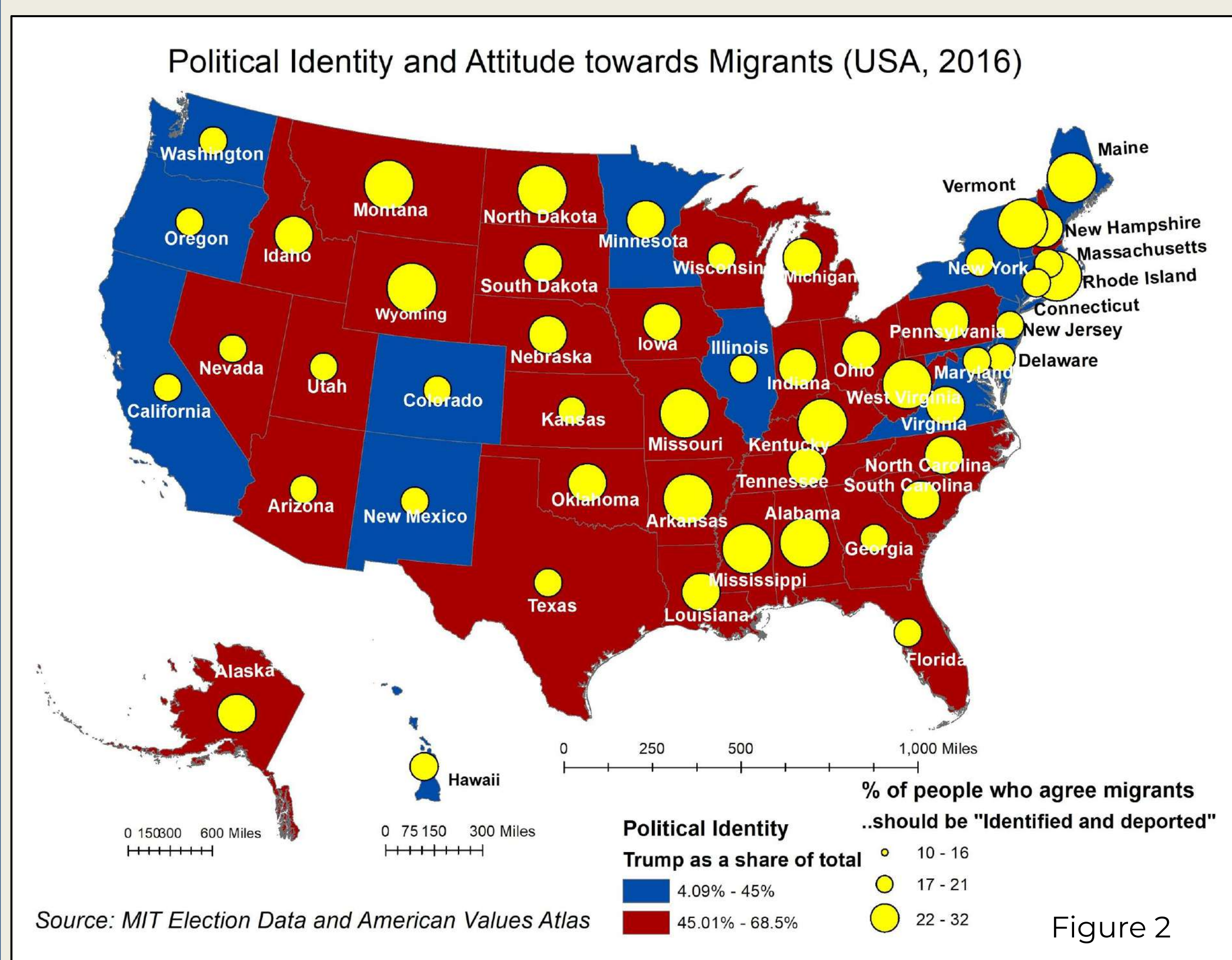


Background

Christianity and whiteness have been at the core of American identity. However, in the last decade, the **Christian share of the U.S. population decreased by 10 percent points**. Additionally, for the first time in U.S. history, in 2015 the Census Bureau reported that **a minority of American children under the age of five is "white"**. American identity has also shaped political identity and preferences. An Associated Press-NORC poll found **64% of Republicans, compared with 32% of Democrats, saw a culture grounded in Christian religious beliefs as extremely or very important**. Additionally, Republicans are much less likely than Democrats to believe any minority group faces a lot of discrimination, and they believe Christians and whites face roughly as much discrimination as immigrants, Muslims and gay people. Only 27% of Republicans said blacks experience a lot of discrimination, while 43% said whites do and 48% said the same of Christians. In 2016, President Trump won the elections by appealing to racial resentment and blaming migrants. He also announced to his audience during his campaign: **"There is an assault on Christianity.... There is an assault on everything we stand for, and we're going to stop the assault"**. The threat to white-Christian American identity seem to have played a role in the results of the elections.



American Identity and Attitude Towards Migrants

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Research Question

The aim of this research is to **explore whether concerns about the loss of American identity** (defined in terms of white Christians majority) **helped shape unwelcoming responses towards migrants in the U.S. and contributed to Trump's victory**, or if his victory (and xenophobia) is merely rooted on economic concerns related to median income and unemployment. The study also explores whether unfriendly attitudes towards migrants are rooted in "real fears" (i.e. living in an area with a high proportion of foreign borns) or if they are merely based on perceptions and misconceptions.

Data and Methodology

The analysis was conducted for the year 2016 when the general elections took place. The dataset used includes: (i) information on race, foreign born, unemployment, and education level from the U.S. Census Bureau; (ii) the results for the 2016 general elections from MIT Election Data; (iii) religion data from the Association of Religion Data Archives; and (iv) a poll on locals' perceptions of migrants conducted by American Values Atlas at the state level.

Figure 1 shows a hotspot analysis to identify if Republican are clustered. **Figure 2** uses a choropleth map and density points to evaluate the relationship between political identity and attitude towards migrants. **Figure 3** utilizes the same instruments to identify areas with high white-Christians prevalence. **Figure 4** is the product of a multiple linear regression model for a Trump binary independent variable, using unemployment, education level and white-Christian as the explanatory variable. It attempts to get a clearer understanding of the relationship between being white-Christian and voting for Trump (used as a proxy of anti-immigrant revealed preferences). **Figure 5** uses a choropleth map to identify the counties with higher proportion of foreign borns and explore its relationship with negative perceptions of migrants.

Results

Figure 1 shows a big hot spot of Republicans clustered in Wyoming and Montana, and from North Dakota, Nebraska, to Texas and the west of Louisiana. Two smaller clusters are located one in Missouri and the other one in the north part of Mississippi and Alabama, and from Tennessee to West Virginia. **Figure 2** supports the idea of some relationship between being a state with Republican majority and locals' having a negative perception of migrants. In fact, the 5 states with the most negative perceptions of migrants are all Republicans: Wyoming, West Virginia, Kentucky, Montana and Alabama.

Figure 3 does not present a straightforward relationship between being a Republican state and presenting a high proportion of whites and Christians.

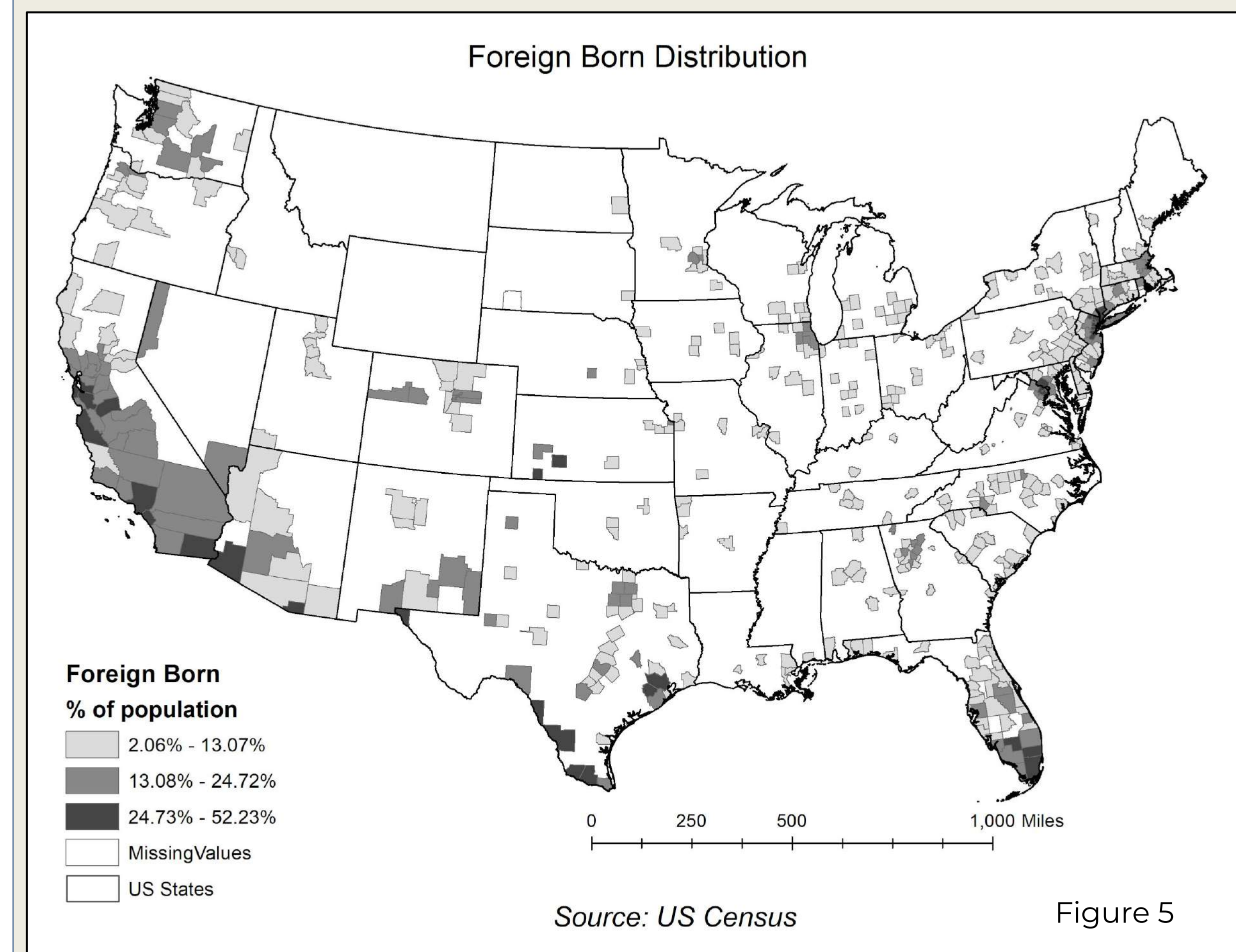
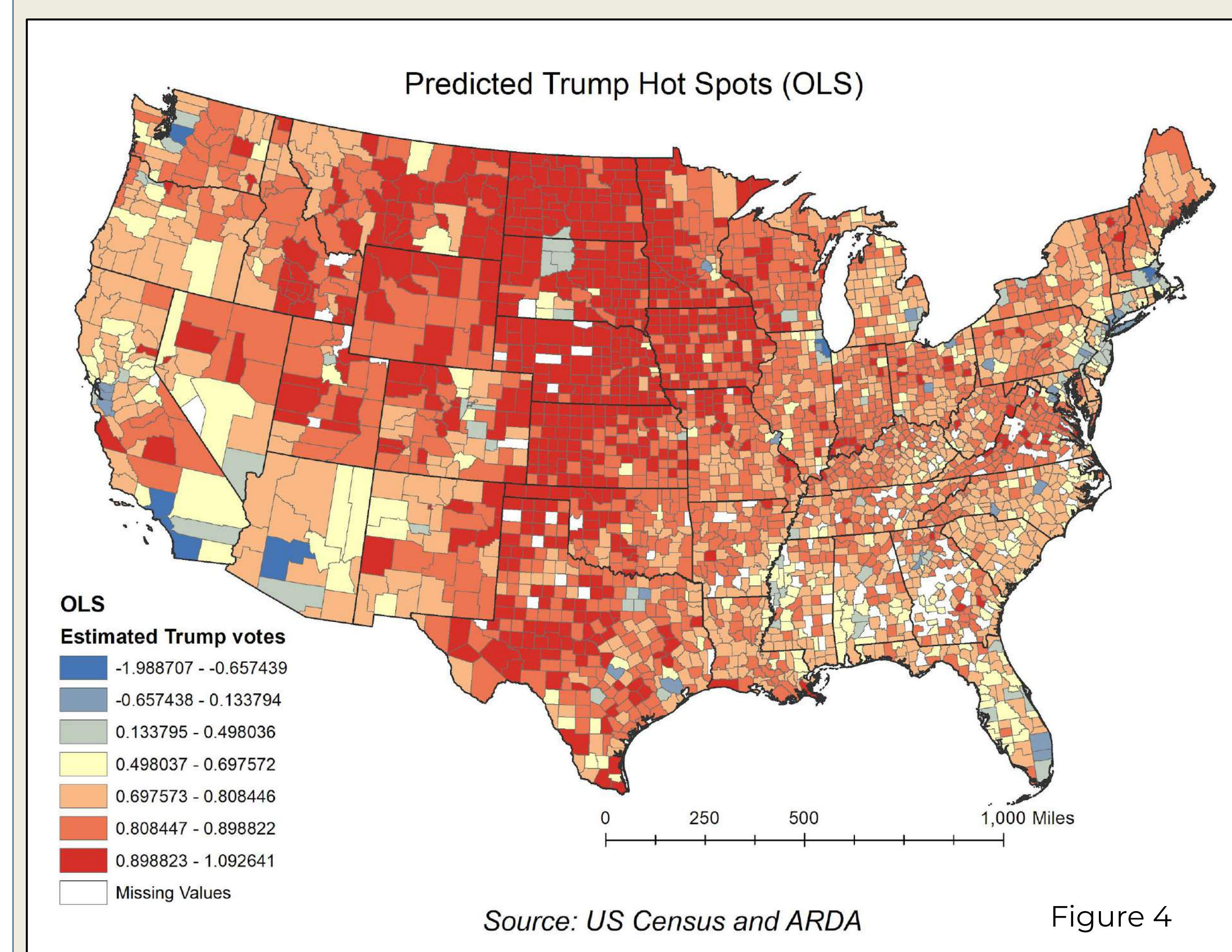
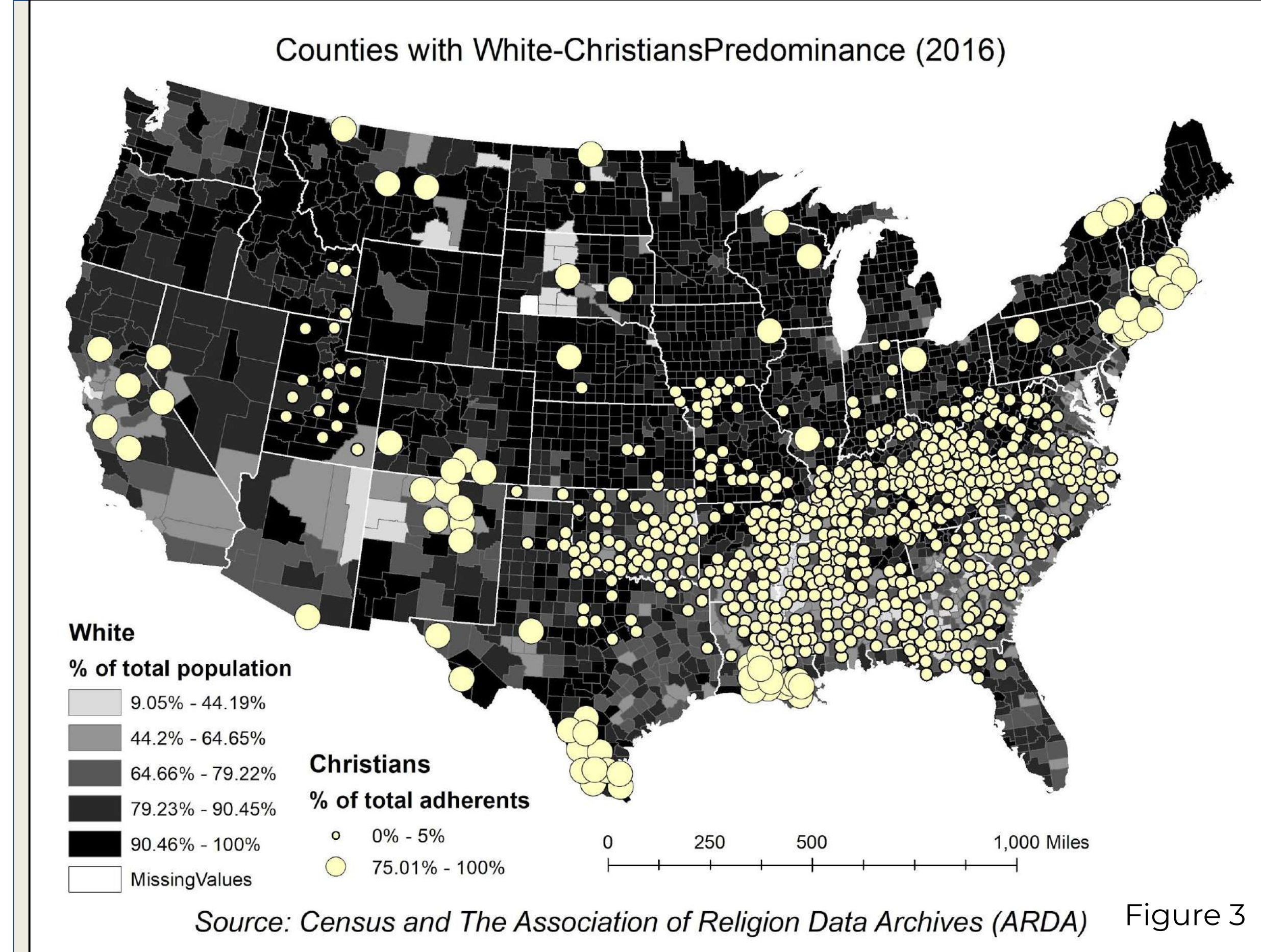
Figure 4 shows the OLS model utilized in this research makes a fairly similar prediction of the actual 2016 general election results and the hot spots observed in Figure 1. The dependent variable **white-Christian is the most significant in predicting a Trump vote** (a coefficient of 0.077), followed by low education level; unemployment and median income are not statistically-significant variables.

Figure 5 shows there seems to be no relationship between proximity to a greater share of foreign born and negative perception of migrants, implying that the latest is not rooted in daily interactions but might be the result of misconceptions or indicate fear of loss of American identity.

Policy Recommendations

Arguments in favor of migration usually focus on showing that migrants do not have a negative economic impact in a community or country. But these arguments usually miss the point of how migrants affect identity or other aspects of locals' lives. As a result, most of the times the policies designed do not address locals' fears.

Arguments in favor of migration should first **understand what identity means for locals and how migrants affect this concept in order to better address their fears**. Identifying and better understanding the root causes of negative conceptions of migrants is key for the design of effective policies that might need to focus on education of locals and promoting integration efforts that bring locals and newcomers together to allow for stronger bonds and reduce misconceptions.



Resources

- ["The American Identity: Points of Pride, Conflicting Views, and a Distinct Culture" \(2016\). The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#)
- ["The Collapse of American Identity" by Robert P. Jones. \(2017\). The New York Times](#)
- [The End of White Christian Americans. PRRI](#)
- Samuel L P., Andrew L W., Christian America in Black and White: Racial Identity, Religious-National Group Boundaries, and Explanations for Racial Inequality, Sociology of Religion, Volume 80, Issue 3, Autumn 2019, Pages 277-298
- [America's Changing Religious Landscape \(2015\). Pew Research Center](#)