Trump and Trade: Protectionist Politics and Redistributive Policy*

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Abstract

Do redistributive policies intended to mitigate the costs of trade reduce protectionist backlash? To understand the link between policymaking and the electoral consequences of policy outcomes, we address this question using original data on redistributive assistance to workers harmed by trade liberalization. By analyzing the 2016 US presidential primary and general election results, we show these redistributive policy benefits are associated with reduced support for then-presidential candidate, Donald Trump, who ran on an anti-globalization platform. These findings suggest redistributive trade assistance may have a political impact by mitigating support for protectionist platforms and anti-globalization rhetoric of presidential candidates. Our results suggest that the redistributive program we examine in this paper may accomplish one of its objectives: to make trade liberalization more politically palatable. This paper extends findings in the extant literature on anti-incumbency effects to suggest that policy outcomes affect citizens' perceptions of policies.

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Republican candidate Donald Trump's arrival on the 2016 electoral stage ushered in a protectionist platform of which the Republican party, and nation, had not seen in decades from a major party nominee. His campaign rhetoric was accompanied by unprecedented tariffs and rumblings of a trade war, evidence that his anti-trade stances were not empty promises. His electoral victory came courtesy of Rust Belt states that were the hardest hit by trade liberalization and materialized the fears of a protectionist backlash (see Hays 2009, 2017; Scheve and Slaughter 2007).

In recent years, scholars studying changes in anti-globalization sentiment pointed to redistributive policies to assist workers harmed by trade as a defense against protectionist backlash (Burgoon, 2001; Hays, 2009, 2017; Rodrik, 1998), even arguing that globalization may not be sustainable absent of trade adjustment compensation for the "losers" of trade liberalization (Colantone and Stanig, Forthcoming). Indeed, the electoral impact of the costs of trade is well-documented across the globe, leading to reduced support for incumbents in the U.S. (Jensen, Quinn, and Weymouth, 2017; Margalit, 2011) and a shift in favor of nationalist and isolationist candidates in Western Europe (Colantone and Stanig, Forthcoming).

Trade adjustment assistance for workers, such as temporary income, job training, and relocation resources, is intended to defend against such electoral consequences (Hornbeck, 2013). However, while such assistance has been shown to reduce anti-incumbency effects (Margalit, 2011), we do not know whether it is effective in curbing protectionism among voters. Moreover, skeptics (e.g., Scheve and Slaughter 2007) argue that current trade adjustment assistance policy is an inadequate barrier against the rise of protectionism.

In this short paper, we consider this question by leveraging the rise of Donald Trump's presidency. We examine the effect of the U.S. Trade Adjustment and Assistance program (TAA) on support for Donald Trump in both the 2016 Republican primary and general elections. We find that trade adjustment assistance benefits are significantly associated with reduced support for Trump during both the primary and the general elections. These

results suggest that trade adjustment compensation has electoral consequences and may influence the electorate's view of globalization.

Our research contributes to the literature on economic voting by suggesting that trade adjustment compensation can reduce the public backlash against trade liberalization. Previous work (Margalit 2011) has found that job loss due to trade has a particularly deleterious effect on support for incumbents, but that TAA lessens anti-incumbent electoral results. Our results build on findings of incumbency effects of TAA to show reduced support for an anti-globalization and protectionist campaign, suggesting that TAA can actually mitigate electoral backlash due to trade-related losses. More broadly, these findings suggest that policy outcomes can have an electoral impact and affect how citizens view policies.

Electoral Consequences of Redistributive Trade Policy

Scholars have argued that governments increase spending in an attempt to soften the blow of domestic job losses and mitigate public backlash towards trade liberalization (Burgoon 2001; Rodrik 1998). In fact, one of the admitted purposes of the Trade Adjustment Assistance program (TAA) in the U.S. is to make trade agreements politically palatable (Hornbeck 2013). While previous work (Margalit 2011) has found positive effects of favorable TAA decisions for presidential incumbents, it is less clear if TAA actually reduces negative public reaction to trade liberalization.

We argue that voters may be influenced by redistributive assistance offered to workers in their communities who have been harmed by trade. While the workers and their families are most obviously affected by trade-related job loss, import exposure can also indirectly affect residents in hard-hit communities facing long-term economic decline (see Colantone and Stanig Forthcoming). In fact, recent work (Colantone and Stanig, Forthcoming; Margalit, 2011) on retrospective economic voting has found evidence of the effect

of sociotropic politics within local communities on voting decisions. The costs of trade and TAA assistance within local communities affects support for incumbent presidents (Margalit, 2011).

Additionally, there are several sources for voters to learn about trade-related costs and TAA benefits within their communities. Plant and business closings are often covered in local news along with announcements when the displaced workers receive government trade adjustment assistance. More importantly, unions are a major source of trade and labor-related information for its members and their families, the voters who are the most motivated to vote based on trade and labor policies (Kim and Margalit, 2017). Kim and Margalit (2017) show evidence that unions in the U.S. frequently communicate their positions on trade with their members and have influence over its members views on trade.

This issue of government assistance to workers harmed by international trade and its political consequences is particularly relevant to the dynamics of the 2016 presidential election during which trade-related job loss was one of the most salient issues (Appelbaum 2016; Chandy and Seidel 2016). The then-Republican candidate, Donald Trump, capitalized on the anti-globalization sentiment. Trump's anti-trade rhetoric was unusual, depicted in the press and by scholars as "challenging the last 200 years of economic orthodoxy that trade among nations is good, and that more is better," and he was noted for being "the first Republican nominee in nearly a century who has called for higher tariffs, or import taxes, as a broad defense against low-cost imports," with more reservations regarding trade liberalization than even his Democratic opponent (Appelbaum 2016). Given his unprecedented protectionist campaign, the 2016 primary and general elections offer an appropriate test of how TAA affects the electoral impact of international economic integration.

Data, Methods, and Results

Congress created the Trade Adjustment Assistance Program with the passage of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 to help US workers and firms that have been negatively affected by trade liberalization by providing job training, temporary income, and other assistance. To be considered under this program, a petition must be filed with the DOL by or on behalf of a group of workers who have lost or may lose their jobs or experienced a reduction in wages as a result of foreign trade. A petition may be filed by a group of workers, an employer, a union, a state workforce official, or an American Job Center operator/partner. Members of Congress sometimes contact the DOL to make a case for petitions from their district or states (Ritchie and You, nd). The Office of Trade Adjustment Assistance (OTAA) investigates the case to determine whether foreign trade was an important cause of job loss.[1] If the OTAA certifies the case, petitioners may apply to their State Workforce Agency for benefits and services (see Hornbeck 2013).[2]

We obtain all TAA petitions submitted between 2005 through 2012 from the DOL website.[3] Petitions include the name of the employer; location of a firm; whether the petition is made by workers, the company, or a union; Standard Industrial Classification (SIC); estimated number of affected workers; decision; and decision date. In total, there were 17,309 petitions made during the period, and 75% of them were approved. Figure 1 presents the total number of petitions by county between 2005 and 2012.

The average estimated number of workers affected by foreign trade for each petition is 88 and over 1.13 million workers in total were represented by petitions during the period.[4] Out of the total number of petitions, 40% were submitted by companies, 30% by workers, 18% by state agencies, and 10% by unions.

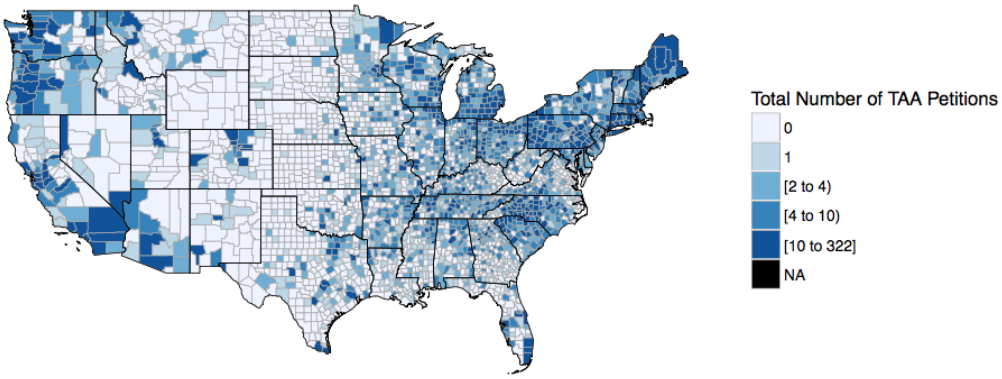
[1]The TAA eligibility criteria include that the workers must have become separated from their employment or have been threatened with separation, and the role of foreign trade must be established by an increase in competitive imports, a shift of production to a foreign country, a decrease in sales to a TAA-certified firm, or by the US International Trade Commission.

[2]https://www.doleta.gov/tradeact/factsheet.cfm

[3]https://www.doleta.gov/tradeact/DownloadPetitions.cfm.

[4]Around 20% of petitions do not have estimated number of workers.

Figure 1: TAA Petitions By County, 2005 - 2012



TAA benefits resulting from approved petitions would take time to be delivered and recognized, and so we expect that benefits from petition decisions occurring during 2005 through 2012 to have an observable impact on public sentiment by the 2016 election, particularly due to the salience of the issue during the entire campaign season.[5] Following this logic, we expect that higher petition approval rates are negatively associated with a shift in support for Trump from the Republican candidates in 2008 and 2012. Figure 2 presents the changes in Republican vote share from the 2008 to the 2016 presidential election by county. It shows significant variation in terms of vote share changes across counties.

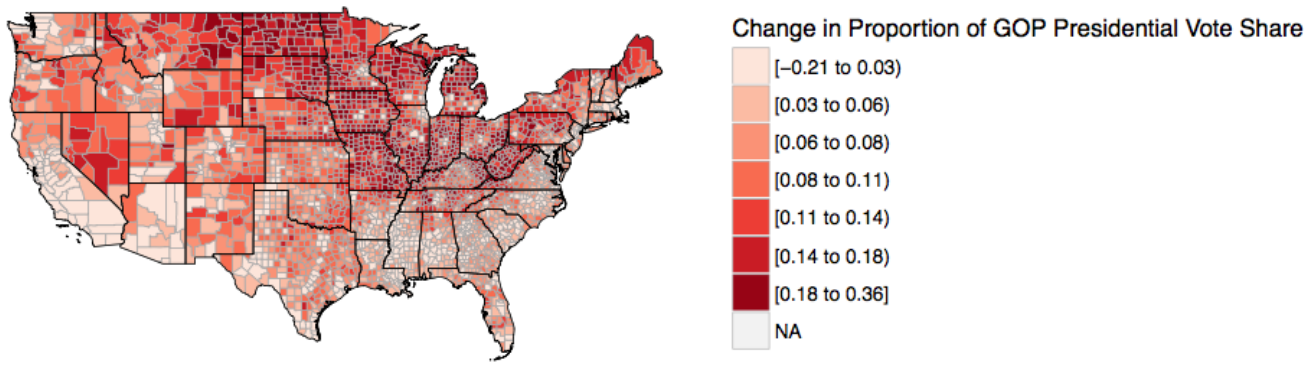
To estimate the electoral impact associated with a petition and its approval rate, we create a dataset at the county level.[6] For each county in the data, we calculate the total number of TAA petitions submitted and approved during the period from 2005 to 2012. We estimate the following model:

$$\text{Trump Support}_{is} = \beta * \text{TAA}_{is} + \Gamma * \text{X}_{is} + \alpha_s + \varepsilon_{is} \quad (1)$$

[5]Table A2 in Appendix D, presents the regression analysis that documents the effect of TAA decisions from 2005 to 2015. The main results hold.

[6]Demographic data are from the American Community Survey 5-year average (2011-2015).

Figure 2: Change in Republican Vote Share, 2008 - 2016, by County



, where i indicates county and s indicates state. We use three variables to measure *Trump Support*. First, we measure Trump's vote share in the Republican primary. Second, we measure a change in Republican vote share (%) from 2008 to 2016 in the general election. Third, we measure a change in Republican vote share from 2012 to 2016 in the general election.[7] The variable TAA includes the total number of TAA petitions submitted and approved during the period between 2005 and 2012, as well as the total number of workers affected by approved TAA petitions. X_{is} includes demographic variables such as race and age composition, education, income, unemployment rate, foreign-born ratio, health insurance coverage rate, and manufacturing sector ratio in each county.[8] We also include the variable, *China Shock*, which captures the change in Chinese import exposure per worker, 1990 - 2007 (Autor, Dorn, and Hanson 2013).[9]

Columns (1) and (2) in Table 1 present the results for the Republican primary. The results also show that while the total number of TAA petitions submitted is not significantly associated with support for Trump during Republican primaries, higher TAA approval

[7]Instead of using a vote share difference between elections, using a vote share in election t as a dependent variable and including a lagged vote share from time $t-1$ as an independent variable at the county level produces similar results.

[8]Table A1 in the Appendix presents the summary statistics for the variables.

[9]Autor, Dorn, and Hanson (2013)'s data do not include information for Alaska and Hawaii so counties in those two states are not included in the analysis.

Table 1: TAA Petitions and Support for Trump

	Primary 16		**General Election**			
			Δ Rep.Vote 08-16		**Δ Rep.Vote 12-16**	
DV (Vote percent) =	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Total TAA Petition	-0.00680	0.00242	-0.00766	-0.00334	-0.00600	-0.00281
	(-0.63)	(0.22)	(-1.17)	(-0.56)	(-0.96)	(-0.48)
TAA Petition Approval Rate	-0.903***		-0.360**		-0.306*	
	(-3.05)		(-2.22)		(-1.94)	
(ln) Number of Affected Workers		-0.210***		-0.0966***		-0.0719**
by Approved TAA		(-3.31)		(-3.21)		(-2.24)
China Shock[a]	-0.00151	0.00333	0.0295	0.0322	0.0356*	0.0373*
	(-0.02)	(0.05)	(1.09)	(1.19)	(1.80)	(1.88)
(ln) Population	0.397	0.466	-0.0926	-0.0552	-0.223**	-0.199*
	(1.33)	(1.63)	(-0.76)	(-0.45)	(-2.10)	(-1.89)
Senior Ratio[b]	27.43***	27.60***	6.134**	6.216**	5.366**	5.421**
	(5.31)	(5.40)	(2.12)	(2.16)	(2.60)	(2.65)
White Ratio	3.859*	3.824*	13.53***	13.52***	4.691***	4.679***
	(1.78)	(1.78)	(11.84)	(11.71)	(4.37)	(4.33)
Lower Education Ratio[c]	34.27***	33.93***	24.70***	24.57***	21.40***	21.31***
	(8.95)	(8.88)	(10.34)	(10.41)	(10.66)	(10.67)
(ln) Income	-0.628	-0.772	-2.401***	-2.454***	-1.926**	-1.962**
	(-0.35)	(-0.42)	(-3.20)	(-3.31)	(-2.08)	(-2.14)
Unemployment Ratio	34.04***	33.77***	0.199	0.140	-4.000	-4.067
	(2.88)	(2.90)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(-0.78)	(-0.79)
White Employment Ratio	17.53*	17.36*	10.34	10.19	16.30***	16.22***
	(1.87)	(1.88)	(1.59)	(1.57)	(3.47)	(3.42)
Manufacturing Employment Ratio	-14.66***	-14.09***	1.554	1.832	3.882*	4.051*
	(-3.05)	(-2.90)	(0.78)	(0.92)	(1.71)	(1.76)
Foreign Born Ratio	0.260	0.0211	-12.31***	-12.41***	-17.25***	-17.31***
	(0.03)	(0.00)	(-3.96)	(-3.99)	(-5.61)	(-5.59)
No Health Insurance Ratio	-0.948	-1.076	-2.793	-2.860	-1.294	-1.343
	(-0.13)	(-0.15)	(-0.79)	(-0.81)	(-0.43)	(-0.44)
Constant	17.29	18.28	9.577	9.843	11.40	11.60
	(0.91)	(0.96)	(1.12)	(1.16)	(1.20)	(1.24)
State FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	2886	2886	3116	3116	3116	3116
adj. R^2	0.904	0.904	0.769	0.770	0.738	0.738

Note: ***t* statistics in parentheses**. $^{*}p < 0.1$,$^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$. Standard errors are clustered at state level. **a**: Change in Chinese import exposure per worker, 1990-2007. **b**: Ratio of population over age 65. **c**: Ratio of population with high school or less than high school education.

(*TAA Petition Approval Rate*) and the number of workers who benefited from the TAA program in a county (*(ln) No. Affected Workers by Approved TAA*) are negatively related to Trump support, and the relationships are statistically significant.

Next, we investigate whether TAA petition approval is associated with a shift in Republican vote share in each county in the 2016 general election. Given that we use the difference in Republican candidates' vote share in a county i from 2008 ($\Delta RepublicanVS_{i,16-08}$) and 2012 elections ($\Delta RepublicanVS_{i,16-12}$), the model we estimate controls time-invariant, county-level characteristics that are correlated with support for the Republican candidate, a model specification that is very similar to Margalit (2011).

Columns (3) through (6) in Table 1 present the results for changes in support for Republican candidates in a general election. The results on TAA-related variables are similar to those of the Republican primary. However, counties where more TAA petitions were approved and more workers benefited from the TAA program are negatively associated with changes in Republican vote share in 2016 both from 2008 and 2012.

Our results suggest that government programs such as TAA have a broader electoral impact and may discourage voters from supporting a protectionist candidate. These findings also indicate that citizens' responses to TAA benefits go beyond evaluations of incumbents, suggesting that TAA may influence perceptions of trade policy. The implications present a more positive evaluation of the program; TAA works as intended by making trade politically palatable, despite critiques that TAA is not effective.

Conclusion

In this paper, we offer evidence that trade adjustment assistance for workers harmed by trade is associated with reduced support for Donald Trump, suggesting that TAA mitigated public opposition to trade liberalization and cooled the protectionist sentiment on which the Trump campaign capitalized. Specifically, we find that approved TAA

petitions are negatively associated with county-level vote share for Donald Trump in both the 2016 primary and general elections.

Our study is limited to the unusual case of Donald Trump, unique as a Republican candidate with a strong protectionist platform and notable for rhetoric beyond anti-globalization statements. While this makes for a unique opportunity to study public backlash to globalization, it also may not be generalizable to other candidates with more moderate protectionist policies that are not in such stark contrast with their party. However, given similar and timely concerns of trade compensation and protectionist backlash in Europe and Latin America, our results may have global implications for evaluations of trade and redistributive adjustment policies.

What do our findings imply about the broader relationship between policy outcomes and electoral impact? Our results build on contributions from the retrospective voting literature to suggest that policy outcomes can have influence beyond incumbency effects. Policy outcomes may influence voters' perception of policies and candidates' issue platforms.

While the economic voting literature (e.g., Lewis-Beck 1986; Lewis-Beck and Elias 2008; Abramowitz and Segal 1986) emphasizes the effect of economic conditions on voting, we show that redistributive policy outcomes can mitigate the relationship between economic conditions and voting. This implication is important because it suggests that redistributive programs can effectively supplement policies by reducing the public's perception of the policies' costs. Given the importance of localized electoral reactions to trade-related job loss in battleground states (Margalit, 2011), our findings may reveal an incentive for proponents of trade liberalization to advocate for redistributive policies that compensate those bearing the costs of trade.

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A Appendix

Table A1: Summary Statistics of the Variables

Variable	N	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max
Republican Primary Trump VS	2892	45.27	17.66	0.14	91.50
ΔRepublican VS 08-16	3125	8.91	6.74	-21.48	35.98
ΔRepublican VS 12-16	3125	5.84	5.26	-18.06	24.29
China Shock	3123	3.66	3.60	0	49.00
Total TAA, 2005-2012	3125	5.30	15.15	0	322.00
TAA Approved Ratio	3125	0.42	0.43	0	1.00
(ln) Population	3125	10.29	1.47	4.7707	16.12
Senior Ratio	3125	0.31	0.06	0.0708	0.68
White Ratio	3125	0.78	0.20	0.0095	1.00
Lower Education Ratio	3125	0.49	0.11	0.0983	0.79
(ln) Per Capita Income	3125	10.07	0.23	9.0232	11.09
Unemployment Rate	3125	0.08	0.04	0.0017	0.29
White Unemployment Rate	3125	0.07	0.03	0.0014	0.27
Manufacturing Employment Ratio	3125	0.12	0.07	0	0.45
Foreign Born Ratio	3125	0.05	0.06	0	0.52
No Health Insurance Ratio	3125	0.13	0.05	0.0185	0.49

Table A2: TAA Petitions and Support for Trump in 2016 (Including all TAA Petitions from 2005 to 2015)

	Republican Primary		**General Election**			
DV (Vote percent) =			**Δ Republican Vote 08-16**		**Δ Republican Vote 12-16**	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Total TAA Petition	-0.00618	0.00161	-0.00790	-0.00440	-0.00647	-0.00417
	(-0.67)	(0.18)	(-1.30)	(-0.78)	(-1.11)	(-0.75)
TAA Petition Approval Rate	-0.963***		-0.353*		-0.214	
	(-3.14)		(-1.89)		(-1.24)	
(ln) Number of Affected Workers		-0.216***		-0.0966***		-0.0638*
		(-3.70)		(-2.89)		(-1.94)
(ln) Population	0.418	0.498*	-0.0836	-0.0386	-0.224**	-0.192*
	(1.37)	(1.68)	(-0.68)	(-0.31)	(-2.05)	(-1.78)
Senior Ratio	27.49***	27.64***	6.176**	6.257**	5.372**	5.429**
	(5.32)	(5.40)	(2.12)	(2.16)	(2.58)	(2.63)
White Ratio	3.823*	3.783*	13.51***	13.50***	4.684***	4.676***
	(1.75)	(1.76)	(11.79)	(11.64)	(4.35)	(4.31)
Lower Education Ratio	34.31***	33.90***	24.70***	24.54***	21.38***	21.27***
	(8.95)	(8.89)	(10.37)	(10.46)	(10.71)	(10.74)
(ln) Per capita Income	-0.574	-0.713	-2.404***	-2.455***	-1.957**	-1.992**
	(-0.32)	(-0.39)	(-3.23)	(-3.33)	(-2.10)	(-2.17)
Unemployment Ratio	34.17***	33.92***	0.181	0.153	-4.122	-4.130
	(2.89)	(2.90)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(-0.80)	(-0.80)
White Unemployment Ratio	17.54*	17.32*	10.38	10.17	16.48***	16.33***
	(1.87)	(1.87)	(1.60)	(1.57)	(3.49)	(3.43)
Manufacturing Employment	-14.68***	-14.00***	1.545	1.885	3.826*	4.069*
	(-3.05)	(-2.89)	(0.78)	(0.95)	(1.70)	(1.78)
Foreign Born Ratio	0.237	-0.0543	-12.33***	-12.45***	-17.31***	-17.40***
	(0.03)	(-0.01)	(-4.00)	(-4.03)	(-5.67)	(-5.64)
No. Health Insurance Ratio	-0.935	-0.958	-2.787	-2.815	-1.278	-1.298
	(-0.13)	(-0.14)	(-0.79)	(-0.79)	(-0.42)	(-0.43)
Constant	16.61	17.47	9.535	9.718	11.72	11.84
	(0.87)	(0.91)	(1.12)	(1.16)	(1.24)	(1.26)
County FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	2892	2892	3123	3123	3123	3123
adj. R^2	0.904	0.904	0.770	0.771	0.738	0.739

Note: t statistics in parentheses. $^{*}p < 0.1$,$^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$. Standard errors are clustered at state level.

Table A3: TAA Petitions and Support for Trump in 2016 (Commuting Zone FE)

	Republican Primary		**General Election**			
DV (Vote percent) =			**Δ Republican Vote 08-16**		**Δ Republican Vote 12-16**	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Total TAA Petition	-0.0102	-0.00523	-0.0102*	-0.00705	-0.00528	-0.00249
	(-0.73)	(-0.38)	(-1.78)	(-1.32)	(-1.04)	(-0.51)
TAA Petition Approval Rate	-0.566		-0.209		-0.265*	
	(-1.25)		(-1.18)		(-1.80)	
(ln) Number of Affected Workers		-0.132*		-0.0826***		-0.0725***
by Approved TAA		(-1.79)		(-2.66)		(-2.73)
(ln) Population	0.116	0.168	-0.209	-0.158	-0.197**	-0.163*
	(0.37)	(0.54)	(-1.64)	(-1.23)	(-2.01)	(-1.68)
Senior Ratio	16.30***	16.43***	2.217	2.317	2.486	2.570
	(3.12)	(3.15)	(1.04)	(1.08)	(1.41)	(1.47)
White Ratio	2.747	2.678	11.60***	11.57***	4.515***	4.479***
	(1.17)	(1.15)	(10.55)	(10.51)	(5.11)	(5.06)
Lower Education Ratio	33.61***	33.42***	26.46***	26.31***	24.48***	24.37***
	(7.19)	(7.16)	(14.52)	(14.49)	(14.02)	(14.00)
(ln) Income	-0.881	-0.932	-1.037	-1.073	-1.062	-1.085
	(-0.37)	(-0.39)	(-1.14)	(-1.18)	(-1.11)	(-1.13)
Unemployment Ratio	16.67	16.61	5.960	6.030	0.657	0.659
	(0.71)	(0.71)	(0.99)	(1.00)	(0.13)	(0.13)
White Unemployment Ratio	19.21	18.96	2.209	1.909	10.40**	10.23**
	(0.88)	(0.87)	(0.37)	(0.32)	(2.21)	(2.17)
Manufacturing Employment Ratio	-4.393	-4.111	1.018	1.330	1.044	1.222
	(-0.88)	(-0.82)	(0.48)	(0.63)	(0.59)	(0.69)
Foreign Born Ratio	-16.44**	-16.50**	-18.08***	-18.17***	-21.09***	-21.14***
	(-2.34)	(-2.35)	(-6.32)	(-6.34)	(-7.24)	(-7.22)
No Health Insurance Ratio	-3.703	-3.889	-5.811*	-5.897*	-3.868	-3.968
	(-0.33)	(-0.35)	(-1.76)	(-1.79)	(-1.29)	(-1.32)
Constant	28.36	28.55	-0.221	-0.213	2.946	2.959
	(1.15)	(1.15)	(-0.02)	(-0.02)	(0.29)	(0.29)
Commuting Zone FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	2886	2886	3116	3116	3116	3116
adj. R^2	0.859	0.859	0.841	0.842	0.819	0.819

Note: t statistics in parentheses. $^{*}p < 0.1$,$^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$. Standard errors are clustered at commuting zone level. "Commuting zones and Labor Market Areas combine counties into units intended to more closely reflect the geographic interrelationship between employers and labor supply" (https://catalog.data.gov/dataset/commuting-zones-and-labor-market-areas). In the US, there are 740 commuting zones. *China Shock* variable is not identified when we use a commuting zone fixed effect because the variable is originally constructed at the commuting zone level.