Vulnerability of Immigrant Populations in Texas

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Research Question

What is the quality of the livelihood of the livelihood of immigrants in the US, (foreign born population) compared to the livelihood of the native born population?

We explore this by looking at
- socioeconomic information (percentage living below the poverty level line)
- health coverage (percentage % of uninsured)
- Political identity (in the presidential 2016 election)

The study also seeks to validate previous research using Texas counties census data on immigrant's vulnerability as greater compared to native born populations. At last, the study explores whether the vulnerability index has any relationship with counties that are majority republican and voted for Trump in 2016.

Background

Prior to the 2016 election, permanent resident immigrants were unable to access health government programs such as Medicaid and CHIP until after 5 years of residence. The Trump administration made immigration a top priority issue, and his anti-immigrant rhetoric has added inequity barriers to social safety protection nets. The Texas legislature has a history of consistently supporting anti-immigrant policies such as Senate Bill 4, famously known as the "show me your documents" law, which enables police officers to verify the immigration status of those they detain. In addition, Texas has rejected the extension of Medicaid and currently holds the highest rate of uninsured in the country– 18% compared to the 9% national average.
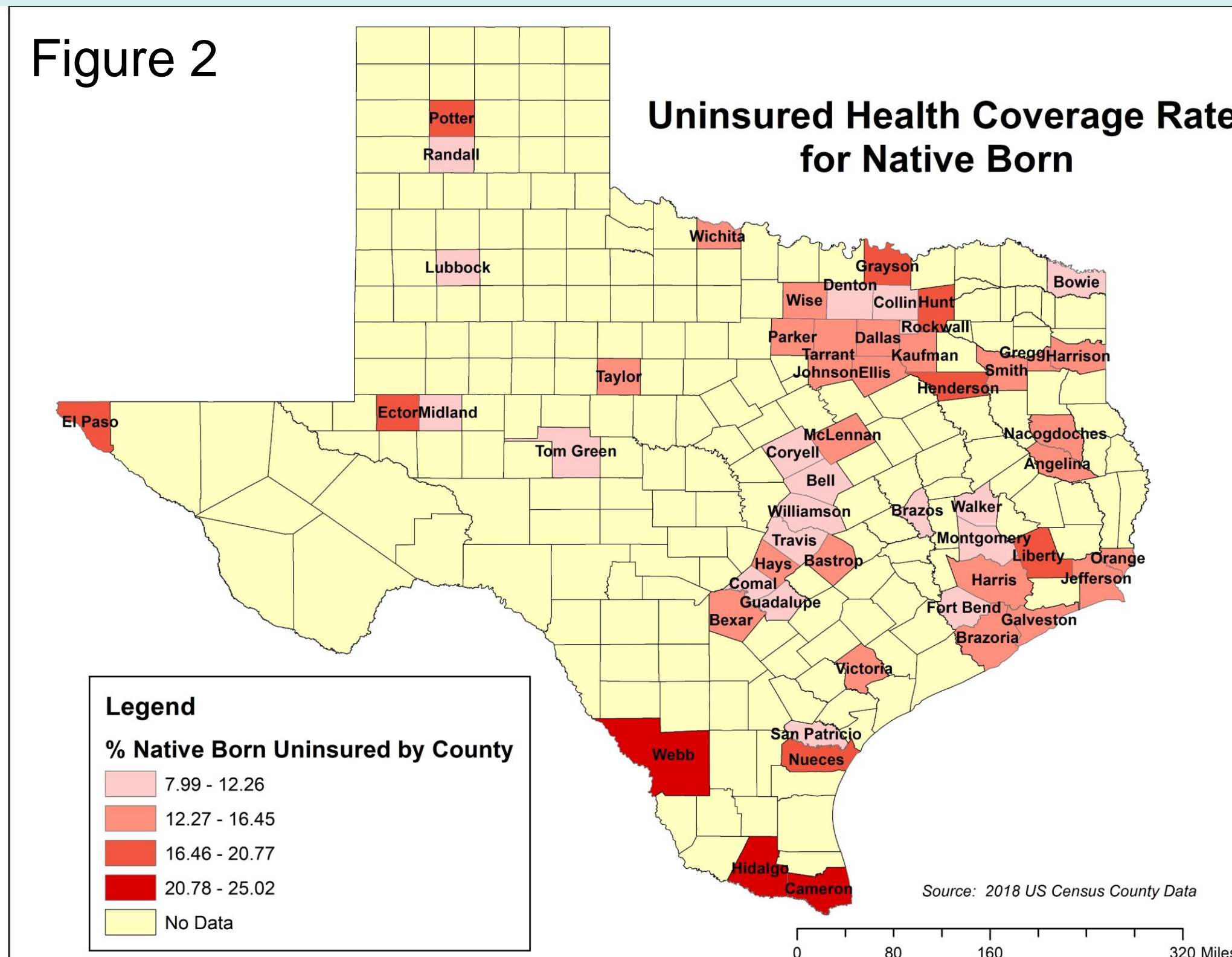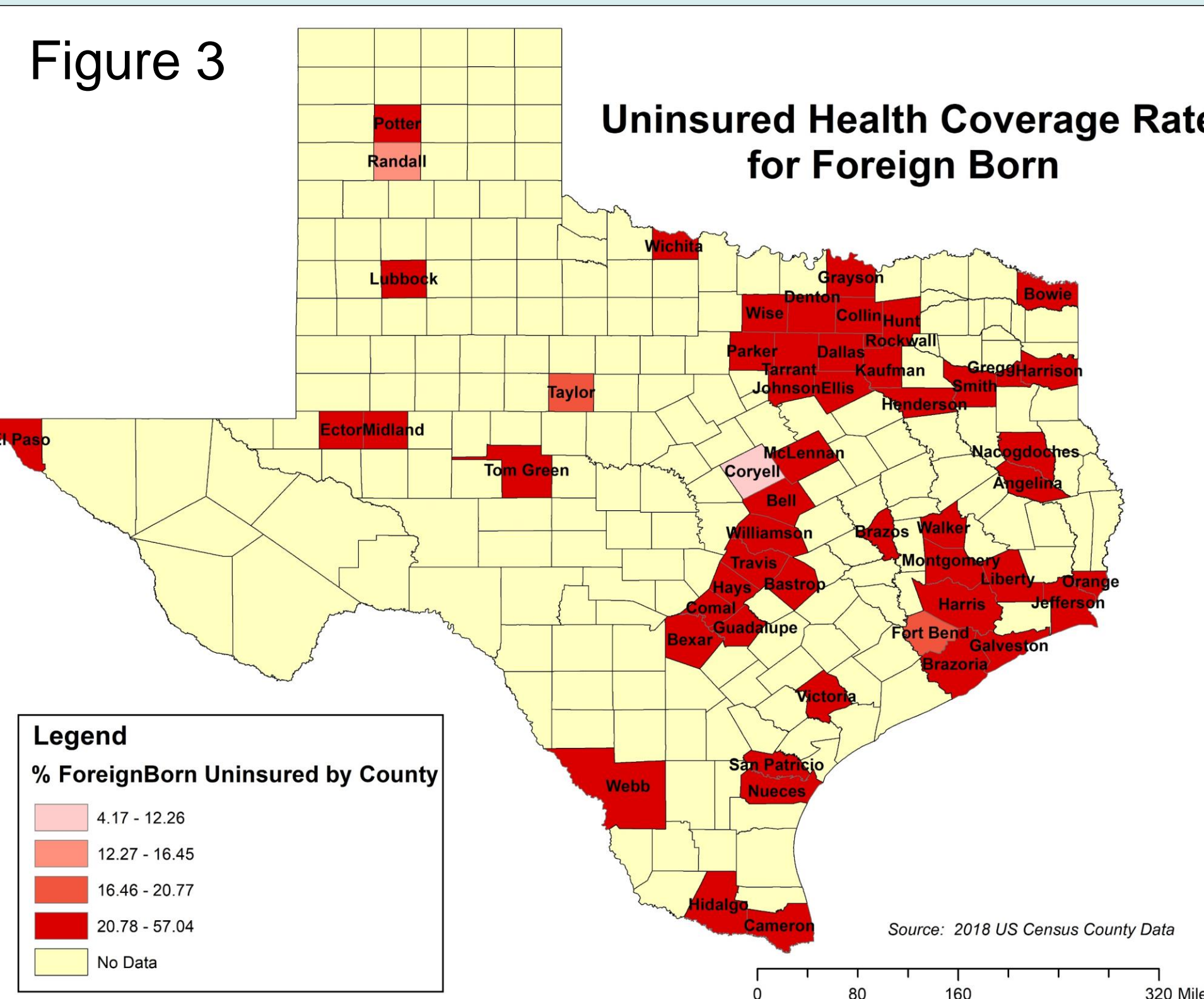
Results

Figure 1

Figure 2 — Uninsured Health Coverage Rate for Native Born
Legend — % Native Born Uninsured by County: 7.99 - 12.26; 12.27 - 16.45; 16.46 - 20.77; 20.78 - 25.02; No Data. Source: 2018 US Census County Data

Figure 3 — Uninsured Health Coverage Rate for Foreign Born
Legend — % ForeignBorn Uninsured by County: 4.17 - 12.26; 12.27 - 16.45; 16.46 - 20.77; 20.78 - 57.04; No Data. Source: 2018 US Census County Data

Figure 4 — Poverty Rate for Native Born
Legend — % of Native Born living under Poverty by County: 5.30 - 9.87; 10.39 - 14.57; 15.44 - 22.17; 24.29 - 28.74; No Data. Source: 2018 Census County Data

Figure 5 — Poverty Rate for Foreign Born
Legend — % of Foreign Born living under Poverty by County: 2.75 - 9.87; 10.05 - 14.57; 15.73 - 22.17; 22.42 - 58.02; No Data. Source: 2018 Census County Data
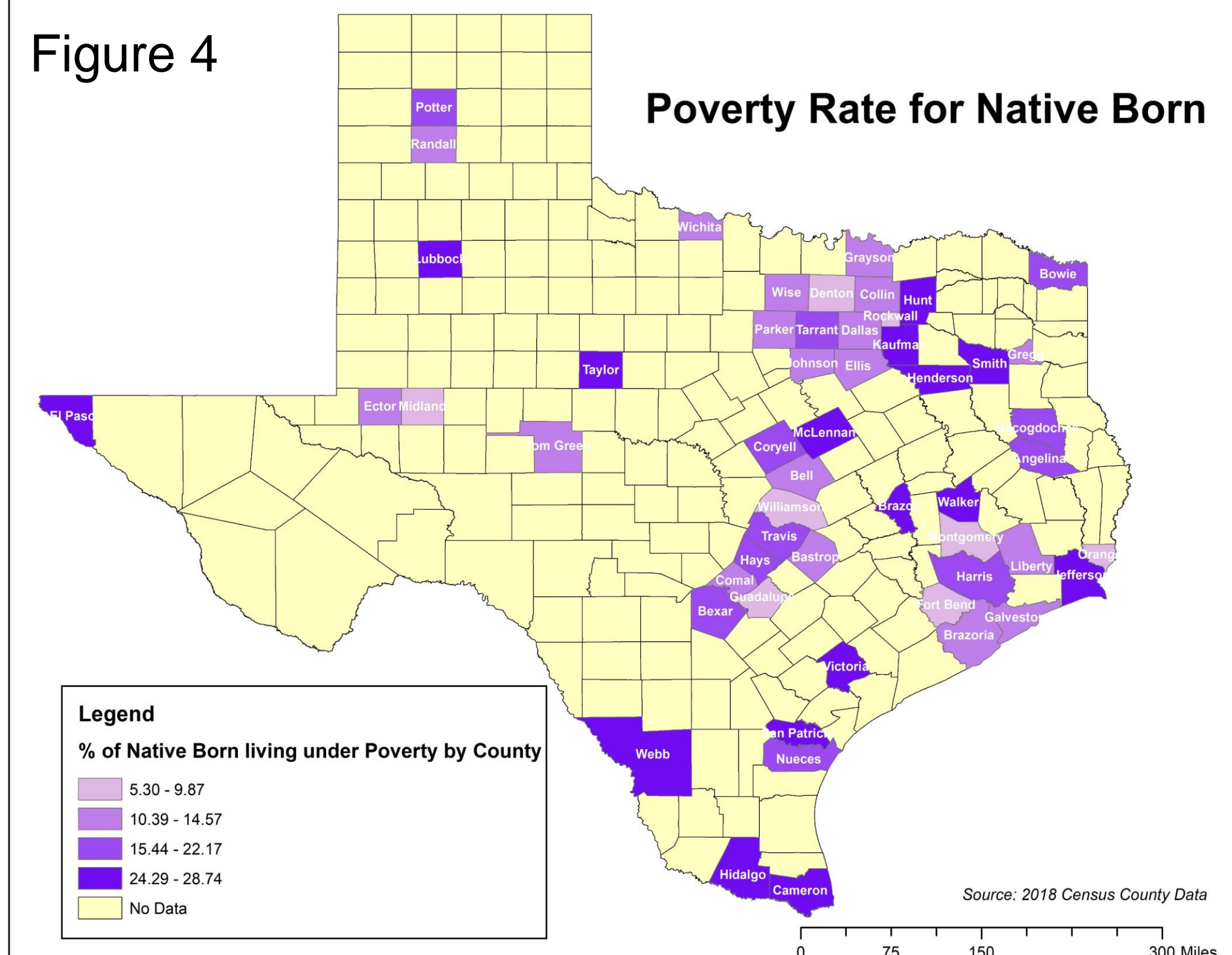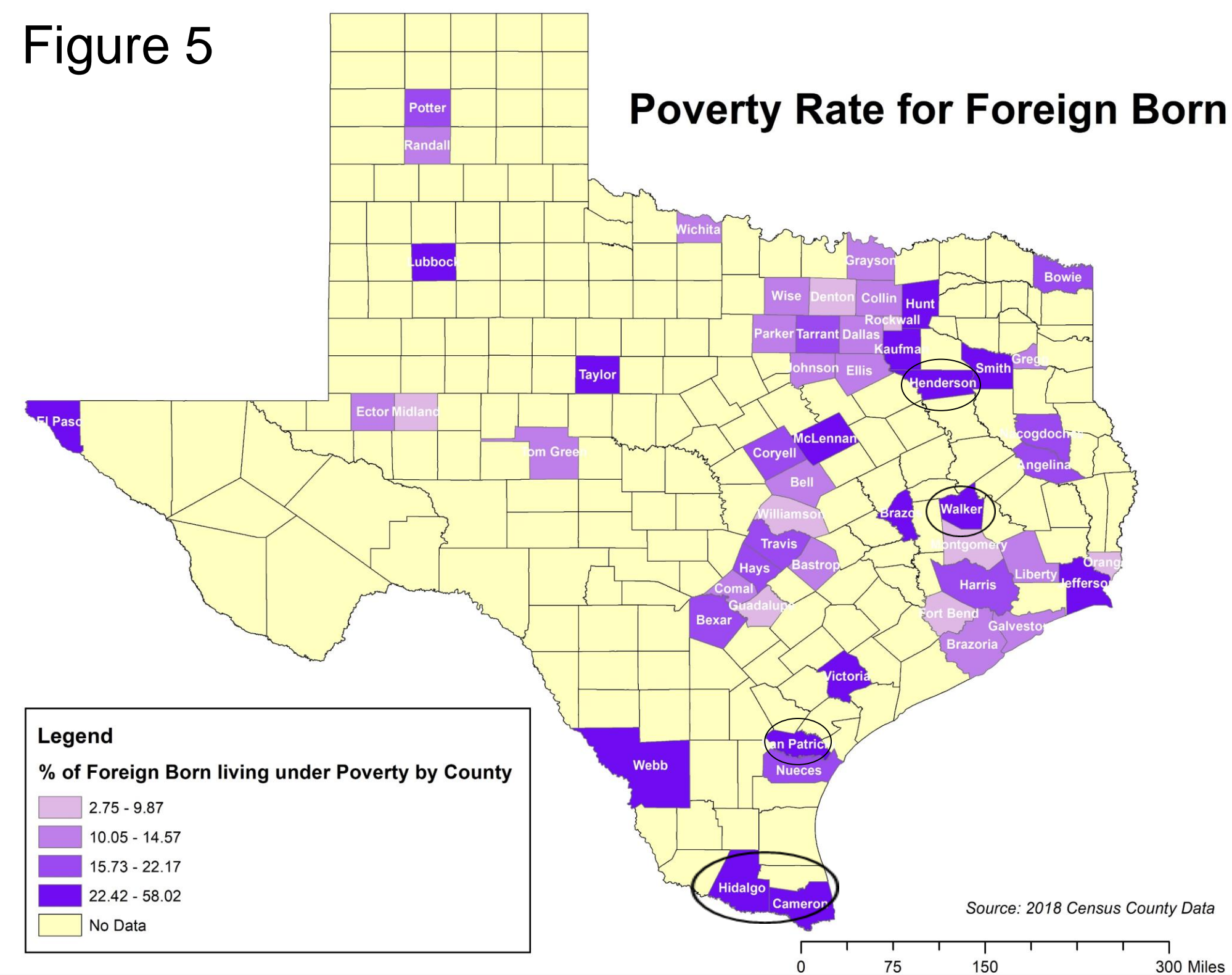
Data and Methodology

The analysis was conducted using county census data sets for the year 201,8 which included rich sociodemographic data on race, foreign born and native born status, poverty income level, and health insurance coverage. In addition, the analysis used the MIT Election Data results from the 2016 election to measure political party affiliation between majority Republican or Democrat counties within Texas. In order to join this data, I used the US National Counties shape file and utilized the query feature to keep Texas Counties Data. I also joined and matched information based on County ID to create choropleth maps to analyze the equity gaps between these populations.

Figure 1 shows the density population of foreign born (Immigrants) in the US using a choropleth map. **Figure 2** utilizes the same choropleth instrument to identify counties that have the highest proportion of health uninsured native born populations. Similarly in **Figure 3**, we can observe the highest proportion of uninsured immigrants. We purposely used the same scale to compare both population groups for consistency. We observe higher proportions of uninsured immigrants individuals compared to native born populations. This is present in the contrast of ranges (between 20-25% to 20-58%). In **Figure 4** and **Figure 5** we observe a comparison between the proportions of both native born and immigrants populations living under the poverty income line. Finally, I created a Vulnerability Index, weighing both poverty rates and uninsured rates each one (0.5) to my Texas County map to see which counties face a greater degree of vulnerability. I listed the results in **Table 1** and highlighted the proportion of votes that supported Trump in the 2016 elections to identify a relationship to the vulnerability index.
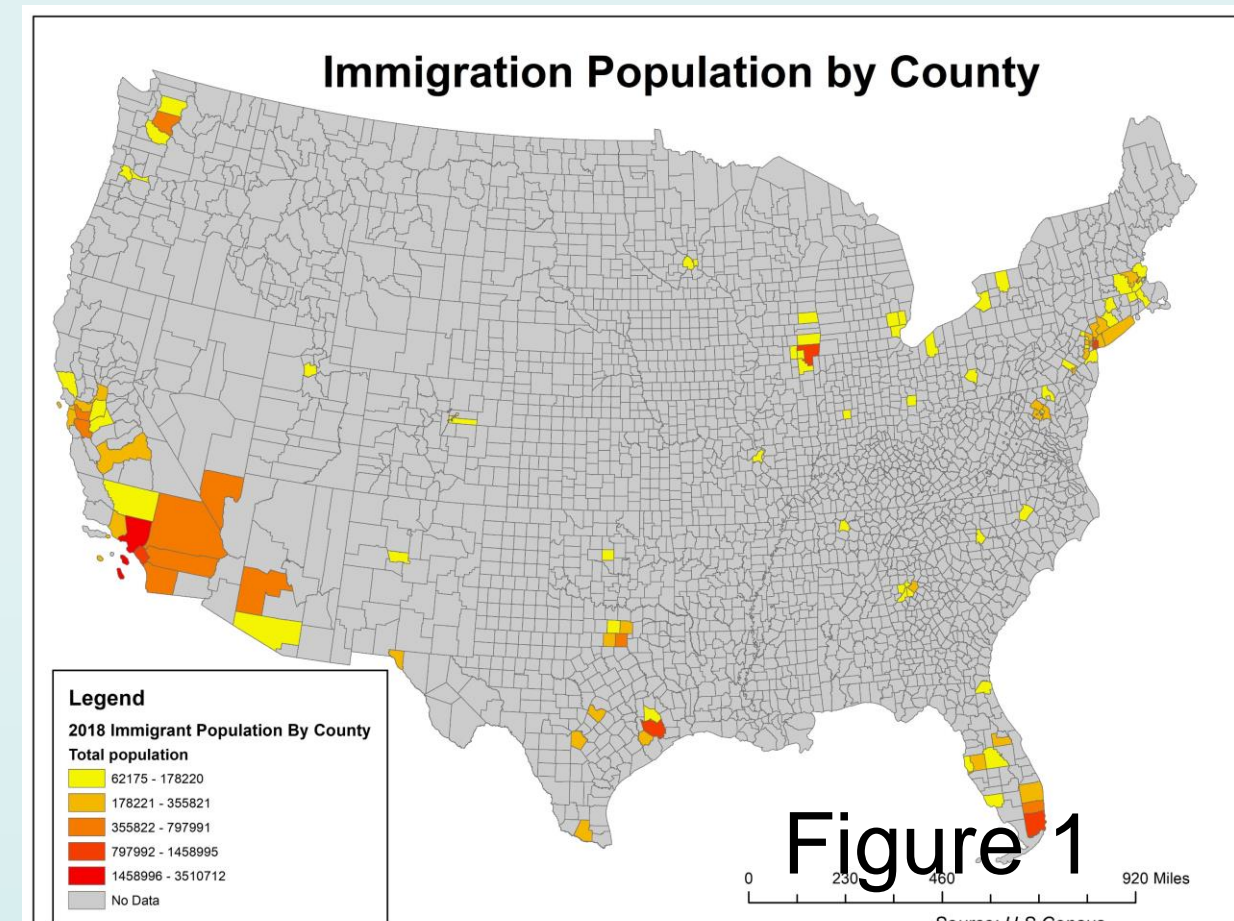
Findings

Based on the analysis we can confirm our initial assumptions regarding greater vulnerability in the immigrant populations, particularly with regards to access to health care through insurance coverage. The uninsured rate of immigrant populations is 5X the national average.

In terms of living under the poverty income level, it is not as obvious, but we can also observe that a higher proportion of immigrants live in poverty, specifically in the northeast part of Texas as well as in random isolated rural counties. The immigrant communities face poverty rates almost 3X (58%) as high as the native born populations (19%) in Henderson or at least 2X in Walker County and San Patricio. In the Southern border, the change is not as pronounced since the native born population already faces high poverty rates, but the immigrants still have 7% higher poverty rates than the native population.

Although the majority of the counties in Table 1 are republican, the findings on political identity as it relates to vulnerability remain inconclusive. However, some of the vulnerability gaps between immigrants and native born groups are most pronounced in Henderson, Walker, and San Patricio counties, all rural and majority republican counties.

Policy Recommendations

- Support Medicaid expansion to support low-income households gain health insurance coverage and access to health care. This would also benefit immigrant communities as they face a higher degree of vulnerability.
- Repeal anti-immigrant policies such as SB4 that instill fear in immigrant communities and also prevents immigrant communities from accessing health care and other social programs.
- Invest in more economic development social safety programs in the top 10 counties listed to alleviate poverty and decrease vulnerability targeted towards immigrants.
- Invest in community outreach/education to overcome fear barriers that immigrants face.

Table 1. Vulnerability and Political Identity.

County	Vulnerability Index	Political Identity	Voted for Trump
Henderson	54.5	Republican	78.7%
Hidalgo	44.6	Democrat	28.05%
Walker	42.5	Republican	65.08%
Cameron	38.7	Democrat	32.01%
Smith	35.9	Republican	69.52%
San Patricio	35.6	Republican	60.17%
Webb	35.2	Democrat	22.8%
Jefferson	34.6	Republican	48.9%
Wise	34.2	Republican	83.84%
Potter	34.1	Republican	68.51%

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Limitations

It's important to acknowledge that the census information utilized offers a sample of information regarding lives of immigrants that are living in Texas. The data is representative of 53 out of 254 counties. In addition, the vulnerability index could be further improved if it included other sources of vulnerability such as education level, employment status, English proficiency and immigration status. The analysis shows a glance of vulnerability of immigrants who have legal status, but the vulnerability index results could be underestimated with missing data from undocumented immigrants which would increase the vulnerability index results.