

# The Trump Election and Attitudes toward the United States in Latin America<sup>1</sup>

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Forthcoming, *Public Opinion Quarterly*

## Abstract

Did the election of Donald Trump have an immediate effect on trust in the US government in Latin America? While on the campaign trail, the Republican candidate used strong and derogatory language to describe Latin American countries and people and made policy proposals that could deteriorate US-Latin American relations. However, the effect of the Trump election on attitudes toward the United States might be null or minimal if Latin American citizens have strong priors and/or if they do not pay attention to political information. Therefore, it is not clear whether the 2016 election led to a rapid decline in trust in the US government in Latin America. Leveraging the timing of the field implementation of the 2016 wave of the AmericasBarometer in five Latin American countries, we estimate the effect of the 2016 presidential election on respondents' attitudes using a regression discontinuity design in time. We find that the election of Trump substantively decreased respondents' trust in the US government.

**Keywords:** trust in the US government, political attitudes, Latin America.

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<sup>1</sup> We thank Andrew Flores, Joy Langston, Jay McCann, Eric McLaughlin, and seminar participants at MPSA 2019, WPSA 2019, and UCR for their useful comments and suggestions. All errors are our own.

## **Introduction**

A political commentator in the United States concluded a piece on Donald Trump by stating that “abroad, anti-Americanism sleeps lightly when it sleeps at all, and it is wide-awake as decent people judge our nation’s health by the character of those to whom power is entrusted” (Will 2020). This line of thinking implies that people in other countries change their views of the United States when leaders they dislike are elected. In this paper, we analyze how the surprising election of a controversial political leader, Donald Trump, influenced attitudes toward the United States in Latin America. This question is important because views of the United States can have direct effects on political processes in the region and for US-Latin American relations (Datta 2014, Kocher and Minushkin 2007, Remmer 2012)

The research question we explore echoes recent debates in social and political psychology. Over the past two decades, the literature on attitude change has shifted from a focus on individual information processing to an approach that recognizes the importance of the broad sociohistorical context (Albarracin and Shavitt 2018). In particular, changes in political and policy attitudes have been linked to significant climatic, political, and economic events (Margalit 2013, Carlin, Love, and Zechmeister 2014, Enos 2016, Merolla and Zechmeister 2009).

Building on this theoretical scaffolding, we analyze whether the election of Donald Trump produced a change in attitudes towards the United States in Latin America. We know that US presidential elections are salient in Latin America given the history of US-Latin American relations. During the run-up to the 2016 election, Trump used derogatory language toward Latin American countries (and people) and committed to policies hurtful to Latin American interests. It is therefore plausible that his election produced an immediate decline in trust in the US government in Latin America.

Nevertheless, previous research on anti-American attitudes has highlighted the impact of structural and slow-moving variables, such as the type of economic exchanges with the United States; and individual-level variables, such as ideology and the receipt of remittances (Baker and Cupery 2013, Azpuru and Boniface 2015).

If Latin Americans have strong priors and attitudes towards the United States are overdetermined by individual and structural factors, we would not expect political changes in Washington to lead to rapid shifts in US favorability. Other factors that might contribute to null or minimum effects include the lack of political information many Latin American citizens have (Salzman 2011) and the fact that any Trump effect might have already taken hold during his campaign.

We leverage the unexpected results of the 2016 US presidential election to construct a regression discontinuity design in time (RDiT) and assess which of these hypotheses provides a better description of reactions to the 2016 US presidential elections in Latin America.

The outcome of the 2016 US election was unexpected in Latin America (see appendix A), which allows us to rule out an anticipation effect when comparing respondents who participated in the survey just before and just after that election. We provide estimates producing consistent results across 32 different bandwidths (i.e., days until/from the election). Our findings indicate that the election of Trump generated a substantive and rapid decline in trust in the US government in Latin America.

## **The Trump Election and Attitudes towards the United States in Latin America**

The expectation that the election of an unpopular US president<sup>2</sup> can generate a rapid decline in trust in the US government abroad is supported by well-known psychological foundations. First, Balmas (2018) shows that the news coverage of a foreign leader's behaviors and personal characteristics influences perceptions of that leader's country. This effect reflects "a psychological phenomenon whereby people project their emotions and perceptions regarding a leader's personal characteristics onto his or her country and people" (Balmas 2018: 499).<sup>3</sup>

Given the aggressive and controversial rhetoric used by Donald Trump during the campaign, it is not surprising that the elite reaction and media coverage in Latin America was lukewarm toward him. This might have contributed to more negative evaluations of the US government as a whole. For instance, Semetko et al. (2018) show that the tone of the media coverage of Trump in Mexico was negative during the campaign and after the election. In appendix A, we further discuss the negative media coverage Trump received during the 2016 elections in the five Latin American countries in our sample.

Secondly, part of the literature on anti-Americanism emphasizes the ambivalence inherent to the phenomenon (Chiozza 2009, Katzenstein and Keohane 2007). Individuals are ambivalent when their evaluations of the United States involve "strong elements of both attraction and repulsion" (Katzenstein and Keohane, 2007: 16). This is significant because psychological research suggests that salient political events can lead to rapid changes in political attitudes in domains with significant attitudinal ambivalence (Conner and Sparks 2002, Zaller 1992, Conner

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<sup>2</sup> A Gallup poll conducted during Trump's first year in office reveals that only 16% of people in Latin America approved of his job performance.

<sup>3</sup> If evaluations of foreign leaders shape stereotypes of their countries more generally, we should also expect a connection between the evaluation of a foreign president and trust in that government. While there are ideological and political divisions within a country, governments are likely to reflect the political views and personal characteristics of their leaders.

and Armitage 2008). Since people in other countries tend to be ambivalent about the United States, the level of trust in the US government might depend on available and quickly retrievable information: that is, the “availability heuristic” (Tversky and Kahneman 1973, Zaller 1992).

American elections may play this role. They are salient events that receive abundant media coverage in Latin America, and can shape views of the US government in the region. During the campaign, then-candidate Trump behaved in ways that may have foregrounded negative predispositions toward the United States (e.g., arrogance and imperialistic behavior). The Republican candidate often disparaged Latin American migrants in the United States as criminals and rapists.<sup>4</sup> He also proposed the construction of a controversial wall along the border with Mexico and stated on numerous occasions that Mexico would pay for it. Finally, Trump also signaled his intention to renegotiate trade agreements with Latin American countries, restrict remittances that Latin Americans send home, and block US companies from moving factories to the region.<sup>5</sup>

While Trump’s rhetorical attacks mainly targeted Mexico and Mexicans, he often disparaged Hispanic migrants more generally calling them “criminals” and “rapists.”<sup>6</sup> To be clear, our argument is not that people in other Latin American countries lost confidence in the United States after Trump’s election out of solidarity with Mexicans (i.e., via linked fate). Rather, the media in other Latin American nations also emphasized the threat Trump posed to Hispanic migrants in general, the remittances they send to their home countries, US economic aid, and trade agreements with the United States. Throughout Latin America, Trump was portrayed as a leader

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jun/16/donald-trump-mexico-presidential-speech-latino-hispanic>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the\\_americas/mexico-officials-are-planning-for-economic-turmoil-if-trump-wins/2016/11/04/8a6fd1e2-a2b7-11e6-b74c-603fd6bbc17f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/mexico-officials-are-planning-for-economic-turmoil-if-trump-wins/2016/11/04/8a6fd1e2-a2b7-11e6-b74c-603fd6bbc17f_story.html)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/9-outrageous-things-donald-trump-has-said-about-latinos\\_n\\_55e483a1e4b0c818f618904b](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/9-outrageous-things-donald-trump-has-said-about-latinos_n_55e483a1e4b0c818f618904b)

who would treat Hispanic migrants badly and lead to a deterioration in US-Latin American relations. We provide a more detailed discussion of the Latin American media coverage of Trump in the 2016 election in appendix A. All this discussion leads to the first hypothesis of the paper.

**Hypothesis 1:** The election of Donald Trump produced an immediate decline in trust in the US government in Latin America.

Several mechanisms may have produced this expected effect, including Trump's abrasive personality and political style, the unpopularity of the policies he proposed, and the negative media coverage he received in the region. Our research design does not allow us to disentangle their individual effects. Nevertheless, a combination of these factors may have contributed to more negative evaluations of the US government in Latin America.

An alternative hypothesis is that people would not have updated their attitudes toward the United States immediately after the election for three reasons. First, the United States is the hegemon in the Western Hemisphere and has an outsize political, economic, and cultural influence in Latin America. It might therefore be the case that Latin Americans are much less ambivalent towards the United States than residents of Europe or the Middle East (Chiozza 2009). Morgenstern and Bohigues (forthcoming: 2) point out that "the long relation of the United States and the countries [in Latin America] has given Latin Americans ample time to form opinions, negative or positive, about their northern neighbor." It is then possible that Latin American citizens already have fully formed and stable evaluations of the United States, and that these attitudes do not rapidly shift in response to political changes in Washington. In fact, attitude stability is a function of the saliency and the amount of experience with the attitude object (Prislin 1996, Petty and Krosnick 1995).

Second, a number of studies suggest that citizens have low levels of political knowledge (Fraile and Gómez 2017, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) and rarely follow political news (Salzman 2011). If Latin American citizens are politically uninformed, it is possible that Trump's election had no (immediate) effect on Latin American public opinion.

Finally, although the Trump election was unexpected, many Latin Americans might have been aware that a large proportion of the US population was considering voting for him, a candidate who often used offensive language toward residents of the region and Latinos in the United States. In other words, decreased positivity toward the United States because of Trump might have occurred before his election.

**Hypothesis 2:** The election of Donald Trump did not have an immediate effect on trust in the US government in Latin America.

Both hypotheses provide plausible accounts of how Latin Americans reacted to the election of Donald Trump. Testing which more closely captures the effect of the Trump election on views of the United States in Latin America requires rigorous empirical analysis.

## **Research Design**

It is not easy to study the causal impact of political shocks because individuals might be able to anticipate them, and as a consequence, react to these circumstances even before they actually occur. The unexpected results of the 2016 presidential elections in the US provide an opportunity to address this issue, and therefore to study the consequences of the election of Donald Trump on how Latin Americans perceive the United States. To do this, we exploit the timing of the field implementation of the AmericasBarometer to compare subjects who participated in the study

before and after the US presidential election.<sup>7</sup> The election happened during the survey implementation in Paraguay, Venezuela, Honduras, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic.

The 2016–2017 wave of the AmericasBarometer includes an item that captures attitudes toward the US government. The question allows us to analyze how the election of Donald Trump affected anti-Americanism in Latin America. In our analysis, we use a binary indicator of “trust in the US government” as the outcome variable (see appendix B for more details).

We use the survey data and the 2016 US presidential election to construct a regression discontinuity design in time (RDiT), where time is the running variable and the treatment begins at a particular threshold in time (Hausman and Rapson 2018). Within this strategy, all units have a score; when that number is above a known cutoff the units will be considered treated, and when it is below the cutoff, they will be considered controls. In our RDiT the units of analysis are the respondents from the five aforementioned countries. We assigned a score to each survey participant based on the difference between the day the survey was implemented and the 2016 US presidential election (November 8, 2016). We define our cutoff as the night of the US election. Using the score and the cutoff, we can construct the treatment and control groups, where the former corresponds to positive values of the score (i.e., Trump as president-elect) and the latter to negative values of the score (i.e., Trump as a candidate). Therefore, the day of the election is the last day of the control group (score: -1), and the first post-election day is the first day of the treatment group (score: +1).<sup>8</sup> We estimate the following local-linear RD specification:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 T_i + \beta_2 S_i + \beta_3 T * S_i + \sigma_p + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

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<sup>7</sup> Minkus et al. (2019) use a similar design to study the impact of Trump’s election on the EU’s popularity.

<sup>8</sup> There is no reason to believe that survey respondents determined their position around the cutoff or that enumerators changed the fieldwork schedule because of the 2016 US presidential elections.



Y is the respondent's trust in the US government. T depicts the treatment (units above the cutoff), and S describes the score. The interaction between T and S allows the regression function to differ on both sides of the cutoff point.  $\sigma_p$  corresponds to country fixed effects. As is typical, we weighted the observations using a triangular kernel, which assigned more importance to respondents closer to the cutoff.

The RDD involves the selection of a bandwidth: values of the score that determine the units to be included in the analysis. Following Bueno and Tuñon (2015), instead of limiting ourselves to the results obtained from using an optimal bandwidth, we implement equation 1 on 32 different bandwidths starting +/- 6 days from the election and ending +/- 37 days from the election, which allows us to observe the sensitivity of our estimates to a wide range of subsets. A bandwidth of 6 days means that we will implement equation 1 in a subset of respondents who answered the survey up to 6 days before and up to 6 days after the election. We limited our bandwidths according to two criteria: one, we did not expand the possible bandwidths to more than 37 days since this was the last day below the cutoff; we did not use less than 6 days to keep a reasonable number of observations on each side of the cutoff.

The optimal bandwidth<sup>9</sup> is 8 days, within the window of bandwidths used in this paper [6, 37]. In appendix C, we compare the main characteristics of the entire sample and the optimal bandwidth sample, which shows that the findings are not coming from an unusual group of respondents. In appendix D, as a validity check, we show that relevant placebo covariates<sup>10</sup> such as age, education, gender, and geographic location do not change abruptly around the cutoff. In

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<sup>9</sup> We use the Mean Squared Error (MSE) optimal bandwidth, which optimizes the bias-variance trade-off (Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Placebo covariates are individual characteristics that should not be affected by the treatment.

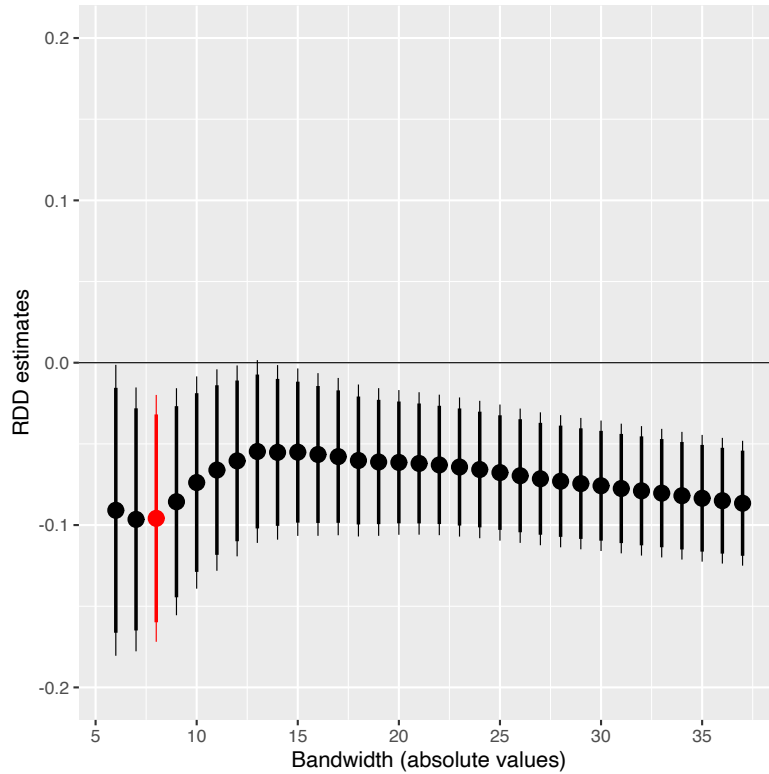
appendix E, we run a falsification test by changing the day of the US presidential election (i.e., modifying the cutoff). In appendix F, as a robustness check, we conduct an interrupted time series analysis using all the units available and including time trends.<sup>11</sup> In appendix G, we use other outcomes as a placebo analysis.

## Results

Figure 1 summarizes the effects of the election of Trump on the outcome of interest based on estimates of equation 1 on a battery of bandwidths. The y-axis represents the RDD point estimates and the x-axis the bandwidths in absolute values. We provide 90% and 95% confidence intervals for every point estimate. We marked in red the results when using the optimal bandwidth. As shown in the first panel of figure 1, when using the optimal bandwidth (8 days), respondents surveyed after Trump's election are 10 percentage points less likely to express trust in the US government (two-tailed p-value: 0.014, observations: 2744). To contextualize the results, before the US presidential election, 48% of respondents expressed trust in the US government.

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<sup>11</sup> A common concern with RDIT is serial dependence (Hausman and Rapson 2018). This problem tends to arise when the study uses the same unit of analysis across time. Since our data do not follow this structure, we expect serial dependence to be less of a concern. Additionally, Muñoz et al. (2020) discuss potential violations to the exclusion restriction, which is a key concern when using unexpected events during survey design. For example, a close election could generate large protests, and as result, it would be hard to know which of these two events explains the outcomes of interest. However, the nature of the treatment (i.e., the US presidential election) reduces the relevance of this concern since the election did not take place in the five Latin American countries studied in the paper.



**Figure 1:** RDD Estimates for trust in the US government

We conducted a number of robustness checks. In appendix G, we provide a table with the number of observations, point estimate, standard error, and p-value for each of the bandwidths. In appendix H, we explore heterogenous treatment effects by respondent and country characteristics. In appendix I, we discuss the existence of floor effects. In appendix J, we check the results by country to illustrate that the main findings are not case specific. In appendix L, we expand on our decision to use a binary dependent variable.

## Conclusions

In this paper, we assessed whether the election of Donald Trump produced an immediate shift in attitudes toward the United States. The results show that the 2016 US presidential elections had an immediate negative effect on trust in the US government in Latin America.<sup>12</sup>

Our results suggest a high level of volatility in attitudes toward the US government in Latin America. Changes in US favorability under different administrations are not surprising *per se* (Chiozza 2009), but the fact that they occurred so quickly is striking. If anti-American attitudes are shaped by the long history of US-Latin American relations (Morgenstern and Bohigues forthcoming), as well as by slow-moving structural (Baker and Cupery 2013) or individual-level factors (Azpuru and Boniface 2015), evaluations of the US government should be strong attitudes: i.e., attitudes that are stable and “have the ability to withstand an attack” (Petty and Krosnick 1995: 3). The rapid decline in trust in the US government as a result of an exogenous shock (i.e., the Trump election) suggests a higher level of ambivalence in anti-American attitudes in Latin America than previously recognized.

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<sup>12</sup> We discuss the generalizability of our findings in appendix M.

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Online Appendix

**The Trump Election and Attitudes toward the United States in Latin America**

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## **Appendix A: Local News Coverage of the US 2016 Presidential Election**

For the five countries in our sample, we looked at local news coverage of the US 2016 presidential election. We examined original pieces in newspapers with high circulation and online accessibility for a period ranging from 15 days before to 15 days after the election. This appendix also shows the domestic coverage of then-candidate Trump's discourse towards Latin America in our cases. Though Trump consistently talked about Mexicans, he did mention people from other countries in the context of his derogatory comments on immigration and race.

<sup>1</sup> For instance, on November 22, 2015, Trump retweeted a news piece highlighting the importance of the border wall to prevent "criminals" of different nationalities from coming into the US from Latin America. Honduras, Guatemala, Honduras, and Brazil are mentioned by name.<sup>2</sup>

### **El Salvador**

Coverage right before the election indicated uncertainty regarding who the winner would be and focused on trying to explain what the electoral college is,<sup>3</sup> while also pointing out that the polls indicated Hillary Clinton as likely winner.<sup>4</sup> Coverage right after the election demonstrates concerns among both the Salvadorean people and government regarding potential measures the future Trump administration would take against Salvadorean citizens in the United States because of Trump's derogatory remarks towards Latin American immigrants during the campaign, calling immigrants, not just Mexicans, "criminals and rapists."<sup>5</sup> Coverage also highlights that the majority of the Salvadorean voters in the US would be choosing Clinton because a Trump presidency would be a threat to all Latinos, not just Mexicans.<sup>6</sup> The highest circulation newspapers stated that a Trump win would produce a major shift in US policy towards El Salvador.<sup>7</sup>

### **Honduras**

*La Prensa*, one of Honduras' most popular newspapers, highlights the potential problems of Donald Trump being elected president of the United States. Analysts interviewed state clearly that his election would be against Honduras' national interests because of potential policies hostile to the one million Hondurans living in the United States, particularly the revocation of temporary protective status from 60,000 Honduran citizens,<sup>8</sup> when remittances comprise 17% of Honduran GDP. In Honduras, the media coverage regarding Trump focused on "Hispanics," not only on Mexicans. Newspapers predicted, however, that Hillary Clinton would be president of the United States. Even the day before the elections, the newspapers were reporting that mail-in ballots were giving Clinton the victory.<sup>9</sup>

As soon as the results of the election were official, the Honduran press started reporting on potential changes that the future Trump administration might implement and their impact on Honduras and its citizens, specifically the Wall and the expulsion of undocumented immigrants.<sup>10</sup> The newspaper also reported on Central American governments asking Donald Trump to respect their citizens in his future administration.<sup>11</sup>



## **Paraguay**

Before the election, the reporting focused on the potential difference that Latinos would make in the election, benefitting Hillary Clinton.<sup>12</sup> They reported that though neither campaign fully convinced voters, Hillary Clinton was the favorite.<sup>13</sup> Reporting on the 50,000 Paraguayan citizens in the United States, journalists also highlighted the polarization that affected the community.<sup>14</sup>

After the election of Donald Trump, his victory was seen as unexpected,<sup>15</sup> and a significant source of uncertainty, both regarding domestic<sup>16</sup> and foreign policies.<sup>17</sup> The election was reported as problematic for Paraguayan citizens abroad. The reporting covered the reaction of organizations such as UNASUR as well as other Latin American governments.<sup>18</sup> It mentioned protests against Trump,<sup>19</sup> while reporting that members of the Paraguayan government were expecting to have good relations with the president.<sup>20</sup> The reporting from the perspective of Paraguayans living in the United States was not favorable, and highlighted their fear.<sup>21</sup>

When it comes to the news coverage of Trump's attitudes towards Latin America, coverage focused particularly on the candidate's attitudes towards immigration.<sup>22</sup> Paraguayan newspapers reported a favorability towards Hillary Clinton because she would be friendlier towards Latino immigrants.<sup>23</sup>

## **Dominican Republic**

Coverage immediately before the election showed that Clinton held an advantage over Trump, but that the margin was becoming smaller because of the announcement of an investigation carried out by the FBI.<sup>24</sup> It reported that the election was activating fault lines between generations of Hispanics in the United States,<sup>25</sup> as well as the fact that except for Trump's pejorative mentions of Latin Americans, the continent was essentially ignored within the electoral debate in the United States.<sup>26</sup> The coverage shows that Dominican-Americans favored Clinton over Trump by a significant margin.<sup>27</sup> The media coverage on Trump's attitudes towards individuals from Latin America did not focus solely on Mexico, but rather on what would happen to Dominicans or "Hispanics" in general.<sup>28</sup> After the election, the coverage reported that politicians did not believe that the Trump presidency would harm US-DR relations<sup>29</sup> while also echoing international reporting on uncertainty and policies that could harm Latin Americans.<sup>30</sup> News coverage also reported on protests and described the election of Donald Trump as threatening to undermine President Obama's legacy.<sup>31</sup>

## **Venezuela**

Coverage before the election was mostly hostile to Donald Trump while relying on polling information that predicted that Hillary Clinton would become president. Coverage right after the election shows discontent among Venezuelan political leadership about Trump's electoral victory.<sup>32</sup> One interview features diplomats and experts stating that the Trump administration would not consider Venezuela a priority.<sup>33</sup> Another editorial compares Trump and Chávez, as expressions of populism.<sup>34</sup> Regarding the news coverage of Trump's attitudes towards Latin America, coverage shows Trump's hostility to Latin American immigration.<sup>35</sup> In addition, President Maduro publicly stated before the election that neither Donald Trump nor Hillary Clinton had favorable views towards Venezuelans.<sup>36</sup>

## **Appendix B: Description of Survey Data**

We use data from the Americas Barometer 2016, and specifically from the five countries where fieldwork coincides with the US presidential election. These five countries are El Salvador (1551 respondents), Honduras (1560 respondents), Paraguay (1528 respondents), Venezuela (1558 respondents), and the Dominican Republic (1518 respondents). We pool the data to increase the sample size since the RDD is based on restricting the analysis to subjects located within a narrow bandwidth.

We do not exclude units with missing outcome data to be able to preserve our original sample and to increase the interpretability of the results. Additionally, assuming that responses were missing completely at random might be problematic if the election of Trump affected the probability of not answering the question (See Visconti (2019) for a similar approach). Therefore, we construct a binary variable of support for trust in the US government using the following question: “I would like to ask you how much you trust the government of the United States. Tell me if in your opinion it is very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy, or not at all trustworthy, or if you don’t have an opinion.” The first two answers are classified as 1, and 0 otherwise.

Finally, we use three placebo covariates (i.e., subjects characteristics that should not be affected by the treatment) to check the continuity assumption in Appendix C. These are: female (1 female, 0 male), age (in years), and education (1 none or less than primary, 2 primary, 3 less than secondary, 4 secondary, 5 more than secondary).

## Appendix C: Comparing Samples

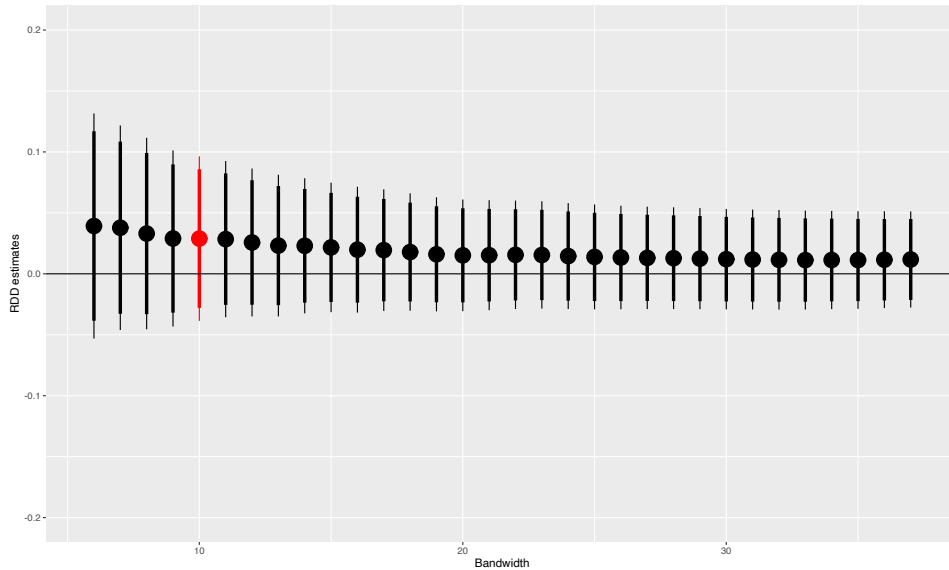
In table A1 we compare the means of the outcome and some key placebo covariates between two samples: all survey respondents and the optimal bandwidth. Both samples report similar means for the four variables, which shows that the findings do not result from an unusual group of survey participants.

**Table A1:** Mean Comparison

<b>Variables</b>	<b>All Respondents</b>	<b>Optimal Bandwidth</b>
US Trust	0.43	0.41
Female	0.50	0.50
Age	39.70	39.52
Education	3.05	2.86

## Appendix D: Continuity Assumption

The key assumption of an RDD is that pretreatment or placebo covariates do not abruptly change at the cutoff. We check this using relevant available placebo or slow-moving covariates, such as gender, age, education, geographic location,<sup>1</sup> and left-wing ideology.<sup>2</sup> We use the same empirical approach as for figure 1 in the manuscript. We do not find evidence that respondent characteristics suddenly change at the cutoff for any of the 128 different estimations.

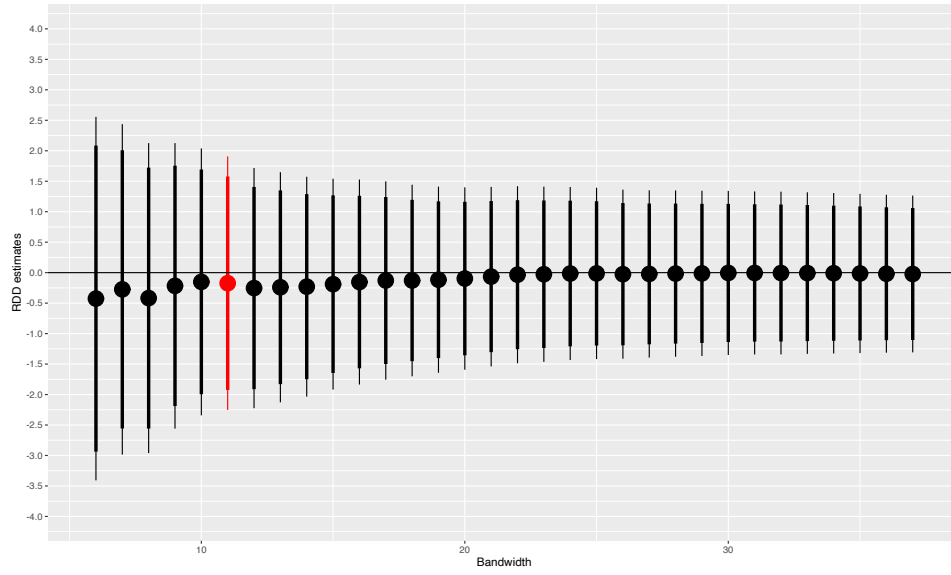


**Figure A1: Female**

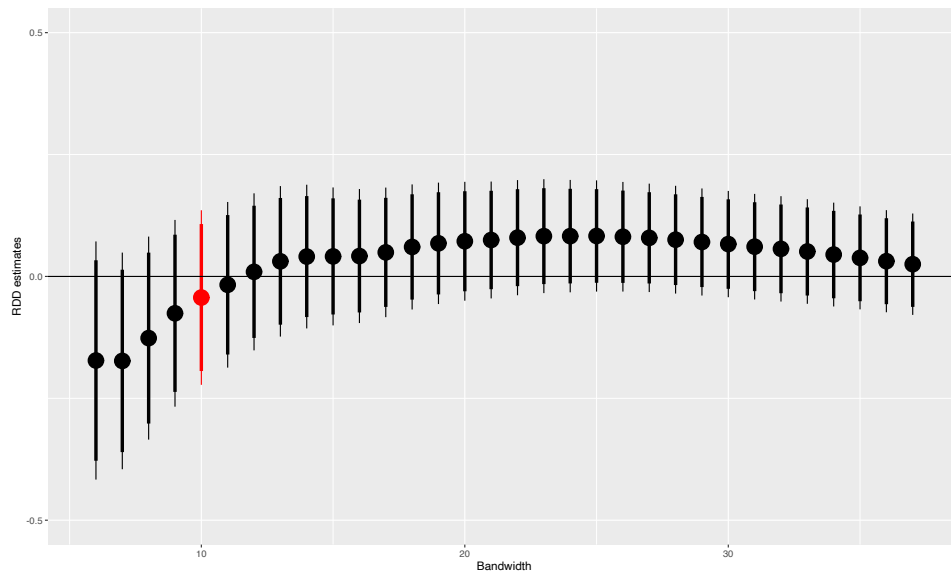
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<sup>1</sup> We use the LAPOP variable called cluster, which refers to final sampling unit or sampling point. This geographic location only contains six interviews.

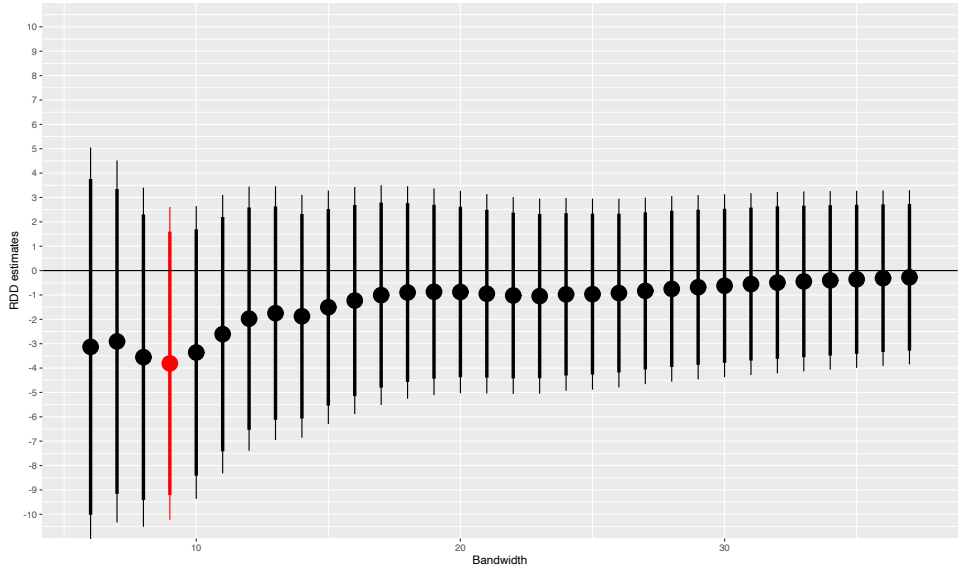
<sup>2</sup> We use Zechmeister (2015) coding scheme to identify left-wing respondents: when using a 1-10 left-right scale, respondents that answer 1, 2, or 3 are considered as left.



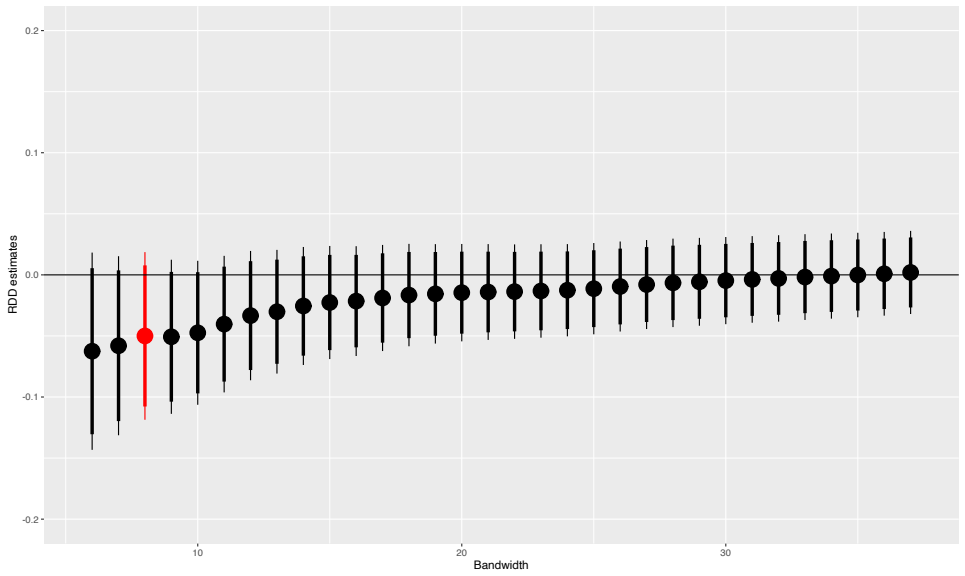
**Figure A2: Age**



**Figure A3: Education**



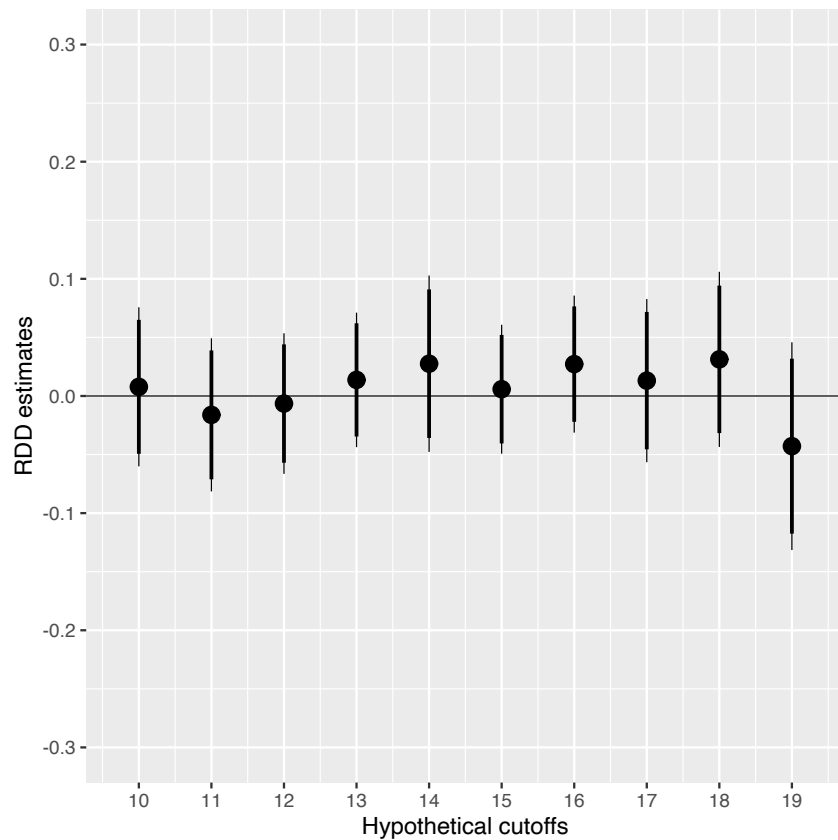
**Figure A4: Geographic location**



**Figure A5: Left-wing respondents**

## Appendix E: Falsification test

We conduct a falsification test by modifying the day of the US presidential elections when constructing the regression discontinuity design in time. The election was held on November 8. Therefore, we test for a possible discontinuity using days from after the election as hypothetical cutoffs. We use a buffer of a few days assuming that not everyone will get informed right away after the election, and we test for a discontinuity we expect to be absent using ten hypothetical cutoffs of the RDD. We use no more than ten cut points to try to keep a reasonable number of observations on each side of the cutoffs. As in the main analysis, we implement different regressions; however, in this case, we modify the cutoff starting in November 10th. We use trust in the US government as the outcome of interest. The x-axis represents the day in November, 2016 used as an hypothetical cutoff.



**Figure A6:** Falsification test

As expected, all the analyses report null effects since none of the used cutoffs correspond to the actual 2016 US presidential election (November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016).

## Appendix F: Interrupted Time Series

As a robustness check, we use an interrupted time series analysis (ITS), which is particularly useful to study the effect of an intervention when the running variable is time (see Mummolo 2018 for an example). Here we use all the observations and we model time trends using a linear, quadratic, and cubic function for the score. The quantity of interest is the immediate change in respondent attitudes on the day of the election. We expand equation 1 to incorporate functions that model times trends (Morgan and Winship 2007).

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 T_i + \beta_2 S_i + \beta_3 T * S_i + \beta_4 S^2_i + \beta_5 T * S^2_i + \sigma_p + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 T_i + \beta_2 S_i + \beta_3 T * S_i + \beta_4 S^2_i + \beta_5 T * S^2_i + \beta_6 S^3_i + \beta_7 T * S^3_i + \sigma_p + \varepsilon_i \quad (3)$$

Table A2 summarizes the results when using trust in the US government as the outcome. The results from the ITS and RDD are similar. The US election generated a substantive and significant reduction in trust in the US government.

**Table A2:** Interrupted Time Series, Trust in the US Government

Trust US Government	
Linear	-0.110*** (0.017)
Quadratic	-0.064** (0.026)
Cubic	-0.070** (0.035)
N	7715

**Note:** \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01.



### Appendix G: Placebo Analysis

We included two extra placebo analyses in this section. We use outcomes where we do not expect to see an effect after the 2016 US election such as trust in local governments and trust in the armed forces. As expected, we do not find evidence that the election of Trump is changing people’s confidence on these issues.

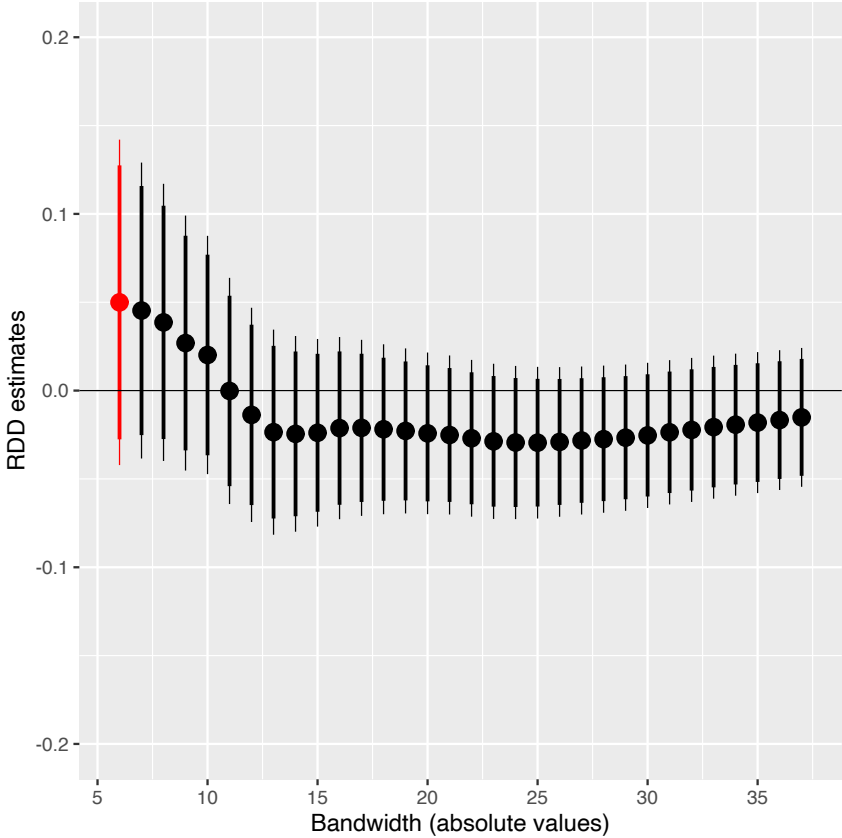
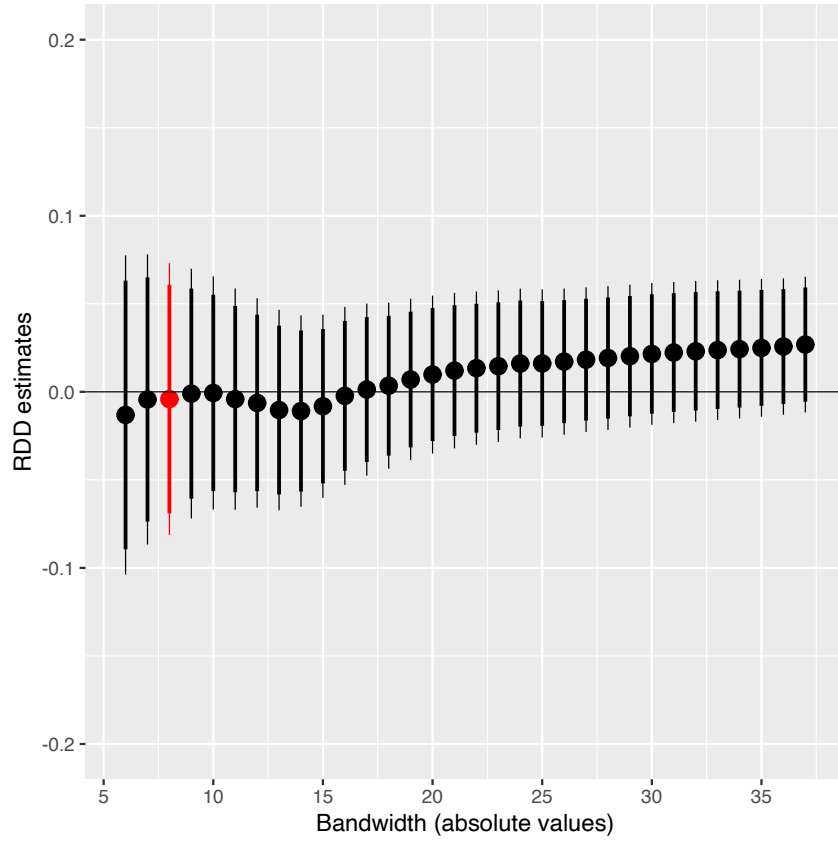


Figure A7: Trust in local governments



**Figure A8:** Trust in the armed forces

## Appendix H: Full Results

Table A3 reports the numbers behind figure 1 in the manuscript: the bandwidth in absolute value (B), and the numbers of observations (N), point estimate (PE), standard error (SE) and p-value (PV) associated with that bandwidth (two-tailed test).

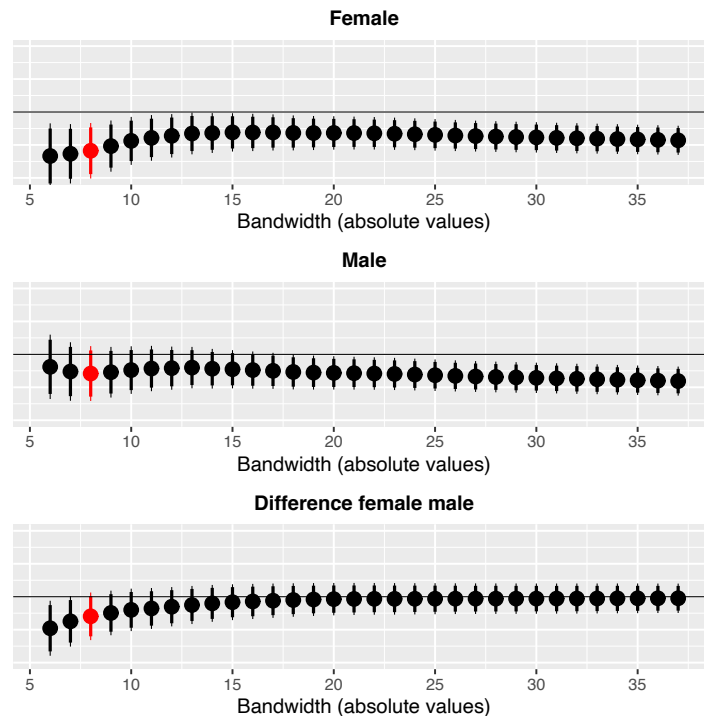
**Table A3:** Figure 1 in Numbers

B	N	PE	SE	PV
6	2,070	-0.091	0.046	0.047
7	2,446	-0.097	0.041	0.020
8	2,744	-0.096	0.039	0.014
9	3,125	-0.086	0.036	0.016
10	3,448	-0.074	0.033	0.027
11	3,718	-0.066	0.032	0.037
12	4,019	-0.060	0.030	0.044
13	4,280	-0.055	0.029	0.057
14	4,580	-0.055	0.027	0.044
15	4,860	-0.055	0.026	0.036
16	5,056	-0.057	0.026	0.027
17	5,306	-0.058	0.025	0.019
18	5,577	-0.060	0.024	0.012
19	5,806	-0.061	0.023	0.008
20	5,968	-0.061	0.023	0.007
21	6,101	-0.062	0.022	0.006
23	6,312	-0.064	0.022	0.003
24	6,431	-0.066	0.022	0.002
25	6,519	-0.068	0.021	0.002
26	6,649	-0.070	0.021	0.001
27	6,743	-0.071	0.021	0.001
28	6,783	-0.073	0.021	0.0004
29	6,833	-0.074	0.021	0.0003
30	6,899	-0.076	0.020	0.0002
31	6,954	-0.077	0.020	0.0001
32	6,960	-0.079	0.020	0.0001
33	7,033	-0.080	0.020	0.0001
34	7,105	-0.082	0.020	0.00004
35	7,182	-0.083	0.020	0.00003
36	7,272	-0.085	0.020	0.00002
37	7,339	-0.087	0.020	0.00001

## Appendix I: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects

We explore heterogeneous treatment effects for respondents' characteristics:<sup>3</sup> binary indicators of female, high school or more, and more than 50 years old; and for countries' characteristics: binary indicators of being located in South America and having a left-wing president.<sup>4</sup> We use binary indicators to facilitate the interpretation of the interaction terms. We find that the effect of the election of Trump had a consistently negative impact on female and male, less and more educated, younger and older respondents, countries in South and Central America/Caribbean, and countries with left and non-left-wing presidents.

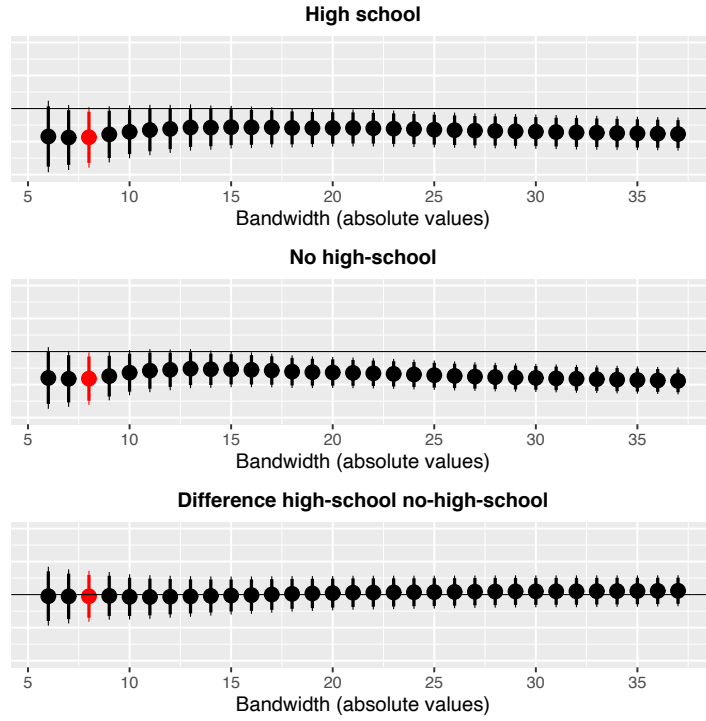
There are more heterogeneous effects that might be interesting to explore. Does the effect vary by media consumption or by being benefited by remittances from the US? However, those are variables that can be affected by the treatment. Respondents might have increased their exposure to media or become less likely to report remittances after the election of Trump. As a result, we follow a more conservative approach and only explore heterogeneous treatment effects of placebo or slow-moving variables.



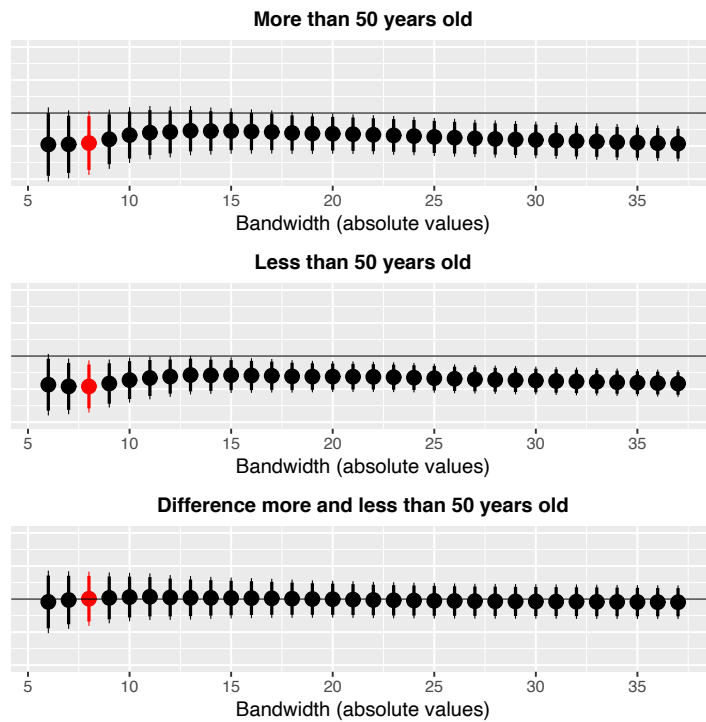
**Figure A9: Heterogenous Effect of Gender**

<sup>3</sup> We use a simpler specification that does not include an interaction between the treatment and the score as described in Lee and Lemieux (2010: 318), which allows us to avoid including and interpreting a triple interaction between the treatment, the running variable, and the covariate.

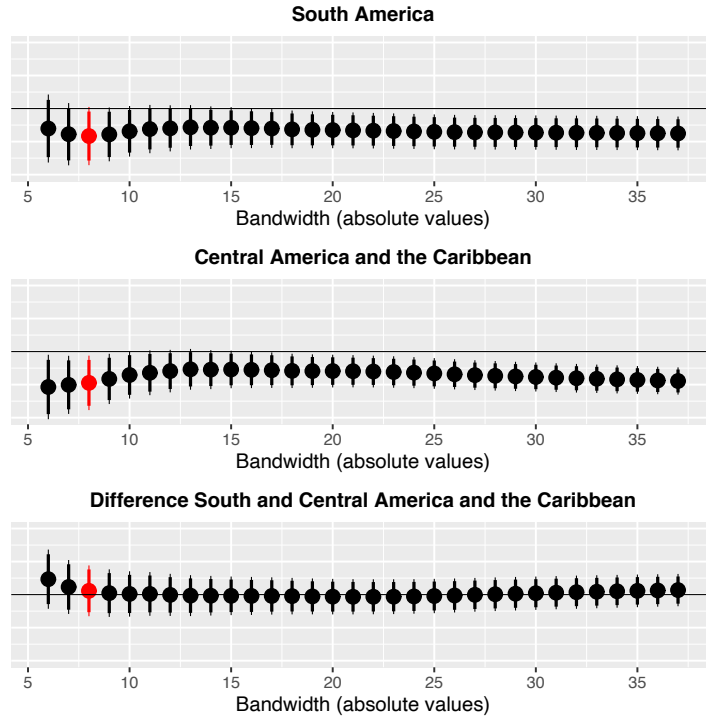
<sup>4</sup> We use Baker and Greene (2018) left-right score (1-20) to identify left-wing presidents.



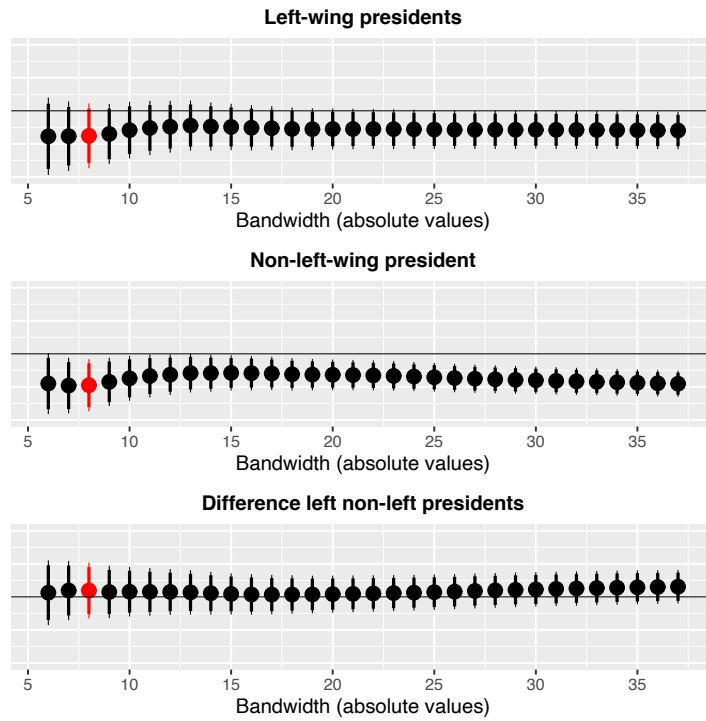
**Figure A10: Heterogenous Effect of Education**



**Figure A11: Heterogenous Effect of Age**



**Figure A12: Heterogenous Effect of Regions**



**Figure A13: Heterogenous Effect of President's Ideology**

## Appendix J: Presidents' Ideologies and Floor Effects

Table A4 provides the pre-election trust level in the five countries studied before the election of Trump, and the ideology of the president in 2016 using Baker and Greene's (2018) left-right score (1–20). These results are summarized in the table below.

**Table A4:** President's ideology and trust in the US before the presidential election.

Country	President's ideology	US trust
Paraguay	15.70	0.40
Venezuela	2.65	0.40
Honduras	17.33	0.54
El Salvador	2.00	0.51
Dominican Republic	11.60	0.56

Regarding the ideology of the government, we can see that countries with left-wing governments can have different levels of baseline trust in the US (e.g., Venezuela and El Salvador). The same variation is present among countries with right-wing governments (e.g., Paraguay and Honduras). To provide a more formal check, we implement the main equation with an interaction for left-wing presidents, and show that there are no significant differences between countries with left- and non-left-wing presidents (see appendix H). Even when there is no evidence of a Trump effect in Venezuela (see appendix J), we are not able to find a significant difference between left- and non-left-governments. The effect might be slightly larger in one set of countries than in the other, but that difference is not statistically significant.

Regarding floor effects (i.e., trust in the US is already so low that it will not be affected by the election of Donald Trump), we can see that the lower levels are present in both South American countries. So, the heterogeneous treatment effects by region included in appendix H works as a formal check. We do not find significant differences between South and Central America (or between regions with lower and higher trust in the US). As a result, there is no evidence of floor effects. The election of Donald Trump had negative effects even in places where trust in the US was already low to begin with. As in the previous analysis, even when there is no evidence of a Trump effect in Venezuela (see appendix J), we are not able to find a significant difference between countries with lower and higher trust in the US.

Finally, the average trust in the US in these five countries before the election of Trump was 0.46. To make direct comparisons with other Latin American countries, we select the cases from the 2016/2017 LAPOP wave where the fieldwork was implemented before the 2016 election: Colombia, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua. In those three cases the average trust in the US was 0.48. As a result, we do not have reason to believe that the five countries used in the study represent unusual cases in the region.

## Appendix K: Results by Country

We implement that main equation (without country fixed effects) in each individual country to check whether the main results are driven by certain cases or not. We recommend that readers pay more attention to point estimates than to confidence intervals since the countries' samples are five times smaller than the sample used in the paper, such that there are important concerns about statistical power when subsetting the main sample.

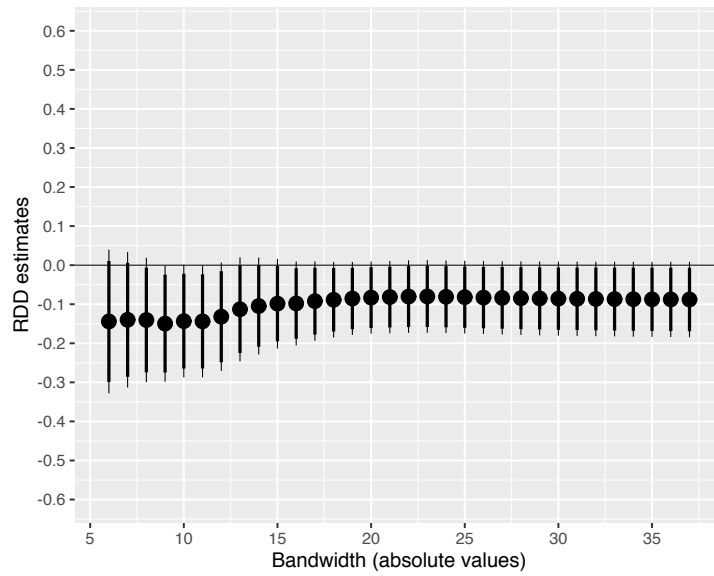
For four countries (Salvador, Honduras, Paraguay, and Dominican Republic) the average effect of the election of Trump ranges between -6 and -10 percentage points, which is fairly stable and similar to the main estimate reported in the manuscript. Therefore, we do not find evidence that results are driven by any country since four countries provide estimates that are highly aligned with the main finding.

The case of Venezuela is the only one where we observe a different pattern. The election of Donald Trump did not affect trust in the US with an average change smaller than 1 percentage point. We can only speculate about the reasons explaining this divergent result. We believe the Venezuelan results are explained by the specific sociopolitical context at the time of the 2016 US election. Venezuela was suffering an economic collapse and experienced increased authoritarianism from the Maduro government. In fact, President Maduro was very unpopular in 2016, with 58% of respondents in the LAPOP survey indicating that Maduro was doing a bad (or very bad) job governing the country. Before the 2016 election, Trump positioned himself strongly against the Venezuelan government, going so far as to say that he “pledged to stand with the people of Cuba and Venezuela in their fight against oppression.”<sup>5</sup> It is very likely that many Venezuelans hoped that the Trump election would lead to long-awaited political changes in their country (i.e., democratization and the collapse of the Maduro government). This might explain why we do not see the same negative effect of the Trump election on trust in the US government in Venezuela.

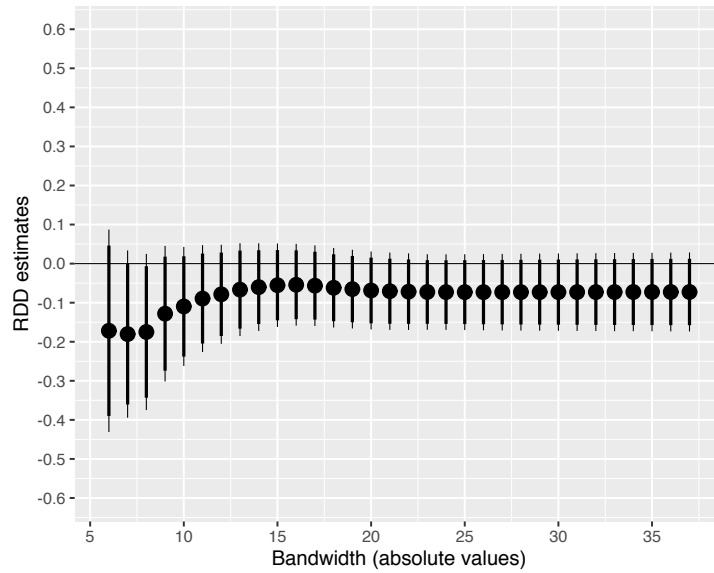
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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DonaldTrump/posts/10158080188865725>

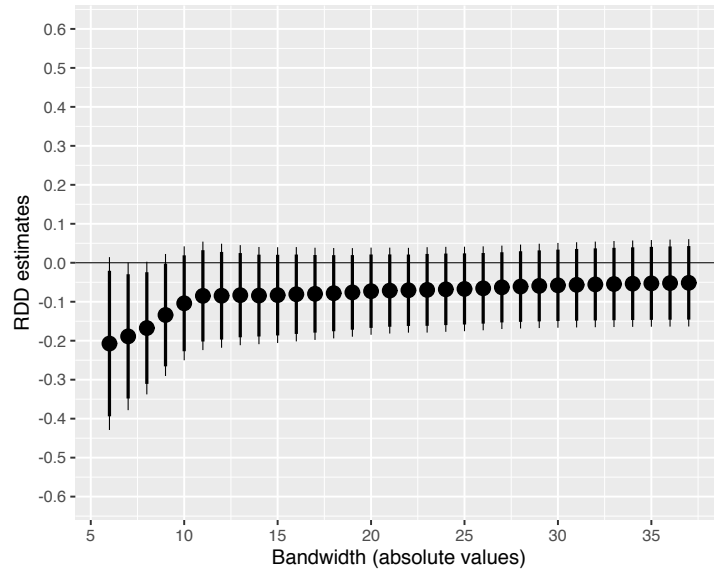




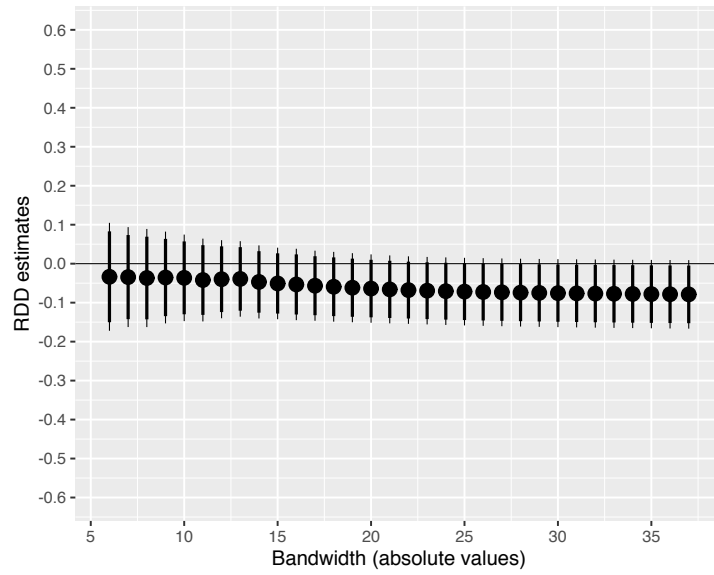
**Figure A14: Dominican Republic**



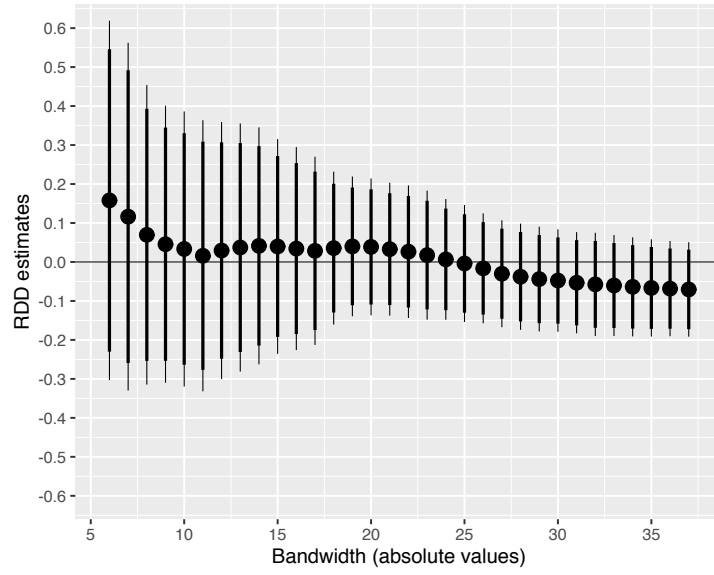
**Figure A15: El Salvador**



**Figure A16: Honduras**



**Figure A17: Paraguay**

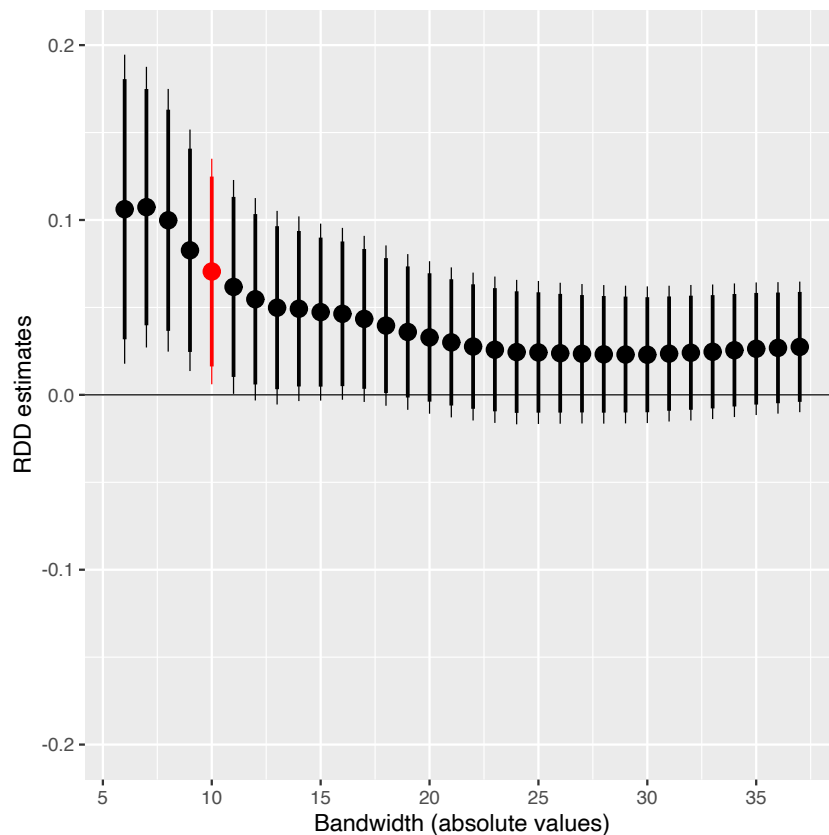


**Figure A18: Venezuela**

## Appendix L: Binary Outcome

The main reason why we transform the dependent variable is to avoid excluding missing values (i.e., 1 means trust in the US government and 0 otherwise). This approach is particularly important since the assumption that responses are missing completely at random might be problematic if the election of Trump affected the probability of answering questions about the US.

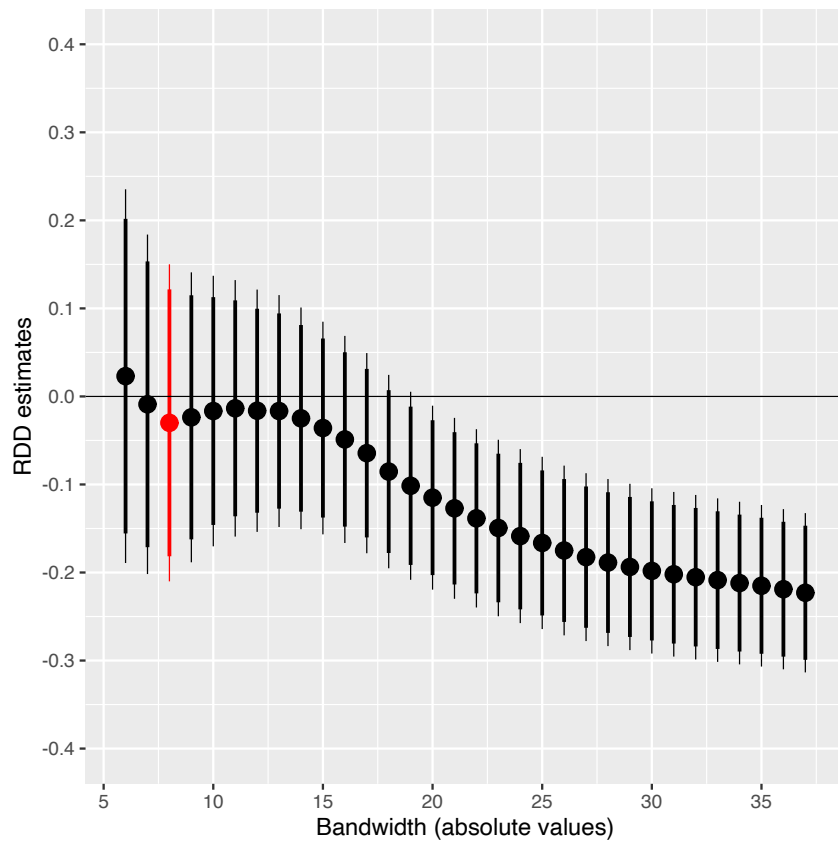
In this section, we provide direct evidence about this methodological problem. We use a binary indicator of missingness for trust in the US as the outcome and implement the main RDD design used in the manuscript. The results show that failing to answer the question was affected by the election of Trump but just for the first few days. What could explain this pattern? One possibility is that people that used to trust the US government now might hesitate when answering this question.



**Figure A19:** Binary indicator of missingness

We also provide the main results when using the continuous variable (and excluding more than 2,000 observations from the analysis). The Trump effect is clear when using large bandwidths (i.e., when the election stopped affecting missingness). However, there is no

evidence of a Trump effect when using small bandwidths (i.e., when the election was affecting missingness).



**Figure A20:** Trust in the US (continuous)

To sum up, we believe that these two extra analyses illustrate the problems of using the continuous version of the dependent variable, and reinforce our decision to transform the dependent variable to address concerns about missing values.

## **Appendix M: Generalizability of the findings**

While we are not aware of similar data for other regions around the world, we expect the results would be very similar if we had analyzed another region. US elections are newsworthy events that attract attention throughout the world and can shape views on the US government. In fact, Pew Research polls reveal that US favorability fell sharply between the end of the Obama presidency and the beginning of the Trump presidency in countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> Trump appears to have been broadly disliked by world public opinion when he was elected in 2016, which rapidly tarnished the image of the US government abroad.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2017/06/26/tarnished-american-brand/>

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