



Framing the 2016 Election: A Look into Donald Trump's Abnormal Rhetoric

By Victoria White



Background

- Donald Trump's bombastic rhetoric as a presidential candidate is upending all political norms. But, how is his campaign rhetoric affecting public opinion?
- Most relevant to this project is *issue framing* or when a subset of potentially relevant considerations is emphasized causing individuals to focus on these considerations when forming their opinions (Druckman 2004).
- Druckman (2004) finds that when a president discusses issues that people find most important, he can influence his/her own approval.
- Druckman (2004) finds that when presidential candidate's stances on a topic align with public opinion, it will influence their approval ratings.
- Research finds that racism is strongly condemned by the public (Dovidio 2009, Fiske 1998)
- Being a racist has become a negative stigma (Sommers 2006)
- Bowler et al. (2006) finds that racially charged ballot propositions sponsored by the Republican party during the 1990s in California reversed the trend among Latinos toward identifying as Republican by shifting party attachments toward the Democratic party.

Research Questions

- How do Trump's statements affect political attitudes toward Trump?
- How do Trump's statements affect political attitudes toward Clinton?
- Are these effects moderated by race, income, partisanship, or gender?

Methods

Design

- National online survey-experiment
- 1,684 Respondents randomly assigned to 1 of 5 groups:
 - Group 1: Control (no statement)
 - Group 2: Muslim ban statement
 - Group 3: Trump wall statement
 - Group 4: Mexicans as rapists statement
 - Group 5: Megyn Kelly statement

Analysis

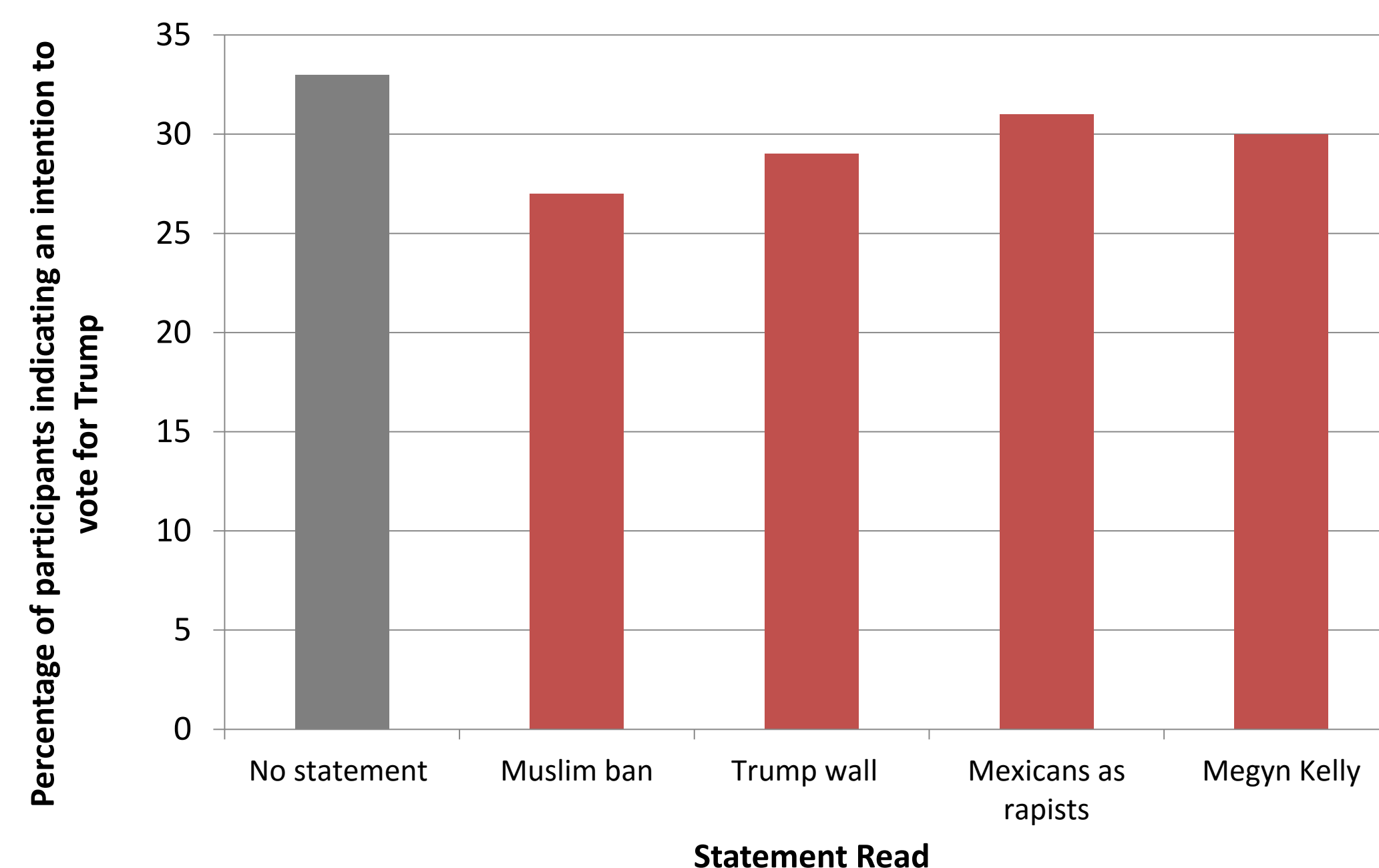
- Difference of means t-tests comparing average responses between groups reading Trump statements to the group reading no statements.
 - Ex. The Trump wall group's average answer to a question (i.e. Trump approval) was compared to the average response in the control group

Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis #1:** Trump's statements will have a negative effect on intention to vote for Trump.
- **Hypothesis #2a:** Latinos who read the Trump build the Wall statement will be less likely to vote for Trump than non-Latinos who read the statement.
- **Hypothesis #2b:** Latinos who read the Trump Mexicans as rapists statement will be less likely to vote for Trump than non-Latinos who read the statement. Mexicans are considered Latinos and therefore they are personally tied to Trump's Mexicans as rapists statement.
- **Hypothesis #3:** Respondents who read the Trump statements will have a higher preference to vote for Hillary.

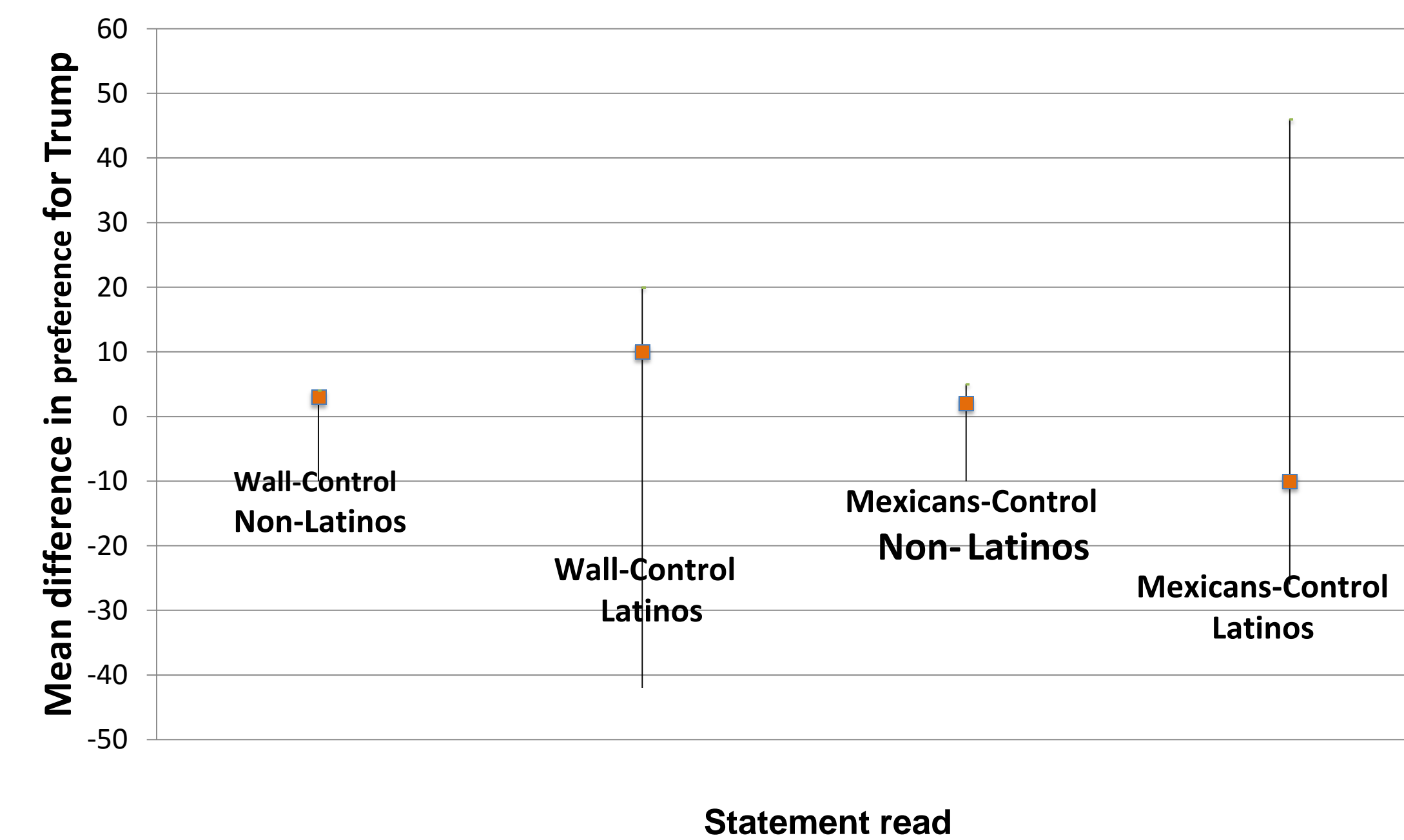
Results & Findings

Figure 1: Intention to vote for Trump by Statement Group



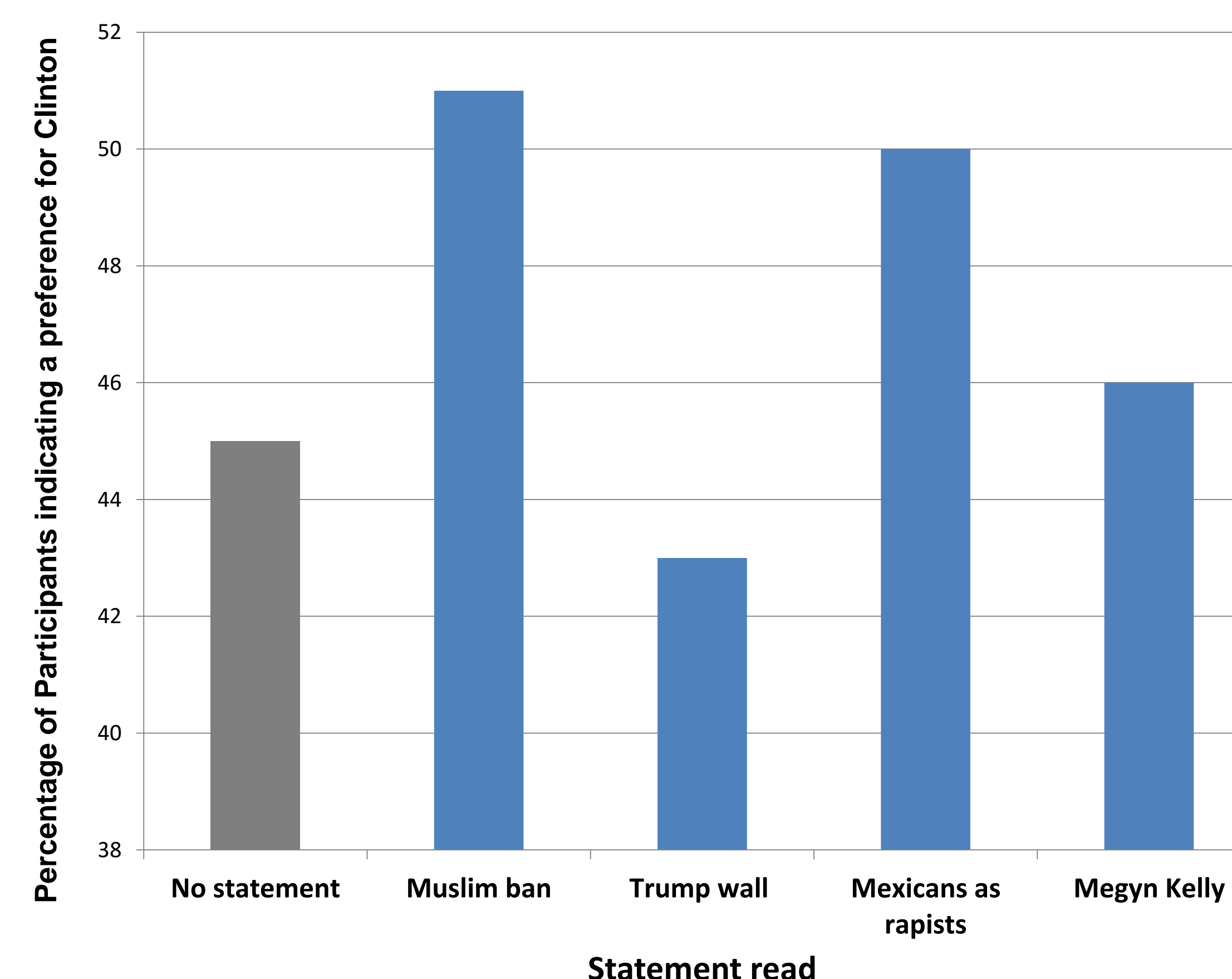
• Trump statements did not affect preference for Trump (H1 not supported)

Figure 2: Voting Preference for Trump among Latinos and Non-Latinos



• Latinos who read the Trump statements reacted no differently than Non-Latinos who read the same statement. (H2a & H2b not supported)

Preference for Clinton by Statement Group



• Those who read the Muslim ban statement did report a higher preference for Hillary than those who did not read the Muslim ban statement. (H3 supported)

Implications/Takeaways

- Future Trump statements may not be as impactful as we might ordinarily think.
- When Trump talks negatively about Latinos and other groups he may not be penalized to the extent one might expect.
- That said, Kawakami (2009) finds that when people experience a racist event they may respond indifferently.
- Those who support Trump may not be listening to what Trump is saying anymore. This could be because they have already decided that they are voting for him and stopped paying attention to his more recent statements.

Challenges

- Because such rhetoric has never been studied before it was challenging to pick which phrases I would examine.
- My unfamiliarity with SPSS and statistical analysis made the analysis portion challenging.
- The imperfect sample yielded fewer Republicans, minorities, conservatives than needed to examine some hypotheses.

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