

Trump got several things wrong at Michigan rally: Here's our fact check

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President Donald Trump's claims at a rally in mid-Michigan on Thursday that he has brought a lot of auto plants to the state isn't the only thing he got wrong.

He also made several claims regarding the polls, fuel economy standards and development in the suburbs that were off-base or exaggerated to say the least.

On Friday, the Free Press — which a day earlier reported on Trump's wildly inaccurate claims of having revitalized an auto industry that actually saw jobs decrease in Michigan even prior to COVID-19 hitting — went back and looked at some other claims. Here's what we found:

Obama killed the auto industry

Trump claimed that former President Barack Obama's administration "nearly killed" the U.S. auto industry. But Obama is widely credited for a package that helped rescue General Motors and Chrysler, pumping some \$80 billion into the companies to keep them solvent and helping them get rid of debt. At the time, in 2009, there were widespread worries that the companies could dissolve without help, destroying the supplier base, hurting other car companies and resulting in huge job losses nationally. And while Trump in his speech then veered into criticisms about trade deals, specifically the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership, which some said could negatively affect American car companies, no one suggested it posed as great a risk as the GM and Chrysler crisis of 2008-9.

Fuel economy standards

On mileage standards, Trump said his Democratic opponent, former Vice President Joe Biden, supported "outrageous fuel economy standards that have hammered the auto industry and I reversed them." He's correct that Biden supported the standards. But those standards, which were first announced in 2009 and set increased mile-per-gallon targets for automakers' fleets, were in place for seven years of consistent growth in U.S. auto sales. And while automakers, noting a trend toward higher sales of SUVs and other lower-mileage vehicles, wanted revisions by 2016 that the Obama administration declined to make, several companies have said they want higher targets to continue at some level. Ford Motor Co. and some other automakers have even agreed with California — which along with other states is suing the Trump administration over

its attempt to weaken those rules — to voluntarily keep improving fuel standards “at about the same rate as the former Obama-era program.”

People lie in polls

The president cited a survey suggesting that a majority of people lie — his word, not ours — when responding to polls, acknowledging he didn't remember exactly where he had seen that. Putting aside the contradiction of citing a statistic from a poll that says people lie on polls, we could find no such survey. What we did find was a survey released this summer by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think-tank in Washington, D.C., that found 62% of Americans "say the political climate these days prevents them from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive" and that the percentage of Americans who "self-censor" has risen in recent years. We don't know whether that was the content the president was referring to, but if so, it's not the same.

Biden wants to 'destroy' the suburbs

During a long riff on the suburbs, Trump accused Biden of wanting to “destroy” them, without providing any kind of evidence for that claim or what he could mean by that. Trump also suggested he had, or could, prevent a “resident of Antifa” from moving into a suburban neighborhood, though Antifa is a loosely organized anti-fascist movement, the members of which have been involved in some violent protests, especially in counter-protests involving white supremacists. Since there is no structured organization, however, it's not known what he meant, and there are strict rules against housing discrimination. Meanwhile, he repeated a claim that he ended a regulation that “forced” projects to be built in the suburbs. But there never was any such rule. In 2015, the Obama administration passed a rule requiring recipients of federal housing funds to take steps to review programs and ensure they were meeting fair housing guidelines, not require zoning changes or that low-income projects be built in certain areas.

Auto and auto parts firms

Trump got some things at least partially right. For instance, at one point he said his administration added more than 200 auto and auto parts plants nationally since taking office. Plants, especially small ones, are hard to track, but Kristin Dziczek, vice president of industry, labor and economics at the Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor, said the nation did add 213 auto and auto parts firms during Trump's first three years in office. Trump also said that the nation lost 500 of those plants "during the Obama-Biden disaster." It's true that, overall, the nation shed 622 auto and auto parts firms during the eight years of the Obama administration, but most of those losses occurred during a recession already underway when Obama took office. Growth in the number of firms began late in Obama's first term, continued through his second term and through the first three years of Trump's term.

Employment, as the Free Press has already noted, however, had started to falter even before COVID-19 hit this year.