# Racial Violence in the American South: An Analysis of Reported Deaths in the 1930s–1950s

How does time, place, and gender affect the distribution of racial killings in the American South? This dataset comes from The Burnham-Nobles Archive of The Civil Rights & Restorative Justice Project at Northeastern University School of Law. The Archive focuses on racially motivated killings in the Southern U.S., between the years 1930 and 1954.
We present this data with the aim of uncovering historical trends as well as recognizing the legacy of racial violence and its relevance to ongoing systemic inequities.

Total deaths reported by county
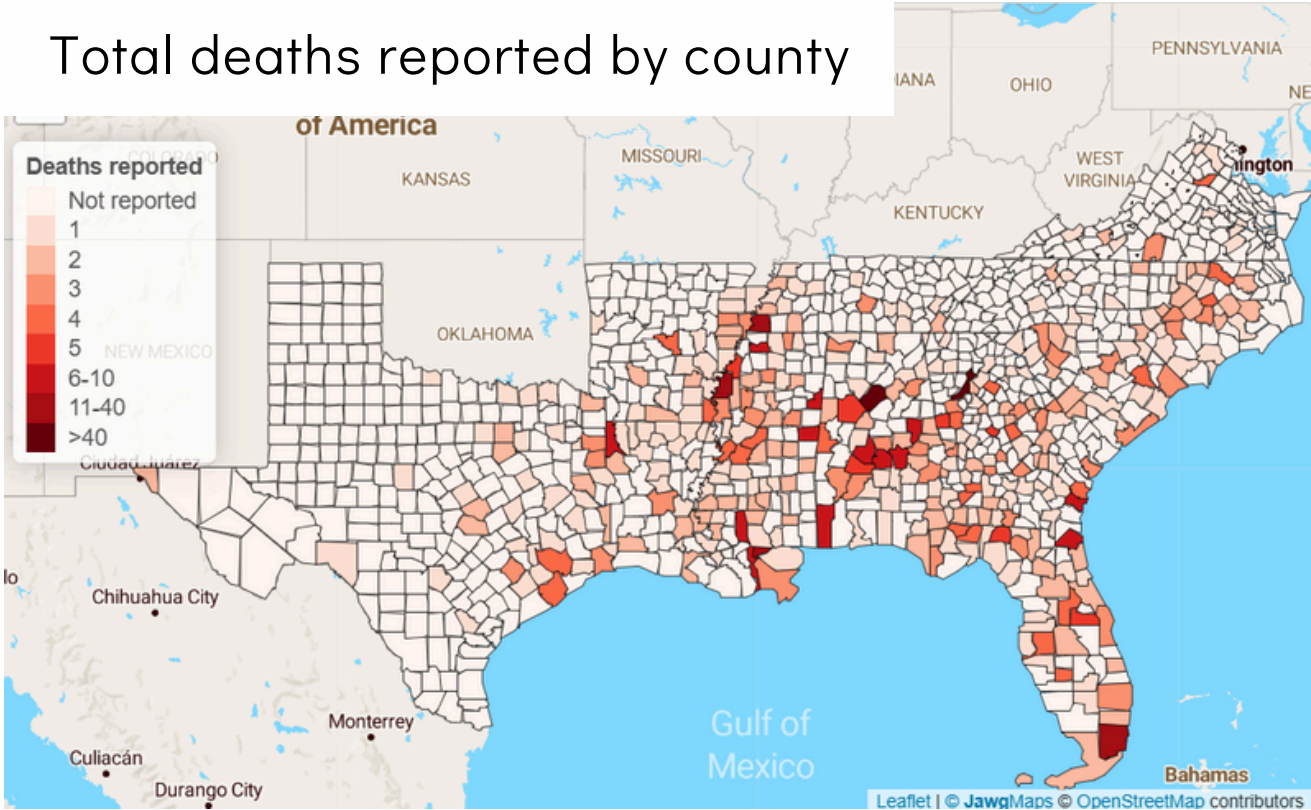
This plot shows the spatial distribution of the reported deaths broken up by county. A majority of counties have death counts up to five, though some counties have significantly higher numbers. Jefferson county, Alabama has the highest count: 95, followed by Fulton county, Georgia: 42, and Orleans county, Louisiana: 23. The online version of this map is interactive and displays counts of individual counties.

The spaghetti plot below shows the recorded Anti-Black Deaths in 11 southern states from 1930 to 1954. The largest spike in the dataset is from 1945 to 1952. With some historical context of racial segregation and racial violence in Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama at the time, the "Birmingham Bombings" was a series of bombings across different African American homes and businesses. Visit our project website (listed below) for a more detailed analysis.

In many instances, police were directly responsible for violence or complicit in allowing it to occur, such as by failing to protect victims from lynch mobs or by engaging in discriminatory practices themselves. This is evident in the high number of police perpetrators in the bar plot below. Murders by police were often justified under the guise of law enforcement, and cops were frequently directly responsible for violence or complicit in allowing it to occur.

Black individuals could be killed for minor perceived slights or infractions, as in cases documented in the late 1940s where officers used lethal force in response to a refusal to adhere to racist social norms like addressing white individuals as "sir" or removing hats in their presence. Additionally, police were integral to maintaining the status quo of racial inequality, as they often acted in service of white supremacist political and legal cultures. This included refusing to investigate or prosecute crimes against Black individuals or even delivering victims to white mobs. The 1930s saw a temporary decline in KKK activity (murders by the KKK would fall under the "mob" section of the plot), but the larger culture of white supremacy laid the foundation for the racially charged violence that would continue into the late 40s and early 50s, as segregationist policies remained largely intact.

Anti-Black Deaths by State from 1930-1954
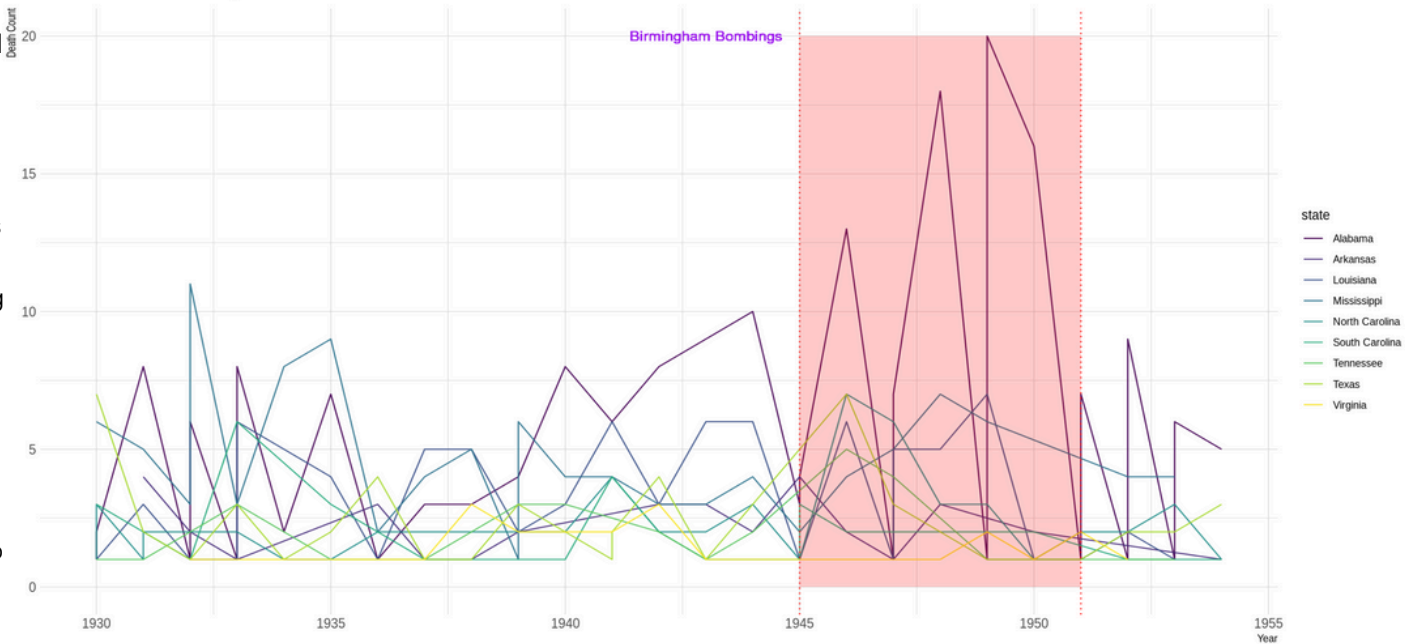
Deaths by racial violence by year and perpetrator type
Of reported incidents in the American South between the years 1930 and 1954
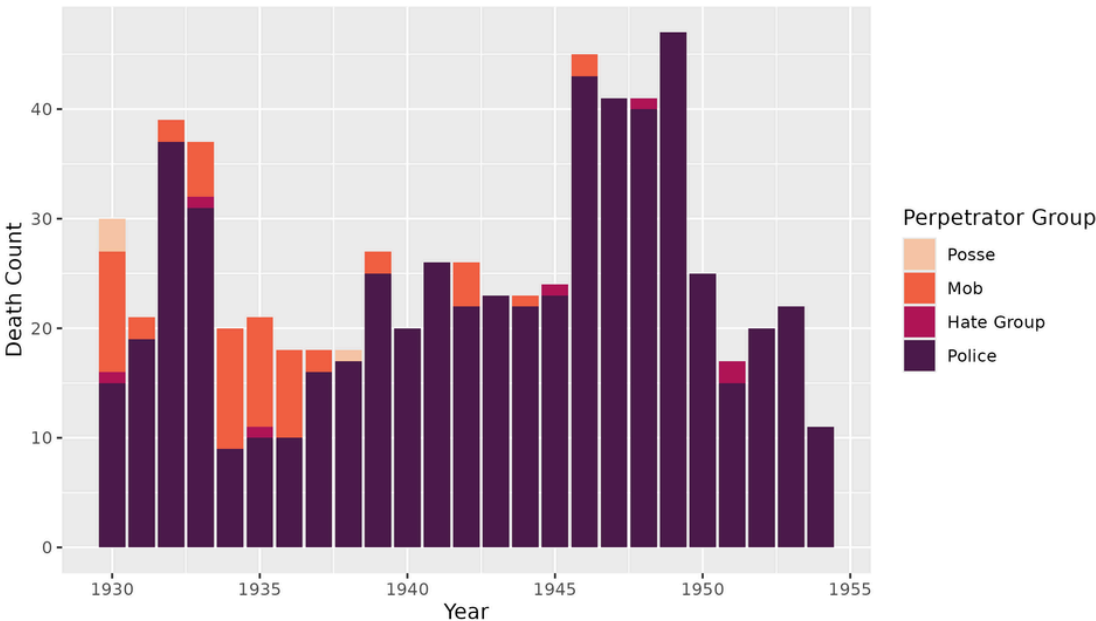
A note about missing data:

Mapping incidents at the county level highlights both areas of concentrated violence and the significant gaps in reporting of incidents. These gaps, due to the covert nature of many crimes and historical biases in record-keeping, show the dataset's inherent limitations. While observing our visualizations, keep in mind that this historical context may be causing inaccuracies in our findings. There is a high likelihood that our count of incidents is greatly underrepresenting the true number of violent acts that occured.

See our GitHub document for complete reference list and analysis: https://es-1085.github.io/f2024-ds1-project-megteam/

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