A Geographical Analysis of Socioeconomic and Ideological Drivers of Hate Crime in the United States

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ABSTRACT

Criminal activities motivated by hate are the most extreme form of bias against people. While hating a class of people and organizing in hate groups to express feelings against those people are not illegal, hate crimes, violent and non-violent, are illegal. However, there remains much to be learned about geographic patterns of hate crimes and facilitating environments. This exploratory research examines hate crime occurrences aggregated to counties in the conterminous United States and attempts to explain resulting patterns using socioeconomic and ideological correlates with traditional and spatial statistics. Geographical patterns of hate crimes in the Unites States are found to be a complicated phenomenon.

KEYWORDS

Bias, Crime, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Hate, Regional Analysis

INTRODUCTION

The term "hate" is commonly heard in the context of "hate crime," arguably the most extreme and sometimes violent expression of this emotion. Hate crime in the United States is complicated. General trends are understood and reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), while organizations including the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) report on individual cases and provide information to the public. Still, it is impossible to know how much hate crime is occurring at any given time. U.S. states have varying policies on what constitutes as a hate crime, while some have no governing statutes at all (Smith and Foley 2010), and regional cultures can influence authority opinions of what activities should be classified as hate crimes. Even within U.S States, different police departments have diverging policies on hate crime.

Since the emergence of the term "hate crime" in the public lexicon, a number of tragic and notorious incidents have drawn national attention. These acts represent violence that is distinct from other crimes, because it was concluded that some or all of perpetrators' motivation came from a desire to harm someone due to, in these examples, the victims' race or sexual orientation, verifying the need for distinct conceptual constructs to understand these phenomena.

Recently, there have been many incidents of hate-based violence. In 2017 in Seattle, a Sikh man was shot in his suburban driveway, after the gunman approached him and said, "go back to your own country." In the same year, a similar incident occurred in a Kansas bar when an Indian man was killed and another wounded. Witnesses say the suspected shooter yelled, "get out of my country" (Le 2017). Two other incidents that received a great deal of media attention were the Charleston, South Carolina church shooting in 2015 by Dylann Roof that killed nine, and the Orlando, Florida Pulse Nightclub shooting in 2016 that resulted in fifty deaths and fifty-eight injuries. Roof's stated motivation was to start a race war (Mosendz 2015) and photos of him posing with White supremacist and neo-Nazi symbols were found online. He also wrote a manifesto that describes his bias against people of varying races and ethnicities (Bernstein, Horwitz, and Holley 2015). The motivations of Omar Mateen, the shooter of the Orlando Nightclub attack are more ambiguous, though some have described the attack as a hate crime against the LGBTQ community (Goldman 2016; Zambelich and Hurt 2016).

In spite of the public attention garnered by these events, hate crime has not been the subject of thorough analysis in any of the academic fields where it logically fits (Perry 2003). Indeed, the concept of hate crime is better described as a political construct than an analytical tool. It generally refers to a specific type of bias or criminal activity, but the crimes allegedly motivated by hate vary drastically, as do the characteristics of the groups and/or individuals that commit them. These variances are likely, in part, a function of geography. Hate in many cases is cultural - learned behavior from family, friends, or other aspects of community. Though this is the case, it is common for hate to be greatly simplified as something we all experience similarly. It is much more likely that motivations toward, and directions of hate, are influenced by local to regional human environments, social networks, and social situations.

This research takes a regional approach to better understand patterns of socioeconomic and ideological drivers of hate crimes in the conterminous United States. It is primarily exploratory, as there have not been many studies of relative regional effects on hate crime in the U.S. In Europe, however, bias based violence toward migrants has been shown to be a complex phenomenon (Blazek, 2014). The authors hypothesize that the factors correlating with hate crimes in U.S. regions will have varying magnitudes of influence, due to different geohistorical and situational environments. Our research question, then, is: how do social, economic, demographic, and ideological factors influence hate crimes in different United States regions? We approach this question using spatial statistics and Geographic Information Systems methods. Specifically, we apply linear regression, spatial filtering with eigenvectors (SFE), and geographically weighted regression (GWR) models to FBI hate crime data as the dependent variable. The independent variables in the models represent socioeconomic (diversity, poverty, mobility, and education) and ideological (religiousness, and degree of conservatism) factors that are assumed to be potential drivers of hate crimes. These variables were selected in response to previous research on hate and bias, which will be discussed throughout Section 2. This research serves as a continuation of a multi-part study on hate in the United States. The first portion of this project focused on socioeconomic and ideological effects on hate groups (Author, date).

UNDERSTANDING HATE CRIME IN THE UNITED STATES

The U.S. Department of Justice defines Hate Crime, or "bias-motivated crimes," as "offenses motivated by hatred against a victim based on his or her race, religion, sexual orientation, handicap, ethnicity, or national origin" (US Department of Justice 1999, p. ix). Hate crime can look like any other type of crime, such as those considered to be "traditional offense[s] like murder, arson, or vandalism with

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