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# Can Violent Political Rhetoric Influence Bias Homicide Rates? Analyzing the Trump Effect

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Can Violent Political Rhetoric Influence Bias Homicide Rates?  Analyzing the Trump Effect

by

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## I. Introduction

The founding document of the United States declares that all men are created equal.

However, history has shown that this is not the case. Citizens in this country have been

discriminated against since its inception based on their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation,

national origin, and many other factors. The first Federal Legislation passed to prevent

discrimination against citizens in the United States did not come until 1968, which "made it a

crime to use, or threaten to use, force to willfully interfere with any person because of race,

color, religion, or national origin" (United States, Department of Justice). It took until 2009 when

the hate crime laws were expanded to include crimes committed because of the victim's

perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender identity. Hate crimes are now described as

"offenses involving an actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual

orientation, gender identity, or disability" (18 U.S.C. § 249).

Prior to the 2016 election, the number of hate crimes were steadily decreasing during

President Obama's time in office (Koski and Bantley 2019). This is thought to be due to several

laws and executive orders passed by President Obama to enhance protections for members of the

LGBTQ+ community, like the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention

Act, which added sexual orientation, disability, and gender identity to hate crime laws. The

Supreme Court also held in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that state bans on same-sex marriages and bans

on recognizing same-sex marriages in another jurisdiction were unconstitutional under the

Fourteenth Amendment. However, in 2015, the year that Donald Trump began his campaign for

presidency, hate crime numbers began to rise (Uniform Crime Reports).

Griffin Edwards and Stephen Rushin (2018) conducted a study to examine the trends in

the hate crimes that have been reported from 1992 through 2017 to examine if there was a

relationship between Trump's rise to power, the rhetoric he used throughout his election, the hate-speech he used after he had won, and increased trends in hate crimes. They examined what is called the "Trump Effect." The Trump Effect was named as such because the number of hate crimes appeared to increase as a result of Trump's intentionally divisive and inflammatory rhetoric throughout his campaign.

Indeed, it is not difficult to find instances of Donald Trump's inflammatory rhetoric, as he began his campaign for presidency saying that he wanted to build a wall to keep out undocumented immigrants and that "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best" alleging that they are criminals (Cohn 2016). Another instance occurred after he had won the presidency and was discussing immigration, once again calling the people that have been deported under his presidency, "animals" (Sankin and Carless 2018). Edwards and Rushin (2018) would go on to hypothesize that it was not only Trump's inflammatory rhetoric throughout his campaign that led to an increase in hate crimes throughout the United States, but the election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States validated his rhetoric in the eyes of perpetrators and fueled the increase in hate crimes. Indeed, the authors found that the largest increases in hate crimes occurred in counties that voted for Trump.

This thesis will expand upon that prior research of the Trump Effect by looking at the rates of right-wing extremist homicides committed in three time periods from 2010 through 2021 (Pre-Trump, Trump, and Post-Trump) to examine if there is a relationship between Trump's instances of hate speech and right-wing extremist homicides. Essentially, the existing research suggests that hate crime increased, but none of the existing research indicates whether Trump's rhetoric cost lives. This paper also examines whether Trump's rhetoric impacted the rates of right-wing perpetrated minority homicides, and whether right-wing incidents became more

violent as measured by the number of deaths per event. This project will analyze these questions using the American Terrorism Study's Bias Homicide Database (BHDB) located here at the University of Arkansas.

## II. Literature Review

Before examining the bias homicide rates, it is important to examine the previous research that has been conducted on political rhetoric, mass psychology, and how the Trump Effect has influenced society.

**Political Rhetoric**

Political rhetoric is defined as "the ways in which politicians try to persuade various audiences and to the (academic) study of such oratory" (Tileagă 2013). Violent political rhetoric has been used throughout history by politicians as a form of propaganda to polarize society, mobilize their supporters, disparage rivals, and "pave the way for further violence that is politically beneficial to them" (Zeitzoff 2018). In xamining the effects that violent political rhetoric can have on aggression, on support for political violence (including threats against leaders, property violence, and physical violence against leaders), Nathan Kalmoe (2014) found that citizens who had aggressive personality traits were significantly more likely to support political violence. This support doubled when exposed to mild violent metaphors within political messages, especially for younger adults who are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior. Although a direct link could not be made between the relationship of violent rhetoric and violent behavior, Kalmoe (2014) suggested that political violence can be a risk factor for violent behavior and milder forms of political aggression. He also found that "political leaders – wittingly or not – mobilize aggression in audiences with violent metaphors, priming the

aggressive predispositions that guide citizens in everyday life" (Kalmoe, 2014:22). It should be noted that the language that was used in this study was very tame, and the targets of these violent metaphors were policy problems and not people or groups of people. That demands a question: what happens when the language used is violent and directed at a person or group of people?

Many studies have been conducted showing a relationship between aggression and exposure to violent media through speech, pictures, video games, music, and text (Anderson and Bushman 2001; Bushman 1995; Bushman and Geen 1990). Nugent and Conway (2021) examined violent political rhetoric and other factors on the rate of mass shootings in the country. They found that violent political rhetoric was positively associated with mass shootings and hypothesized that this was because "VPR [violent political rhetoric] may stimulate racism, xenophobia, and anger towards those who have been the targets of the VPR and help erode social norms against violence. The VPR would legitimize the use of violence in the minds of those amenable to such rhetoric." Levine (2018) found support for this hypothesis in the five years since Trump announced his candidacy for president, as there were at least 54 cases in the United States of perpetrators of violence, threats, and alleged assaults against minorities invoking Trump's name. Other researchers found a 226% increase in hate crimes committed in counties that hosted a Donald Trump rally during his election campaign (Feinberg, Branton, and Martinez-Ebers 2019). Interestingly, it can be inferred from these 54 cases of violence that Levine (2018) referenced, of perpetrators who directly referred to Trump, that violent political rhetoric can inspire people to commit acts of violence. The Trump Effect has been tested in many studies such as Edwards and Rushin's work (2018) mentioned earlier as well as research conducted by Newman et al. (2021) in which they found that those who were already prejudiced and read a statement from Trump disparaging Latinos were significantly more likely to express

their prejudice, but even more so when other "elites" condoned Trump's statements and behavior. The key findings from this study were that when other elites, like other politicians in the Republican party, do not condemn these types of violent political rhetoric from Trump, that it signals to those who are already prejudiced that the social climate has changed, and it is no longer unacceptable to express this prejudice. For example, Scott and Steven Leader committed violence against minorities when they urinated, punched, and beat a sleeping homeless man of Mexican descent before saying "Donald Trump was right, all these illegals need to be deported" (Herndon 2016).

Donald Trump's rhetoric not only targets minority groups, but also targets the media and other politicians. Trump targeted the media and said he intended to "discredit you all [the media] and demean you all so that when you write negative stories about me no one will believe you" (Mangan 2018). In an article examining Trump's rhetoric and political violence, Brigitte L. Nacos, et al. (2020) argues that the tactic used by Trump to discredit the media is similar to what Hitler and his propagandists did to the independent German news media in the 1930's. The authors state that hateful rhetoric of this kind is especially dangerous for the targets when the person saying these things is a "powerful [individual] in the public sphere with fanatical followers." This is demonstrated by one man who, in responding to a Trump post, put a swastika under his comment and said, "I was like, literally, tearing my eyes out watching Trump's speech! I literally exploded. It was like literally 1933. He's literally Hitler!" (Nacos et al, 2020:5). These types of comments are in line with Newman et al's (2021) study and show the power that someone in the highest office in the country can have on their supporters and the ways that they can mobilize them to commit acts of violence. These findings are also outlined in Nugent and

Conway's (2021) work, as well as in Nacos et al.'s (2020) article of political violence with perpetrators influenced by Trump.

**Mass Psychology**

Donald Trump's campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" was chosen for a very specific reason: to create an ingroup with his own supporters and an outgroup of everyone else (Samuelson 2016). Social categorization is used to classify the countless individuals we know into groups and is done to make recalling information about who they are, and other characteristics, easier. These characteristics could include someone's sex, age, race, and even who their favorite MLB team is. However, these categorizations can lead to the creation of ingroups and outgroups. There have been numerous studies conducted on the relationships between ingroups and outgroups, especially with stereotypes, through Harvard's Implicit Association Tests. According to Robert J. Samuelson (2016), Trump has used his rhetoric and his slogan to get his supporters to "displace their anger and frustration onto groups that (in Trump's view) have eroded America's "greatness" — Mexicans, Muslims, the Chinese, political and financial elites, and "the media." Through his rhetoric, Trump has been able to create his own fanatical ingroup of mainly straight white males who feel that the reasons for why they are failing themselves is because of the outgroup that Trump targets in his speeches (Brownstein, 2016). Brownstein argues that Trump's rhetoric appeals to a sense of white nostalgia among his supporters in which he uses the words "again" and "back" to signal to his voters that if he is elected president, America will go back to the time in which the white male culture dominated. His wording is deliberate and appeals to people who feel the changes that have come in America have disparaged them economically, demographically, and culturally and the reasons for their disparagement are the outgroup that he has created. The times that Trump refers to are times in

which many racial and religious minorities, gays, and transgender people lived in fear from the very people who are supporting Trump and want to "Make America Great Again."

This sense of white nostalgia is not alone in the type of nostalgia that Trump uses in his rhetoric and slogan. National Nostalgia a type of collective nostalgia in which citizens of a country self-categorize as members of that country and then feel a collective remembrance of a countries "good old days" (Behler et al., 2021). This type of nostalgia can lead to the exclusion of other members of the country, such as those who have immigrated to the country recently or minorities inside that country. In America, Trump has combined the white nostalgia talked about in the Atlantic article with this national nostalgia to make people want to go back to a time in which straight white men were the controlling power at the expense of the minorities in the country.

Behler et al., (2021) tested this phenomenon of national nostalgia and found that national nostalgia was positively associated with pro-Trump attitudes and both anti-black racial prejudice as well as perceived realistic threat. For those moderate to high in racial prejudice, national nostalgia predicted their pro-Trump attitudes (Behler et al., 2021). These findings are consistent with Newman et al., (2021) who found in that more prejudiced individuals were more likely to express their prejudice. One surprising result from this study was that white Republicans rated their racial identity as more important to them than did black participants. This is shocking as research has found that, normally, white individuals are less likely than people of color to think of their race when they think of themselves (Steck et al., 2003).

Steck et al., (2003) argue that the perceived threat from the racial outgroups that Trump has invoked through national nostalgia could explain why white individuals may have voted for

Trump. Many politicians have used, and currently use, psychological strategies to try to amass voters to win elections, but nobody has gone to the extreme levels of violent political rhetoric that Trump has used throughout his campaign and presidency. Moreover, it is difficult to find another contemporary American politician who has had a more powerful direct negative effect on the people that he is supposed to represent.

**The Trump Effect in Society**

Some might argue that Trump's violent rhetoric is just words used to rally support for election day and nothing more. But what impact do they actually have? There are many instances across the country that seem to show his hateful rhetoric has permeated through all levels of society and do in fact have a huge impact on his constituents. Directly after Trump was elected, teachers reported an increase in the number of targeted instances of harassment in majority white schools towards immigrants, Muslims, girls, LGBT students, kids with disabilities and anyone who was on the "wrong" side of the election (SPLC 2016; Costello 2016). This targeted harassment and discrimination was new to their schools as one elementary teacher from Georgia stated "this is my 21st year of teaching. This is the first time I've had a student call another student the 'n' word. This incident occurred the day after a conference with the offender's mother. During the conference, the mother made her support of Trump known and expressed her hope that 'the blacks' would soon 'know their place again'" (SPLC 2016). This type of language showing up in elementary schools is very alarming and shows the effect that Trump's rhetoric has had on his supporters.

Similarly, Newman et al.'s (2021) argues that Trump emboldens people to think that society has shifted, and that now it is fine to express their prejudicial views. In schools that have

large populations of people of color, there was a collective sense of fear and anxiety because of the results of the election, especially among immigrants who worried about deportation and family separation as a result of the election (SPLC 2016; Costello 2016). Donald Trump has not shied away from using violent political rhetoric in his speeches and rallies as evidenced in his announcement speech of his running for presidency when he said, "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (Cineas 2020).

Language like this is harmful to people who are the targets of violent political rhetoric. The harm is demonstrated by examples of students fearing deportation and separation from their families, and it has also been documented in scientific studies. Chavez et al., (2019) showed a sample of Mexican-origin college students varied images and texts of political rhetoric, some of them positive, some negative, and some neutral. They tested the affect, perceived stress, subjective health, and subjective well-being of the participants. Some of the participants completed the study before and some completed it after the election of Donald Trump. Negative political rhetoric was significantly associated with higher negative emotions and the opposite was true for positive emotions (Chavez et al., 2019). Negative emotions were associated with significantly higher perceived stress, lower perceived health, and lower subjected well-being. Those participating in the study after the 2016 election of Donald Trump had higher perceived stress and lower subjective well-being than those who participated in the study prior to Trump's election. This study highlights how dangerous violent political rhetoric is in that it can negatively

affect the emotions and mental health of the targets of that rhetoric and can elicit feelings of hurt, anger, distress, and anxiety (Chavez et al. 2019).

The Trump effect has not only entered the realm of education but has also infiltrated the realm of therapy. Over 3,000 therapists signed a self-described manifesto declaring Trump's proclivity for scapegoating, intolerance, and blatant sexism a "threat to the well-being of the people we care for" (Sheehy 2016). The President of the United States should not affect the mental health of the very citizens that he is supposed to represent, especially not to the point that therapists are worried about the well-being of their patients. One therapist noted that the Trump Effect caused a lesbian patient to feel so unnerved while travelling through "Trumpish" areas of the south that she hid her relationship with her same-sex partner over fear.

Political rhetoric is a very important factor in campaigns for office in our country and we are exposed to them repeatedly during election time, especially for the presidential election. What is unique about Trump's rhetoric is the violent nature.  Research has shown that it leads to aggression and an increase in hate crime (Kalmoe, 2014; Nugent and Conway, 2021). What the research has not shown, however, is what impact the Trump Effect has had on homicide rates. So, my chief research question is to explore what impact Trump's political rhetoric may have had on bias homicides performed by persons politically aligned with him.

### III. Methods

Throughout Donald Trump's presidential campaign, as well as when he was in office, he made many statements that can be categorized as hate speech. There have also been many instances of his supporters committing hate crimes in his name because of some of the statements that he made. After these crimes were committed, Trump was asked about them. The

former President repeatedly refused to denounce the hate crimes perpetrated by his supporters and instead made excuses for them, calling these people "very passionate" (Lind 2015). The focus of this research will be bias homicides using the Bias Homicide Database, an open-source database that includes information on violent crimes against social minorities. These data include homicides that were officially classified as bias crimes by police as well as those that were not (Gruenwald, K., 2015). This study focuses exclusively on bias homicides that occurred in the United States. According to Gruenewald (2015), the use of homicide is noteworthy because it is the most serious form of crime and the most consistently reported by law enforcement and media sources (see also, Chermak, 1995; Graber, 1980). This database is described in more detail below.

To measure whether the Trump Effect is a real phenomenon, and what impact it may have had on bias homicide, I have relied on existing research to establish a few hypotheses.

**Hypotheses**

The Trump Effect has been noted as an increase in the hate crime rates thought to be due to the intentionally divisive and inflammatory rhetoric used throughout Donald Trump's campaign and during his presidency (Edwards and Rushin 2018). To examine this effect regarding bias homicides, the following hypotheses are offered:

> $H_1$ *If the Trump Effect is an actual phenomenon, the frequency of right-wing bias homicides should be higher after Donald Trump announced his candidacy for president compared to the frequency of bias homicides prior to that event.*

> $H_2$ *If the Trump Effect is an actual phenomenon, the frequency of right-wing bias homicides should decrease after the inauguration of President Biden compared to the frequency of bias homicides during President Trump's tenure.*

I further hypothesized that there will be an increase in the frequency of right-wing bias homicides due to Trump's rhetoric. To examine these hypotheses, the rates of right-wing extremist homicides were measured in two eras. Originally, I had planned to use three-time intervals (Pre-Trump, Trump, and Post-Trump), but the data from the third era is incomplete (explained below). By examining the homicide rates before and during his campaign and presidency, it is possible to examine whether there is a relationship between the instances of hate speech and the proportion of bias homicides perpetrated by the right-wing.

Similarly, if the Trump effect is real, we should be able to measure its impact in other ways. For instance, if Trump's rhetoric impacted the types of victims targeted and the severity of incidents, we should be able to measure that. Donald Trump has stated that his supporters are "very passionate" about his beliefs and the statements that he has made (Lind 2015). However, his messages have been inflammatory and divisive toward the minority groups that he has targeted, particularly Hispanic persons and African Americans (Niedzwiadik, 2020). Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed to examine the severity of bias homicides perpetrated by right-wing groups.

> H3 *If the Trump Effect is real, the focus of bias homicides during Trump's presidency will likely be directed against a higher proportion of Hispanic and Black victims than bias crimes prior to his candidacy.*
>
> H4 *If the Trump Effect is real, the severity of hate crimes during Trump's presidency will likely be higher than before.*

**Data**

I will be using data from the Bias Homicide Database (BHDB), which makes it possible to examine the bias homicides that have been committed at the federal level, including those perpetrated by rightwing and non-rightwing groups. There are other databases that collect

information on this subject, like the American Terrorism Study, but the Bias Homicide Database is currently the only dataset with enough data to analyze the era's I intend to examine. Moreover, the Bias Homicide Database is unique in that it collects data on violent bias crimes— violent crimes directed at social minorities (Gruenewald, 2015). The Bias Homicide Database (BHDB) was created in 2008 by Dr. Jeff Gruenewald and was initially a part of the U.S. Extremist Crime Database. The BHDB is an open-source database containing offender, victim, and incident-level data on all bias homicides occurring in the U.S. since 1990.  In 2019, the BHDB was integrated into the Terrorism Research Center (TRC) in the Department of Sociology and Criminology at University of Arkansas.

An advantage of the BHDB is that it defines bias homicide as a felonious killing that is associated with one or more indicators of bias or hate, without relying on police or prosecutors to officially classify a homicide as a hate or bias crime. For a bias homicide to be included in the BHDB, one or more offenders must be arrested and legally charged with some form of murder. The indicators of bias used to define a homicide as bias include: verbal harassment prior, during, or following the homicide; the location of the homicide, including symbolic sites; official hate crime charge of an offender; police or prosecutor label it as a bias crime; the offender admits the homicide was motivated at least in part by animus toward social minority victims; prior violence towards minorities; mode of victim selection where the victim was identified or selected through affiliation with a social minority group, organization, business, or engaging in an activity linked to their social status; or a symbolic manipulation of the victims body (Terrorism Research Center 2019). The sample I'm using from the database consists of 206 incidents. The database contains over 182 variables, of which I will pull the following: *YearofIncident*, *FarRight,* *NumberVictimDeaths,* and *VictimRace.*

I used SPSS to analyze these data, and performed a variety of analyses, including Crosstabs and independent sample t-tests. The Bias Homicide Database contained information on 221 unique incidents of hate crimes committed during the eras analyzed. However, 15 were removed because the database lacked information on right-wing affiliation for those cases. Of the 206 remaining cases, 25 of the incidents were classified as perpetrated by the far-right (12.1%) and 181 were not affiliated with the far-right (87.9%).

I divided the sample into different time intervals based on the year of the offense with the variable *TimePeriod*. The first era contained cases from 2010 to 2015 (*Pre-Trump =1*). This era represents the five and a half years prior to Trump's formal announcement of his candidacy for presidency, which occurred on June 16, 2015. The second interval contains the five-and-a-half-year period from 2015 to 2021 (*Trump =2*), which represents the period of his campaign and his presidency. Donald Trump left office with Joe Biden's inauguration on January 20, 2021. Therefore, the last time interval included cases from January 20, 2021, to present (*Post-Trump=3*).

## IV. Findings

With the three era samples ready, I used the variable (*FarRight*) to set up my first analysis. *FarRight* is a measure of whether the perpetrator of each case had ties to right-wing extremism, and it allowed me to divide the sample into a dichotomous variable to distinguish between right-wing crimes and all others (right-wing =1, other = 0). The BHDB defines indicators of far-right affiliation as: self-admission of far-right affiliation; membership in extremist group; verbal/written evidence of far-right ideology; witness testimony to offender far-right affiliation; non-violent involvement in far-right extremist movement; bodily markings (e.g.,

attire, tattoos), and possession of extremist literature (Terrorism Research Center 2019). I then

calculated the overall proportion of right-wing crimes by performing a frequency distribution

(results not shown).  I ran the *Pre-Trump* and *Trump* eras in a crosstab.  Again, in hypothesis

one, I posited that *if the Trump Effect is an actual phenomenon, the frequency of right-wing bias*

*homicides should be higher after Donald Trump announced his candidacy for president*

*compared to the frequency of similar right-wing homicides prior to that event.*

The results of the crosstab provided support for hypothesis 1.  Prior to Donald Trump's

announcement of his formal candidacy for president (*Pre-Trump)*, right-wing hate crimes made

up just 7.2% of the total bias homicides committed during this era (See table 1). After his formal

announcement, bias homicides committed by the right-wing increased to 16.1% of the total

homicides committed during the *Trump* era. This data suggests that the proportion of right-wing

bias homicides nearly doubled after the announcement of Trump's candidacy for president while

homicides committed by non-right-wing affiliated perpetrators decreased by the same

percentage. This finding was significant at the .001 level ($X^2(1) = 59.78$ p $< .001$).

Recall Hypothesis 2: *If the Trump Effect is an actual phenomenon, the frequency of right-*

*wing bias homicides should decrease after the inauguration of President Biden compared to the*

*frequency of bias homicides during President Trump's tenure.*  Unfortunately, due to the low

number of incidents during the *Post-Trump* era (n=5), analysis is not yet possible.  It appears that

data collection and coding of these most recent cases is ongoing.  Nonetheless, I would like to

note anecdotally that none of the *Post-Trump* homicides in the database (at this point) were

committed by members of the right-wing. Though the crosstab was performed with *Pre-Trump*

and *Trump* eras, I presented the data for all three eras in Table 1.

**Table 1: Crosstabulation of Bias Homicides by Period and Far Right Affiliation (*Post-Trump* numbers added in combined results)**

| Time Period | Far Right? | Count | Percent within Time Period |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Pre-Trump** | Yes | 6 | 7.2% |
| | No | 77 | 92.8% |
| | Total | 83 | 100% |
| **Trump** | Yes | 19 | 16.1% |
| | No | 99 | 83.9% |
| | Total | 118 | 100% |
| **\*Post-Trump** | Yes | 0 | 0% |
| | No | 5 | 100% |
| | Total | 5 | 100% |
| **Total** | Yes | 25 | 12.1% |
| | No | 181 | 87.9% |
| | Total | 206 | 100% |

$X^2 = 59.78$     df= 2     Sig < .001

Many violent right-wing organizations and far-right media outlets have embraced Trump throughout his political career, for example, the official newspaper of the Ku Klux Clan, the Crusader (Holley 2016). Because of their support for the president, the literature suggests that we might expect an increase in the proportion of far-right bias homicides, but we should be able to measure the *Trump Effect* in other ways. Due to the nature of the rhetoric that Trump has used throughout the course of his political career, and his focus on Hispanic persons and the Black

Lives Matter movement, we expect an increase in the number of attacks targeted towards Hispanic and Black victims as compared to other social minorities (e.g., Asians, Mixed race, etc.). Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

> H[3] *If the Trump Effect is real, the focus of bias homicides during Trump's presidency will likely be directed against a higher proportion of Hispanic and Black victims than bias crimes prior to his candidacy.*

In testing hypothesis 3, I used the variable *VictimRace* to examine if there were differences in the race of bias homicide victims across eras. Using this variable, I was able to run a crosstabulation with the variable *FarRight,v* to analyze right-wing attacks during the Pre-Trump and Post-Trump eras to examine if there was a difference in the racial makeup of victims over time.

**Table 2:**
**Crosstabulation of Bias Homicides by Period, Race, and Far Right Affiliation**

| Period | Far Right? | Victim Race | White/Caucasian | Black | Hispanic | Asian | Multi-Racial | Other | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pre-Trump | Far Right | Count | 9 | **3** | **0** | 0 | 0 | 1 | 13 |
| | | % In Period | 69.2% | **23.1%** | **0%** | 0% | 0% | 7.7% | 100% |
| | All Other | Count | 33 | 56 | 19 | 8 | 0 | 9 | 125 |
| | | % In Period | 26.4% | 44.8% | 15.2% | 6.4% | 0% | 7.2% | 100% |
| Trump | Far Right | Count | 8 | **20*** | **44**** | 3 | 0 | 1 | 76 |
| | | % In Period | 10.5% | **26.3%*** | **57.9%**** | 3.9% | 0% | 1.3% | 100% |
| | All Other | Count | 40 | 82 | 55 | 14 | 2 | 14 | 207 |

| | | % In Period | 19.3% | | 39.6% | 26.6% | 6.8% | 1.0% | 6.8% | 100% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | Count | 90 | | 161 | 118 | 25 | 2 | 25 | 421 |
| | % Total | 21.4% | | 38.2% | 28% | 5.9% | 0.5% | 5.9% | 100% |

*. significant at the .05 level
**. significant at the .001 level

Table 2 shows the racial composition of bias homicides committed by right-wing offenders and non-right-wing offenders in the *Pre-Trump* and *Trump* eras. Crosstabulations showed that for bias homicides, there were statistically significant differences between the eras for only Hispanic and Black victims and only for Right-wing defendants. No other differences between eras were significant for far-right or any other typology. These findings support the hypothesis. In the *Pre-Trump* era, far-right groups did not target Hispanics, but in the *Trump* era, Hispanic victims made up nearly 58% of the sample (p < .001). While not as large a difference, the percent of Black victims also increased from 23% *Pre-Trump,* to 26.4% during the *Trump* era (P< .05). To reiterate, the only significant changes in the racial composition of bias homicide victims in the eras measured were an increase in the proportion of Hispanic and Black victims targeted by far-right perpetrators.

Finally, I turn to hypothesis four, which states: *If the Trump Effect is real, the severity of hate crimes during Trump's presidency will likely be higher, than before.* To test this hypothesis, I examined the number of victims per attack as a surrogate for severity. This makes sense as our data consists of homicides, the only significant measure of severity would be the number of victims per incident. The variable *NumberVictimDeaths* was used to examine whether the number of victim deaths per attack increased during Trump's presidency. I performed an

independent samples T-Test, with era as the grouping variable (*Pre-Trump* and *Trump*) and number of victim deaths per incident as the dependent (see Table 3). *NumberVictimDeaths* recorded the number of victim deaths per incident.

This revealed a significant positive effect (t(545) =-4.288, p=< .001).  The number of attacks increased from 176 to 371, but the number of victims per attack more than doubled, from 1.29 victims per attack in the *Pre-Trump* era, to more than three victims per attack during Trumps campaign and presidency.

**Table 3:**
**Independent Samples t-Test Number of Deaths per incident by Time Period**

|  | Time Period | N | Mean | Stand Dev. | Standard Error |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of deaths | *Pre-Trump Era* | 176 | 1.29 | 1.147 | .086 |
|  | *Trump Era* | 371 | 3.06 | 5.423 | .282 |
| t(545) =-4.288, p=< .001 | | | | | |

## V. Discussion

Existing literature suggested that the Trump Effect would lead to an increase in the hate crime rates nationwide due to the violent political rhetoric that Trump used throughout his campaign and presidency. The literature also suggested that violent political rhetoric can lead to higher levels of aggression, especially in people pronte to aggression.  The literature suggested this occurs when political rhetoric validates the use of violence. This paper examined whether these observations were true with regard to homicide rates.  Focusing on bias homicide rates for right-wing and non-right-wing perpetrators provides a measure of the Trump effect among the most serious crimes. This project also focused on the impact of violent rhetoric on racial composition of victims and the severity of crimes.

The findings suggests not only that the Trump Effect had a real impact on right-wing persons, consistent with prior literature, but it had a significant impact on the frequency and severity bias homicides committed by these groups. Compared the era before Trump launched his presidential bid, the bias homicide rates for the right-wing doubled in the years that followed Trump's announcement of his candidacy and his election. These findings are consistent with the existing literature, which suggests that Trump's intentionally inflammatory and divisive rhetoric could be fanning the increase in violence. While a direct causal link cannot be drawn because there could be other explanations that are not examined here, the results do suggest a correlation and warrant more in-depth analysis in the future.

The literature suggests that the rhetoric Trump used throughout his candidacy and as president targeted certain groups, especially minorities, and made the world a more dangerous place for them.a Trump famously made numerous disparaging remarks about Hispanics, and he often railed against the Black Lives Matter movement. His supporters rallied around a common belief that these groups have eroded the "greatness" that Trump states that America needs to get back to. The findings of this project are consistent with that literature and suggest that there was a dramatic increase in the proportion of bias homicides against Blacks and Hispanics. These findings do not establish a direct link between Trump's rhetoric and the victimology of bias homicides during the Trump era, but the results warrant serious consideration and future study, as there was a marked increase in the bias homicide rates of the very minority groups Trump targeted in his rhetoric. Most telling, the analysis showed that right-wing perpetrators had not targeted Hispanic victims in the 5 years prior to Trump's announcement to run for president. But after Trump began making high profile disparaging remarks to frenzied crowds, Hispanics became the most common target of right-wing bias homicide, at nearly 60 percent.

The literature also found support for the proposition that violent political rhetoric was positively associated with mass shootings, which suggests that dangerous rhetoric stimulates racism, xenophobia, and anger towards the targets. This paper examined the severity of the bias homicides committed during the different eras by examining the number of victim deaths that occurred during each incident and found that there was a significant increase in the number of victims between the different eras—the rate more than doubled. This suggests that Trump's rhetoric led to a dramatic increase in severity of the crimes committed. The findings are disturbing.

**Future Research**

Since this paper only focused on the bias homicides that occurred from 2010-2021, it would be beneficial to examine other types of hate crimes to explore whether other types of hate crimes also significantly increased during Trump's candidacy and presidential term, and whether they demonstrated a similar impact on racial composition of victims and severity.

Due to there not being data available on many cases after Trump left office, it would be beneficial to explore the bias homicide rates as well as other types of hate crimes in the future to get a full grasp on whether the rates are going down since Trump left office.

## VI. Conclusion

In examining the literature of hate crimes, no other study was found that examined the bias homicide rates that occurred over the period studied making this potentially the first to examine these homicide rates due to the "Trump Effect." The findings of this paper not only provide support that the Trump Effect is real, but also show that right-wing offenders committed

significantly more homicides, targeted a greater percentage of Hispanic and Black victims, and increased the severity of their crimes after Donald Trump announced his candidacy for president.

Examining the Trump Effect is important because no American politician has used the extreme violent political rhetoric like Trump, and no politician has rallied their supporters around beliefs that are intentionally violent towards certain groups of people. Disturbingly, this appears to have a massive effect on the targets of the rhetoric. Donald Trump attracted a massive group of devoted supporters that believed every word that he said, including his violent rhetoric, and they believed that anyone who was not in their group threatened their place in this country. The effect that Trump had on his supporters is evident by the unprecedented storming of the capital that occurred on January 6th, 2021, in which his followers believed that the results of the 2020 election of Joe Biden were false, and that the election had been "stolen" from Trump. It is important to examine what effect Trump's violent rhetoric had on his supporters so that in the future no other politician can use rhetoric similar to his, and to protect the mental and physical health of the targets of violent political rhetoric.

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