Upholding Trust in Library Partnerships with Immigrants: Reflections on the Impact of Trump 2024

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ABSTRACT

Trump's 2024 election win simultaneously disrupts, contradicts, and reifies what we know about immigrants. This article describes how anti-immigrant political leaders capitalize on the practice of polarizing and marginalizing immigrants. The return of a populist leader and his characteristically divisive approach has magnified how immigrants contend with divisions and oppression. Trump relies on powerful immigrant loyalists to advance his objectives while vulnerable immigrants face tantamount harm. The technology sector plays a part in this, and the library profession can as well.

When it comes to the 2024 election, immigrants' political participation and social inclusion presented an antinomy. The far right's America-first campaign messaging, on the one hand, continuously vilified immigrants. To be sure, xenophobic US leaders have long scapegoated immigrants of all backgrounds, who are perceived as "poisoning the blood" of United States society (Lee and Ueda 2006; O'Brien 2024). Yet, anti-immigrant sentiment has not been this mainstreamed since the Know Nothing party's mid-nineteenth-century ascendancy and eventual demise. Although the 2024 Republican presidential candidate targeted immigrants of all kinds, including Asian and Black diasporic immigrants such as those from China and Haiti, respectively, those of Central American Hispanic heritage were especially singled out (Zheng and Zompetti 2023). To some, immigrants are beyond our national imagery. An "all-American" monocultural ideal now prevails in the highest levels of government; this purist ideology relies on exclusionary views of US citizenship, broadly construed. It results in the suppression of educational curricula, cultural heritage celebrations, established terminology, and the arts. Mandates to establish a single US story have brought changes to how the public perceives classic literature, celebrates Black History Month, and learns about the US government (Fairfax and Akande 2023; Journell 2024). These restrictions jeopardize trust in our institutions, including schools, libraries, archives, museums, and governance.

At the same time, it *is* true that immigrants are changing United States society. Immigrants are indeed transforming the nation's demographic composition and cultural richness. Hispanics of all races now comprise the largest ethnicity in the United States (US Census Bureau 2023)—so much so that the US Census Bureau now recognizes this segment

of the population as a racial group, which poses myriad political and social challenges. In this moment of extreme political polarization, it is therefore not a matter of whether it is true that the immigrant segment of the population is growing and diverse but whether this really poses a threat. That the US is home to the most diverse immigrant population, with new neighbors from every other country in the world, is either a source of honor or worry for many (Moslimani and Passel 2024).

Multiple things can thus be true at once: Immigrants can be disenfranchised by the powerful majority who seek to define the nation's racial, social, and cultural consciousness. It is also possible that constituents of immigrant heritage uphold this assimilationist ideology. Further still, immigrants can belong to the status quo to the extent that they perpetuate anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies. Here, we reflect on how the library workforce can better comprehend the multiplex that is immigrant sociopolitical identity. We can no longer rely on simplistic framings such that immigrants are cast as politically and informationally dispossessed. Some immigrants hold, enact, and abuse power. These dynamics are not divorced from the information sector and, as we will argue, emanate from remarkably fraught structures that have long limited the United States' capacity to truly be a plural society.

We identify as a generation 1.5 (who immigrated as a teenager or adolescent) Asian immigrant and an Afro-Latina Central American former asylee. Our positionalities and studies bring us to problematize assumptions about immigrants' political capacities. We therefore ask: *What aspects of immigrant identity formation, information determinism, and public trust has the LIS field overlooked? What are the paradoxes around immigrants' political power, anti-immigration, and information access?* Our goal is that these provocations, presented as intertwined facets, will inspire strategies for library-immigrant community partnerships rooted in realism.

Looking Back

To explore whether and how the LIS field discussed the impact of the first Trump administration on immigrant communities, we turned to articles related to serving immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers published around the first presidency of Donald Trump (2017–21). Our goal was to trace topics, trends, and themes about Trump's first term to contextualize library engagement and pinpoint the conceptual changes thereafter, notably during Biden's 2020–24 term. Our review revealed substantial coverage in *The Political Librarian, The Library Quarterly, and The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion (IJIDI)*.* Following the 2016 election, *The Library Quarterly* published a two-part special issue titled "Aftermath: Libraries, Democracy, and the 2016 Presidential Election." These special volumes included topics related to immigrants, namely information sources (Adkins et al. 2017) and civic education (Bossaller 2017). Some pieces used Trump's presidency as a case study to reflect on key issues in the field of LIS. Caidi, Ghaddar, and Allard (2017) explored the resurgence of divisive politics and the need to move beyond neutrality. Gibson and Hughes-Hassell (2017) noted the importance of continuing support for diversity, equity, and inclusion, while Mehra's (2017) reflection focused on the implication of Trump's presidency on political information literacy and economic development in rural America. Beyond these special issues, there were occasional one-off information science publications, such as Worrall and colleagues' (2022) examination of Trump's birthright citizenship Twitter speech acts and Ceja-Alcalá, Colón-Aguirre, and Alaniz's (2018) action research with the Latinx community

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* For LISS, we used the query strings: immigra* OR refuge* OR asyl* OR migrants AND librar* AND trump and limited the search from 2016 to 2025.

in Boston in response to Trump's Executive Order 13768, emphasizing the importance of record literacy for immigrant rights advocacy in information organizations.

Yet, in the years following Trump's first term, few LIS articles focused on his political dominance. There was, however, gradual growth in works on immigrants' information behavior. A sample of topics include gatekeeping factors in engaging with Latin American immigrants in rural areas (Adkins and Sandy 2018), participatory game strategy to protect migrants' privacy (Gomez et al. 2020), young refugee women's migratory experience in post-secondary education (Luck and Santamaria 2020), and situation-focused approach to understanding refugee integration (Oduntan and Ruthven 2017). Kosciejew (2019) emphasized the important role that public libraries hold in providing refugees access to the tools they need to navigate unfamiliar information landscapes.

Nonetheless, we posit that, collectively, the LIS field's focus on immigrant information behavior or LIS service to immigrants was not proportionate with the outsized attention to immigration in the media and politics. The research was meager. Further, gauging by the number and types of publications after Trump's loss in 2020, the field was relatively silent on Trump's normalization of anti-immigrant rhetoric. Despite initial efforts to make sense of the 2016 election, this topic of conversation—and that of immigrants' information realities—was hardly sustained. We wonder whether the LIS field perceived Trump's first presidential term and its attendant nativist and racially charged politics as a one-hit-wonder fluke that opposes US mores. We now know that much of the nation preferred a populist and absolutist political leader. Our field has not examined the lasting impact of Trump's first administration's frenzied, hardline handling of immigration policy. Apropos, the available literature appears to characterize immigrant and refugee groups as marginalized and at risk without attending to much-needed in-group distinctions. In doing so, the LIS workforce ignores the power differentials within. In what follows, we describe the harm caused by immigrant underestimations and homogenization broadly enacted by actors on either side—distinctly, immigrant advocates and xenophobic demagogues.

Facet 1: Immigrants' Voting Patterns Defy Notions of and Attempts at Immigrant Disenfranchisement

The 2024 election solidified that immigrants are a powerful and complex voting bloc. Bureaucratic naturalization and voter registration processes historically undermine voting propensity among naturalized citizens, but those who were able to cast ballots play a key role (Frimgpong and Sanchez 2024). Fifty-three percent or 23.8 million of all eligible naturalized citizens voted, according to recent Pew Research Center data (Schaeffer 2024). Put simply, not all immigrants are politically disenfranchised. A growing number choose to exercise their civic right in lieu of divesting from US governance. This reality is often overlooked, which reduces immigrants' political agency. In spite of repeated threats of hardline immigration and mass deportation during Trump's 2024 presidential campaign, the turnout among immigrant voters was relatively strong. Trump's rhetoric serves a perlocutionary purpose, as posited by Searle's (1969; 1979) speech act theory, in that it signals who should and can be members of a political community. It positions immigrants as "semi-citizens" (Chen and Knapp 2021). Rather than a chilling effect, the election energized many naturalized immigrants and US-born relatives of immigrants in both expected and unexpected ways.

To grasp the here and now, we should look back. The 2024 election pattern contrasts that of 2020, when there appeared to be election fatigue stemming from the COVID-19

pandemic and the 2020 census, of which anti-immigrant messaging demonstrably resulted in an undercount (Chen and Knapp 2021). For example, the Trump administration discouraged undocumented immigrants from responding to the census, though this duty is civically mandated for all permanent residents regardless of status. Notably, the eventual 2024 electoral map was influenced by 2020's unprecedented census enumerating challenges stemming from a global health crisis, dual response burdens, and long-standing problems with capturing transient and marginalized groups, including some migrants.

The 2024 election differed. When compared to 2020, it was fast-paced and unpredictable. In fact, the 2024 election broke many records, one directly linked to immigrant inclusion: The Democratic nominee, then-Vice President Kamala Harris, was the first descendant of Black and South Asian immigrants to run for office. Yet, she hardly held a gargantuan grip on voters of immigrant backgrounds. We touch on this fact further along.

Here, we bring attention to the duality of the promise and susceptibility of immigrant civic participation. Voter suppression often begins long before the polls open. This multifaceted inequity functions through census weaponization, including but not limited to reapportionment and gerrymandering battles; unnecessary and confusing voter registration requirements such as on-site, in-person proof of citizenship; predictable election-year naturalization backlogs; and unfounded rumors of noncitizens casting illegal votes (Chen and Knapp 2021). These are all means of intimidating would-be voters. We dial in on the census, citizenship, naturalization, and other legal definitions to emphasize the flaws in US race-making and social class stratification. In another venue, we (Ndumu and Orie Chuku 2023) write about how so-called "dry documents" are often used to paint a skewed picture of a nation's origin story—a type of machination that literally encompasses identity politics.

Many immigrants view voting and contributing to the public good as extensions of the quintessential American dream. At the same time, those opposing immigration seek to limit certain immigrants' full participation in the United States' political process. To be sure, this wanton redefinition of citizenship and belonging explains why it's possible to offer US citizenship for $5 million to wealthy immigrants through a "gold card" system (Spagat and Weissert 2025). When analyzed from a systems lens, the 2024 presidential (and concurrent congressional) election demonstrated that immigrants' political agency is strengthening in spite of, not because of, the country's democratic infrastructure. Under punitive circumstances, immigrants comprised a solid voter base. We cannot define immigrants by attempts to relegate them to the margins of US governance.

Facet 2: Trump's Populist Agenda Is Bolstered by Immigrants and Descendants of Recent Immigrants

Immigrants' growing political mobilization does not evince a collective and uniform experience. Wealthy and established immigrants may benefit from various social safety nets, while the most vulnerable are subjected to political suppression. The 2024 election revealed that established and powerful immigrants can very well be among the oppressors. Trump's nativist and populist messaging resonated with some, often established, immigrants. Thus, another quagmire lies in the fact that the immigrant community is not only diverse but also fragmented along political lines.

As a 2024 Brookings Institution report indicates, immigrant party affiliation and voter priorities are not uniform (Frimpong and Sanchez 2024). Historically, immigrants have leaned Democratic, but the 2024 election revealed new trends. A separate Pew Research

Center report makes important distinctions among immigrant groups. Drawing from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey and the 2000 IPUMS decennial census data, two racial groups with the most eligible naturalized voters were found to be Hispanic or Asian Americans (Schaeffer 2014). The Latino male votes were noted as a significant support group for Trump, contributing directly to the tight races in Arizona, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. Among Asian Americans, though the majority voted along Democratic lines, polls reported increased Asian American support for Republicans, particularly Trump. Crucially, most support for Kamala Harris came from Japanese voters (75 percent), while the biggest support for Donald Trump came from Filipino voters (45 percent). Another change within the Asian voter group entailed Chinese American voters who shifted from 72 percent support for Biden in the 2020 election to 53 percent for Harris in the 2024 election, resulting in increased support for the Republican Party from 27 percent in 2020 to 39 percent in 2024 (Montanaro 2025).

Religious affiliation, ethnoracial identity, and socioeconomic status were reliable determinants of voting preferences among immigrants. According to postelection research (Vergara 2024), the high cost of living concerned working-class immigrants, while Trump's perceived capitalist and business zeal attracted wealthy immigrants. There's religious in-group variance, too, though not entirely relating to faith systems or beliefs. Compared to US-born voters not of recent immigrant heritage, immigrants are almost twice as likely to hold conservative/very conservative religious views and still identify as a Democrat, with the exception of evangelical immigrants who reliably vote Republican. Trump gained fourteen points among Hispanic voters in 2024; white-identifying Hispanic voters particularly comprise a substantial Republican base. Stated differently, immigrant voters who aligned with Trump's religious, economic, and white Eurocentric agenda were more likely to support the Republican platform, even if doing so materially upheld stringent immigration policies and hate speech.

Some prominent right-wing actors are, in fact, descendants of immigrants. Trump is a child of immigrants, and his wife, Milania, immigrated thirty years ago. Candace Owens, the granddaughter of a Caribbean migrant, falsely claimed that "immigrants living in the US illegally who come from Mexico, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador are 'twice as likely' to commit crime than US-born citizens" (Kelety 2022). Former Proud Boys' chairperson, Enrique Tarrio, is an Afro-Cuban who espouses "closed borders" and touts the group's mantra of "reinstating a spirit of Western chauvinism" (McBain 2020). FBI Director Kash Patel, himself of Ugandan-Indian heritage, has long identified as a loyalist of the "widespread breath of the MAGA and the America First movement" (Patel 2022). Immigrants of color and/or descendants of immigrants can, indeed, parrot xenophobic ideology. Librarians and knowledge workers should make note of this overlooked intersectionality among immigrants.

Facet 3: The Information Sector Is Monopolized by People of Recent Immigrant Heritage and Relies on Newcomer Workers

The information and technology fields are encompassed in this paradigm shift. We cannot discuss the 2024 election without spotlighting the role of technology juggernauts such as South African-born Elon Musk, whose Teflon grip on the social media platform X has reshaped political discourse and information dissemination. Musk notoriously contributed $300 million toward Trump's campaign. Early into Trump's second term, Musk and fellow immigrant-descending tech mogul Vivek Ramaswamy were tasked with heading up Trump's

ad hoc Department of Government Efficiency. Among their initial priority areas was support for H1-B highly skilled visa workers who are essential to the information workforce (Musk and Ramaswamy 2024).

The conflict of interest is undeniable. Technology companies have been able to recruit talented workers from all over the world thanks to this nonimmigrant visa. Proponents claim that this recruitment strategy not only alleviates workforce shortages but also advances science and information. H1-B visa holders contribute to scientific and technological innovation, helping to roll out groundbreaking innovations and successful start-ups. On the other hand, H1-B visa holders face many restrictions and are seldom guaranteed pathways to permanent residence, much less citizenship. Though these workers directly contribute to the tools that often enable public discourse and civic engagement—including but not limited to databases, social media platforms, statistical analysis tools, and multimedia software—they lack the political capital to help shape the country's direction. In actuality, H1-B visa holders are the recipients of recent backlash among nativists who propagate presumed immigrant jobs *and* social replacements. All the while, companies like Facebook are walking back the fact-checking mechanisms that debunk these very conspiracy theories (Saric 2024). As tech billionaires like Mark Zuckerberg and Jeff Bezos celebrate their immigrant heritage, their products increasingly pose risks to vulnerable immigrant groups (Chirinos 2022).

The H-1B visa holder population is but one sample. Technology surveillance constitutes a powerful Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) apparatus. Civil liberties and immigration rights groups condemn ICE tracking, especially social media monitoring and biometric identification systems. They contend that these actions marginalize vulnerable groups and erect digital barriers for immigrants who use free or low-cost personal technology to remain connected to loved ones and resources. As librarian and law professor Sarah Lamdan (2022) writes, "Similarly, undocumented immigrants are more likely to be tracked by immigration enforcement the more they comply with US laws. They generate digital 'paper trails' by getting licenses and insurance, paying bills, sending kids to school, filing taxes, working and participating in society. Social participation makes people more findable… more likely to be snared by ICE." Companies like RELX are now bolstered even more by data mining abilities under the Trump administration. Some advocates worry that due process is being compromised and the distinction between criminal and civil actions is blurred as a result of the convergence of immigration enforcement and a technology-fueled justice system, as is the case with corporations like Secure Communities, Palantir, and Thomson Reuters. Immigrants' rights and protections are jeopardized by this trifecta.

Concluding Thoughts

Hate abounds. For more than a decade, Trump and his supporters have relied on immigrant caricaturing, appeals to American exceptionalism, and ethnocentric fearmongering to chip away at people's trust in US society. The erosion of public trust puts partnerships between libraries and immigrant communities at risk. Many immigrants find support in libraries. The library profession is comprised of immigrants, too. And our library colleagues around the world are watching as they absorb the ripple effects of what appears to be a global populist tidal wave.

Some library workers instinctively know how to respond: We must protect works by and about immigrants, sustain events celebrating world cultures, promote legal services and civic engagement in our spaces, and defend against attacks on library funding and governance. However, there are other less apparent steps we can take to reorient US democracy toward decency, reason, and human rights.

First, we should challenge typecasts suggesting immigrants are universally disenfranchised, downtrodden, and exploited. Immigrants, like other societal groups, demonstrate significant voting power and may exercise it in underestimated ways. We must question premises about immigrant identities. Just as xenophobes pedal essentialist or reductionist tropes, well-intending allies can do the same. There is no one universal immigrant identity, and one-size-fits-all assumptions mean we fail to recognize that immigrants, too, can find belonging among far-right extremists and align with propaganda. A conundrum about xenophobic misinformation is that some immigrants acquiesce. Thus, we must understand "upward assimilation" as a political locus of control among certain immigrants. For some, misperceptions of successful integration into mainstream US society shape their racial, political, and social identity formation. As we write elsewhere,

> Given the history of race-based immigration policy in the US, some immigrants are positioned as white assimilated "model minorities," a divisive stereotype that weaponizes notions of exceptionalism (Petersen 1966), while others are attributed to so-called maladaptive Americanization … fatalist cultural inscriptions based on racial constructions force minoritized immigrants of color into a US racial binary and inculpates their ways of being rather than the conditions that deepen poverty, displacement, and disruption. (Ndumu and Park 2025)

However, we cannot absolve dogmatic politicians of their responsibilities either. In addition to grasping their information tactics, expressly hate speech, censorship, and technology dominance, we must continue to uphold unfettered access to information. Library workers should still champion accurate, diverse, and democratized information *and* put it in the places most likely to reach far-right anti-immigrant extremists. Aside from our libraries, media spotlights and social networking content are possible avenues.

Our field must also model information literacy at this moment where anything goes. The information sector is moving away from debunking false information, and soon, moderators and fact-checkers may very well be as obsolete as phone operators. But our field can ensure that important concepts like *critical thinking* do not become extinct. We can start working now to reposition critical thinking as an essential post-Trump 2024 skill. Much like our well-known READ campaigns, we should get back to the basics of rallying caregivers, educators, and other leaders around evaluating the reliability and credibility of information sources. Our work should be about teaching all of society—immigrants, nativists, and everyone—to be discerning consumers of media who can distinguish fact from deceit. Critical consciousness also empowers immigrants to reject assimilationist ideology.

Finally, we must not let up in writing and researching about the Trump era's assault on immigrants. The lesson from the past is that Trump's ideology will be a mainstay in US politics for years to come. His dominance is not by happenstance. Restoring trust means counter-storytelling. In addition to wonderful special issues like this one, LIS leaders should publish widely and often so as to match stereotypes and bigotry with evidence, firsthand accounts, and substantiated knowledge. When it comes to contributing to the breadth of scholarship on immigrants' vast identities, the LIS field has a lot to offer. Several of our field's most vivid theories, such as Fisher's information grounds, emanate from studies alongside immigrants

(Pettigrew 1999). Community partners can and should join us in the work of documenting and publishing their information experiences.

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