

Extreme Hatred: Revisiting the Hate Crime and Terrorism Relationship

OVERVIEW

This study investigates the relationship between hate crime (bias-motivated crime) and terrorism at the county level to uncover whether increases in one type of bias-motivated or extremist acts are associated with increases in other types of extremist activity. This study is part of a larger research project seeking to answer the overarching question: Are hate crime and terrorism more interrelated than prior research has demonstrated?

METHOD

This study uses three major databases on bias-motivated and extremist violence, focusing on the United States from 1992 to 2012. Data on general anti-minority hate crime offending comes from the FBI's Uniform Crime Report, Hate Crime Statistics Act (HCSA) data (n=130,289). Data on fatal hate crimes committed by far-right extremists (n=118) is drawn from the U.S. Extremist Crime Database (ECDB). The study authors also re-classify U.S. incidents from START's Global Terrorism Database (GTD) as representing either far-right terrorist acts (n=223) or non-far-right terrorist acts attacking "traditional American values" (e.g., those committed by far-left and Islamist jihadist perpetrators) (n=225).

The study tests the following major hypotheses:

- H1: An increase in counties' non-fatal anti-minority/anti-"other" hate crimes committed by all types of perpetrators is associated with an increase in counties' fatal hate crimes by the far-right (FR).
- H2: An increase in counties' fatal hate crimes committed by the FR is associated with an increase in counties' terrorist acts by the FR.
- H3: An increase in counties' terrorist acts by non-right-wing groups is associated with an increase in counties' fatal hate crimes by the FR.

To test these hypotheses, the study uses negative binomial regressions, using the total counts of these extremist acts over a 20-year period (1992-2012, excluding 1993) in 3,137 U.S. counties. Furthermore, the study examines these relationships in the context of intergroup conflict, using variables on minority presence, diversity, unemployment, poverty, as well as the change in those four variables over the 20-year period (data drawn from U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics).

FINDINGS

The results show that counties experiencing increases in one type of bias-motivated or extremist violence are likely to see significant increases in other types of extremist activity. While there is only a weak positive association between general hate crime and fatal FR hate crime, there are very strong positive associations between FR hate crime and FR terrorism as well as anti-U.S. terrorism and FR hate crime at the county level.

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The results indicate that increases in counties' fatal hate crimes by the far-right are associated with approximately four times more far-right terrorist acts. Furthermore, the results also show that increases in non-right-wing terrorist acts see between a 64% to 78% increase in far-right fatal hate crime.

The results also support hypotheses drawn from the tenets of group conflict theories in that greater minority presence and diversity as well as increasing minority presence and diversity over time are correlated with increases in far-right activity. Contrary to expectations, greater levels of poverty are associated with fewer far-right acts. Despite this finding, counties suffering from other poor or worsening economic conditions (greater unemployment and increasing poverty over time) see associated increases in both types of far-right violence.

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IMPLICATIONS

The results have potential implications for law enforcement and policymakers. Hate crime and terrorism both pose unique threats to society and as such, require specialized handling by law enforcement. Extremist activity threatens harm to government, law enforcement, and citizens, particularly those targeted for their inherent characteristics. Future law enforcement efforts should focus on the particular threat posed by far-right extremism, training officers to understand far-right groups, their beliefs and how these beliefs spur them to violent action. It is also important for law enforcement to recognize where one type of extremist activity is happening, so as to prevent other types of activity.

The current study also demonstrates that far-right activities can be an outgrowth of underlying community characteristics. Demographic change and worsening economic conditions have the potential to contribute to group tensions, which if unresolved, can damage intergroup relations. Governmental and law enforcement agencies can intervene to repair community relations, thus preventing tensions from escalating to more violence. Law enforcement should also focus on communicating with far-right groups as well as tracking such groups and bias-motivated violence. Furthermore, governmental and law enforcement agencies should reach out to community stakeholders to better address the threat extremist violence poses to communities.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The current study supports the assertion that hate crime and terrorism are more alike than different. Future research, however, should continue to investigate the relationship between hate crime and terrorism, both spatially and temporally. Furthermore, such research should pay attention to the middle ground between the two: hate crime committed by far-right extremists.

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