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Asylum Seeking Determinants and Deterrents: A Trump Presidential Study

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ABSTRACT

In an age of global deterrence, President Donald Trump has enacted his own set of policies aiming to restrict the migration of refugees into the US. This paper outlines the effect of Trump's deterrence policies and negative rhetoric on US asylum rejection rates. This study finds that Trump's presidency increased total asylum rejection rates and had a significantly higher impact on Chinese applicants. Causes can be traced back to the Covid-19 pandemic, a US-China trade war, and other economic factors.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the end of World War II, the Westphalian system that governed the world has evolved into what is currently known as the liberal international order. This current international order is rule-based and holds additional focus on human rights rather than state rights. International institutions such as the United Nations (UN) play a large role in providing universal laws for human rights. As wars rampaged through the 20th century, millions of people were displaced from their homes. In response to the refugee crisis of World War II, the UN organized the 1951 Refugee Convention which dictated that countries must treat these refugees in accordance with internationally recognized legal and humanitarian standards. These standards include the principle of non-refoulement, which is the prohibition of sending refugees to a place where they risk persecution or to another country that may send them to such a place. Countries must also comply by providing refugees with legal status and rights such as access to employment, education, and security. These rights were then extended for refugees displaced after World War II in the 1967 UN Protocol.¹

Despite the United States ratifying the 1967 UN Protocol, the issue of admitting refugees and asylum seekers has been salient in US policy. Political and economic arguments against admittance include increased government debt, burden on the welfare system, doubt of cultural assimilation, increased crime, and the theft of jobs. Regardless of validity, these arguments have been used in American politics to prevent or reduce the number of refugees and asylum seekers accepted into the United States. In the last four decades, these sentiments have led to an age of deterrence within popular destination countries such as the U.S. and the European Union (EU).

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/1951-refugee-convention.html>

Deterrence policies are mainly pushed by presidents and their administrations, and can be used for or against refugee and asylee admittance. Historically, immigration policy has matched the situational contexts presidents have been put into. For example, Ronald Reagan aimed to be conservative with refugee admittance policy nearing the end of the Cold War, but faced civil protest, human rights groups, and UN pressures to be more liberal with policy. Under President Bill Clinton, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) was passed during a time of rising illegal border crossings from Mexico which allowed the due process of removal cases and deportation to be shorter and easier to occur.² During the presidency of George W. Bush, the post 9/11 Patriot Act and Real ID Act made it easier for asylum officers and immigration judges to deny applications by making the definition for deniable individuals more broad and open to interpretation.³

Leading up to the 2016 presidential election, President Trump's campaign featured anti-immigration policy. Trump infamously said "They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" in reference to illegal immigrants from Mexico. Trump also expressed opposition to allowing Syrian refugees into the U.S.— saying they could be the "ultimate Trojan horse" — implying some could be terrorists.⁴ Throughout his campaign, Trump continued to use anti-immigration rhetoric which manifested into protectionist policy during his presidency.

These actions included stricter access at the border for asylum seekers, increased troops at the southern border, aggressive detention policy, and increased Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids. Trump's administration also initiated the removal process of Deferred

² <https://www.vox.com/2016/4/28/11515132/iirira-clinton-immigration>

³ https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/patriot_act#:~:text=The%20Patriot%20Act%20is%20a,Bush.

⁴ [Immigration policy of Donald Trump - Wikipedia.](#)

Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and the beginning of family separation for illegal immigrants and asylum seekers crossing the US-Mexico border. Trump also signed an executive order in 2017 that suspended entry for the citizens of seven countries from Africa and the Middle East for 90 days. This same executive order also indefinitely barred Syrian refugees from entering the United States. In 2018, President Trump issued a proclamation suspending the right of asylum to any migrant crossing the US–Mexico border outside of a lawful port of entry. Later that year, the Department of Justice (DOJ) also deemed that the lack of government protection from gender-based violence or gang violence is not a valid argument for seeking asylum in the US.

The track record of Trump’s negative rhetoric and immigration policy is extensive. Anti-immigration policy was a core part of Trump’s political campaign and continued into his presidency. Additionally, Trump gained support of many people domestic and abroad who aligned with his sentiment towards immigration, refugees, and asylum seekers. The age of deterrence is evolving in a time where there are 26 million refugees world wide⁵. It is critical to analyze the growing conflict between these two opposing forces.

Despite the popularity of the topic, there are few studies on the effects of Trump’s deterrent policies on asylum seekers and refugees. Since such a large focus remains on illegal immigration during the Trump presidency, it has neglected much empirical research on those seeking asylum during this time. The literature has also never focused empirically on the change of acceptance rates and number of applications for asylum seekers to the US under his presidency. My primary research question focuses on how the Trump presidency affected asylum seeker applicants and their respective rejection rates in the United States. This study will not only focus on applicants from South and Central America, but also other geographical areas such as

⁵ <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

Africa and Asia. This is important because Trump's negative rhetoric has been global and has the potential to affect asylum seekers all over the world.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Every year millions of people are forcibly displaced from their homes. By the end of the 2017 calendar year, this number had hit over 65 million, with 26 million being displaced as refugees and 3 million as asylum seekers. Studies show that the most important push variables for asylum migration are political terror and lack of civil liberties (Hatton 2020). Additional significant push variables include genocide, civil war, dissident conflict, and regime change (Poe 2003). This aligns with the fact that most asylum applications come from countries with low income, civil war, and low human rights protection (Hatton 2020).

As asylum seekers are pushed out of their countries, they are pulled to destination countries by another set of variables. Hatton (2009) finds that asylum seekers seek destinations that are more likely to guarantee them permanent residence, neglecting factors such as difficulty of the application process and stricter immigration policy. Hatton (2020) shows that economic motivations are not as strong for asylum seekers compared to non-asylum migrators. This aligns with Levchenko's (2021) study that shows refugees are more likely to travel longer distances, less likely to seek protection in an adjacent country, less geographically concentrated, and more likely to relocate to a high-income OECD country. The findings of this literature reveal that refugees are involved in a deeper decision making process compared to previous decades, hence their relocation to farther distances on the globe.

As more and more asylum seekers are seeking refuge in North American and European countries, more pressure has been put on the West to deal with growing refugee numbers.

Politicians have to deal with the humanitarian aspect of the issue while also satisfying their political agendas. Rosenblum and Salehyan (2004) ask the question of whether political interests or international humanitarian norms dominate asylum enforcement in the United States. Their study concludes that political interest factors play a larger role in US asylum enforcement than humanitarian norms. Additionally, this study proves that asylum enforcement is based on non-humanitarian factors in addition to the expected humanitarian ones.

Presidents have used asylum enforcement as a political tool in various ways. During the Cold War, asylum applicants from countries with negative diplomatic ties with the United States were accepted at a higher rate than countries with good diplomatic ties (Hamilton 2015). The same result held for countries that the US had placed sanctions on. In addition, by accepting applicants from communist countries the US could delegitimize those regimes that are not respecting human rights. The US could also potentially offend an allied country if it accepts asylum applications from a country.

As political and public concerns grow over national security and economic issues, presidents have increasingly used deterrent refugee and asylum policy as a means of protecting both U.S. and personal political interests. A study by Neumayer (2005) shows that recognition rates of asylum applications are highly sensitive to the destination country's unemployment rate. As unemployment rates increased, recognition rates decreased. Intuitively, politicians will avoid public policy favoring immigration during times of higher unemployment because of the sentiment, valid or not, that immigrants will steal jobs from those living here already. The same type of logic applies for issues of national security. Certain constituents may fear that terrorism will enter the country through asylum seekers, pressuring politicians to favor deterrence policies.

But do these deterrence policies work? How do they affect the number of applications and acceptance rates? The IIRIRA, Patriot Act, and Real ID Act were among the policies enacted by presidents before Trump. It would be assumed that since the rejection and deportation of asylum applicants have become easier, this would then lead to a lower number of applicants and lower acceptance rates (Holmes et al. 2005). However, it was found that these acts actually increase grant percentage by asylum officers and immigration judges. The demographic group that benefited the most were those most at risk of persecution. Holmes et al. (2005) theorize that asylum officers began to view asylum applications as more valid due to the extra restrictions and thus more willing to grant applicants asylum in the US.

Rottman et al. (2009) investigate post 9/11 deterrence policies by analyzing the decision making of asylum officers and immigration judges. Consistent with previous literature, the authors find that decisions contained non-humanitarian based factors. Officers and judges valued the threat to physical integrity of asylum seekers at one half the value compared to before 9/11. In addition, decisions by officers and judges were based less on humanitarian merit than they were prior to 9/11.

A second important finding by Rottman et al. (2009) is that after 9/11 applicants that spoke Arabic were denied at higher rates. Results also showed that applicants that spoke English and Spanish were not affected. It can potentially be interpreted that there are political biases involved in the decision making process of asylum officers and judges. While asylum grant percentage was found to be up in the post 9/11 era by the Holmes et al. (2005) study, Rottman et al. (2009) shows how certain groups can be affected differently by global events and political sentiment. In this case, it was 9/11 and the following negative sentiment towards Middle Eastern immigration that played a role in this demographic split.

With the rise of President Trump the anti-immigration sentiment has largely shifted to Latin and South American immigration. As a result, Trump enacted his own deterrence policies to hinder illegal immigration across the country's southern border. Early studies show that by the end of the Trump presidency, Trump's policy had no significant effect on illegal migration flows between the US-Mexico border (Hoekstra & Orozco-Aleman 2021). On the other hand, the study also finds that deported illegal immigrants returned to the United States at lower rates starting in 2016.

III. DATA

The Syracuse University Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) database collects monthly data of all US asylum records. These records are obtained through requests made under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), a unit within the Department of Justice in which these administrative courts are housed.⁶ The TRAC database contains monthly records of total asylum applications filed to the United States by country of origin ranging from 2000 to 2022. The TRAC also contains data for monthly decisions of asylum applications to the US by country of origin. The decisions are classified as "Asylum Relief Denied", "Asylum Granted", and "Other Relief Granted." This records whether the asylum application was: (i) granted, (ii) denied, or (iii) denied but another form of permanent or temporary relief from deportation was granted. Additionally, applications are categorized as either being "Defensive" or "Affirmative." TRAC defines affirmative applications as "asylum applications initially filed with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) which are subsequently referred by USCIS to the Immigration Court for

⁶ https://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/asylum/about_data.html

decision.” A defensive application “applies when the initial asylum request is made to an Immigration Judge.” It is important to note that this dataset does not contain asylum seekers that are denied at the border and not able to file an application.

In addition to TRAC, Eurostat provides identical information but for the European Union (EU). Eurostat provides a dataset named “Asylum applicants by type of applicant, citizenship, age and sex - monthly data (rounded)” that ranges from 2012 to 2022. This database includes total asylum applications to the European Union by country of citizenship. It also includes additional categorical variables such as age group, gender, and applicant type. This dataset also does not include asylum seekers denied at the border of the European Union. It is important to also note that there are no data on whether or not asylum seekers are fully aware of immigration policy in the US or the EU.

Table 1 summarizes the total number of asylum applications to the United States and the European Union ranging from 2013 to 2022. Annually, the EU receives more asylum applications than the US. This is likely because Europe is closer to many of the world’s largest asylum producers. For example, asylum applications in the EU peaked in 2014 as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis. Asylum applications in the US peaked in 2022 and has an increasing trend in applications, excluding the Covid-19 blip in 2020/2021.

Table 1. Total Annual Asylum Applications to the United States and EU, 2013-2022

Year	United States	European Union
2013	44,452	404,515
2014	48,499	594,180
2015	64,651	1,282,690

Year	United States	European Union
2016	83,911	1,221,185
2017	146,612	677,470
2018	166,355	625,575
2019	216,869	698,760
2020	197,733	472,395
2021	92,036	632,325
2022	255,025	-

Table 2 shows the 10 largest producers of asylum seekers to the US since 2022. These countries, in order, are Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, Honduras, China, Venezuela, India, Haiti, Cuba, and Colombia. Most of these countries are in South and Latin America, suggesting that proximity influences where asylum seekers chose to apply. Similarly, the data show that very few African and Middle Eastern countries have a significant population applying for asylum in the US.

Table 2 also shows that the US rarely has allowed more than 50% of total applicants (in the 2001 to 2022 timespan) of a country to be given a decision on their application. The only countries from this list with more than a 50% response rate are China, Haiti, and Colombia. The data partially exemplify the bureaucratic red tape referenced in the literature. Additionally, the US has been most generous granting asylum to Chinese and Indian applicants. These two countries have the lowest rejection rates while the other Latin American countries face higher rejection rates ranging between 50 and 80 percent. These data reveal a clear fluctuation in rejection rates by country, as the total average floats around 57 percent. From a very early standpoint, it appears that the US is more favorable to countries not south of its border.

Table 2. Number of Applications and Decisions by Country, 2001-2022

Country of Origin	Total Applications to the US	Decisions Made	Number Rejected
Total	1,924,197	687,455	396,836 (57.7%)
Guatemala	249,118	65,007	51,737 (78.4%)
El Salvador	249,103	72,926	56,910 (79.1%)
Mexico	244,712	46,456	38,482 (82.8%)
Honduras	193,382	52,354	42,195 (80.6%)
China	154,792	116,821	37,575 (32.1%)
Venezuela	85,971	11,760	5,244 (44.6%)
India	65,362	25,070	10,473 (41.8%)
Haiti	63,570	32,909	27,003 (82.1%)
Cuba	60,211	8,908	5,315 (59.6%)
Colombia	51,488	26,650	17,101 (64.2%)

Note : Percentage in the parenthesis is the total number rejected divided by total decisions made

Figure 1. US and EU rejection rates over time, 2001-2022

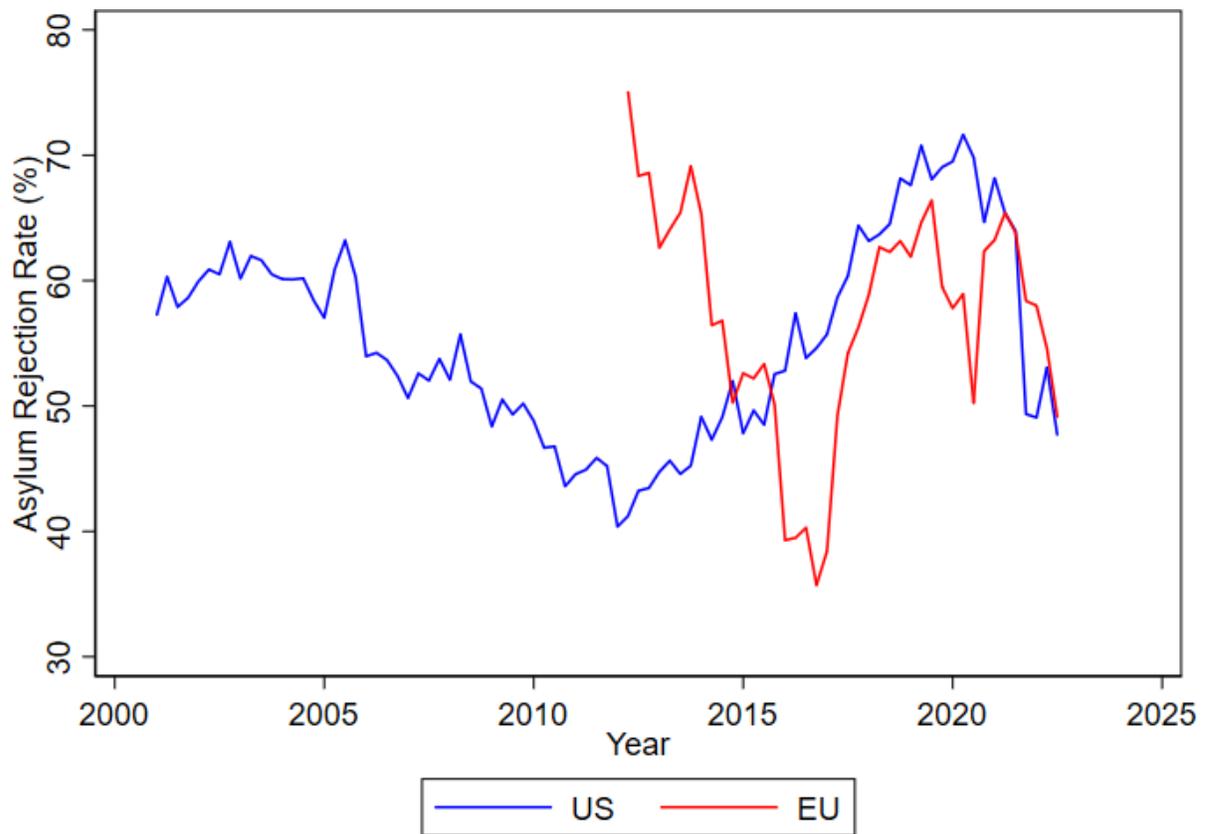


Figure 1 compares the total rejection rates of asylum applicants in the US and EU. The US line shows an increasing trend in rejection rates from 2015 to 2020, a time that aligns with Trump's presidency and campaign. The EU line faced a sharp decline between 2014 and 2016, which shows the increased generosity during the Syrian refugee crisis. However, the EU rejection rates converge with the US beginning in 2017 and have remained similar since.

IV. METHODOLOGY

To estimate the effect of Trump's actions on US asylum rejection rates, I use a multiple regression. The dependent variable is the rejection rate of asylum applicants in the United States by month. I run this model first for total rejection rates and then a second set of regressions for

rejection rates by geographic region (Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East). The central model is as follows.

$$US-Rejection_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 trump_t + \beta_2 corona_t + \beta_3 republican-house + \beta_4 republican-senate_t + \beta_5 november_t + \alpha_1 unemployment_t + \alpha_2 S\&P-price_t + \varepsilon_t$$

This model contains five dummy variables. The first, *trump_t*, equals one for every month Trump is president of the United States which ranges from 2017 to 2021. The coefficient β_1 is the marginal effect of Trump's presidency on asylum rejection rates. The second dummy variable, *corona_t*, equals one during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this paper, the Covid-19 era begins in March 2020. This is an important control because Covid-19 is a major world event that disrupted the world and overlapped with Trump's presidency.

The next two dummy variables, *republican-house_t* and *republican-senate_t*, are variables that indicate months when the Republican had a majority seating in Congress. Literature shows that Republicans are typically more conservative with immigration policy than Democrats, which could signify higher rejection rates in times where Republicans have a majority in Congress. The last dummy variable, *november_t*, signifies the election month of November in the US. This control tests whether rejection rates change during an election month, a time most open to policy fluctuation.

In addition to the dummy variables, two additional controls are added. The first control variable, *unemployment_t*, is the monthly unemployment rate in the US. The second control variable, *S&P-price_t*, is the monthly Standard & Poors 500 Index. These two variables are notable measures of economic health.

Based on inferences from the literature and summary statistics, I expect a positive correlation between Trump's presidency and rejection rates. This would also make me expect that when Republicans have a majority of Congress, it would lead to a higher rejection rate. Rejection rates would be higher because Republicans tend to have more conservative policies towards immigration and refugees. I also expect that when this model is run for specific geographic regions, it will show increased rejection rates in negatively targeted areas like Latin America and the Middle East during the Trump presidency.

H₀: Trump's presidency will not have a significant effect on US asylum rejection rates

H_a: Trump's presidency will have a significant effect on US asylum rejection rates

Additionally, I theorize that economic factors will have a significant effect on rejection rates. Based on the literature, economic factors have influence over willingness to grant or deny asylum. Specifically, I expect that changes in economic factors would also push rejection rates in opposite directions. I would expect an increase in unemployment rates to drive rejection rates up while an increase in the S&P index to drive rejection rates down. Unemployment rates imply economic pain, so I would expect that a country would be hesitant to accept asylum seekers when jobs are more scarce in an economy. However, an increase in the S&P index implies economic growth. An economically growing country would be more willing to accept asylum seekers and be able to sustain this influx.

V. RESULTS

Table 3 shows the multiple regression estimation for total US asylum rejection rates.

Table 3 provides the estimated coefficient and p-value for each of the estimates mentioned in the previous “Methodology” section.

Table 3. Estimation of Trump’s effect on total US asylum rejection rates

	Coefficient	P-Value
Trump Presidency	13.8938*	< 0.001
Covid-19	16.0416*	< 0.001
Republican Majority of House	-0.9844	0.193
Republican Majority of Senate	3.5984*	< 0.001
November (election month)	-0.3673	0.722
Unemployment Rates	-2.0099*	< 0.001
S&P Price	-0.0059*	< 0.001
<i>r</i> -squared	0.6827	

Note: (*) statistically significant, p-value < 0.05

Based on the results, Trump’s presidency led to an approximately 13.89 percentage point increase in total US asylum rejection rates. This coefficient is statistically significant and implies that Trump had an influential impact on rejection rates. While Trump’s term showed implications of conservative policy, the results were split when Republicans had control over Congress. The results show that when Republicans had control over the Senate rejection rates went up, while when they controlled the House the effects were the opposite. However, only the effect for the Republican majority in the Senate is statistically significant, which matches Trump’s overall effect. Lastly for political factors, the control for an election month, *november*, showed no statistical significance for its results.

In regards to external controls, the results show diverse effects. Most notably, the Covid-19 pandemic produces the most significant increase in rejection rates. The estimated marginal effect of approximately 16 percentage points is even higher than Trump's estimated marginal increase of 13 percentage points. However, increases in the S&P index and unemployment rates decrease rejection rates despite the conflict in the nature of the two variables described in the previous section.

Table 4 is the same estimation for asylum rejection rates, except it stratifies the results for geographic regions. To note, each geographic region only uses data for selected countries with the most decisions made in the past 20 years. *Africa* consists of the countries Cameroon, Ethiopia, and Somalia. *Asia* consists of China, India, and Indonesia. *Latin America* includes El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, and Venezuela. *The Middle East* comprises Iran, Iraq, and Egypt.

Table 4. Estimation of Trump's effect on US asylum rejection rates by geographic region

	Africa	Asia	Latin America	Middle East
Trump's Presidency	0.0414 (0.117)	0.1303 (p < 0.001)	0.0488 (p < 0.001)	0.0338 (p = 0.155)
Covid-19	0.2180 (p < 0.001)	0.5013 (p < 0.001)	-0.1186 (p < 0.001)	0.3551 (p < 0.001)
Republican House Majority	0.0699 (p < 0.001)	0.1575 (p = 0.239)	-0.0004 (p = 0.950)	0.0449 (p = 0.005)
Republican Senate Majority	0.0694 (p < 0.001)	0.0061 (p = 0.664)	-0.0133 (p = 0.086)	0.0937 (p < 0.001)
Unemployment Rate	-0.0238 (p < 0.001)	-0.0333 (p < 0.001)	0.0127 (p < 0.001)	-0.0139 (p = 0.001)
S&P Price	-0.0001 (p < 0.001)	-0.0002 (p < 0.001)	0.0002 (p = 0.001)	-0.0001 (p < 0.001)
<i>r</i> -squared	0.3816	0.6250	0.3528	0.4311

Note: p-value is given in the parenthesis

Matching the results from Table 4, all geographic regions show that rejection rates spiked during the Trump presidency. However, only Asia and Latin America have statistically significant estimates for this coefficient. Additionally, Covid-19 significantly pushed rejection rates up for Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, while having the adverse effect on Latin America. Latin America also deviates from other geographic regions in the effects of the economic variables. The results show that when the S&P index and unemployment rate increase, rejection rates amongst Latin American applicants also go up. For other geographic regions, the rise in these two factors leads to a decrease in rejection rates matching the results from Table 3.

Table 5. Estimation of Trump's effect on asylum rejection rates by country

	China	El Salvador	Mexico	Guatemala	Honduras
Trump's Presidency	0.1511 (p < 0.001)	0.0085 (p = 0.563)	0.0423 (p = 0.022)	0.0973 (p < 0.001)	0.0682 (p < 0.001)
Covid-19	0.5133 (p < 0.001)	0.0229 (p = 0.352)	-0.0034 (p = 0.909)	0.0789 (p = 0.004)	0.0163 (p = 0.606)
Republican House Majority	0.0436 (p = 0.003)	-0.0373 (p < 0.001)	0.0608 (p < 0.001)	-0.0456 (p < 0.001)	-0.0213 (p = 0.095)
Republican Senate Majority	-0.0243 (p = 0.111)	0.0199 (p = 0.055)	-0.0116 (p = 0.368)	-0.0315 (p = 0.006)	-0.0141 (p = 0.289)
Unemployment Rate	-0.0346 (p < 0.001)	-0.0004 (p = 0.986)	0.0109 (p = 0.001)	-0.0078 (p = 0.006)	0.0006 (p = 0.846)
S&P Price	-0.0002 (p < 0.001)	-0.0001 (p < 0.001)	-0.0001 (p = 0.610)	-0.0001 (p < 0.001)	0.0004 (p < 0.001)
r-squared	0.5908	0.5147	0.4698	0.3346	0.3176

Note: p-value is given in the parenthesis

To further look into the significance of Asia and Latin America, Table 5 shows an additional estimation for select Latin American countries and China. Based on the results of Table 5, Trump's presidency led to an increase in the rejection rates of all Latin American countries. All of these estimates are statistically significant besides El Salvador. From the five countries studied, China had the largest increase in rejection rates. Most notably, China was most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic as the results show a 50 percentage point increase in rejection rates. While the Latin American countries besides Mexico also have this relationship between Covid-19 and rejection rates, the estimated marginal effects are much smaller.

Lastly, the results for the remaining four variables varied from country to country. For China the economic variables decrease application rejection rates, while the opposite occurs for applicants in Honduras. For Mexico, these results are split in opposite directions between the S&P index and unemployment rates. The results are also ambiguous for the Republican majority. Some countries benefit from Republican control over Congress while others do not. Some benefit when only Republicans have control of the Senate and not the House, and vice versa. But most importantly, asylum seekers from each of these countries experienced higher rejection rates during the Trump presidency.

VI. Analysis

Based on the results, there are many key takeaways. The main estimation, Table 3, shows that Trump's presidency resulted in an increase of asylum rejection rates, matching my prediction. It appears as if Trump's negative immigration policy and rhetoric had seeped into the decision making of immigration judges and officers. By negatively influencing the viewpoints of these figures, the likelihood of rejection for asylum seekers increased as a whole. The

estimations in Tables 4 and 5 further dissect this notion by showing the results for geographic region and individual countries. Across the board, rejection rates went up, matching the results of total estimation from Table 3. However, the region and country from the study that was most affected by Trump was Asia and China. Despite Trump's focus on Latin American and Middle Eastern immigration, Trump's presidency most affected their Asian counterparts. One possible explanation connects two factors: the US-China trade war and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Trump displayed anti-Chinese sentiment with the initiation of a US-China trade war. The negative effects of this trade war extended past economic ones, and entered into asylum decisions. Trump villainized Chinese applicants with this trade war, and led to a sharp increase in Chinese applicant rejection rates. This is an aberration from the US's generous behavior towards Chinese applicants 15 years prior to Trump's presidency. In the past 20 years, China has had a fairly low rejection rate relative to other countries in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East (Table 2). It is notable to observe China having such a large spike in rejection rates with the introduction of Trump's presidency and his trade war.

The second factor that could have led to this significant distinction with China is the Covid-19 pandemic. The estimation for China shows that rejection rates during the Covid-19 pandemic increased by approximately 51 percentage points. The other Latin American countries in this study do not come close to this effect. Specifically, none of these countries even reached an increase in 10 percentage points because of the pandemic. Even the total effect shows at most a 16 percentage point increase in rejection rates because of Covid-19.

It is difficult to determine whether rejection rates increased during the pandemic strictly because of health concerns, or if Trump influenced their decisions with fear mongering and scapegoating of the Chinese as the origin of the virus. However, I theorize that these two things

are not mutually exclusive since other geographics regions hover around similar marginal effects from Trump's presidency, while Asia and China are outliers in these results. A further study will need to be done to truly analyze the effects of Covid-19 in relation to Trump's presidency. This extends beyond just China, but to other countries. It is possible that immigration judge decisions for other areas could have used Covid-19 as an excuse to reject applications. Since a measure for Trump's influence during the pandemic cannot be measured, this study determines that Trump's rhetoric about the origin of the virus may have influenced asylum decisions.

Based on the total estimation from Table 3, it is observed that when Republicans have a majority of the Senate, total asylum rejection rates go up. However, when they have a majority of the House the trend is the opposite but not statistically significant. When observing individual countries and geographic regions, these results are inconsistent and switch often between increasing and decreasing rejection rates. It is possible that these variables are not very good estimators for asylum rejection rates. However, it is possible that these variations in the results are just a byproduct of the nature of politicians.

Politicians choose policy that is most favorable to them despite having a general set of political beliefs. The reason is that many politicians want to get re-elected and thus need to choose favorable policies for their constituents. In some cases it may be more beneficial for Republicans to enact more conservative immigration towards Latin Americans and times where it is not. By this logic, politicians in the House of Representatives who represent a smaller and thus more homogeneous population would be most prone to this pattern. However, the total results shows a majority in the Senate have a significantly increasing effect on rejection rates while the results of the House are inconclusive. The effect of Congress overall is fairly vague and

implies political control through a binary variable may not be precise enough as a predictor. This explanation only provides a small sense of understanding of the overall effect of these variables.

Other key takeaways from the study are based on the results of the economic controls. I expected that the unemployment rates and S&P price would work in opposite directions. If unemployment increases, I expect that an increase in unemployment rates would make the country as whole more unwilling to accept asylum applications as there would be a fear that these asylum seekers would take their jobs. I also theorized that an increase in the S&P index (an indicator of economic growth) would do the opposite and make the country more willing to accept asylum seekers since the fear is now more minimalized.

The study shows that a rise in either of these variables decreases in overall rejection rates. This is the expected relationship for the S&P index but not unemployment rates. One explanation is that when unemployment rates are high, it is because firms cannot afford to pay wages for their workers. These firms will then seek to employ cheaper labor and will target populations like asylum seekers who might be more willing to take a job for lower pay. This is tied in with the rise of the S&P index. Large companies benefit when there are more substitutable workers in an industry as it drives down wages and makes labor less scarce. Once again, these factors are not mutually exclusive to political ones, as lobbyists have the ability to advocate for these policies in Congress. It is possible that policies could be swayed by more than political factors, but also by external demands and preferences.

VII. Conclusion

Immigration has always been a salient issue in the United States. It has led to the enactment of many conservative policies led by influential American presidents. Recently,

President Trump has taken his opportunity to make immigration policy one of the core elements in his public platform. He used negative rhetoric and has been unempathetic to asylum seekers and migrants. These protectionist policies have affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of people seeking asylum in the United States for security and economic reasons. There has not been much empirical research on the effect Trump had on asylum application rejection rates to the United States. I use a multiple regression analysis to determine if Trump's actions caused an increase in rejection rates for asylum seekers. It is possible that his presidency had no influence on rates, as the individual-level decisions are done by independent domestic Immigration Judges and Asylum Officers.

The results showed that Trump had a significant impact on increasing asylum rejection rates. The effects are consistent amongst geographic regions and the individual countries studied. Asia and China showed the largest increase in rejection rates during his presidency and were most likely correlated with Trump's actions in the trade war and the result of the Covid-19 pandemic beginning in China. The results also imply that many of these factors are not mutually exclusive of each other. It is difficult to determine how much of the rejections came from political scapegoating instead of genuine health and safety concerns. When the economic conditions increased, rejection rates decreased. It was brought up in the previous section that there are factions in the economy pushing for more immigration. Taken together, this shows that rejection decisions are influenced by more than presidential platforms.

In conclusion, this study investigates Trump's influence on asylum rejection rates while controlling for other factors. I find that Trump's presidency increased rejection rates, but more of the mutual exclusivity issues need to be addressed to fully analyze the subject. Additionally, the study was limited to larger asylum producing countries because many countries do not have a

large enough sample size to statistically meaningful results. This issue is the byproduct of the United States only making a decision on a little more than one-third of total applications since 2001. Additionally, due to the nature of asylum applications, there are times when countries send large numbers of applications and times when there are not many. Regardless of the complications, this study shows the power of presidential platforms on asylum seekers.

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