech-mention charts could be due to inconsistency in the polling timeframes, but could also signal that Trump's mentions of Arabs and Muslims did not impact public opinion of those groups. Ultimately, contrasting with hate crime statistics, it cannot

be reasonably concluded that Trump's anti-immigrant mentions regarding Arab and Muslim

groups are correlated with changes in public opinion of those groups.

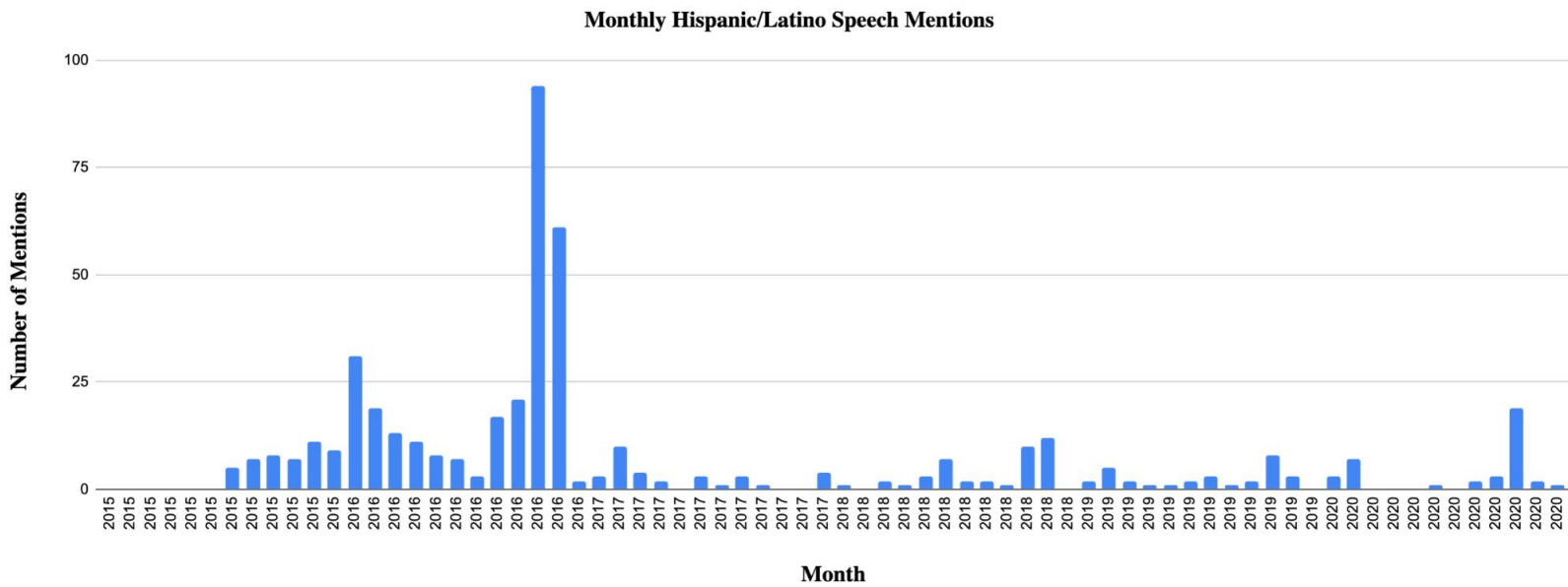## 2. Hispanic/Latino Targeted Rhetoric and Public Opinion

**Monthly Hispanic/Latino Speech Mentions**

**Figure 3.1**: Figure shows number of Trump's anti-Latino/Hispanic speech mentions from January 2015-December 2020

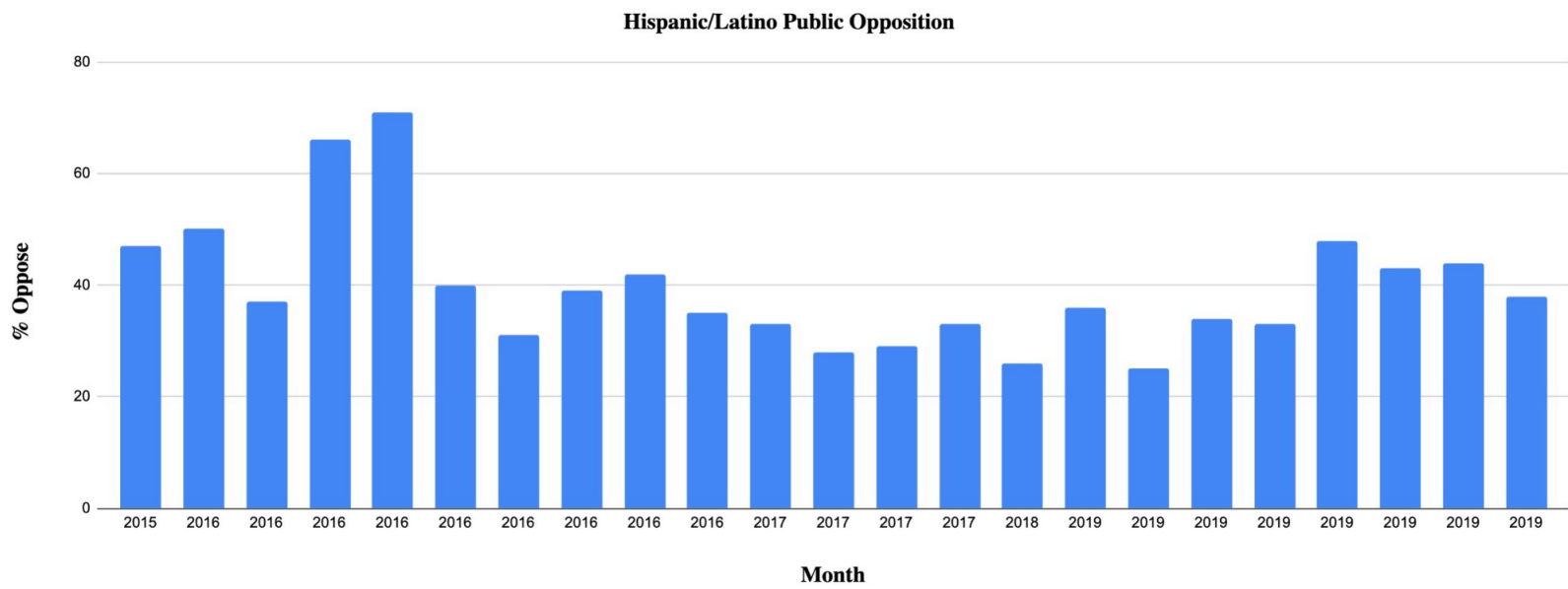**Hispanic/Latino Public Opposition**

**Figure 6.1:** Figure shows percentage of survey respondents who opposed Hispanics/Latinos by month between 2015

and 2019

Contrary to the Arab and Muslim public opinion data, there are detectable spikes in the public's opposition to Hispanic/Latino (Hispanic) immigrant groups, specifically in 2016, as shown in figure 6.1. Although the relationship is not as clear in the public opposition data as the hate crime statistics, opposition percentages seem to follow a similar trajectory as speech-mentions. In both the anti-Hispanic speech mentions (shown in Figure 3.1) and public opposition to Hispanic individuals, the numbers are elevated in 2015, begin to spike in the beginning of 2016, decrease, and then spike again. However, because polls were not taken each month in 2015 or 2016 and the same amount of polls were not conducted in months where poll data exists, it is not a perfect comparison. Additionally, only 23 total polls pertaining to Hispanic immigrants were analyzed, which may not be sufficient to draw meaningful conclusions.

Therefore, although it seems like there may be some relationship between Trump's negative Hispanic speech mentions and public opposition to Hispanic groups, it is not clear enough to suggest correlation. In order to more accurately assess these results, more polls would have had to have been conducted more regularly.

3. **Asian Targeted Rhetoric and Public Opinion**

There were only four polls gauging opposition to Asian immigrants in the 2020 timeframe of Trump's anti-Asian speech mentions, so metrics discovered by other researchers were considered to gather insight on public opposition to Asian groups. When reviewing literature about anti-Asian perspectives at the start of 2020, I found that in New York's Chinatown, restaurants suffered immediately after the first reports of COVID-19, as some restaurants and businesses experienced up to an 85% drop in profits for the two months prior to March 16th, 2020 (Tessler), demonstrating Americans' increasingly negative views of Asians

and Asian immigrants following the onset of the virus. Also, researchers observed a clear spike in hate speech on Twitter between the dates of March 16, 2020 and March 19, 2020, and others "discovered a significant rise of old and new Sinophobic slurs on Twitter induced by the coronavirus pandemic" (Chen).

In addition to a significant increase in hate crimes against Asian groups, the data posits that public opinion of Asians was also sharply declining. Although the results from this paper's public opposition study are inconclusive due to lack of analyzable data, it is likely that either Americans were permitted by Trump's tweets to commit violence towards Asians, Trump perpetuated hate against Asians to distract the public from his role as a leader during the pandemic, or a combination of both factors, where both Trump and the public acted as two separate entities, repeatedly compounding permission effects.

**CONCLUSION**

Originally I hypothesized that Trump's negative rhetoric targeting particular immigrant groups would cause public opinion of those groups to fall, and that Trump's negative speech about particular immigrant groups would cause some individuals who experience permission effects to commit hate crimes against those groups. Although these hypotheses were both true to a certain extent, the impact on hate crime rates was significantly more apparent. Through my research I endeavored to uncover direct impacts of Trump's rhetoric on societal attitudes and behaviors, and ultimately demonstrated a clear relationship between his anti-immigrant speech mentions and hate crime statistics in the United States. Although some metrics of the public opinion data pointed to possible connection to Trump's anti-immigrant speech mentions, his impacts on American public opinion was not as prevalent.

Ultimately, this paper concludes that Trump's permission impacts—emboldening individuals who previously concealed their anti-immigrant opinions to comply with societal standards to act on those perceptions—were stronger than his persuasion effects—truly changing individuals' perceptions of immigrants from positive to negative. However, future research could expand on these findings using a more streamlined methodology, most importantly for assessing public opinion. It is also essential to note that as Trump's presidency progressed, normalization of his anti-immigrant rhetoric may have diminished the immediate impact of his speech mentions on public opinion and hate crimes. This could provide insight as to why hate crimes did not seem equally dependent on anti-immigrant speech mentions at the start of Trump's campaign and presidency and the later years of the study. As time progressed, Trump's overarching stance on immigrants and immigration likely became general knowledge of the American public, therefore influencing attitudes and actions towards immigrants irrespective of specific mentions.

The information provided in this paper regarding Trump's ability to mobilize individuals with anti-immigrant prejudices and potentially alter individuals' perceptions of immigrants comes at an especially crucial moment. If the United States re-elects Trump in 2024, once again giving him the highest platform to spread hateful language and sentiments about immigrants, our immigrant communities will be increasingly harmed. Clear elevation in hate crime incidents associated with Trump's language should be sufficiently compelling for the average American to vote against Trump, and his power to mobilize and embolden dangerous individuals raises even more concern. Americans must consider the heightened danger and sense of insecurity that our immigrant communities—those who are already often marginalized and underserved—will experience at highly increased levels if we reinstate Trump in office.

However, the prospect of Trump's potential re-election in 2024 would present an opportunity for continued research. Collecting sufficient poll data from a timeframe that has already passed provided a significant challenge as I strictly had access to the polls that already existed. Conducting more extensive polling during his campaign and potential presidency in the upcoming year could allow researchers to capture real-time data to more accurately assess the impact of his rhetoric on public opinion, and researchers would have more autonomy to ask the most pertinent questions.

In addition to limited access to public opinion poll data which weakened my ability to assess persuasion effects, it is essential to acknowledge potential limitations of my research. Because my study focuses exclusively on Trump's impact, my findings are specific to his case and will not necessarily be generalizable across all presidents, elites, or leaders. Due to these limitations, some remaining questions that could be addressed in future research address whether these results could be replicated for past or future presidents in the United States, and if these results could be replicated examining leaders in other countries. It would be particularly fascinating to examine a range of autocratic and democratic populations to investigate how results vary. Furthermore, while my study provides valuable insights into the relationship between Trump's rhetoric, public opinion, and hate crimes, it does not encompass all forms of media through which Trump communicates with the public, such as tweets and deleted tweets. Future research could explore the impact of these additional channels of communication on attitudes towards immigrants.

In conclusion, while my research focuses specifically on the Trump era, its implications extend beyond his presidency, underscoring the need for ongoing inquiry into the relationships

between political rhetoric, public opinion, and hate crimes to inform policy and protect

immigrant communities.

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