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Far-Right Extremism in America: A Geospatial Analysis of Incident Distribution

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Far-Right Extremism in America: A Geospatial Analysis of Incident Distribution

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Abstract

There has been little empirical research on the spatial relationship of violent far-right extremism. Previous studies have only focused on portions of far-right violent incidents, such as homicides, or amalgamated all far-right extremist activity, including legal incidents. This study uses data from the Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) and Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) in a temporal frame of 2000 to 2018 to test the relationship of violent incidents against geographic and social factors. The goal is to explore the relationships between macro-level factors and violent far-right extremist incident. The research determines that the presence of hate groups, higher immigrant populations, higher unemployment rates, higher education levels and higher urbanicity in counties all indicate an increased likelihood a violent extremist far-right incident will take place.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States, research and public discourse on the topic of terrorism has centered primarily on the threat of Islamic extremism (Riffikin, 2015; Reignhart, 2017). However, far-right extremists, including both white supremacists (e.g., neo-Nazis) and anti-government extremists (e.g., members of the Patriot movement), have remained active throughout U.S. history and are responsible for some of the deadliest domestic terrorist attacks to date (Hewitt, 2003). In fact, a recent report found that far-right extremists perpetrated nearly three times more violent incidents resulting in death than Islamic extremists between September 12, 2001 and December 31, 2016 (Office of U.S. Government Accountability 2017). The 2014 anti-Semitic shooting at the Overland Park Jewish Community Center which claimed three lives and the racially-motivated 2015 Charleston Church shooting that resulted in nine fatalities of parishioners are among these incidents (Eligon, 2015; Horowitz, Corasaniti, & Southall, 2015). Several more recent deadly extremist attacks have occurred since the 2017 report was published, including the 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue shooting that killed 11 (Robertson, Mele, & Tavernise, 2018). While these incidents are similar in that they were all perpetrated by extreme far-rightists, there are clear differences in the types of places *where* these attacks occurred across the nation.

A key indicator which often signifies extremist behavior is active hate groups. The existence of hate groups in America that propagate the same types of bigoted and anti-government ideologies as extreme far-right murderers has been a constant over the last century. Importantly, though, the U.S. periodically experiences increases in the number of these groups, such as after both the 9/11 attacks and the 2008 election of President Barack Obama (Adamczyk,

Gruenewald, Chermak & Freilich, 2014). Increases in hate groups may be attributed to many different factors; however, the most prominent is increasing expression of xenophobia stemming from the growing ethnic and religious diversity within the nation (Adamczyk et al, 2014; Ezekiel, 1995; Hamm, 1993). Fear of others and concerns that your way of life is threatened manifests in a variety of social and political responses, including political shifts to protectionism (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015). While the majority of hate group members are non-violent, reactionary measures can turn violent when groups perceive threats, including those ostensibly posed by social and ethnic minority populations, to be imminent.

To date, only a few studies have considered if the presence of hate groups influences far-right extremist violence in a particular place (Ryan & Leeson 2011; Mulholland, 2013; Adamczyk, Gruenewald, Chermak & Freilich, 2014; Jendryke & McClure, 2019). While the results of these studies vary, most found evidence suggesting a spatial correlation between hate groups and hate crimes. However, there is a gap in the discourse as almost no studies focus on violent hate crimes. Adamczyk et al. (2014) was the only study which focused on an aspect of violent incidents (homicides) and it was conducted well before the release of the 2018 FBI hate crime statistics annual report. According to the report, the United States marked a 16-year high in violent hate crimes (Hassan, 2019; FBI, 2019). Thus, all of the previous studies either do not focus on violent incidents or exclude a substantial portion of violent incidents from the population. Not only are large portions of violent incidents excluded, but the temporal frames do not contain the substantial increase in violent hate crime activity. Therefore, it is salient to re-examine this spatial relationship with hate groups, violent hate crimes, and other possible influential variables.

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Current Study

The purpose of the study is to comparatively examine factors that increase the likelihood of extreme far-right violent crimes in the United States. Based on prior research, it is believed that hate groups can partially explain the occurrence of extreme violent far-right incidents in counties where hate groups are located, but not in the majority of U.S. counties where there are no known hate groups.

The study conceptualizes U.S. counties as either *violently contested spaces* or *free spaces*. The concept of contested space stems from relational geography and emphasizes agency in the perception of space and one's need to protect or lay claim to it. Any space can be considered contested; however, this study labels laying claim through violent measures *violently contested spaces*. Therefore, violently contested spaces are places that a far-right incident has occurred. Spaces without an incident will be used as the control for the study. Through understanding the similarities and differences in these two spatial categories, factors influencing far-right incidents can be better understood. This then poses the main research question of this study:

> **Research Question:** What geographic and other social and political factors will predict whether a U.S. county will become a violently contested space or a free space?

Data from the Extremist Crime Databased (ECDB), Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), and U.S. Census Bureau will be collected on extreme far-right crimes and socioeconomic and political conditions of U.S. counties from 2000 to 2018. This study comparatively examines how socio-economic and political factors operating at the macro-level of U.S. counties, including presence of hate groups, race, education levels, unemployment rate,

urbanicity, and percentage immigrant, shapes the likelihood of a county shifting from free to

violently contested spaces.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Orientation and Literature Review

__Cultural and Racial Threat in Contested Spaces__

The concept of contested areas has been utilized in prior research to understand the spatial dynamics of areas experiencing high concentrations of violence (Morrissey & Gaffikan, 2006). Major territorial conflicts like the historical war on the border of Palestine and Israel are high-profile examples of contested areas. However, contested spaces are present in every country, city, and neighborhood (Sibley, 1999). Contested space assumes that borders, and the implied ownership they denote, are constructs of human volition. In other words, they are recognized by some and disputed by others. Space itself exists in the physical realm but also within the context of human perception. Consequently, it is necessary to first define the parameters of space and then relate it to the contested views people hold concerning it.

__Defining Space__

Space was originally bound to a mathematical set of geometric figures; however, it eventually developed multiple meanings (Lefebvre, 1974). The most applicable to the proposed project is, as Lefebvre (1974) describes it, the concept of, "logico-epistemological space" (p 12). Logico-epistemological space combines three central factors: the physical, mental, and social (Lefebvre, 1974). It is within these confines that human beings process, function, and define space. It acknowledges the agency of those living on the physical plane, which is often overlooked when analyzing geographic impacts. This agency given to people is an aspect of legal definitions of space, such as in the sovereignty of a state, as well as in a social sense through human imagination, projection, and identity formation (Lefebvre, 1974). While each

theme is important, the role of forming and maintaining social identities in shaping human interactions, and human conflicts, in particular, is especially salient.

<u>Cultural Threat</u>

Social identity is the foundation of cultural threat. Social identity is defined by the process of self-assigning to a collective identity based on perceived common factors shared with other groups of people (Davis, Love, & Fares, 2019). Sellin (1938) hypothesizes that people form social identities to maintain membership in specific groups (and not others), either based on biology or choice. Once a group identity is formed, people who do not have the same social or biological group markers are othered. Othering is a process of creating separate groups, one of which is considered superior, based off common group markers (Johnson, & Coleman, 2012). This results in countless societal norms, and subsequent groups, in which different people belong. Dissimilarities in group identities and opposing ideologies may result in collective fear of group differences and the belief that one's group status is threatened. At the core of many group conflicts are contested spaces, including group-defined territorial borders (Sellin, 1938). Spaces can be contested at various spatial levels including neighborhoods, cities, counties, or states. However, many far-right extremist groups find the need to protect, "local sovereignty," at spatial borders, "Usually defined as the county (Flint, 2013, p. 13)."

According to Sibley (1999), "[a] fear of difference is projected onto objects and spaces," (p 91). This fear manifests in a sense of territorialism over these places and objects creating an "Us versus Them" mentality. Anyone who is observed as a nonconformist to group-defined norms is considered a threat (Sibley, 1999). Nonconformity can be attributed to numerous factors including something as simple as physical appearance, but contested spaces typically revolve

around cultural differences, specifically pertaining to ethnic and racial factors (Morrissey et al., 2006). According to Keirsey and Gatrell (2001), noted in Morissey et al., "In contested spaces, competing culture groups…strengthen and legitimize themselves and their efforts through the development of adaptive spatial practices," (p 875). Competing cultural groups exist in every country and nation throughout the word, including the United States.

In America, there are multiple competing groups which partake in the practices of claiming and defending contested spaces. According to Flint (2013), "Maintaining spaces that contain and protect established or desired social relations is a common theme…people adopt cognitive maps as to what should belong there and what needs to be expelled," (p 2). These maps are a projection of the human agency and the assessment, and subsequent need for possession of space. This form of idealized geography which stems from sorting 'others' of society into groups and then placing blame on those groups is intrinsic to far-right extremist actors (Flint, 2013). However, the process of othering and claiming space in America is not distinctive to subscribers of far-right extremism. Space in the United States is defined on both a national and local scale by race, gender, and sexuality which can be seen in placement of and response to commemorative street naming and monuments (Webster & Leib, 2000; Alderman, 2003; Flint, 2013).

Different symbols and figures throughout American history denote certain feelings in specific groups of people. For instance, there is often opposition to the naming and placement of streets after influential black historical figures (Alderman, 2003). Alderman (2003) notes that many whites do not identify with black historical figures and object to the placement of street names honoring these figures outside of predominantly black neighborhoods. This then creates contested space within these areas.

Another instance of contested space is the implementation of the Confederate flag. It is a symbol which evokes pride in certain groups but represents hundreds of years of oppression to others. Within the South, the flag is often flown by white Southerners who cite its purpose as a symbol of, "Southern heritage," and, "A way of life," (Webster et al., 2000, p 273). The state of South Carolina even flew the Civil War flag over the capitol building. The placement of the Confederate flag on a government building caused tension in the state and resulted in the proposal of bills for its removal. In 1997, South Carolina representatives voted on a bill proposed to move the flag away from the front of the capitol building. The bill ultimately did not pass, but the voting patterns pertaining to it saw representatives from, districts comprised of majority black constituents support the bill proposing the removal and representatives from districts containing a majority of white constituents vote against the bill (Webster et al., 2000). It is clear demographics of spatial regions play a role in the perception of space and the need to either protect or change it. Thus, contested spaces is inevitable and often times related to racial and ethnic differences. While the channels people use to claim contested space are often legal, spatial claiming practices can manifest through violence, such as hate crimes.

Racial Threat

A specific type of cultural threat, otherwise referred to as racial threat, is defined based on socially constructed notions of group differences based on race and ethnicity. A key component of racial threat perspective is group position, with some racial and ethnic groups perceiving themselves as dominant to other subordinate groups (Blumer, 1958). Dominant racial and ethnic groups prejudicially "other" members of subordinate groups as somehow inferior (Blumer, 1958). According to Blumer (1958), there are four main tenets of racial prejudice,

"(1) a feeling of superiority, (2) a feeling that the subordinate race is intrinsically different and alien, (3) a feeling of proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage, (4) a fear and suspicion that the subordinate race harbors designs on the prerogative of the dominant race," (pp 4).

Prejudice is fueled by a dominant racial or ethnic group's perception that their social status is being threatened by outside groups (Quillian, 1995). Blalock's (1967) Racial Threat Hypothesis suggests that racial tensions come down to two considerations: political power and the economy. First, when the political power of the dominant racial groups is perceived as being under threat by increasing numbers of racial minorities in a particular space, a phenomenon later coined as White Backlash (Abrajano et al., 2015) and a shift to protectionist policies often occurs. Second, Blalock's (1967) Racial Threat Hypothesis suggests that when racial minorities move into contested areas, the dominant group may feel that their economic resources (e.g., housing, employment) and social positions are at risk.

Racial and other cultural threats have been used by some as one explanation for inter-racial and ethnic violence in the context of contested spaces. According to King et al. (2009), perpetrators of bias crimes act as, "a means of controlling the behavior of an entire group through intimidation and often violence," (pp 292). Therefore, the target of far-right extremism is not simply the individual attacked but the whole social group (Lyons, 2008). Violent means are often executed when a dominant group in society feels as though their territory is threated by a person or group of people.

The dominant racial group in the United State are white Americans, and those who perpetrate violent far-right extremist incidents typically do so in an attempt to protect their 'whiteness' (Flint, 2013). These perpetrators of far-right incidents often, "share a commitment to territorial and social separation between races," (Flint, 2013). People who subscribe to this

ideology imagine and intend to create communities based on whiteness (Flint,2013). Racist far-right extremists actively work towards creating these communities in numerous ways including violent incidents against those who do not fit their self-defined parameters of whiteness (Flint, 2013). This threat to perceived group dominance and the perpetration of incidents in an attempt to make homogeneous communities often occurs in distinct racial and ethnic demographic situations.

As previously discussed with Blalock's (1967) Racial Threat Hypothesis, increasing group heterogeneity increases the likelihood of reactionary crimes. While increasing heterogeneity is important for the creation of contested space, implying a positive linear relationship is misleading. The defended neighborhood hypothesis, which builds off racial threat, emphasizes that the racially dominant group is more likely to act when the othered groups are few in number (Lyson, 2008). Bias incidents motivated by racial and social differences typically need heterogeneity and a dominant group established through both number and societal norm (Green, Strolovitch, & Wong, 1998; Lyson, 2008). The established societal norm in the U.S is typically seen as white middle to upper echelon members of society (Abrajano et al., 2015). Therefore, a group which threatens this status is seen as hostile and treated as such (Abrajano et al., 2015).

Reactionary Violence and Far-right Extremism in America

Far-right extremism has been embedded within the United States since the country's establishment in 1776 (Schlatter, 2006). Like all members of social movements, far-right extremists are motivated by some form of overarching ideology. There are varying definitions

used when attempting to label this ideology; however, all include some form of reactionary

elements. According to Schlatter (2006), far-right extremist ideology,

> "Incorporates organized and/or violent reaction to an individual or group of individuals whose race, ethnicity, or religious, social, or political beliefs and practices differ from perceived status quo in the place and time where rightist agitation occurs" (p 11).

This organized reaction does not necessarily result in violence and often manifests in democratic

societies through political and social shifts to protectionism (Saull, Anievas, Davidson, & Fabry,

2015). However, the proposed research focuses primarily on violent incidents perpetrated by far-

right extremists and therefore, the focus of this brief history will be on violent expressions of far-

right extremist ideology.

Most narratives of the far-right are framed in a temporal period beginning in the mid 20th

century and extending to modern day times, but there were groups before this time frame which

played a major role in facilitating the violent movements in the 20th century. Most prominent of

these groups is known as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The KKK was formed by disgruntled ex-

Confederate soldiers in 1865 in Pulaski, Tennessee (United States Congress House Committee

1967). While the group was originally made for the amusement of its members, it quickly

evolved into a terrorist organization under the leadership of Nathan Bedford Forest (United

States Congress House Committee 1967). This evolution not only pitted the KKK against

minorities within the U.S. but also against those within politics petitioning for institutional

change. The group itself advocated for social change through violent means such as lynching and

arson (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1997). While the organization has officially banded and

disbanded throughout U.S. history, members have perpetrated terrorism incidents in every

decade of the 20th century and inspired future violent far-right extremism.

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Contemporary far-right extremism found its footing in the late 1970s and early 1980s with the Christian Identity movement (Aho, 1990; Smith 1994; Barkun, 1997; Dobratz et al., 1997). The ideology behind the Christian Identity movement came to the United States from England as it drew heavily from British-Israelism (Barkun, 1997). One of two key principles of British-Israelism is the idea that British and American Anglo-Saxon, are decedents of the "'ten lost tribes,' of Israel" (Barkun, 1997, p 4). This provides white Anglo-Saxons who subscribe to these teachings a perception of divine right and superiority over other non-White racial and ethnic groups. Second, Anglo-Saxon Jewish lineage evolved further within the dogma by discrediting the Jewish people from any claim to the House of Israel (Barkun, 1997). According to Barkun (1997), Edward Hine, a famous proponent of the British Israelism, claimed, "The people of the Ten Tribes [of Israel] were never Jews" (p. 11). This notion of the usurper Jew is taken to further extremes when British Israelism, and the subsequent Christian Identity movement, took root in America.

In the United States, British Israelism shifted from simply deeming whites as superior to also demonizing other races and religions. Facilitated by many of Edward Hine's students, British Israelism shifted into what is referred to today as Christian Identity. Dobratz et al. (1997) relies on two fundamental beliefs to define this ideology. The amalgamation of these tenets essentially dubs white Aryans the descendants of the tribe of Israel and Jews the descendants of Satan. Another salient belief of the movement frames the world in a near apocalyptic state where Aryans must safeguard their racial purity from other ethnic and religious groups, specifically those of Jewish descent (Dobratz et al., 1997). This idea of racial purity and the need to defend it vilified pre-existing extremist groups, including the KKK, and sparked the creation of countless others.

The 1980s is a landmark period for far-right extremism. Fueled by Christian Identity, several infamous extremist groups were formed. Posse Comitatus was among these groups and its members espoused anti-government and white supremacist sentiment. The death of Posse Comitatus leader Gordon Kahl during a shootout with law enforcement in 1983 served as the catalyst for Christian Identity group, The Order, to officially declare war on the United States government (Smith, 1994). In a venomous screed, Order founder Robert Matthews laments racial integration and immigration while accusing the United States government of colluding to dilute the Aryan race (Kaplan 2000). He concludes with a call to arms and thus the, "War in 84," mobilized numerous Christian Identity groups, including the Covenant Sword and Arm of the Lord (CSA) (Smith 1994).

Members of these aforementioned movements partook in countless violent incidents in the 1980s including bombings and arson of government and religious buildings. Most notably, however, was the murder of Jewish radio host and staunch liberal critic of white supremacy, Alan Berg (Smith 1994). Berg was murdered execution style in 1984 by members of the Order who traveled hundreds of miles to commit the crime (Smith 1994). While the overall number of incidents committed in the 1980s by far-right extremists is relatively low compared to later decades, these rural revolutionaries of the Christian Identity movement had a palpable influence on future extremism.

The 1990s is arguably the most infamous era of far-right extremism. The early 90s continued to be influenced by the Christian Identity movement and the bigoted anti-government sentiment which plagued the previous decade. This anti-government view was only fueled further by the Ruby Ridge and WACO Texas incidents, which took place in 1992 and 1993

respectively (Pease, 2009). The perceived government mishandling of both of these events angered members of the far-right movement and served as a catalyst for the deadliest far-right extremist attack to date.

At 9:02 A.M. on April 19, 1995, a fertilizer bomb was detonated by Timothy McVeigh at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (Michel & Herbeck, 2001). Until September 11, 2001, this attack was the deadliest terrorist attack on United States soil. A total of 168 people died in the bombing and 19 of those victims were children (Michel et al., 2001). While Timothy McVeigh associated with some white supremacists, he did not personally identify with the racist dogma. Instead, his attack was arguably a direct response to the government handlings of Ruby Ridge and the WACO siege (Michel et al., 2001).

While Timothy McVeigh acted without any formal connection to extremist groups, his actions were influenced by the perceived mistreatment of members within the far-right movement that belonged to organized hate groups. It is clear hate groups like the Order and Posse Comitatus can be directly linked to perpetrated incidents. Therefore, hate groups have inspired and perpetrated rightist extremist incidents. This observed relationship has sparked numerous studies aimed to analyze the link between hate groups and hate crimes.

Hate Groups and Hate Crimes through a Geographic Lens

While most who belong to hate groups and hold far-right extremist views are not violent, some choose to act on these beliefs in the form of violent incidents. Some scholars have examined the influence that hate groups have on extremist violence (Ryan & Leeson, 2011; Mulholland 2013; Adamczyk, Gruenewald, Chermak & Freilich, 2014; Jendryke & McClure,

2019). According to Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), a hate group is defined as, "An organization that-based on its official statements or principles, the statements of its leaders, or its activities-has beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics" (n.d.). While it may seem intuitive to suggest that hate groups breed extremist violence, the relationship between these two variables is more tenuous than one might expect. Ryan and Leeson (2011) published one of the first studies to examine the relationship of hate groups on hate crimes. They used hate crime data issued through the FBI's *Hate Crime Statistics* report and hate group data released annually by SPLC. In addition to the existence of hate groups, they analyzed how several other social and economic state level measures predicted hate crimes. The authors ultimately concluded there was no correlation between the presence of hate groups and hate crimes across states. They did, however, find a tentative relationship between economic hardships and the perpetration of these hate crimes.

In another study, Mulholland (2013) relied on similar data sources as Ryan and Leeson (2011) to examine how hate groups affected the likelihood of hate crimes, but did so at the county-level rather than the state-level. Controlling for other social and economic county-level measures, the author found significant correlation between hate crimes and hate groups. The research indicated that the existence of active white supremacy chapters resulted in a 18.7% higher hate crime rate (Mulholland 2013).

Adamczyk et al. (2014) extended the work of Ryan and Leeson (2011) and Mulholland (2013) by examining how the existence of hate groups in a particular county was associated with deadly attacks by extreme far-rightists. The authors claimed that this was the first study to, "empirically examine the influence of hate groups specifically on violence perpetrated by those

affiliated with far-right movements in the United States" (Adamczyk et al., 2014 pp 312). Controlling for several social, political, and economic measures, their findings supported Mulholland's conclusion that hate groups were positively associated with fatal attacks by extreme far-rightists. However, the study only examines homicides ignoring other violent extremist crimes such as assault.

In the most recent study to examine the potential link between hate groups and hate crimes, Jendryke and McClure (2019) provided a spatial analysis that fails to consider the social and economic factors included in previous studies. It also differed from previous studies by using both hate crime and hate group data from the SPLC. While the authors found a spatial relationship between hate groups and hate crime for, on average, 39.5% of hate crimes, over half of hate crimes were not spatially correlated with hate groups (Jendryke et al., 2019). The authors also conclude, "many hate crimes cannot be spatially associated with hate groups" (Jendryke et al 2019 pp 8). Based on their finding, they suggest that variables unrelated to the presence of hates groups may be better suited to explain extremist crimes.

CHAPTER THREE

Data and Methods

The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between far-right extremist incidents and socio-demographic and geographic variables across U.S. counties between 2000 and 2018. The goal is to explore the relationships between macro-level factors and violent far-right extremist incident. Therefore, the current study seeks to answer the following question:

Research Question: What geographic and other social and political factors best predict whether a U.S. county will become a violently contested space or remain a free space?

This study will answer this research question with four main hypotheses that stem from Blalock's (1967) Racial Threat Hypothesis and previous studies.

H_1: Counties that contain hate groups are more likely to have a far-right violent incident

H_2: Higher numbers of racial minorities in a county will result in an increased likelihood of far-right extremist incidents

H_3: Counties with larger immigrant populations are more likely chance of far-right violently contested space

H_4: Counties that have lower socioeconomic status (higher unemployment rates, lower education levels) have a higher chance of far-right violently contested space

The following section details the research design for collecting the location of hundreds of incidents and running Binary Logistic Regression along with a Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial model to test the proposed hypotheses.

Data Sources

The Extremist Crime Database

The Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) is an open-source database with information on homicides committed by far-right extremists from 1990 to 2019. Cases are identified using publicly-available open-sources, including primarily news articles, advocacy group reports, court documents, along with open-source databases. After identifying the incident, researchers collect all information pertaining to the homicide incident. At least one participant in the homicide must be affiliated with the extreme far-right movement. The ECDB defines extreme far-rightists as:

"…fiercely nationalistic (as opposed to universal and international in orientation), anti-global, suspicious of centralized federal authority, reverent of individual liberty (especially their right to own guns, be free of taxes), believe in conspiracy theories that involve a grave threat to national sovereignty and/or personal liberty and a belief that one's personal and/or national "way of life" is under attack and is either already lost or that the threat is imminent (sometimes such beliefs are amorphous and vague, but for some the threat is from a specific ethnic, racial, or religious group), and a belief in the need to be prepared for an attack either by participating in or supporting the need for paramilitary preparations and training or survivalism (Gruenewald, Chermak, & Freilich, 2013, p. 1012).

ECDB differs from other databases because it collects information on all extreme far-right homicide incidents regardless of whether crimes are officially labeled as terrorism. This puts the ECDB in a unique position to analyze violent far-right extremism through various lenses. Consequently, it has been used by researchers in an attempt to understand far-right extremist violent crime (Gruenewald, Chermak, & Freilich, 2013).

The homicide data ECDB collects includes information on the perpetrators, victims, methods and spatiality of homicide incidents. Examples of the methods and spatiality of an incident are the weapons involved and the exact longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates of the

event. Perpetrator variables include age, ideological affiliation, and group involvement. The victim data are comprised mostly of demographic variables including race, sex, and victim type. This study captures the county location of each homicide incident.

Southern Poverty Law Center

The SPLC was founded in 1971 with the goal, "to ensure that the promise of the civil rights movement became a reality for all. (n.d.)" Since 1990, the SPLC has released annual reports which catalogue far-right extremist behavior and organizations. These annual reports include detailed information about incidents perpetrated by members of White Supremacist organizations or incidents perpetrated on the basis of bias. The SPLC tracks hate groups throughout America and discovers extremist incidents through both tracking these groups and media reports on extremist activity (SPLC, n.d.). The quarterly SPLC reports which contain the collected incidents include sections on arson, bombing, vandalism, assault, cross burning, and harassment/threat.

Assault data from the SPLC Intelligence Reports and assault data from the Hate Crime log from the SPLC website were utilized to obtain information on violent far-right extremist incidents not involving deaths (homicide data is obtained through ECDB). This study's temporal frame of 2000 to 2018 was selected because incidents logged on the SPLC's Hate Crime log begin in the year 2000. The presence of a violent incident was chosen as the measure for far-right extremist behavior because it denotes an indisputable example of laying claim to contested spaces. Violent incidents from the SPLC's Intelligence Reports and Hate Crime log were only chosen for this study's population if there was a clear link to rightist extremism as defined by the ECDB.

United States Census Bureau Statistics

The third source of data used in this research comes from the United States Census Bureau. The Census Bureau collects, codes, and makes demographic data such as race and unemployment available to the public. Through the search engine feature on the Census Bureau website, demographic data can be selected, the spatial unit (region, state, county, etc.) specified, and the tables which contain the information downloaded. The U.S. Census is decennial and provides information at all spatial measures, including county. The American Community Survey (ACS) provides information on portions of the U.S. at all spatial measures and is considered the foremost resource on population data by county (U.S. Census, n.d.; Medina et al., 2018). Therefore, data from both the 2010 U.S. Census and the 2010 ACS were used in this analysis.

Measurements

The dependent variable of this study is incidents. Incidents were coded in two different variable formats. The presence of violent far-right extremist incidents at the county level was coded dichotomously as 1=Yes or 0=No. The incidents were also coded as a continuous variable with the number of incidents in a single county ranging from 0 to 42.

The independent variables tested against the dependent variable are *presence of hate groups, race, education levels, unemployment rate, urbanicity, and percentage immigrant*. Hate groups were pulled from the SPLC's 2010 Hate Maps released in the Intelligent report and available online. The year 2010 was selected as a designated midpoint for the temporal period of this study in order to coincide with the 2010 Census and inaugural release of the ACS. Hate

groups were coded as a discrete variable by county: 1=Yes and 0=No. One is coded for counties that have at least one hate group present and 0 is coded for counties with no hate groups. If the hate group was coded by the SPLC only as State Wide, it was excluded from the population because it could not be linked to a specific county.

A key factor for cultural and racial threat in contested space is the presence of minority populations within a county. Therefore, the demographic variables of *race and percentage immigrant* were selected to measure minority populations in counties. Race data was collected from the 2010 Census and then transformed and categorized as a nominal variable Race is broken down into three separate categories: White, Black, and Other. An indicator variable for race was also employed and it was coded as 0 for counties without a white majority population and 1 for counties with a white majority population. Percent immigrant was measured through the ratio of foreign-born citizens living in a county and was collected through the ACS. Unlike race, percent immigrant accounts for a number of foreign-born minority populations that are identified through ethnicity.

Secondly, research has found a causal relationship between lower Socioeconomic Status (SES) and higher presence of hate groups (Medina et al, 2018). Therefore, SES will be included as an independent variable to determine if it plays a significant role in predicting incidents. This research design measures SES through *education levels, unemployment rate, and urbanicity*. Education levels are broken down into four subcategories: 1) Some High School or Less, 2) High School Degree or Equivalent, 3.) Some College, and 4.) Bachelor/Associate Degree or Higher. Education and Unemployment are collected through the ACS estimates per county. In order to better represent education in counties, quartile calculations were then run for each subcategory of

education and each subcategory was then coded categorically on a scale from 1 to 4 (1 being the lowest percent and 4 being the highest percent). Unemployment is the estimate for percentage of unemployment for residents 16 and older by county. Lastly, urbanicity was collected through the 2010 Census and measured through the percent of people living inside urban areas and clusters. While the data was transformed into ratio in order to control for population fluctuation by county, this study did not normalize the Census data.

Methodology

In order to determine if the binary coded dependent variable county with extreme far-right incidents is influenced by the independent variables, **binary logistical regression** is employed. This regression is useful for testing binary coded dependent variables as it does not assume linearity when running analysis on both categorical and continuous independent variables (Midi, Sarkar, & Rana, 2010). This model is then compared against the **zero-inflated negative binomial regression** output which is run against the continuous variable total incidents per county. Zero-inflated negative binomial regression is beneficial with count data that experiences an overdispersal of zeros such as the incident data in this study (Ridout, Hinde, & Demetrio, 2001). The statistical software R is used when conducting these regression analyses.

Finally, ArcMap is used to display the spatial relation of incidents with demographic variables. Thematic maps are produced using this software, specifically utilizing the mapping technique known as **choropleth**. Choropleth mapping was first used by the United States Census Bureau for the creation of statistical atlases in the 19th century (Dent 1999). Also known as enumeration mapping, choropleth uses aggregated data to display statistical fluctuation in

regions (Dent 1999). This fluctuation is displayed through unique shading and colors for

variation in different areas.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The results for this study are presented in this chapter. First, descriptive statistics outline the dependent and independent variables. Second, the results from the binary logistic regression are detailed and displayed. Lastly, the outcome from the zero-inflation negative binomial model is outlined and contrasted to the binary model.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the variables included in the study. The total number of counties used in this analysis were 3,143. Of the 3,143 counties, 303 contained at least one violent incident (Figure 1). A total of 849 violent incidents were logged during the temporal period of 2000-2018 (Figure 2). There were 381 counties which had at least one hate groups which could be geospatially tied to it (Figure 3).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables in Analysis

| Dependent Variables	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
County with Incident (2000-2018)	0.1002	0.3003	0	1
n=315				
Total Incidents in County (2000-2018)	0.2701	0.2701	0	42
n=849				
Predictor Variables				
Hate Groups	0.1212	0.3264	0	1
n=381				
Race & Immigration				
White	82.8848	16.855	2.6947	99.2191
Black	8.8835	14.500	0	85.6847
Other	8.2316	10.341	0.5264	97.2919
Majority White	0.9415	0.2348	0	1
Foreign-Born	4.6418	6.0187	0	73.9563
Urbanicity	40.4844	31.554	0	100
Education				
Some High School or Less	16.8952	7.3572	0.7	52.1
High School Degree or Equivalent	35.6486	6.9536	8.2	74.4
Some College	20.9657	4.0844	0	39.6
Bachelor or Associate Degree	26.4925	9.3466	6.8	74.2
Unemployment	7.5303	3.3571	0	30.9

All data is pulled from the 2010 U.S Census and ACS
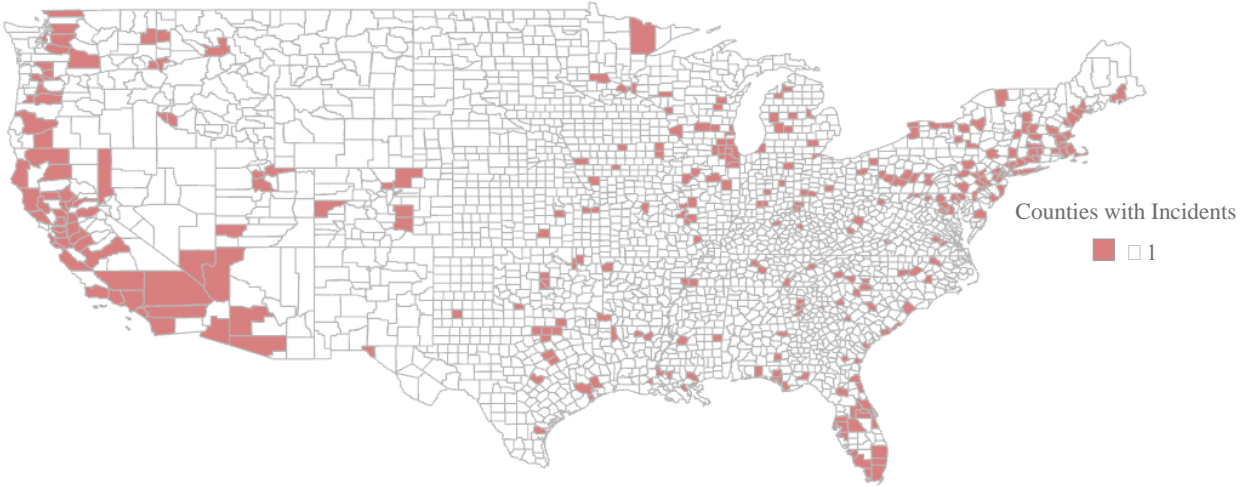
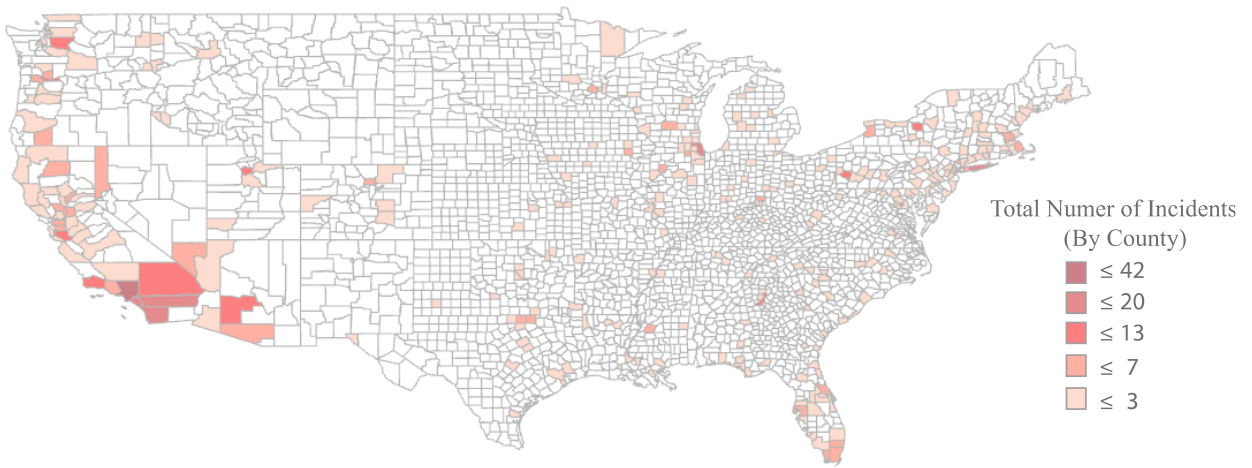Figure 1. Counties with Incidents
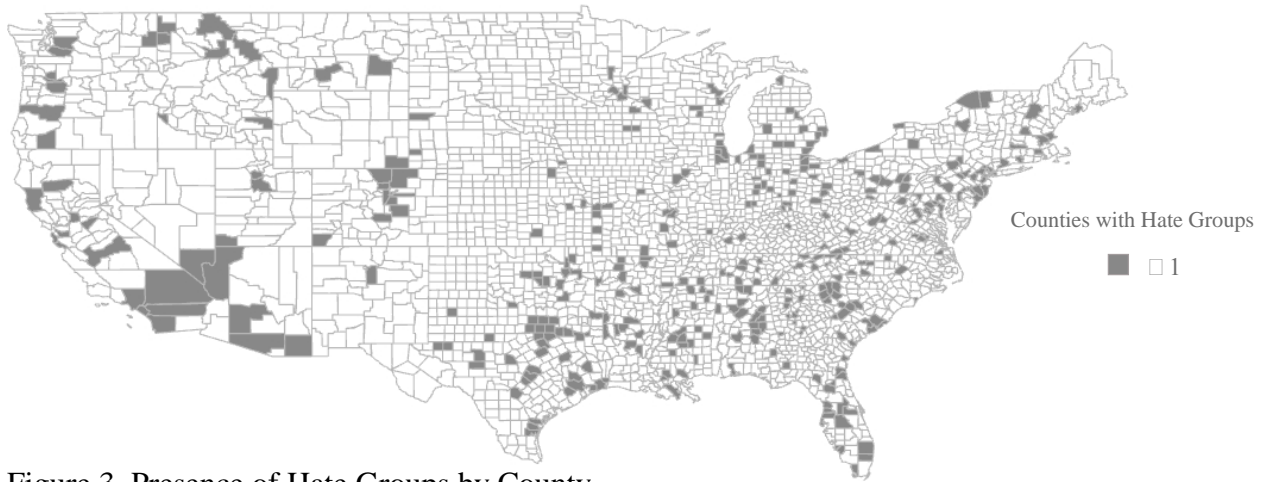
Figure 2. Total Number of Incidents by County

Figure 3. Presence of Hate Groups by County

Binary Logistic Regression

Binary logistic regression was used to determine significance between the dependent and independent variables because the dependent variable **county with incidents** is dichotomous. Table 2 displays the results of the regression and the variables which hold significance. The presence of hate groups in a county holds a strong positive relationship with the dependent variable. A total of 41.9% of violent incidents occurred in counties where hate groups were identified (Figure 6). This strong relationship provides evidence supportive of Hypothesis 1, suggesting that the presence of hate groups in a county increases the likelihood of violently contested spaces. It also corroborates the evidence found in past studies (Mulholland 2013; Adamczyk et al., 2014) which has found a positive relationship between hate groups and certain types of far-right extremist incidents.

Race held no statistical significance in this study which does not support Hypothesis 2. However, the lack of significance may be explained through the Defended Neighborhood Hypothesis (Lyons, 2008). While Blalock's (1967) Racial Threat Hypothesis emphasizes the need for increasing populations of racial minorities, the Defended Neighborhood Hypothesis proposes that violent incidents take place in communities with a small number of racial minorities. Thus, a lack of statistical significance does not support the hypothesis in this study, but it could be evidence backing the Defended Neighborhood Hypothesis.

Although race was not a significant predictor of the outcome of interest, the presence of immigrant populations was. The results show a positive relationship with the presence of foreign-born populations and the probability of a violent incident occurring (Figure 6). This supports Hypothesis 3 and the Racial Threat Hypothesis. Thus, there is evidence that the higher

the foreign-born populations within a county, the higher the chances of the perpetration of a violent incident.

Another significant finding pertains to the positive relationship between higher levels of urbanicity in a county and the perpetration of violent incidents. Counties with higher percentages of urbanicity experience an increased likelihood of an extremist far-right violent incident occurring (Figure 6).

Socioeconomic status was measured in two ways: Unemployment Rates and Education. Both of the measures showed significance after conducting the analysis. As seen in table 2, there is a positive relationship between violent incidents by far-rightists and the unemployment rates (Figure 7). Thus, counties which contain higher unemployment rates are more likely to have at least one violent incident. The unemployment measure of SES supports Hypothesis 4 and Blalock's (1967) theory.

The *Some High School or Less* measure of the education variable indicates a negative relationship with the presence of incidents (Figure 8). Therefore, counties with lower numbers of people who did not graduate from high school are more likely to have incidents. The *College or Associate Degree or higher* variable also indicates a significant relationship (Figure 9). A positive relationship was found between obtaining a college degree and the presence of an incident in a county. These results indicate higher levels of education are positively associated with the presence of a far-right violent incident. This finding is contrary to the portion of Hypothesis 4 pertaining to education level and incidents. This could be explained by the significant findings with the urbanicity variable. Higher levels of urbanicity and subsequent urban clusters often denote heterogeneity in both racial demographics and social class (Ye, 2017). Urban areas also have higher percentages of college graduates than rural counties (United

States Department of Agriculture, n.d.). Since far-right extremists typically target heterogenous

urban areas, the overall education, particularly pertaining to college graduates, within these

counties is higher.

Table 2. Predicting Extreme Far-right Violent Incidents
Using Binary Logistic Regression

|	b	SE	exp(b)
Hate Groups	2.65E-10***	1.64E-01	2.8111
Race			
White	5.65E-01	1.73E+07	0
Black	5.65E-01	1.73E+07	0
Other	5.65E-01	1.73E+07	0
Majority White	1.53E-01	4.35E-01	1.86
Foreign Born	1.76E-04***	1.59E-02	1.062
Urbanicity	2E-16***	3.96E-03	1.04
Education			
Some High School or Less	3.27E-03	1.66E-01	0.613
High School Degree or Equivalent	5.21E-01	1.85E-01	1.126
Some College	3.41E-01	1.60E-01	0.859
College or Associate Degree	3.63E-04	1.60E-01	1.987
Unemployment	7.81E-07***	3.22E-02	1.173

$p < 0.01$***
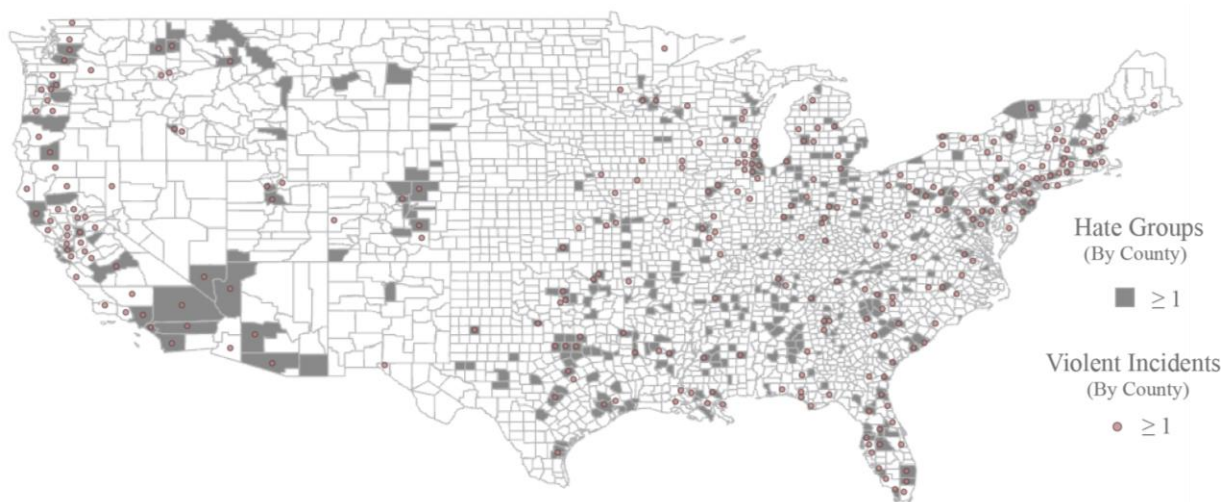
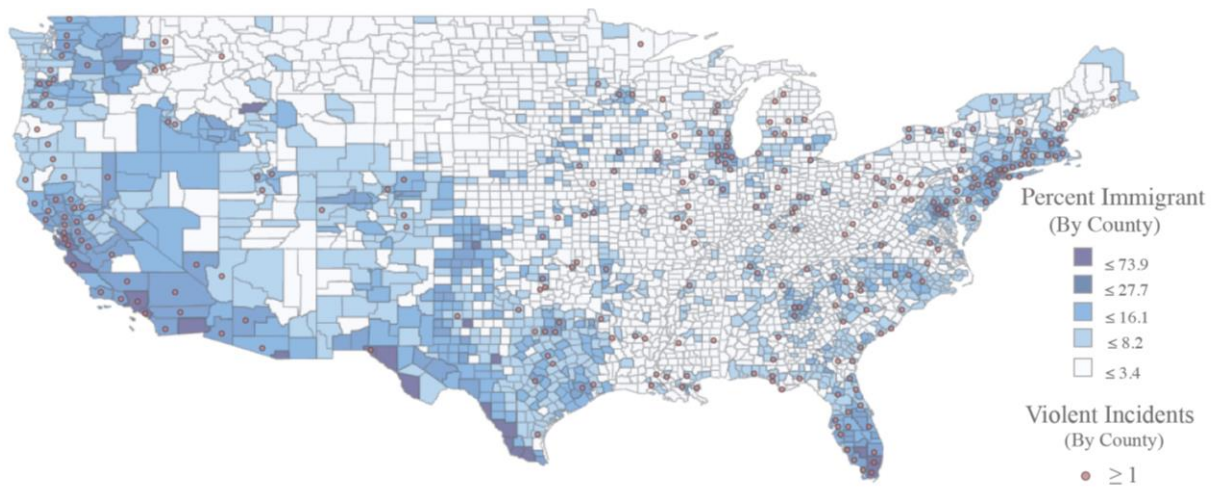Figure 4. Hate Group Counties with Incidents Overlay

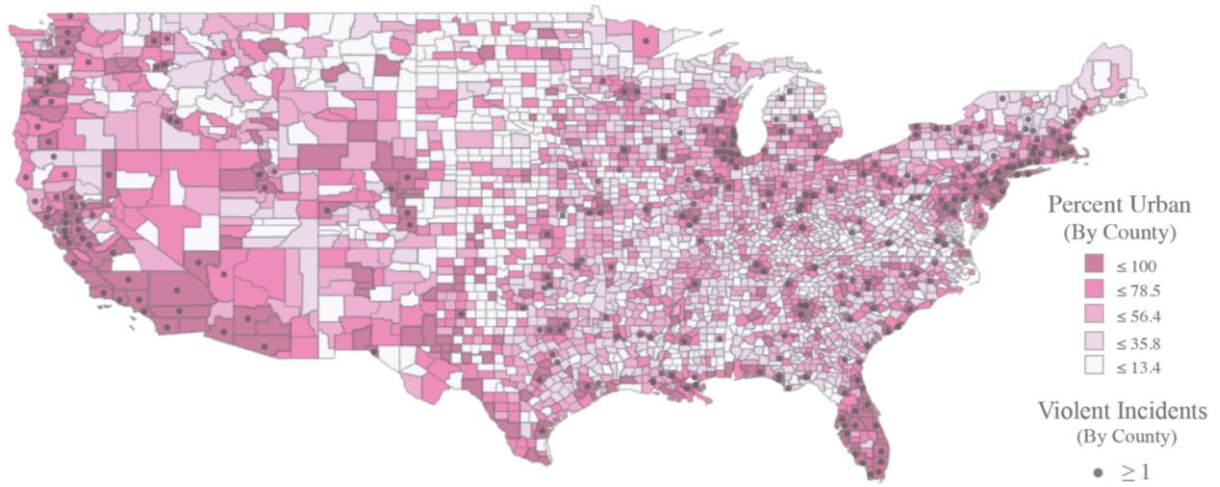Figure 5. Percent Immigrant by County with Incidents Overlay

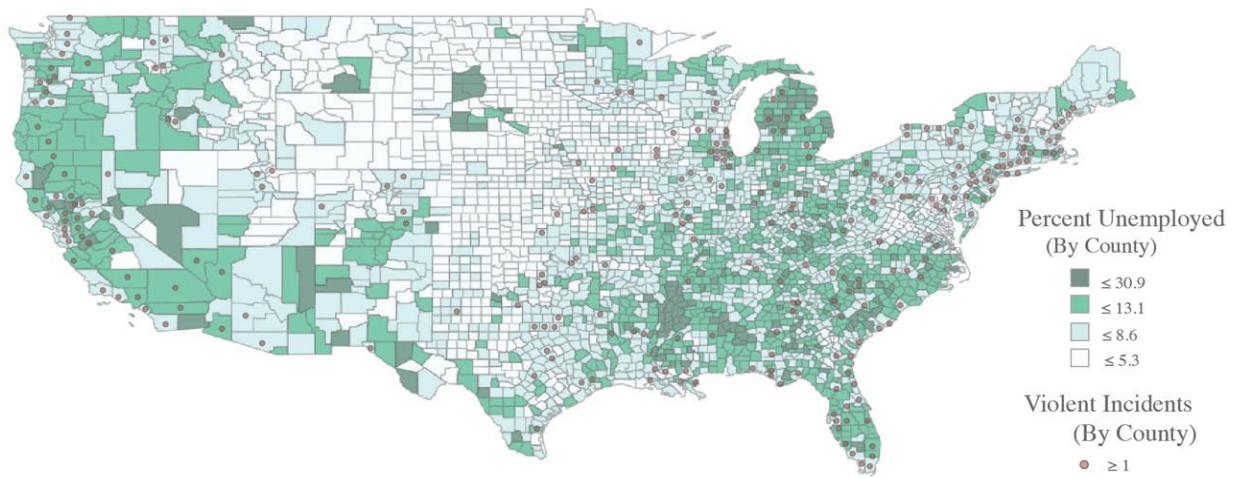Figure 6. Percent Urban by County with Incidents Overlay

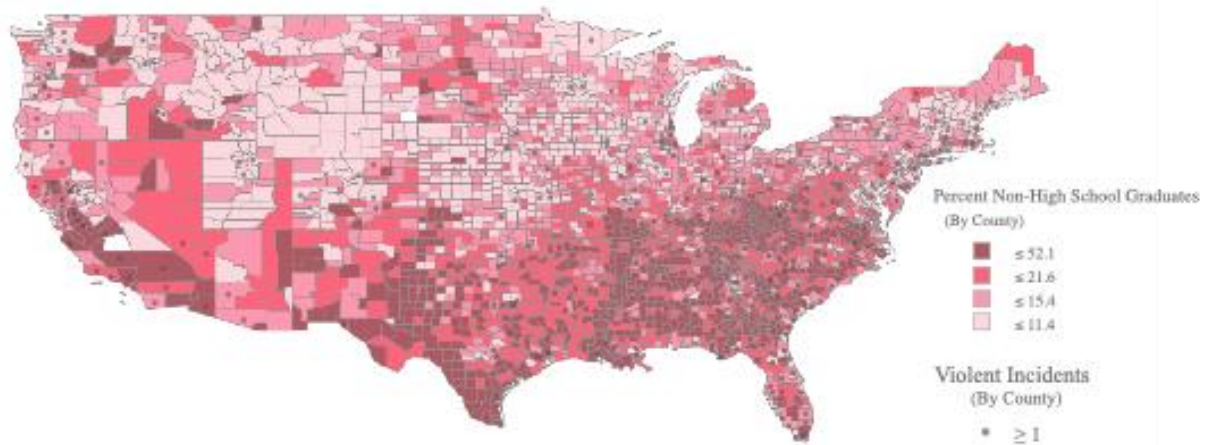Figure 7. Percent Unemployed by County with Incidents Overlay

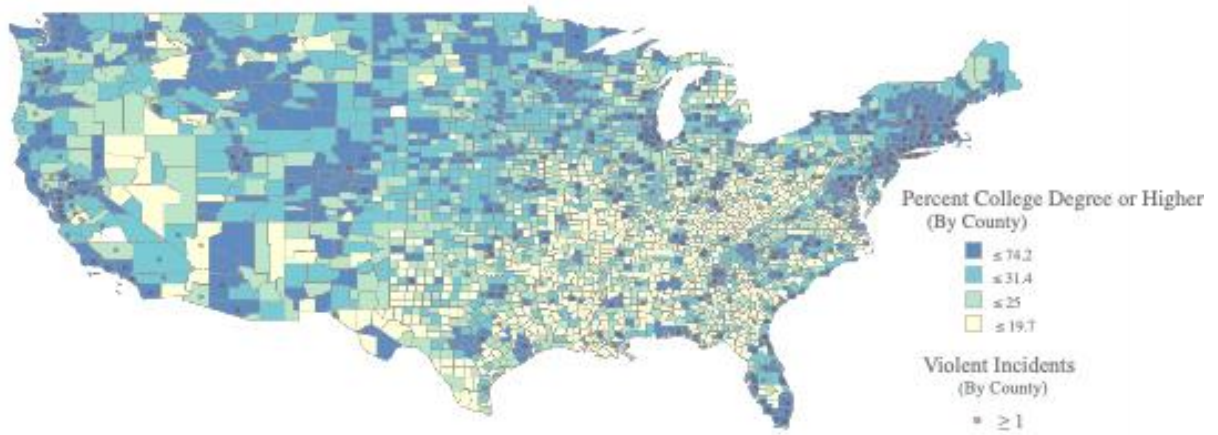Figure 8. Percent non-High School Graduates by County with Incidents Overlay

Figure 9. Percent College Degree or Higher by County with Incidents Overlay

Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial Regression

The dependent variable county with incidents is dichotomous and contains overdispersal; therefore, a zero-inflated negative binomial regression model was utilized. This analysis uses the total number of incidents per county as the dependent variable and runs against the same independent variables as the first model. The output of this model indicates significant relationships between the independent variables: hate groups, foreign-born, unemployment, and urbanicity in relation to the outcome of interest, as seen in Table 3. The significance in the findings from the zero-inflated negative binomial model match those of the binomial regression. The only observable differences from the first model is marginally stronger positive relationships between the dependent variable with urbanicity and foreign-born and slightly weaker positive relationship with the dependent variable between hate groups and unemployment. In other words, these independent variables were predictive of both extreme far-right violent incidents and the number of incidents per U.S. county.

Table 3. Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial Regression

	b	SE	exp(b)
Hate Groups	1.44E-08***	1.37E-01	2.17
Race & Immigration			
White	8.19E-01	1.42E+07	0
Black	8.19E-01	1.42E+07	0
Other	8.19E-01	1.42E+07	0
Majority White	6.34E-01	3.45E-01	1.178
Foreign Born	6.12E-09***	1.15E-02	1.069
Urbanicity	2E-16***	3.60E-03	1.041
Education			
Some High School or Less	9.79E-05***	1.41E-01	0.577
High School Degree or Equivalent	9.17E-01	1.53E-01	1.016
Some College	1.13E-01	1.36E-01	0.807
College or Associate Degree	5.45E-05***	1.60E-01	1.904
Unemployment	1.88E-07***	2.84E-02	1.16

$p < 0.01$***

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Conclusion

This study adds to the discourse by analyzing all violent far-right extremist incidents in the framework of contested space. Previous studies have either focused on all far-right extremist behavior, including legal practices such as protests, or limited illicit rightist activities to only fatal incidents. By focusing on all violent incidents perpetrated by far-right extremists, this study has both contributed to the growing research on the spatial patterns of far-right extremist incidents.

Key Findings

Hate Groups

Past studies focusing on geospatial incidents and hate crimes provide a conflicting story on the relationship between the two variables. Some have determined there not to be a significant relationship (Ryan et al., 2011; Jendryke et al., 2019). Other studies found strong evidence to support the relationship between the two variables (Mulholland 2013; Adamczyk, Gruenewald, Chermak & Freilich, 2014). This study found evidence which supports the positive relationship between the presence of hate groups in a county and violent far-right extremist crimes in a county.

Immigration

No studies have tested the spatial relationship of far-right extremist incidents and immigrant populations. However, white American's perceived threat pertaining to immigrant populations has increased in the twenty-first century (Abrajano et al., 2015). Extreme far-rightist incidents targeting immigrant populations, specifically Latino, have grown substantially in the past few years (Hassan, 2019). This idea of minority populations taking resources from majority

populations is outlined in Blalock's (1967) theory of racial threat. While race was not found to be a statistically significant predictor of far-right extremist violence in any of the analyses, there was a positive relationship between immigrant populations in a county and incidents in a county. Though this is the first spatial research conducted on immigrant populations and violent rightist incidents, the finding suggests an increased likelihood of a violent far-right incidents in counties with higher immigrant populations. The relationship between the two incidents needs to be studied further to make a strong claim between the two variables; nonetheless, this study provides evidence which supports a link.

Urbanicity

Past studies on far-right extremism have noted that far-rightists target rural areas more than other extremist ideologies. (Freilich, Adamczyk, Chermak, Boyd, & Parkin, 2015; Parkin, Gruenewald, & Jandro, 2017). This analysis chose urbanicity by county to measure whether violent far-right extremist activity was more likely to take place in urban or rural areas. The study found a significant positive relationship between higher urbanicity and increased likelihood of violent rightist incidents. So, while far-right extremist violence may be more of a rural phenomenon than other forms of terrorism, most violence still occurs in relatively urban settings.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic factors such as income, poverty, and unemployment have been tested in past studies researching the spatial patterns of far-right extremist incident behavior (Ryan et al., 2011). The studies have found links which support evidence of a relationship between these economic factors. This coincides with Blalock's (1967) Racial Threat Hypothesis which proposes competition for financial resources results in violently contested spaces. Therefore, this

study used unemployment as the measure for fiscally related hardships. The results suggest a significant positive relationship between higher unemployment rates and the likelihood of violent far-right extremist incidents in a county.

This study also found a significant relationship in both the percentage of those who have not graduated from high school along with the percentage of college graduates and incident perpetration in counties. The findings show the fewer people in a county which have not graduated from high school the less likely a far-right violent incident will occur. It also found the higher the percentage of college graduates in a county the more likely a far-right incident will occur. This is contrary to the hypothesis of the study which predicted positive correlation between lower levels of education and the perpetration of violent far-right extremist incidents in a county. One possible explanation for the positive findings between higher education levels and the perpetration of violent incidents could be attributed to the urban target selection of far-right extremists. Urban areas have higher education levels as opposed to rural areas, specifically in the percentage of college graduates (United States Department of Agriculture, 2020).

Limitations and Future Research

Hate Crime Reporting

Hate crimes, including those perpetrated by individuals associated with far-right extremism, are massively underreported throughout the United States (SPLC, n.d.). Two main issues with cataloging hate incidents fall with victim underreporting and misclassification of hate crimes as normal crimes by police departments (Pezzella, Fetzer, & Keller, T., 2019). Pezzella et al. (2019) found that the odds of reporting a violent hate crime to police were up to 17.1% less likely than a violent incident that does not involve bias motive. There is already underreporting of violent incidents in the U.S. and hate crimes are even less likely to be reported by the victim.

Second, only 10% of the police departments which participate in the FBI Hate Crime Reporting program document at least one hate crime in their jurisdiction yearly (Pezzella, et al., 2019). Researchers propose that the classification of hate crimes lies within the reporting officer's ability to recognize and properly catalog bias incidents (Pezzella, et al., 2019; Haider-Markel, 1998; Martin, 1996). Therefore, hate crime logging is up to the discretion of the reporting officer (Pezzella, et al., 2019). This can lead to misclassifications of hate crimes that should be reported to the FBI. Underreporting is referred to in the discourse as the dark figure of crime and the figure for hate crimes is larger than normal crimes. Therefore, countless violent far-right extremist incidents were not able to be accounted for and tested in this study.

Immigrant Populations and Violent Far Right Extremism

This study only scratched the surface on the relationship between higher immigrant populations and rightist violent incidents. Considering incidents like the 2019 El Paso Walmart shooting, it is clear many far-right extremists are driven by anti-immigrant sentiment. Hate crime violence was at a 16 year high in 2018 and the targeting of Latino and immigrant populations was at its highest since 2010 (Hassan, 2019; FBI, 2019). The trend of targeting immigrant populations and ethnic minorities has steadily increased over the past four years (Hassan, 2019). The presence of immigrant populations provides a scapegoat for all native-born citizens who face economic hardships as detailed in Blalock's (1967) Racial Threat Hypothesis. The relationship found in this study is tenuous as there is no other research to support the findings. Therefore, further research must be conducted focusing on this relationship to provide valuable insight into the targeting of immigrant populations and the spatial prediction for far-right violence.

<u>Conclusion</u>

  Violent far-right extremist incidents in the United States are at a 16-year high (Hassan, 2019; FBI, 2019). There are few studies which focus on the spatiality of far-right extremist incidents. These studies either focus on all incidents committed by far-right extremists, including legal activity, or only analyzed homicides perpetrated by far-right extremists. Therefore, there was a gap in the discourse pertaining to all violent incidents committed by far-rightists. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships between macro-level factors and violent far-right extremist incident. The research determined that the presence of hate groups, higher immigrant populations, higher unemployment rates, higher education rates, and higher urbanicity in counties all indicate an increased likelihood a violent extremist far-right incident will take place.

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