Job Insecurity and Vote Choice in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election

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Abstract

Informing a large body of research on e**conomic votin**g is the "**reward/punishment" thesi**s, which contends that citizens tend to reward or punish an incumbent party based on their evaluations of or expectations about past or future national and personal economic conditions. This paper questions the extent to which this argument is applicable to voters' perceptions about jobs.

Job insecurity has been a salient issue among American workers since the 2007 economic recession and the 2016 presidential election provides an interesting context to explore this question. Throughout his campaign, Donald Trump had capitalized on a rhetoric that lamented the loss of American jobs and carefully tailored his message to American workers who felt insecure about their job prospects. It is, therefore, this paper's interest to explore how successful this rhetoric worked for Trump, in other words, whether parts of the support for him could be explained by job insecurity.

Employing the "*Work Trends Poll: 2016 Views on Unemployment*" survey conducted by GfK Knowledge Networks in August 2016 (N=822), I examined the relationships between job concerns, economic evaluations, and vote preference three months prior to the general election. The analysis shows that: (1) concerns about job availability at the national level (as opposed to personal job insecurity) increased the intention to turn out, (2) respondents who expressed concerns about national jobs and personal employment were more likely to prefer Trump over all other alternatives (including vote for Clinton, for a third-party candidate, and abstention), confirming the insecurity-based roots of Trump support, (3) partisanship, retrospective and prospective economic evaluations were significant predictors of vote choice between Trump and Clinton, whereas respondents' knowledge about the economy and their employment status were not significant. Implications of findings are discussed regarding how right-wing populist rhetoric capitalizing on job insecurity could be used to gain electoral advantage.

Outline

Donald Trump: "They took our jobs!"
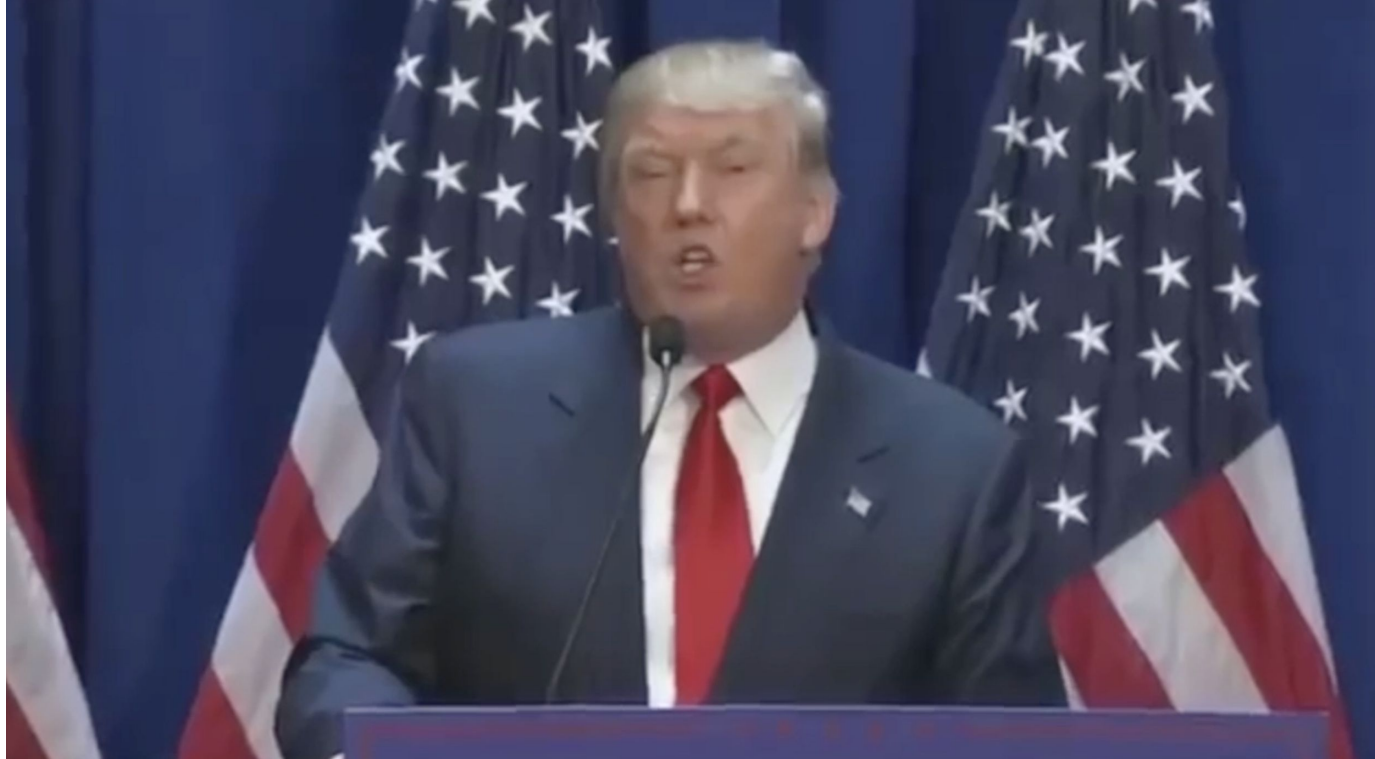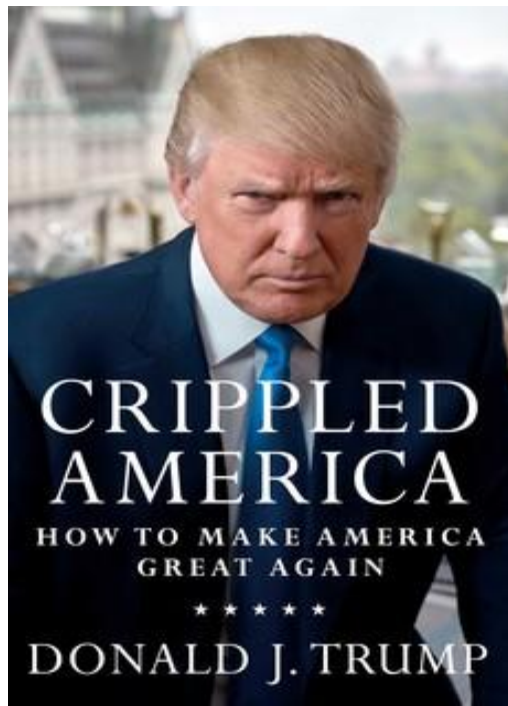
Trump campaign promises on jobs

- **Create at least 25 million jobs.** "Be the greatest jobs president that God over created."
- Bring back **manufacturing jobs** from China, Mexico, Japan and elsewhere.
- Give **tax incentives** to manufacturers to build or grow factories in the US
- **Refuse to eat another Oreo** until Nabisco fully moves production back from Mexico.
- Tell **Ford** that the company will face a 35 percent tax on imported cars if it does not cancel plans to build plants in Mexico.
- "Get **Apple** to start building their damn computers and things in this country."
- Bring back the **steel industry to Pennsylvania.**
- Make the **auto industry in Michigan** "bigger and better and stronger than ever before".
- Bring the **coal industry back to life** in the Appalachian Mountain region.
- "**The minimum wage has to go up".** Raise the federal minimum wage to $10 per hour.
- **Allow states to set their own minimum wage.**

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Can Trump Save Their Jobs? They're Counting on It

Trump promised to bring back Pennsylvania's coal, steel and energy jobs. But can he?

Posted on November 17, 2016 at 8:15 AM

POLITICS

FACT CHECK: Trump's Speech On The Economy, Annotated

June 28, 2016 · 5:27 PM ET

NPR STAFF

TRUMP

Two main goals of this research

- To see how successful Trump's campaign rhetoric on jobs worked for him. Or whether parts of his support could be explained by job insecurity.

- To explore whether the 'economic voting' thesis also applied to voters' perceptions about jobs?

Research Questions

1) Are factors predicting job concerns same as factors predicting economic assessment?

2) How did job concerns impact voting intention in the 2016 presidential election?

+ Profiles of voters who are concerned about jobs 3 months before the election. Who are they?
+ What is their vote preference?
+ What is the relationship between employment status, perceptions of job security and intended vote choice?

Data

Dataset "Work Trends Poll: 2016 Views on Unemployment", by GfK Knowledge Networks, from August 3-11, 2016.

Oversampling of the employed, unemployed and looking for work with sample size of 822.

- 58.3% identify as being currently employed,

- 8.7% identify as unemployed and looking for job.

- 33.1% are "unemployed and NOT looking for work", including the retired.

The analysis focuses on the Currently Employed (n=479) and Job Seekers (n=71).

Measures

Job Insecurity:

   Sociotropic dimension of job insecurity: concern about the current employment rate, job security for people who are currently working; potential of job market for those looking for job.

   Personal job insecurity: concern about *one's own* job security.

   Confidence in one's own job prospect: in case they lose/want to leave current job.

Evaluations of economic performance:

   Sociotropic and personal: both retro and prospective

Vote preference: "While it is some time away, how do you think you will vote in the election for president in November?"

Controls

Party ID: dummy.

Age: 4 categories (18-29, 30-44, 45-59, and 60+). 60+ is the reference group.

Race: white as 1. Gender: female as 1

Education, Household Income,

Knowledge (0 to 4): percentage of American workers belonging to unions, the "figure closest to the official government unemployment rate", percentage of population who are immigrants or born elsewhere, percentage of citizens who are actively working part or full time.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Knowledge Scale	822	0	4	1.10	0.94
Socio_job security concerns	820	3	12	8.60	2.11
Personal_job security concerns	479	1	4	2.32	0.91
Job prospect concern	474	1	5	2.99	1.10
'Bad' time to find jobs	812	0	1	0.33	0.47
Personal finance getting worse	815	1	4	2.53	0.85
Retro-national economy	816	-1	1	0.05	0.79
Prospective-national economy	810	-1	1	0.10	0.71
Prospective-family finances	813	1	5	2.67	0.90
Attention to election	819	1	4	2.70	1.07

	Concerned about job security (national) N=802	Thinking it's 'bad' time to find job (logistic regression) N=799	Concerned about job security (personal) N=467	Not confidence in personal job prospect N=465
Age 18-29	-0.11*	-0.35	0.15*	-0.05
Age 30-44	-0.16***	-0.69**	0.16*	-0.01
Age 45-59	-0.07	0.04	0.20**	0.13
Democrat	-0.02	-0.52**	-0.1*	-0.09
Republican	0.11**	0.18	-0.03	-0.09
Female	0.07*	0.17	0.02	0.03
White	-0.03	0.55**	-0.07	0.09
College	-0.1**	-0.32	-0.07	-0.09
Income	-0.02	-0.01	-0.17**	-0.12*

Determinants of job-related attitudes

-> People with job concerns: in the working age from 18-44, lower income and low knowledge of actual economic indicators.

Those in the 45-59 age group, who were more likely to be the breadwinners of the family, were more anxious about their own job situation than the general job conditions.

- Job insecurity and economic evaluations are driven by different factors:

+ Age has more consistent effects on job security, whereas partisanship has more consistent effects on evaluations.
+ The role of Knowledge: Higher knowledge about the economy had *significant* impact on all indicators of job security assessments and *insignificant* impact on retrospective and prospective assessments.

- Perceptions differ between employment status: job seekers more likely to say it is hard to find jobs and worry about their own finance.

Vote choice

Of all 822 respondents, 40.6% said Clinton as vote choice vs 27% said Trump. 12.8% indicating they would not vote, and 14.8% said they would vote for someone else (weighted statistics).

25 respondents who said they "could not vote/not registered/ felon" were eliminated from the analysis. 15 respondents refused to answer the question, leaving N=782 in the analysis.

	Vote HC		Will not vote		Vote for someone else	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Employed	0.391	0.373	-0.408	0.359	0.325	0.349
Job Seekers	-0.85	0.804	-0.767	0.82	0.012	0.773
Socio_job security concerns	-0.219*	0.088	**-0.318*****	0.085	-0.149#	0.082
'Bad' time to find job	-0.294	0.356	-0.445	0.361	-0.303	0.323
Personal finance getting worse	**-0.479***	0.195	-0.05	0.194	-0.24	0.181
Retro-national economy	**1.527*****	0.235	0.515*	0.24	**0.944*****	0.228
Prospective-national economy	0.075	0.246	-0.211	0.246	**-0.936*****	0.231

2) Concerns about job availability (national) increases intention to turn out.

3) Evidence for insecurity-based support for Trump: Those who have insecurity prefer Trump over other alternatives.

4) When the choice is between Trump and HC, preference is in line with partisanship and economic evaluations.

Summary of findings

1) Different factors affected perceptions of jobs and perceptions of the economy.
2) Trump supporters had insecurity about jobs, either personal concerns or sociotropic concerns.

3) Partisanship, retrospective and prospective economic evaluations explains vote choice between Trump and Clinton, whereas knowledge about the economy and employment status were not significant.

Discussion

- Findings from Gallup study: Living in areas with high exposure to manufacturing job loss was linked to slightly lower support for Trump. (Rothwell, Jonathan T. and Diego-Rosell, Pablo, Explaining Nationalist Political Views: The Case of Donald Trump (November 2, 2016). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2822059 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2822059)

- The 2016 US presidential nominee Donald Trump has broken with the policies of previous Republican Party presidents on trade, immigration, and war, in favor of a more nationalist and populist platform. Using detailed Gallup survey data for 125,000 American adults, we analyze the individual and geographic factors that predict a higher probability of viewing Trump favorably. The results show **mixed evidence that economic distress has motivated Trump support**. His supporters are less educated and more likely to work in blue collar occupations, but they earn relatively high household incomes and are no less likely to be unemployed or exposed to competition through trade or immigration. On the other hand, living in racially isolated communities with worse health outcomes, lower social mobility, less social capital, greater reliance on social security income and less reliance on capital income, predicts higher levels of Trump support. We confirm the theoretical results of our regression analysis using machine learning algorithms and an extensive set of additional variables.

Questions/Comments are welcome

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