Examining the Relationship between the Presence of Hate Groups and the Presence of Violent Far-Right Perpetrators at the County Level

Final Report to START

March 2012

National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism
A Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Center of Excellence
Based at the University of Maryland

3300 Symons Hall • College Park, MD 20742 • 301.405.6600 • www.start.umd.edu

About This Report

The authors of this report are Amy Adamczyk (John Jay College), Steven M. Chermak (Michigan State University), Joshua D. Freilich (John Jay College), and William S. Parkin (John Jay College). Questions about this report should be directed to Amy Adamczyk at AAdamczyk@jjay.cuny.edu.

About START

The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) is supported in part by the Science and Technology Directorate of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security through a Center of Excellence program based at the University of Maryland. START uses state-of-the-art theories, methods and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics and social and psychological impacts of terrorism. For more information, contact START at infostart@start.umd.edu or visit www.start.umd.edu.

Citations

To cite this report, please use this format:

Adamczyk, Amy and Steven M. Chermak, Joshua D. Freilich, William S. Parkin. "Examining the Relationship between the Presence of Hate Groups and the Presence of Violent Far-Right Extremists at the County Level," Final Report to START. College Park MD: START, 2012.

Executive Summary

This report examines the relationship between the presence of hate groups in a county and the presence of violent far-right perpetrators (VFRP) of ideologically motivated homicide attacks in that county. We compiled data on the number of white and black hate groups within each U.S. county and analyzed the relationship between the number of hate groups within a county and the odds that a known VFRP resided in the county, controlling for other key variables.

The key outcome variable for this study was whether a county had at least one violent far-right perpetrator (VFRP) in residence. We identified 246 suspects that were involved in 126 far-right ideologically motivated homicides between 1990 and 2008. The suspects resided in 94 U.S. counties. We used the Southern Poverty Law Center's (SPLC) Annual Hate Crime Listing Reports to identify the number of black and white hate-groups in a county. The SPLC reports included 5,420 groups located within 3,107 US counties. We also investigated variables that prior research has found to be related to ideological violence as well as general demographic variables, including socioeconomic variables, social disorganization variables, and a measure of social vulnerability.

We present the results from three types of analysis. First, we provide maps that depict the clustering of VFRPs and demonstrate that, while most U.S. counties did not have a VFRP, there were clusters in California, Florida, Washington State and Oregon. These clusters overlapped with the presence of white and black hate groups. Second, we examine the correlations between county-level data on the presence of at least one VFRP, the number of white and black hate groups present, and the control variables. There are large correlations between size of a county's population, the total number of white hate groups, the total number of black hate groups and the presence of a VFRP. Third, we present models using multivariate logistic regression. Importantly, as the number of white hate groups increase in a county, the odds that a VFRP resides in a county increases. The number of black hate groups is not significantly related to the odds that a VFRP resided in a county. Other variables of significance include presence of Muslims in a county, county population, and population turnover.

Although it might have been expected that the number of white hate groups would be a significant predictor of the presence of a VFRP in the county, it is important to have this assumption empirically supported. It highlights the need to conduct rigorous evaluations and original research to inform threat assessments. We also find that measures related to social disorganization are important to explaining the presence of a VFRP. Future research should examine these characteristics in more detail, and investigate if they also explain other types of ideological violence.

Examining the Relationship between the Presence of Hate Groups and the Presence of Violent Far-Right Perpetrators at the County Level

This report examines the relationship between the presence of hate groups in a county and the presence of far-right perpetrators (VFRP) of ideologically motivated homicide attacks in that county. We explore whether the number of white and/or black hate groups in a county increase the likelihood that a VFRP lives in that county, controlling for other key variables. This report should interest policymakers and analysts as it makes several contributions to the extant research. First, although there is a growing body of research on ideologically motivated violence, there is almost no research on county-level predictors of violent extremism. There are a few studies that examine county-level predictors or identify terrorism hot-spots nationally, but most focus on a single state and not the entire United States (LaFree and Bersani 2012; McVeigh 2004; Van Dyke and Soule 2002). Second, state and local law enforcement personnel share concerns about the nature of the threat posed by violent far-right extremists (Freilich, Chermak and Simone 2009), and there is evidence far-right extremists have in fact committed scores of violent acts in recent years (Chermak, Freilich, Parkin & Lynch, 2012; Freilich, Chermak, Belli, Gruenewald & Parkin 2012). Third, to date, no study has examined whether the presence of hate groups is associated with the presence of ideological violence. In fact, one of this study's greatest strengths is examining this behavioral indicator and its relationship to extremist violence. Previous studies have relied on either attitudinal surveys or case studies to study the emergence of violent extremism, with many focused on examples of violent extremism from the distant past. For example, social movement scholar Rory McVeigh's (2009) general theory of far-right mobilization seeks to explain the rise of all far-right social movements. McVeigh asserts that macro-level changes facilitate the growth of far-right extremist groups in some areas but not in others and that far-right extremist groups emerge in response to the devaluation of their constituents' economic, political, and status-based purchasing power. McVeigh tested his theory by examining changes in the KKK's activities across the United States in the 1920s. He did not explore whether the presence of the groups or their activities had any relationship to the extensive Klan violence occurring during that period. Thus, compiling data about the presence or absence of hate groups in a county provides a rare opportunity to examine whether the presence of such groups in a county increases the likelihood that violent far-right extremists live in that county.

This study investigated if the number of hate-groups in a county is related to the likelihood that a VFRP also resided in the county. The key outcome variable for this study was whether a county had at least one VFRP in residence.[1] For a county to be coded as having a VFRP in residence: (1) there had to be clear evidence that the perpetrator living in the county adhered to a far-right belief system;[2] (2) the VFRP must have committed a homicide between 1990-2008; and (3) the motive for the homicide had to be ideological. The data on VFRPs were derived from the Extremist Crime Database (ECDB), a national open-source database that includes data about

[1] The vast majority of the VFRPs in this study were arrested. However, 14 of the suspects included in the analysis were technically not arrested. Six of these suspects committed suicide before their arrest, and 5 were killed by law enforcement before they could be arrested (For these 11 suspects the police were either in the process of arresting them, or the police had evidence to make an arrest). Three others were in prison at the time of the incident (prison murders). For all 14 of these perpetrators the open source information that we collected specifically discussed their linkage to the homicide at issue and described their extremist activities. Finally, another 3 far-right perpetrators were juveniles, and were never identified. Importantly, these 3 perpetrators were not used in our analysis.

[2] Far-right extremists believe that their personal or national 'way of life' is under attack. Sometimes such beliefs are vague, but for some the threat originates from specific racial or religious groups. They believe that they must be prepared to defend against this attack by participating in paramilitary training or survivalism. These extremists are fiercely nationalistic, anti-global, suspicious of federal authority and reverent of individual liberties, especially their right to own guns and be free of taxes. They believe in conspiracy theories involving imminent threats to national sovereignty or personal liberty and beliefs (Freilich and Chermak 2009; Freilich, Chermak, Belli, Gruenewald and Parkin 2012).

violent, financial, and foiled plots committed by far-right, far-left, and al-Qa'ida-influenced extremists. We extracted from the ECDB information on homicides that were ideologically motivated and committed by far-right extremists in the United States, and then coded the county of residence for each perpetrator identified in this subset of the ECDB. We were able to determine county of residence for 94% of the suspects (n=231) in the database. After placing suspects within their county of residence, we identified 94 U.S. counties that had been home to at least one VFRP.

Our measure of the number of hate groups in a county was derived using the Southern Poverty Law Center's (SPLC) Annual Hate Crime Listing Reports. Importantly, we subdivided the number of hate groups within a county into white and black hate groups. The SPLC's Hate Crime Listing places groups into several categories. We combined racist skinheads, skinheads, identity, white nationalists, Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Confederates, and Neo-Nazis in the white hate group count. All groups identified as black separatists were combined into the black hate group count. There are few sources that systematically and regularly maintain listings of individual far-right violent and nonviolent hate groups. An exception is the SPLC listing. The listing is the best available source for several reasons. First, the report is published annually; one issue every year includes a state-by-state listing of all known hate groups in the United States. Second, although scholars have noted problems with SPLC procedures for identifying hate incidents or groups (Chermak 2002; Freilich and Pridemore 2006), the SPLC has used the same set of strategies to identify hate organizations over time, relying on "hate group publications and websites, citizen and law enforcement reports, field sources and news reports" (SPLC 2011), providing a consistent measure. Third, unlike law enforcement agencies and others that compile intelligence information only on criminally active groups, the SPLC tracks violent and non-violent groups. Significantly, the SPLC specifically excludes websites that are the work of a lone person not affiliated with a group.

The compilation of groups listed in the SPLC reports was cumbersome. For each annual report, we recorded every group listed in the report organized by state and listed if it was a white hate group or a black hate group. For some groups, information on the county in which the hate group was located was provided by the SPLC, but for many others, we had to open source search for this information. We followed this procedure for each successive year, adding groups that were not previously identified or indicating their presence for another year as appropriate. For example, if the White Knights of the KKK were listed in the 1990 report, we recorded the group and identified the state and county where it was located. If the group was again identified in the 1991 report (for the same state/county), we tallied an additional year for that group. If a group appeared in the 1991 report but was not listed in the 1990 report, we added the group to the master list.

In all, the SPLC reports included 5,420 groups located within 3,107 U.S. counties.[3] After the inventory of hate groups by county by year was compiled we created three measures related to the presence of hate groups in a county: (i) whether the county housed a hate group or not during the period from 1990 - 2008; (ii) how many unique hate groups were located in that county during that timeframe; and (iii) the average number of years that each group existed in that county. For the analysis described below, we use the total number of white and black hate groups present in a county from 1990 - 2008 as independent variables.

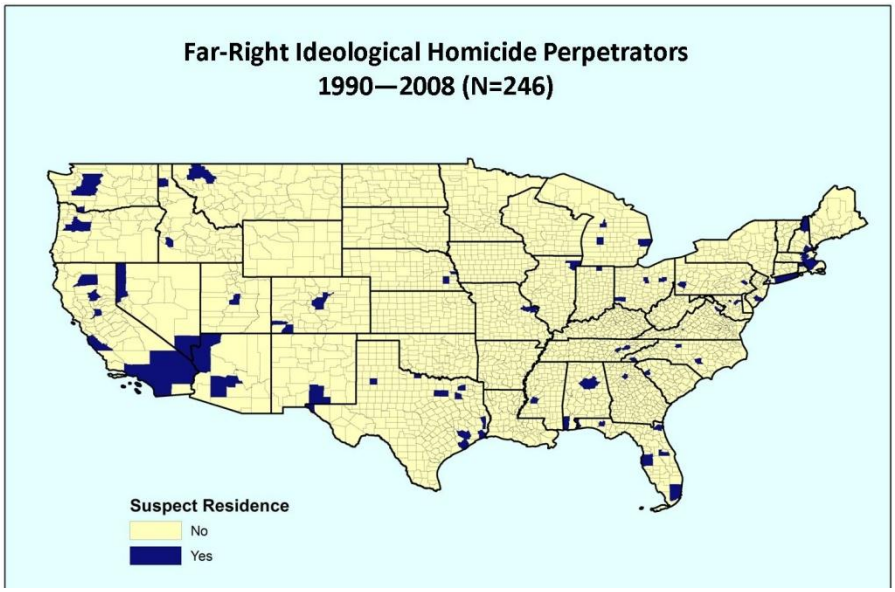
We also include in the analysis control variables that prior research has found to be related to ideological violence as well as a range of general demographic variables. These variables were taken from three sources; (1) the 2000 US Census; (2) the Association of Religion Data Archive; and (3) data provided from the National Consortium for

[3] This report does not examine activities in either Hawaii or Alaska.

the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). These variables include socioeconomic variables, such as percentage of the county's population living below the poverty level and percentage of female headed households; social disorganization variables, such as the percentage of population that moved during the last five years; and a measure of social vulnerability. The measure of social vulnerability was created with START funding by the Hazards and Vulnerabilities Research Institute. The measure represents a counties vulnerability to environmental hazards (see Hazards and Vulnerabilities Research Institute, 2011). Demographic variables include county population and the gender, racial, and religious composition of the county's residents.[4]

We began our analysis by providing maps that display the clustering of ideological homicide perpetrators, white hate groups, and black hate groups. The first map (Figure A) displays counties that had at least one VFRP in residence during the study period (N=94). This map demonstrates that the vast majority of the counties did not have a VFRP in residence at any point. Importantly though, there were a few clusters of counties in California, Florida, Washington and Oregon that had VFRPs in residence.

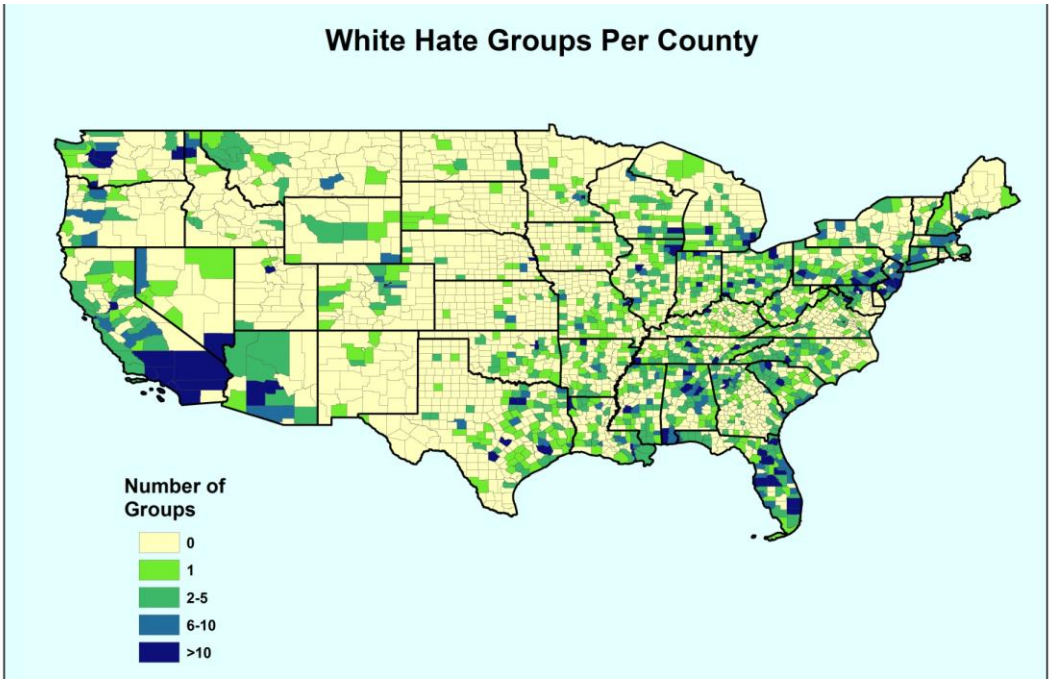
Figure A.



The second map (Figure B) depicts white hate groups by county. Unsurprisingly, hate groups were in more counties than VFRPs. Interestingly though there appears to be a similar clustering of groups as depicted in Figure A. Counties in California, Washington, Oregon, and Florida seem to have a large number of hate groups clustered in areas that had VFRP in residence.

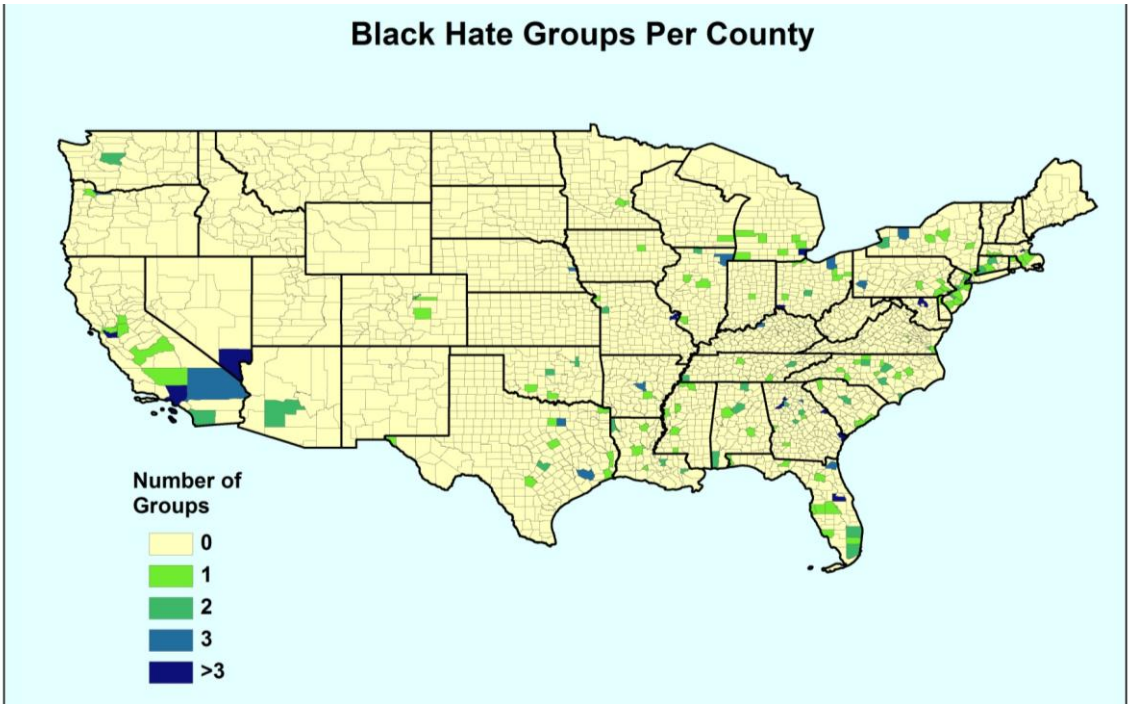
[4] In contrast to Catholics, mainline Protestants, Evangelicals, and Jews, Muslims make up a small part of the religious landscape of the United States. Therefore rather than examining rates of adherence among Muslims, we decided to make the Muslim variable dichotomous where 0=no Muslims in the county; and 1=Muslims present in the county.

Figure B.



The third map (Figure C) depicts black hate groups by county. Although there are fewer black hate groups than white hate groups, their locations overlap somewhat with white hate groups. These groups were also concentrated in Florida, California and Washington.

Figure C.



The second step in our analysis was to examine the correlations between the county-level data on the presence of at least one VFRP, the number of white and black hate groups[5] present, and the control variables. Table 1 presents these correlations. Not surprisingly, the largest correlation is between the size of a county's population and the presence of a VFRP. Counties that have larger populations are more likely to have a VFRP in residence. The next largest correlation is between the presence of a VFRP and the total number of white hate groups in a county, followed by the total number of black hate groups: Counties with more hate groups also are more likely to have a VFRP in residence. In addition, all religion variables included as controls are significantly correlated with the presence of a VFRP in a county: A higher rate of Evangelical adherence was negatively associated with the presence of a VFRP while a higher rate of Catholic adherence and the presence of Muslims are positively correlated with the presence of a VFRP in a county. The social vulnerability measure and the percentage of the county's population below the poverty level are negatively associated with presence of a VFRP such that counties that were higher in social vulnerability and had a higher percentage of the population living in poverty were less likely to have a VFRP in residence. Conversely, counties that had higher percentages of female headed households and higher percentages of residents that moved in the last five years are more likely to have a VFRP in residence.

Table 1. Correlations between Key County Characteristics and Outcome: Presence or Absence of VFRP in Residence in the County (N=3,107)

	VFRP in residence in county
Independent Variables	
Total white hate groups in county	0.3982*
Total black hate groups in county	0.2693*
Control Variables	
Evangelical rates of adherence per 1000	-0.0705*
Muslims present in county (0 or 1)	0.2520*
Catholic rates of adherence per 1000	0.0526*
County Population per 1,000	0.4003*
Social vulnerability index percentile	-0.0656*
Percentage of county below poverty level	-0.0582*
Percentage that has moved in last 5 years	0.1609*
Percentage of female headed households	0.0529*
Percentage foreign born	0.2228*
Percentage Black/African American	0.0186
Percentage male	-0.0285
* =< .05	

Since many of the control variables are also correlated with one another, we also examined which variables had independent effects and whether the total number of white or black hate groups would be

[5] We also conducted the analysis with a dichotomous measure of black and white hate groups where 0=no group present and 1=any groups present. But, the effects appeared larger and more robust when we used the count instead of the dichotomous measure.

significant predictors of the presence of a VFRP in the context of control variables. In other words, we investigated if county characteristics (i.e., percentage black, high levels of poverty) could partially explain both the number of white hate groups and the presence of a VFRP. We wanted to see whether after accounting for these county characteristics, our key relationships would remain, suggesting that the number of hate groups is more directly related to the presence of a VFRP and not the result of a third factor (i.e., percentage black). Table 2 presents our logit regression analysis of presence of a VFRP. Model 1 includes only county population, which, as expected, was significant and explained a large proportion (22%) of the variance. In other words, 22% of the distribution of counties in whether or not they have a VFRP is explained by a county's population size. Model 2 includes the control variables, and several of them were significant. As the percentage of a county's population below the poverty level increased, the odds of a VFRP residing in the county decreased. Conversely, higher percentages of female-headed households were associated with increased odds that a VFRP resided in a county. Similarly, as the percentage of a county's population that moved in the last five years increased, so did the odds that a VFRP lived in the county. In other words, VFRPs are more likely to reside in counties that have higher population turnover. This finding is consistent with research by LaFree and Bersani (2012), which found that a terrorist attack is less likely in more residentially stable counties (see Table 10, p. 26). Finally, higher percentages of African Americans in a county were associated with lower odds of having a perpetrator in residence.

Table 2. Logit Regression Analysis of County Characteristics (Number of Hate Groups and Control Variables) for Explaining Presence of a VFRP (N=3,107)

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
County Population per 1,000	0.003 **	0.003 **	0.002 **	0.003 **	0.002 **	0.002 **
Social vulnerability index percentile		-0.008 +	-0.008 +	-0.008 +	-0.008 +	-0.008 +
% of county below poverty level		-0.103 **	-0.096 **	-0.102 **	-0.090 **	-0.095 **
% of female headed households		0.688 **	0.654 **	0.694 **	0.611 **	0.643 **
% of county that has moved in last 5 years		0.116 **	0.104 **	0.117 **	0.094 **	0.089 **
% foreign born		-0.024	-0.007	-0.026	-0.013	-0.008
% Black/African American		-0.050 **	-0.050 **	-0.049 **	-0.051 **	-0.056 **
% male		-0.049	-0.041	-0.049	-0.019	-0.011
Total white extremist groups			0.057 *		0.049 *	0.049 +
Total black extremist groups				-0.072		
Muslims present in county (0 or 1)					0.652 *	0.711 *
Evangelical adherence rates per 1000						0.000
Catholic rates of adherence per 1000						-0.001
Pseudo R-squared	0.22	0.29	0.29	0.29	0.30	0.30

Logit coefficients are reported
*=<.05, **=<.01

Model 3 includes the number of white hate groups, which had a significant relationship with the presence of a VFRP in a county. As the number of white hate groups in a county increased, the odds that a VFRP resided in the county also increased. Model 4 examines the number of black hate groups and, unlike the number of white hate groups, it was not significantly related to the odds that a VFRP resided in the county. Model 5 includes the presence or absence of Muslims, which was significantly related to the presence of a VFRP in a county. If there were Muslims present in the county, a VFRP was more likely to have resided in the county. Model 6 includes the remaining religion variables. In a separate analysis (not shown) we examined whether the adherence rate of Catholics, mainline Protestants, or Evangelicals were significantly related to the presence of a VFRP in a county when examined separately without any of the other religion variables. None of these variables were significant. Hence, it seems that religious adherence per se is not associated with the presence of a VFRP; rather there is something unique about the relationship between the presence of Muslims in a county and the presence of a VFRP. However, while this relationship was significant, it explained only an additional 1% in the variance.

Conclusions

Our findings raise questions that need to be explored in more detail. It is interesting that the number of white hate groups was a significant predictor of the presence of a VFRP in the county. Although this might be expected, it is important to have this assumption empirically supported. It highlights the need to conduct rigorous evaluations and original research to inform threat assessments.

Future research needs to explanation our finding that far-right hate groups predicted the presence of VFRPs at the county-level. What is the mechanism that links greater number of hate groups in a county to that county also being more likely to have a VFRP present? It is possible that the some of the groups in these counties call for violence or in some other way encourage far-right extremist residents of that county to commit fatal attacks. For instance, Green and Rich (1998) found that more hate crimes occurred in North Carolina counties that had recently had a cross burning. Green and Rich hypothesized that these cross burnings drew attention to the goals of the movement and encouraged individuals to act. They wondered if the cross burnings attracted individuals from other counties to come and commit an attack in the county where the cross burning occurred. This may not be the case for our findings because the VFRPs lived in the same counties as the hate groups. Thus, another possibility is that certain characteristics of these counties may partially explain the presence of both more hate groups and VFRPs residing in it compared to counties that do not have VFRPs or hate groups residing in it. In future research, it would be interesting to examine how a VFRP ended up in a particular county—did their presence predate the presence of a hate group or did the VFRP reside in the county because the hate group was present?

Relatedly, although the mapping of the VFRP and hate groups was somewhat crude, it was interesting that white and black hate groups apparently clustered in the same counties. Future studies need to investigate whether the same sets of county-level predictors explain the presence of white and black extremist groups, and whether there is any relationship between the violence committed by the two

types of groups. Further analysis can then be done that brings us closer to understanding under what conditions the presence of such groups are associated with violence.

Similar to other research (e.g., LaFree and Bersani 2012), it appears that our social disorganization measure helped explain the presence of a VFRP in a county. This finding is a consistent with a long line of prior research that has highlighted the importance of such measures in predicting violence and far-right extremism (Lipset and Raab 1977; Sampson et al 1997; Shaw and McKay 1942). Finally, finding that the presence of Muslims in a county was related to the presence of a VFRP was important. We wonder if Green, Strolovich and Wong's (1998) classic study of hate crimes in New York City could help shed light on this finding. Green et al. found that hate crimes were more likely in NYC districts that were increasing in minority populations. They speculated that young white men felt threatened by these changing demographics and committed hate crimes to defend their neighborhoods. In future work we will investigate if the mere presence of Muslims could be a proxy for other county conditions that could similarly be viewed as a threat to VFRPs belief systems. We are also in the process of identifying al-Qa'ida inspired groups and where they are present in the United States, as well as violent events committed by individuals who adhere to al-Qa'ida's ideology. We plan to then conduct similar analyses of that violent extremist ideology. We will investigate if the al-Qa'ida inspired events occur in the same counties where VFRPs reside. Green et al. in fact found in New York City that cross-sectionally anti-black and anti-white hate crimes correlated and "temporally these two monthly time series seem to follow a tit-for-tat pattern" (Green at al 1998: 399). Thus, knowing whether there is a relationship between what should be unique events and highlighting the characteristics of places where both types of events occur would increase our understanding of ideological violence in the United States. As Green et al (1998: 400) note, "Questions such as these suggest a larger research program in which population flows and racial violence are studied in historical… perspective (e.g., Lieberson 1980; Horowitz 1985)… to develop and test more refined hypotheses about the conditions under which intergroup contact leads to violence."

Works Cited

Chermak, Steven M. 2002. *Searching for a Demon: The Media Construction of the Militia Movement*. Boston, Mass: Northeastern University Press.

Chermak, Steven M., Joshua D. Freilich, William S. Parkin, and James P. Lynch. 2012. American terrorism and extremist crime data sources and selectivity bias: An investigation focusing on homicide events committed by far-right extremists. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 28: 191-218.

Freilich, Joshua D., Steven M. Chermak and Joseph Simone Jr. 2009. "Surveying American State Police Agencies about Terrorism Threats, Terrorism Sources, and Terrorism Definitions," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21 (3); 450-475.

Freilich, Joshua, Steven Chermak, Roberta Belli, Jeffrey Gruenewald & William Parkin. 2012. "Open Source Research and Terrorism Studies: Introducing the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB)" (Under review).

Freilich, Joshua D. and William A. Pridemore. 2006. "Mismeasuring Militias: Limitations of Advocacy Group Data and of State-Level Studies of Paramilitary Groups," *Justice Quarterly* 23, 147-162.

Green, Donald P., and Andrew Rich. 1998. "White Supremacist Activity and Cross burnings in North Carolina." *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 14 (3): 263-282.

Green, Donald P, Dara Z. Strolovitch, and Janelle S. Wong. 1998. Defended Neighborhoods, Integration, and Racially Motivated Crime. *American Journal of Sociology*, 104(2): 372-403.

Hazards and Vulnerabilities Research Institute, 2011. Available from the WWW at: http://webra.cas.sc.edu/hvri/products/sovi.aspx

LaFree, Gary and Bianca E. Bersani. 2011. *The Geographic Concentration of Terrorism in the United States, 1970 to 2008* Final Report to Human Factors/Behavioral Sciences Division, Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security. College Park MD: START, 2012.

Lipset, Seymour & Earl Raab. 1977. *The Politics of Unreason: Right Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1977*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McVeigh, Rory. 2009. *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

McVeigh, Rory. 2004. "Structured Ignorance and Organized Racism in the United States. *Social Forces*, 82 (3): 895-936.

Sampson, Robert J., Stephen W. Raudenbush & Felton Earls. 1997. Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy. *Science* 15 (Vol. 277 no. 5328): 918-924

Shaw, Clifford and Henry H. McKay. 1942. *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Southern Poverty Law Center, "Hate Map" (2011), available from, http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/hate-map