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# What if Hillary Clinton *Had* Gone to Wisconsin?

## Presidential Campaign Visits and Vote Choice in the 2016 Election

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**ABSTRACT:** Hillary Clinton’s failure to visit the key battleground state of Wisconsin in 2016 has become a popular metaphor for the alleged strategic inadequacies of her presidential campaign. Critics who cite this fact, however, make two important assumptions: that campaign visits are effective, in general, and that they were effective for Clinton in 2016. I test these assumptions using an original database of presidential and vice presidential campaign visits in 2016. Specifically, I regress party vote share on each candidate’s number of campaign visits, at the county level, first for all counties located within battleground states, and then for counties located within each of six key battleground states: Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The results of this analysis do not clearly support either of the assumptions made by Clinton’s critics. In general, none of the presidential or vice presidential candidates – including Clinton – significantly influenced voting via campaign visits. However, Clinton is one of only two candidates – along with Mike Pence, in Ohio – whose campaign visits had a significant effect on voting in an individual state. Specifically, Clinton’s visits to Pennsylvania improved the Democratic ticket’s performance in that state by 1.2 percentage points. Also, there is weak evidence to suggest that Clinton might have had a similar effect on voting in Michigan. It is unclear from this evidence whether Clinton also would have gained votes, or even won, in Wisconsin had she campaigned in that state. But two conclusions are clear. First, Clinton’s visits to Democratic-leaning battleground states did not have the “backfiring” effect that her campaign reportedly feared. Second, Donald Trump did not win in Pennsylvania, Michigan, or Wisconsin as a direct result of his campaign visits to those decisive states.

**KEYWORDS:** Campaign visits; Hillary Clinton; Donald Trump; Wisconsin; counties; 2016 presidential election.

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Donald Trump lost the national popular vote to Hillary Clinton by 2.9 million votes, or two percentage points, in 2016. But he defeated her by a comfortable margin in the Electoral College, 304-227, to win the presidency. Trump's victory depended upon the votes of three key battleground states – Pennsylvania (20 electoral votes), Michigan (16), and Wisconsin (10) – that he won by narrow margins of 0.7% (44,292 votes), 0.2% (10,704), and 0.7% (22,748), respectively. To make this outcome even more dramatic, and painful for Democrats, Trump was the first Republican presidential candidate to win Pennsylvania and Michigan since 1988, and Wisconsin since 1984.

With such a close, and unexpected, election outcome inevitably come attempts to explain *why* a particular candidate won or lost, and what the losing campaign could or should have done differently. As Clinton (2017, 304), herself, put it: “With a margin like that, everyone can have a pet theory about why I lost. It’s difficult to rule anything out.” A common explanation for Hillary Clinton’s loss, among Democratic and Republican critics, is that she ran a poor, even “doomed”, presidential campaign – one that lacked a clear and compelling message; ignored or resisted, rather than adapting to, changing political circumstances; and failed to connect with voters in the Rust Belt states that decided the election (see Allen and Parnes 2017). One piece of evidence is cited so frequently, and prominently, to support this explanation that it has come to serve as a central metaphor for the campaign’s shortcomings: Hillary Clinton did not visit Wisconsin.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In her campaign memoir, *What Happened*, Clinton addresses several leading explanations for her loss in a section titled “Common Critiques.” The substantive portion of that section begins: “For example, some critics have said that everything hinged on me not campaigning enough in the Midwest” (Clinton 2017, 394).

## The Wisconsin Narrative

In fact, Clinton was the first major party presidential nominee *not* to visit Wisconsin since Richard Nixon, in 1972. In the election's immediate aftermath, local and national media outlets cited this fact to help explain Clinton's loss. Milwaukee's Fox 6 posted an article on November 9, with the headline: "'We needed to see Hillary:' Clinton failed to rally voters in Milwaukee County; Trump won Wisconsin" (Bayatpour 2016). *Business Insider* ran a similar headline that day: "Clinton never set foot in Wisconsin – then she lost it, and it helped cost her the presidency" (Engel 2016).

Hillary Clinton's absence from Wisconsin has become increasingly salient in public discourse since the election. The main catalyst for this has been Clinton's post-election comments attributing the election's outcome to factors outside of her control, such as FBI Director James Comey's October 28, 2016, letter to Congress regarding the investigation into her use of a private e-mail server while serving as Secretary of State, and the Russian government's apparent attempts to interfere in the election.

After Clinton made comments to this effect in early May 2017, former Trump campaign manager Kellyanne Conway fired back with a tweet enumerating what she believed to be the actual reasons for Clinton's loss. The first item on the list: "You ignored WI" (Conway 2017). But this was not just a Republican line of attack. In response to the same comments, David Axelrod, former campaign manager and presidential adviser to Barack Obama, said in an interview on CNN: "Jim Comey didn't tell her not to campaign in Wisconsin after the convention. Jim Comey didn't say 'don't put any resources into Michigan until the final week of the campaign'" (Quigley 2017).

Journalists and news commentators have adopted the line, as well. On the May 31, 2017, edition of Fox News Channel’s “Special Report,” correspondent Jennifer Griffin reported on Clinton’s most recent comments blaming others, now including the Democratic National Committee, for her loss. At the end of Griffin’s report, anchor Bret Baier editorialized: “None of that list [sic] told her not to show up in Wisconsin.”<sup>2</sup> And months earlier, at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference, former liberal MSNBC television host Ed Schultz, since hired by Russia’s RT America, dismissed charges of Russian interference in the election by telling the audience: “Full disclosure: the Russians did not tell Hillary Clinton don’t go to Wisconsin. They didn’t tell her not to go to Michigan, either [sic]” (Hohman 2017).

Even late night comics have helped to make the Wisconsin narrative into something of a punch line. On September 6, 2017, *Late Night* host Seth Meyers ridiculed Clinton for suggesting, in her campaign memoir, that Bernie Sanders was partly to blame for her general election loss to Donald Trump. “You’re not president, but that is not Bernie’s fault,” Meyers chided Clinton, in one of his trademark “Hey!” segments. “He’s the one guy you did beat. Also, he didn’t tell you not to go to Wisconsin” (Bradley 2017).

Essentially, the Wisconsin narrative has become a ready comeback to any argument that critics believe deflects responsibility for Clinton’s election loss away from her campaign. And, like any good comeback, it is effective because it seems so obviously true and it directly implicates one of the target’s most embarrassing vulnerabilities. In this case, the obvious truth is that Wisconsin was a battleground state that Hillary Clinton needed in order to win the election.

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<sup>2</sup> See here:

[https://archive.org/details/FOXNEWSW\\_20170601\\_080000\\_Special\\_Report\\_With\\_Bret\\_Baier/s tart/780/end/840](https://archive.org/details/FOXNEWSW_20170601_080000_Special_Report_With_Bret_Baier/s tart/780/end/840). Accessed February 23, 2018.

By not visiting Wisconsin, then, she seemed to demonstrate that many of the most embarrassing vulnerabilities attributed to her campaign – which included being overconfident, inflexible, out of touch with voters, and strategically inept – were real, and potentially responsible for the election’s outcome.

However, this argument’s validity rests upon two contestable assumptions: first, that campaign visits influence vote choice, in general; second, that Hillary Clinton, specifically, would have gained votes in Wisconsin – as well as in the other decisive battleground states of Pennsylvania and Michigan – via campaign visits. To provide an empirical basis for evaluating these assumptions, in this article I test the county-level effects of campaign visits on presidential vote choice in 2016, aggregated across battleground states or within individual states such as Wisconsin. The results of this analysis indicate that campaign visits generally did not influence vote choice in 2016, for any of the candidates, including Clinton. In that case, it is unreasonable merely to assume that Clinton would have gained votes in Wisconsin by campaigning there. However, there is some evidence that Clinton campaigned effectively in certain individual states. I find clear evidence of this in Pennsylvania, and weak evidence in Michigan. Whether Clinton also might have gained votes by campaigning in Wisconsin is unclear.

At a minimum, this evidence indicates that Clinton’s visits did not have the “backfiring” effect in Democratic-leaning battleground states that her campaign reportedly feared; in fact, she might have overcome her 44,000-vote deficit in Pennsylvania had she visited that state more often. Also, this evidence indicates that Clinton did not lose in Pennsylvania, Michigan, or Wisconsin, as a direct result of Donald Trump’s visits to those decisive states; his campaign visits did not have any discernible effect on voting in battleground states, generally, or in the six states that I test, individually, in this analysis.

## **Campaign Visits Effects**

It is reasonable to expect that presidential campaign visits would have a significant and positive effect on vote choice. Thomas Holbrook (2002, 60) aptly summarizes the logic:

Campaign appearances provide candidates with an opportunity to deliver their messages in a setting that may or may not generate national media coverage but is almost guaranteed to generate extended local and state coverage. The local and state coverage of campaign activities translates into more localized exposure to the campaign rhetoric and, hence, greater opportunities for persuasion and mobilization at the state and local level. Also, since the candidates' stump speeches and other local activities are delivered in a relatively uncontested format, direct campaigning provides a great opportunity for candidates to convey their messages without interference from the other side.

Yet, there is only mixed evidence that campaign visits have their intended effects on vote intention or eventual vote choice. Some studies indicate very limited or no such effects (Holbrook and McClurg 2005; Johnston, Hagen, and Jamieson 2004; Wood 2016), while others generally indicate positive effects (King and Morehouse 2004; Shaw 1999). Wood (2016, 118) offers this summary of the literature: "On balance... campaign events are found to have only a modest effect on voter behavior, such that only in the most marginal elections would the pattern of campaign visits prove decisive."

But the effects of campaign visits also are not uniform; rather, the literature suggests their variability by candidate, party, election year, state competitiveness, or campaign phase. The potential for candidate-specific effects is particularly relevant to this analysis. As Heersink and Peterson (2017, 49-50) note, "studies of campaign visits typically focus on the quantity of visits

while ignoring the quality of those visits. That is, not all politicians are equally effective in connecting with voters during their visits.” Indeed, their analysis of the 1948 presidential election indicates that Harry Truman’s campaign visits had a statistically significant and positive effect on vote choice, aggregated at the county level, while Thomas Dewey’s visits had no effect. Holbrook (2002) reaches essentially the same conclusions, using state-level data from 1948. Also, Herr (2002) finds that, in 1996, Bill Clinton’s campaign visits had a statistically significant and positive effect on voting, while Bob Dole’s did not. In each case, these results correspond to the candidates’ reputations as campaigners: Truman and Clinton were widely regarded as vigorous and effective on the stump, while Dewey and Dole were not. Much the same comparison could be drawn in 2016: Donald Trump was a particularly vigorous campaigner and apparently an effective one, in the sense that his events drew large crowds and a great deal of media attention; Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, campaigned much less frequently and generated considerably less interest and enthusiasm when she did so (Devine 2017; Sheridan 2016).

Some studies also indicate that campaign visits might be counterproductive, at least for certain candidates and in certain states. For example, Hill, Rodriguez, and Wooden (2010) find that Dick Cheney’s campaign visits in 2000 had a statistically significant but *negative* effect on Republicans’ polling numbers in battleground states. This is an odd result, but not an isolated one; other studies also find at least some evidence that Cheney’s visits (Franklin 2001; Shaw 2006), or Bush’s and Cheney’s combined visits (Johnston et al. 2004), in 2000, alienated voters. To explain this effect, Shaw (2006) suggests that the Republican ticket might have received unusually critical local news coverage that year. Johnston et al. (2004, 82) merely concede, “we

can offer no defensible speculation about the causal mechanisms at work, so we do not dwell on it further.”

In some cases, signaling theory (Spence 1973) might help to explain negative campaign visit effects. That is to say, if a candidate repeatedly visits a state that he or she was supposed to win easily, or stops visiting a state that was supposed to be competitive, voters might interpret this (in)activity as a signal of the candidate’s vulnerability in the state. In turn, this impression might hurt the candidate’s performance by encouraging the opposing campaign to invest more resources in the state, while also helping it to attract volunteers, campaign contributions, and other means of support. Put simply: signals of electoral vulnerability might help to cause, or increase, actual vulnerability. An analog for this argument can be found in studies of the incumbency advantage, which show that the mere presence of a challenger can signal to voters that the incumbent is vulnerable, or weaken evaluations of the incumbent’s performance in office (Gordon, Huber, and Landa 2007). Erikson and Palfrey (1993) explain: “A high-visibility campaign might also be interpreted by some voters as a signal that ‘something must be wrong’ with the incumbent.” Similarly, visiting a state that was not supposed to be (very) competitive – thereby increasing its visibility, as a potential battleground – might be interpreted by some voters as a signal that “something must be wrong” with the candidate who was supposed to win there.

Indeed, Hillary Clinton’s absence from Wisconsin, and her limited presence in other states such as Michigan, might be attributable to concerns that visiting those states (more often) would trigger just such a negative response. According to a leading journalistic account:

In Michigan, the campaign feared that sending Hillary would actually backfire.... [S]aid one person familiar with the decisions... ‘Every time there was a mention of the election

there, we did worse. To make the election a bigger deal was not good for our prospects in Michigan.’ So they largely kept the candidate out of the state... (Allen and Parnes 2017, 368).

In other words, the campaign did not want to signal that a state such as Michigan was, in fact, competitive by sending Clinton for a visit, because doing so would invite negative media coverage, alarm party activists and donors, and invigorate the Republican opposition – thus weakening, rather than strengthening, the candidate’s position there. The reverse logic also applied in states such as Ohio and Iowa, where “The analytics suggested Hillary wasn’t likely to win... but the imperative to avoid signaling this to the press and the public drove some of the decision making. That is, they kept real campaigns going on in those states just to keep up the appearance that they were competitive” (Allen and Parnes 2017, 312).

Journalists and political figures did, in fact, treat campaign visits as a signal of competitiveness in 2016. When Clinton’s running mate, Tim Kaine, visited Green Bay two days before the election, a local media report paraphrased Wisconsin Republican Congressman Sean Duffy as saying that “Kaine’s visit shows the Clinton campaign is worried about winning Wisconsin” (LaCombe 2016). And when the campaign announced that Clinton and President Barack Obama would appear at separate events in Michigan the day before the election, *New York Magazine’s* Daily Intelligencer surmised: “it’s unlikely that the Clinton campaign would send both its candidate *and* best surrogate to the state if their internal polling didn’t show Trump with at least an outside chance there” (Levitz 2016).

The relevant literature and the facts of the 2016 campaign therefore provide no clear set of expectations for this analysis. As a general rule, the literature indicates that campaign visits

likely had no discernible impact on voting in the 2016 presidential election. However, these effects might have varied by candidate – and, if so, probably Trump was more effective at gaining votes via campaign visits than Clinton. It might even be the case that Clinton lost votes by campaigning in Democratic-leaning battleground states, such as Michigan and Pennsylvania, and therefore might have lost votes in Wisconsin had she campaigned there, as well. Reportedly, this was the fear that kept the Clinton campaign from sending her to Wisconsin, or more often to Michigan.

As an empirical matter, there is no way to know for sure what effect Clinton visiting Wisconsin would have had on her actual performance in that state. This analysis, however, provides an empirical basis for evaluating the Clinton campaign’s strategy, with respect to campaign visits, as well as the assumptions underlying the most familiar critiques of that strategy.

## **Data & Methodology**

For this analysis, I utilize an original database of presidential and vice presidential campaign visits in 2016. This database includes all visits made by one or both of the candidates on a given ticket, starting with the vice presidential announcements (July 15 for Republicans, July 22 for Democrats) and ending on Election Day (November 7).

### *Data*

I define a campaign visit as any public appearance apparently organized or initiated by the campaign or its candidates, for the purpose of appealing to a localized concentration of voters. This definition excludes several types of nationally-oriented events (e.g., national

conventions, conferences, debates, and historical commemorations), as well as events excluding the public and/or the press (e.g., private fundraisers, closed press conferences).<sup>3</sup> Using this methodology, I identified 515 campaign visits in 2016, including 157 for Donald Trump, 148 for Mike Pence, 101 for Hillary Clinton, and 109 for Tim Kaine.

Table 1 reports the number of campaign visits made by each presidential or vice presidential candidate, nationally and in select states. The first set of states included in Table 1 are the four – Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Ohio – visited most often by each ticket (albeit in different orders). Next, I add the two states that, in addition to Pennsylvania, effectively decided the 2016 election: Michigan and Wisconsin. Of course, these are also the two states that critics of the Clinton campaign suggest she should have visited (more often).

(Table 1)

Table 1 shows that Clinton did not visit Wisconsin, but she did visit Michigan five times. Also, it shows that the Clinton *campaign* was not absent from Wisconsin, since Tim Kaine visited the state six times. In fact, Kaine visited Wisconsin more than any other candidate in 2016, and only three times fewer than the Republican candidates, combined.

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<sup>3</sup> I identified most of these visits through advance announcements on websites hosted by the campaigns and affiliated organizations. To confirm that the visits took place as scheduled, I used internet searches to identify two reliable sources of documentation (i.e., a news article, video footage, or photographs) via news media websites or, in some cases, social media accounts associated with the campaigns or accompanying journalists. In doing so, I also identified many unscheduled candidate visits, including stops at restaurants, businesses, campaign offices, and early voting locations. As long as these visits attracted media coverage and included voter interactions, I included them in the analysis.

To evaluate the electoral effects of campaign visits, I estimate a series of linear regression models based upon county-level data from battleground states that hosted a total of ten or more visits in 2016.<sup>4</sup> I use county-level data for two reasons, in particular. First, as Herr (2002, 908) notes: “Using states as units of analysis presents some problems in that the effects of campaign appearances are probably localized and not statewide.” Indeed, many studies in the campaign visits literature cite the limitations of state-level data to justify using sub-state units of analysis (see Chen and Reeves 2011, 535; Heersink and Peterson 2017, 49; Jones 1998, 400). Using more localized data to evaluate campaign visits effects is preferable because voters’ exposure to campaign visits usually comes through local news coverage, and that coverage should be greater in the county or media market where a visit occurs rather than being equal statewide (see, for example, King and Morehouse 2004; Shaw 2006).<sup>5</sup> Also, as Heersink and Peterson (2017, 63) – who use county-level data to test campaign visit effects in the 1948 presidential election – explain: “many of the mediating impacts of a visit, such as increases in voter registration,

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to the six states from Table 1, these states include: Iowa (29 total visits); New Hampshire (28); Virginia (27); Nevada (23); Colorado (22). Limiting empirical analyses to battleground states, as judged by the number of campaign visits or other metrics, is commonplace within the relevant literature (see, for example, Chen and Reeves 2011; Herr 2002; Hill et al. 2011; Wood 2016).

<sup>5</sup> To this point, Wood (2016) finds “negligible spillover effects” in terms of survey respondents’ awareness of presidential campaign visits. That is, respondents were no more likely to be aware of a visit if they lived in a media market contiguous to the market in which that visit occurred, than if they lived elsewhere in the state. Awareness was highest among respondents who lived in the media market where the campaign visit occurred.

number of volunteers, or mobilization are strongest at the local level. By focusing on a smaller geographical unit of analysis, researchers are more likely to uncover the actual effect of a visit, rather than the influence of unrelated campaign activities in the same state.” Counties – “perhaps the fundamental political geographic unit in the U.S.” (Althaus, Nardulli, and Shaw 2002, 55) – therefore should be particularly sensitive to the direct effects of campaign visits.

The second reason for using county-level data in this analysis is a practical one. Because state-level campaign visits in 2016 were very highly correlated across parties (0.90) and within party tickets (0.89 for Trump-Pence, 0.93 for Clinton-Kaine), testing their effects for each candidate via multivariate regression results in a high degree of multicollinearity. Specifically, I find that the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) exceeds acceptable levels (approximately 10) for three of the four candidate visit variables in each variation of the empirical models described below, when using state-level data. County-level data, on the other hand, present no such problems. The correlation between candidate visits, at the county level, is not nearly as high (0.63 for Trump-Pence, 0.66 for Clinton-Kaine), and so the VIF is (well) below 10 for every variable presented in the empirical models that follow.

### *Variables*

The dependent variable in each model is the vote percentage won by either the Republican or Democratic ticket in each county, in 2016. I do not use two-party vote share since minor party and independent candidates were unusually competitive in this election, winning a higher percentage of the vote (6%), combined, than at any time since 1996.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Election results come from David Leip’s Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections, accessed February 23, 2018, <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS>.

The independent variables in each model represent the number of campaign visits made by each presidential or vice presidential candidate to a given county. I include variables for each candidate, rather than each ticket, since previous studies (see above) indicate that visit effects may vary by candidate, including those belonging to different tickets or the same ticket.

To isolate the independent effects of campaign visits, I add a number of relevant control variables to each model. First, to account for demographic characteristics likely to influence county vote share, I include control variables measuring each county's: median age; median household income (in thousands of dollars); percentage of population growth (2010-2015); percentage of college graduates; percentage of African-Americans; percentage of Latinos; number of evangelical Protestants (per thousand residents).<sup>7</sup> Second, to account for the influence of campaign advertising, I include a control variable measuring the ratio of Democratic to Republican ads aired within each county's Designated Market Area (DMA) in the final weeks of the campaign.<sup>8</sup> Finally, to provide a baseline for analyzing effects on vote choice, I include a

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<sup>7</sup> Data for each of the demographic controls, except evangelical Protestants, come from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Fact Finder (accessed February 23, 2018, <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>) or QuickFacts (accessed February 23, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00>) web tools. Data on evangelical Protestants come from the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies' 2010 U.S. Religion Census, accessed February 23, 2018, <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/RCMSCY10.asp>.

<sup>8</sup> Advertising data come from Kantar Media/CMAG, with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project. See Figure 1 here: "Clinton Crushes Trump 3:1 in Air War," Wesleyan Media Project, accessed February 23, 2018, <http://mediaproject.wesleyan.edu/releases/nov-2016/#table1>. To

control variable representing party voting in the 2012 presidential election. Specifically, this variable represents the percentage of the 2012 presidential vote won by the Republican (Democratic) Party's candidate, in a given county, when testing the Republican (Democratic) vote share model.

I also cluster the standard errors by DMA in each model, since many counties belong to the same media market, thus exposing them to the same campaign ads and roughly the same local coverage of campaign visits. This makes it inappropriate to assume that each observation is independent and identically distributed.

## **Results**

Table 2 summarizes campaign visit effects in 2016. Specifically, it presents results from two linear regression models predicting Democratic (first column) and Republican (second column) county vote percentages, using aggregated data from all of the included battleground states.

(Table 2)

### *Aggregated Analysis*

The results from Table 2 indicate that campaign visits generally did not influence voting in 2016, in terms of county-level vote share. Indeed, none of the campaign visit variables reach

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identify the media market in which a given campaign visit took place, I use Nielsen Media Research's Fall 2016 Designated Market Area (DMA) definitions (Kantar Media 2016). Nielsen assigns each U.S. county to one discrete DMA, using audience estimates for local commercial stations. Because many counties can access stations from different media markets, a given county's DMA may vary from year to year based upon viewership trends.

the conventional  $p < .05$  significance level. Only the variable representing Tim Kaine's campaign visits is significant at  $p < .10$  in the Democratic vote model, with its coefficient indicating a 0.54% increase in vote share, per visit. But it would be inappropriate to treat this as an actual effect, since the variable does not reach conventional significance levels and it has no comparable effect in the Republican vote model.

Generally, these results are not surprising, since most studies indicate that campaign visits have no effect, or only modest effects, on voting behavior (see Wood 2016). Also, Clinton and Kaine, on the Democratic ticket, and Mike Pence, on the Republican ticket, by reputation were not particularly exciting or dynamic campaigners. Donald Trump's null results, on the other hand, perhaps are surprising; after all, Trump's rallies attracted massive crowds and they seemed to energize the local Republican base. Given these findings, it may be the case that Trump merely preached to the choir at his events, and failed to attract any new voters. Or, perhaps, he made gains but cancelled them out by alienating an approximately equal number of local voters. In any case, while Trump was more active than Clinton on the campaign trail (see Table 1), this evidence indicates that he was no more effective than Clinton at campaigning for votes in battleground states.

It is also important to note that each empirical model does exceptionally well at predicting county-level vote share, accounting for approximately 95% of the variance. Moreover, the control variables generally perform as expected, and quite consistently, across both models. Specifically, I find that Democrats (Republicans) earned a higher (lower) percentage of the vote in counties with a greater population of college graduates, African-Americans, and Latinos, and where Democrats (Republicans) performed better in the 2012

presidential election. These results encourage confidence in the models, and in their ability to detect the actual effects of campaign visits.<sup>9</sup>

### *State-Specific Analysis*

Previous research indicates that campaign visit effects may vary across candidates and electoral circumstances (e.g., election year, state competitiveness). It seems unwarranted, then, to assume that the effects of a given candidate's visits will be uniform across states, even in the same election year. Rather, some candidates may be more effective at campaigning in some states than in others, reflecting an interaction between state and candidate characteristics. For instance, the local appeal of Donald Trump's populist economic message and trade policies might have made his visits to Rust Belt states such as Michigan more effective at generating grassroots enthusiasm and positive media coverage. Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, might have been less effective in those states given her reputation for struggling to connect with

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<sup>9</sup> It is a plausible concern that including these control variables in the model masks campaign visit effects, particularly if candidates tend to visit demographically-advantageous counties in an effort to mobilize supporters. However, I do not find that the demographic controls correlate highly with candidate visits. In nearly every case, the correlation is below 0.20. The highest such correlation in the dataset is 0.27 (for county population change and Trump visits), and for Clinton's visits it is only 0.21 (Latino percentage). Furthermore, the demographic controls only weakly predict the number of candidate visits to a given county. For each candidate, I regressed his or her county-level visits on the county demographic controls included in each model. The R-Squared value indicates that demographics explain only 10.8% of the variance in Clinton's campaign visits; 11.0% for Donald Trump; 11.3% for Tim Kaine; and 8.7% for Mike Pence.

working-class voters, and her muddled trade policies. Indeed, during the presidential primaries, Trump scored an impressive win in Michigan while Clinton suffered an embarrassing defeat there. By the same token, Clinton's style and message might have played more favorably, and Trump's less favorably, in relatively prosperous and college-educated states such as North Carolina. In that case, this analysis might indicate that one candidate's campaign visits attracted voters, while the other repelled voters or had no effect on voting, in a particular state.

To evaluate the state-specific effects of campaign visits in 2016, I re-estimate the models from Table 2 separately for each of six key battleground states: Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. As previously noted, the first four states hosted the most campaign visits in 2016, while the last two states – plus Pennsylvania – effectively decided the election. It is also worth noting that the first three states in recent elections were more competitive, or even Republican-leaning, while the last three states were more Democratic-leaning, in that they had not voted for a Republican presidential candidate since the 1980s.

Table 3 presents results from the first set of regression models, testing campaign visit effects in Florida (columns 1 and 2), North Carolina (columns 3 and 4), and Ohio (columns 5 and 6). In most cases, these results affirm the conclusion from Table 2 that campaign visits generally did not influence county-level voting in 2016. In Florida and North Carolina – the first- and second-most visited states, respectively – none of the campaign visit variables reach conventional significance levels. However, in Ohio, Mike Pence's visits had a statistically significant effect on voting, and in the expected directions. Specifically, these results indicate that a Pence visit to the Buckeye State increased Republicans' vote share by 1.22%, and decreased Democrats' vote share by 1.26%, in the county where that visit occurred. This finding

is particularly noteworthy because, as Table 1 shows, Pence visited Ohio more often than any other state (24 times).

(Table 3)

But this is the only reliable evidence that campaign visits influenced voting in Florida, North Carolina, or Ohio. For Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, and Tim Kaine, their visits had no discernible effect – at conventional or even marginal significance levels – on voting in any of these states.

Table 4 presents results from the second set of regression models, testing campaign visit effects in Pennsylvania (columns 1 and 2), Michigan (columns 3 and 4), and Wisconsin (columns 5 and 6). It is particularly interesting to consider these results since Trump won each state by less than one percentage point, and, collectively, their electoral votes decided the election in his favor. Therefore, if campaign visits changed, or could have changed, the election's outcome, their effects probably would have to be detectable in these states.

(Table 4)

The results from Table 4 further affirm that campaign visits had little effect on voting in 2016, this time within the most critical battleground states. Only one candidate's visits significantly influenced vote choice, at  $p > .05$ : Hillary Clinton, in Pennsylvania. Specifically, a Clinton visit to Pennsylvania increased Democrats' vote share, in a given county, by 1.2 percentage points, while decreasing Republicans' vote share by 1.1 percentage points. There is also weak evidence that Clinton's visits influenced voting in Michigan. This variable is significant at  $p < .10$  in the Democratic vote model, only, and it is positively signed. However, like Kaine's overall performance in Table 2, this ought not to be treated as evidence of an actual

effect, since the variable falls short of conventional significance levels ( $p = 0.072$ ) in this model and it is not significant in the Republican vote model.

This pattern of results begs the question: What made Clinton a particularly effective campaigner in Pennsylvania? Perhaps it was the fact that she had represented a neighboring state, New York, for eight years in the U.S. Senate, and thus enjoyed something of a geographic advantage. Indeed, the only other candidate whose campaign visits significantly influenced voting, according to this analysis, was Indiana Governor Mike Pence, in his neighboring state of Ohio. However, Pence's visits had no such effect in another neighboring state, Michigan. Nor did Virginia Senator Tim Kaine's visits have such an effect in his neighboring state of North Carolina.<sup>10</sup> For that matter, Donald Trump also came from New York, but, unlike Clinton, his visits had no discernible effect on voters in neighboring Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvanians also might have been more responsive to Clinton's campaign visits because the state hosted her party's convention, in Philadelphia, in 2016. But Ohio hosted the Republican Party's convention, in Cleveland, that year, and Donald Trump enjoyed no such advantage there. For that matter, Tim Kaine's visits were ineffective in Pennsylvania, yet he, too, was nominated (for vice president) at the Democratic convention in Philadelphia.

Perhaps, then, Clinton had a particular rapport with Pennsylvania voters because she visited the state so frequently during the 2016 campaign, and she had campaigned there often during the 2008 and 2016 Democratic presidential primaries. But much the same could be said for other states in which Clinton's visits had no apparent effect. For example, Clinton visited

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<sup>10</sup> In a separate analysis, I tested the same model using data from Kaine's home state of Virginia. I find that Kaine's visits to the state, as well as Trump's and Pence's visits, had no effect on vote choice. (Clinton made no campaign visits to Virginia.)

Florida (23) more often than Pennsylvania (18), and she visited North Carolina (17) and Ohio (15) nearly as often. She also campaigned extensively in each of these states during one, if not two, earlier Democratic primaries. Yet it was only in Pennsylvania that Clinton's visits had a discernible effect on voting.

It is, therefore, unclear why Clinton's campaign visits influenced voting in Pennsylvania, and not in other states. On two other important points, though, this evidence is quite clear. First, I find no evidence that Clinton's visits in any state, including Michigan, "backfired" as some of her campaign officials reportedly feared. Instead, Clinton successfully campaigned for votes in Pennsylvania, and there is weak evidence that the same might have been true in Michigan. At worst, Clinton's visits were ineffective in some states; but they were not counterproductive.

Second, I find no evidence that Donald Trump's campaign visits had any effect on voting in battleground states, including the two states in which his presence and Clinton's (relative) absence have attracted so much attention: Michigan and Wisconsin. Indeed, there is no reason to believe that Trump's victories in those decisive states, and in Pennsylvania, are directly attributable to his (or Pence's) campaigning there more frequently than Clinton. If anything, Clinton's effective campaigning in Pennsylvania was partly responsible for narrowing her deficit in that state to only 44,000 votes.

## **Discussion**

So, what if Hillary Clinton *had* gone to Wisconsin? And what if she had gone to Michigan more often? There is no way to answer such counterfactual questions with empirical certainty. However, it is possible – and, indeed, it is quite important – to test these questions' underlying assumptions against the available evidence, in order to evaluate their credibility. I

test two assumptions in this analysis. The first is that campaign visits have a significant and positive effect on electoral performance, in general. The second is that Hillary Clinton's campaign visits had a significant and positive effect on her electoral performance in 2016, specifically, such that she would have gained votes in battleground states including Michigan and Wisconsin had she visited those states (more often). In fact, the evidence does not clearly sustain either of these assumptions.

First, it is not the case that campaign visits generally improved electoral performance in 2016. The regression analyses presented in Table 2 indicate that none of the major party presidential or vice presidential candidates – including Clinton – significantly influenced voting in battleground states, as a whole, via campaign visits. Furthermore, when separately analyzing campaign visit effects within six key battleground states – Florida, Ohio, and North Carolina, in Table 3; Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, in Table 4 – I find no evidence that Clinton's opponent, Donald Trump, or her running mate, Tim Kaine, influenced voters.

Second, it is not safe to assume that Hillary Clinton would have gained votes in Wisconsin had she campaigned there, or in Michigan had she campaigned there more often. Clinton did, in fact, campaign effectively in the Democratic-leaning battleground state of Pennsylvania, gaining more than one percent of the vote share in a given county, per visit. Also, there is weak – but not sufficiently reliable – evidence that her campaign visits had a similar effect in Michigan. Nonetheless, these results are only suggestive of Clinton's potential effectiveness in Wisconsin. It would be going too far to conclude that she would have gained votes, or even won, in that state had she campaigned there. If this were the case, one would also expect to find that Clinton's visits influenced voting in battleground states, generally, and in several particular battleground states. Instead, there is only one piece of evidence – her

performance in Pennsylvania – to clearly associate Clinton’s campaign visits with an improvement in her electoral performance. For that matter, neither Clinton’s running mate nor her Republican opponents won votes in Wisconsin or Michigan by visiting those states. Therefore, to assume that Clinton would have won in Wisconsin if she had visited that state, or Michigan if she had visited there more often, is to assume too much.

But this does not absolve the Clinton campaign of responsibility for losing the 2016 election. Indeed, there is plenty of reason to believe that the candidate and the campaign were flawed in serious ways that directly contributed to the election’s outcome, in general and particularly in states such as Michigan and Wisconsin (see Allen and Parnes 2017). For instance, during the last two weeks of October the Clinton campaign’s absence from Wisconsin was almost as apparent on the airwaves as on the ground. According to my analysis of the advertising data previously described, during this critical period Republicans aired *nine times more* campaign ads than Democrats in Wisconsin media markets (2,437 to 276, respectively). This was the third-worst ad ratio for Democrats nationwide, behind only Tennessee (192 total ads) and Washington, D.C. (382), neither of which were competitive states or the actual targets for these ads. Yet Wisconsin was, and should have been treated as, one of the nation’s most competitive and potentially-decisive battleground states. The Clinton campaign did not treat it as such, and in fact it seemed blind-sided by the outcome in that state. Clinton (2017, 394) concedes this point, in her campaign memoirs: “If there’s one place where we were caught by surprise, it was Wisconsin.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Clinton also makes clear that campaign visits would have been the surest means of addressing her weakness in Wisconsin, had she perceived it. She writes: “if our data (or anyone else’s) had shown we were in danger [in Wisconsin], of course we would have invested even more

In that case, perhaps the most appropriate response to the now-familiar taunt that Hillary Clinton should have visited Wisconsin is that – like so many things in politics – it is not necessarily wrong, but it is lacking in nuance. In fact, Clinton’s absence from Wisconsin almost certainly had no material effect on the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. This is because her loss did not hinge on that state’s vote, alone; as it turned out, Clinton needed to win in Pennsylvania and Michigan, as well as Wisconsin, in order to secure a majority in the Electoral College. Furthermore, as Clinton rightly notes in her memoirs, she *did* campaign heavily in Pennsylvania – visiting the state more often than any other, except Florida – but lost there, anyway. “So it’s just not credible that the best explanation for the outcome in [Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin] – and therefore the election – was where I held rallies,” (Clinton 2017, 395) she concludes. I find it difficult to refute this argument.

But the broader argument, which gives life to the Wisconsin narrative, rings true: the Clinton campaign systematically underestimated Donald Trump’s strength, misjudged the electoral map, and misallocated resources accordingly – investing too heavily in states such as Ohio and Iowa where it had little chance of winning, while investing too little in states such as Michigan and Wisconsin where it was most vulnerable. In that case, Hillary Clinton’s failure to visit Wisconsin may not be a plausible explanation for her loss to Donald Trump in the 2016 election, but it is a powerful metaphor for the more complex flaws of a campaign, and a candidate, that seemed to take victory for granted.

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[resources in that state]. I would have torn up my schedule... and camped out there” (Clinton 2017, 394-395).

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<b>State</b>	<b>Trump</b>	<b>Pence</b>	<b>Clinton</b>	<b>Kaine</b>	<b>Total</b>
Florida	25	10	23	26	84
North Carolina	19	20	17	15	71
Pennsylvania	19	15	18	17	69
Ohio	19	24	15	10	68
Michigan	9	8	5	5	27
Wisconsin	5	4	0	6	15
United States	157	148	101	109	515

Table 1: Presidential Campaign Visits in U.S. and Key Battleground States, 2016

Parameter	Democratic Vote %	Republican Vote %
Median Age	-0.016 (0.023)	0.079* (0.032)
Median HH Income (\$1,000)	-0.019 (0.034)	-0.005 (0.039)
% College Graduates	0.350*** (0.071)	-0.387*** (0.080)
% Latinos	0.100*** (0.022)	-0.122*** (0.017)
% African-Americans	0.266*** (0.018)	-0.209*** (0.017)
Evangelical Protestants/1,000	0.000 (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)
% Population Change (2010-2015)	0.158* (0.068)	-0.139^ (0.074)
TV Ad Ratio (Dem:Rep)	-0.010^ (0.006)	0.015* (0.006)
Trump Visits	0.146 (0.154)	-0.087 (0.168)
Pence Visits	0.164 (0.241)	-0.375 (0.259)
Clinton Visits	-0.024 (0.155)	0.161 (0.179)
Kaine Visits	0.537^ (0.279)	-0.402 (0.279)
Party Presidential Vote %, 2012	0.764*** (0.032)	0.795*** (0.036)
Constant	-6.936** (2.385)	23.557*** (2.145)
R-Squared	0.954	0.944
N	796	796

Table 2: Predictors of County-Level Vote Percentage, 2016

Entries are linear regression coefficients. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05; ^p < 0.10.

The dependent variables represents the vote percentage won by the Democratic or Republican presidential ticket, by county, in 2016. Observations include each county in each state that hosted ten or more campaign visits. Observations are clustered by Designated Media Market (DMA).

Parameter	Florida		North Carolina		Ohio	
	Dem. %	Rep. %	Dem. %	Rep. %	Dem. %	Rep. %
Median Age	0.009 (0.050)	0.043 (0.049)	0.063 (0.045)	-0.023 (0.051)	-0.346* (0.149)	0.410* (0.145)
Median HH Income (\$1,000)	0.027 (0.059)	-0.069 (0.056)	-0.031 (0.068)	0.027 (0.071)	0.224** (0.064)	-0.270** (0.065)
% College Graduates	0.319*** (0.055)	-0.357*** (0.053)	0.396*** (0.065)	-0.425*** (0.077)	0.031 (0.063)	-0.034 (0.066)
% Latinos	0.131*** (0.019)	-0.117*** (0.018)	0.200*** (0.040)	-0.175** (0.039)	-0.001 (0.095)	-0.141 (0.126)
% African-Americans	0.226*** (0.039)	-0.183*** (0.036)	0.225*** (0.025)	-0.196*** (0.023)	0.582*** (0.049)	-0.570*** (0.045)
Evangelical Protestants/1,000	0.006* (0.002)	-0.009** (0.003)	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.004)
% Population Change (2010-2015)	0.072 (0.042)	-0.064 (0.036)	-0.055 (0.040)	0.014 (0.056)	0.259 (0.274)	-0.281 (0.297)
TV Ad Ratio (Dem:Rep)	0.014 (0.034)	-0.045 (0.030)	0.023^ (0.010)	-0.020^ (0.010)	0.019* (0.008)	-0.028* (0.009)
Trump Visits	-0.039 (0.211)	0.153 (0.212)	0.170 (0.167)	-0.234 (0.141)	0.157 (0.348)	0.027 (0.346)
Pence Visits	0.485 (0.415)	-0.845^ (0.405)	-0.157 (0.443)	0.063 (0.438)	-1.264* (0.459)	1.217* (0.511)
Clinton Visits	0.209 (0.145)	-0.075 (0.139)	-0.432 (0.327)	0.528 (0.350)	0.575 (0.334)	-0.510 (0.333)
Kaine Visits	-0.163 (0.267)	0.201 (0.274)	0.136 (0.517)	-0.235 (0.461)	0.393 (0.736)	-0.475 (0.702)
Party Presidential Vote %, 2012	0.819*** (0.040)	0.866*** (0.041)	0.815*** (0.044)	0.837*** (0.041)	0.791*** (0.051)	0.822*** (0.047)
Constant	-13.500* (4.510)	28.305*** (4.856)	-12.903* (5.418)	26.119*** (4.037)	-3.983 (7.644)	20.003** (5.500)
R-Squared	0.991	0.992	0.992	0.991	0.971	0.970
N	68	68	100	100	87	87

Table 3: Predictors of County-Level Vote Percentage in Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, 2016

Entries are linear regression coefficients. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05; ^p < 0.10.

The dependent variables represents the vote percentage won by the Democratic or Republican presidential ticket, by county, in 2016. Observations include each county from the states of Florida, North Carolina, and Ohio. Observations are clustered by Designated Media Market (DMA).

Parameter	Pennsylvania		Michigan		Wisconsin	
	Dem. %	Rep. %	Dem. %	Rep. %	Dem. %	Rep. %
Median Age	-0.287 (0.210)	0.380 (0.252)	0.059* (0.023)	0.006 (0.020)	0.031 (0.039)	0.103* (0.030)
Median HH Income (\$1,000)	-0.096 (0.088)	0.120 (0.088)	-0.083 (0.047)	0.086 (0.067)	0.003 (0.061)	-0.031 (0.073)
% College Graduates	0.729*** (0.163)	-0.793*** (0.130)	0.530*** (0.021)	-0.562*** (0.039)	0.427*** (0.039)	-0.505*** (0.048)
% Latinos	0.443* (0.157)	-0.486*** (0.111)	0.251*** (0.047)	-0.311*** (0.067)	0.192^ (0.101)	-0.219^ (0.111)
% African-Americans	0.414** (0.132)	-0.430** (0.113)	0.199*** (0.030)	-0.159*** (0.034)	0.223 (0.121)	-0.152 (0.116)
Evangelical Protestants/1,000	-0.008 (0.008)	0.014 (0.009)	-0.002 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)	0.009* (0.003)	-0.012* (0.004)
% Population Change (2010-15)	-0.561 (0.335)	0.487 (0.304)	0.024 (0.078)	-0.053 (0.133)	0.307 (0.232)	-0.088 (0.192)
TV Ad Ratio (Dem:Rep)	0.023 (0.036)	0.054 (0.053)	-0.010 (0.007)	0.014 (0.008)	-0.005 (0.005)	0.007^ (0.003)
Trump Visits	1.443 (0.972)	-1.646 (0.999)	0.158 (0.998)	-0.811 (1.215)	0.239 (0.815)	-0.130 (0.576)
Pence Visits	1.562 (0.920)	-1.764^ (0.888)	0.391 (0.840)	-0.073 (1.159)	0.283 (0.994)	-0.450 (1.117)
Clinton Visits	1.191* (0.497)	-1.071* (0.380)	1.010^ (0.503)	-1.035 (0.836)	- -	- -
Kaine Visits	-0.084 (0.712)	-0.041 (0.730)	-0.928 (1.223)	2.340 (1.435)	-0.828 (1.341)	0.722 (1.548)
Party Presidential Vote %, 2012	0.295 (0.196)	0.201 (0.125)	0.774*** (0.021)	0.783*** (0.024)	0.920*** (0.041)	0.938*** (0.042)
Constant	15.816 (13.664)	54.127*** (10.154)	-10.994** (2.907)	25.880*** (2.245)	-19.594* (5.687)	19.962*** (2.912)
R-Squared	0.960	0.951	0.984	0.976	0.978	0.976
N	67	67	83	83	71	71

Table 4: Predictors of County-Level Vote Percentage in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, 2016

Entries are linear regression coefficients. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05; ^p < 0.10.

The dependent variables represents the vote percentage won by the Democratic or Republican presidential ticket, by county, in 2016. Observations include each county from the states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Observations are clustered by Designated Media Market (DMA).