# The Effect of President Trump's Election on Hate Crimes

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ABSTRACT

**Objectives**: A number of critics predicted that President Donald Trump's divisive rhetoric during the presidential campaign and his subsequent election would embolden hate crime perpetrators, thereby contributing to more hate crimes. Media commentators have dubbed this the Trump Effect. This Essay empirically evaluates the relationship between President Trump's rise to power and the recent increase in reported hate crimes.

**Methods**: We use time series analysis and panel regression techniques to examine the relationship between President Trump's election and trends in reported hate crime rates at the national and local level from 1992 through 2017.

**Results**: President Trump's election was associated with a statistically significant surge in reported hate crimes across the United States, even when controlling for alternative explanations. Counties that voted for President Trump by the widest margins in the presidential election experienced the largest increases in reported hate crimes.

**Conclusions**: Using the data from this study, we offer a novel theory that builds on the existing literature on the causes of hate crimes. We hypothesize that it was not just Trump's inflammatory rhetoric throughout the political campaign that caused hate crimes to increase. Rather, we argue that it was Trump's subsequent election as President of the United States that may have validated this rhetoric in eyes of perpetrators and fueled the hate crime surge.

**Key Words**: hate crimes, bias-based offenses, politics, causes of crime

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## INTRODUCTION

Donald Trump's unorthodox presidential campaign was historically anomalous—at least in recent American history—in its use of inflammatory and divisive rhetoric (Lopez, 2018). At the start of his campaign, he called Mexican immigrants "criminals and rapists" responsible for "bringing crime" and "drugs" to the United States while later conceding that some were "good people" (Hee Lee, 2015). He called for a ban on all Muslims entering the United States (Healy & Barbaro, 2015). He demanded that U.S. District Judge Gonzalo Curiel, born in Indiana to Mexican immigrant parents, recuse himself from hearing a case involving Trump University because of the "conflict of interest" inherent in Judge Curiel's "Mexican heritage" (Kendall, 2016). Trump has been slow or reluctant to condemn white supremacists, including those that openly supported his candidacy.[1] On multiple occasions, Trump retweeted anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim messages (Wildman & Kirby, 2017), and Trump continues to refer to Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren as "Pocahontas," in reference to contested claims of Senator Warren's Native American lineage (Davis, 2017).

Despite these controversial comments, the American people ultimately elected Donald Trump the forty-fifth President of the United States. Numerous commentators predicted that President Trump's rhetoric during and after the campaign would embolden perpetrators of hate crimes (Potok, 2017). Indeed, over the last two years, a number of hate crime victims have described being targeted by perpetrators who explicitly reference Trump during the attack. For example, in Boston, two men returning home after a Red Sox game came upon a homeless Mexican immigrant sleeping near a train station. They proceeded to beat the man with a metal pipe, urinated on him, and used racial slurs during the attack. When police apprehended the men shortly thereafter, one of them told the arresting officer "Donald Trump was right. All these illegals need to be deported" (Clauss, 2016). Similarly, in New York, a white businessman faced criminal charges after assaulting an airline worker in a hijab and telling her, "Trump is here now [and] he will get rid of all of you" (Bever, 2017). In Michigan, an undocumented immigrant reported that two men stapled a note with a racial slur to his stomach and told him that, "Trump doesn't like you" (Barry & Eligon, 2017).

[1] See Chan (2016) describing how, despite previously publicly denouncing David Duke in 2000, he claimed he "didn't know David Duke" and he did not "know anything about him" when asked for his reaction to receiving a public endorsement from the former Klansman. More recently, Trump made headlines in his failure to quickly condemn the murder of Heather Heyer at the hands of a white supremacist in Charlottesville, Virginia (Shear & Haberman, 2017).

Preliminary analysis by organizations like the Southern Poverty Law Center suggests that these anecdotes are part of a broader national epidemic. In fact, one analysis found that a quarter of recent hate crime perpetrators in states like Florida allegedly invoked Trump's name (Lipscomb, 2017). Some media commentators have dubbed this the "Trump Effect."[2] Fundamentally, this raises an important empirical question: has President Trump's ascent to the White House contributed to a statistically significant increase in hate crimes across the United States? And if it has, what does that tell us about the causes of such bias offenses?

This Essay empirically evaluates the relationship between Donald Trump's rise to power and the recent increase in reported hate crimes. We use historical hate crime data from the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) from 1992 through 2017 to show that President Trump's rise to the presidency was associated with one of the largest upticks in hate crimes in recorded American history—second only to the spike in hate crimes after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. While attributing causation is challenging given the preliminary nature of the data, two pieces of evidence suggest that President Trump's heated rhetoric and subsequent election may be connected to this surge in hate crimes.

First, we detrend the raw hate crime data to show that the recent spike in hate crimes was concentrated close in time to the election of President Trump in the fourth quarter of 2016. Such a surge in the number of reported hate crimes in the fourth quarter of a year is highly unusual; generally, the number of reported crimes declines between the third and fourth quarter of each year due to predicable seasonal variations in crime rates. After this initial surge in the fourth quarter of 2016, hate crimes remained elevated in 2017 relative to recent years. By running formal time series regressions with a full set of controls, we show that no alternative variable seems to explain this spike in hate crimes. In our judgement, this leaves Trump's election as the strongest possible explanation. Second, by using panel regression techniques, we show that counties that voted for President Trump by the widest margins in the presidential election also experienced the largest increases in reported hate crimes during this time period.

Combined, we believe that this provides compelling evidence to support the Trump Effect hypothesis. Using the data from this study, we offer a novel theory that builds on the existing literature on the causes of hate crimes. We hypothesize that it was not just Trump's inflammatory rhetoric throughout the political campaign that caused hate crimes to increase. Rather, we argue that it may have been Trump's subsequent election as President of the United States that validated this rhetoric in eyes of perpetrators and fueled the hate crime surge.

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[2] *See, e.g., 'Trump Effect' Led to Hate Crime Surge, Report Finds*, BBC News, (Nov. 29, 2016), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38149406

This essay proceeds in four parts. In Part I, we conduct a preliminary analysis of the raw data, and we give an overview of the existing literature on hate crime causation. Then, Part II details our methodology, including our time series and panel regression analyses. Part III presents the results of this modeling. And Part IV explores the implications of our findings.

## I. EXISTING LITERATURE ON THE CAUSES OF HATE CRIMES

The existing literature on the causes of hate crimes is relatively thin.[3] As one researcher put it, "[i]t might take the better part of a lifetime to read the prodigious research literature on prejudice … yet scarcely any of this research examines directly and systematically the question of why prejudice erupts into violence." (Green et al. (2001).

Those who have theorized on the causes of hate crimes have frequently attributed their occurrence to marginalized individuals using acts of prejudice to reassert their identity in the face of economic, social, and political insecurity. For example, some criminologists have applied criminological strain theory in explaining hate crimes. Strain theory criminology argues that crime is often the result of mismatches between the "goals by which Western society judges 'success' (wealth and material possessions) and the means available to individuals to achieve those goals." These scholars have theorized that "perceived instability (or strain) in their lives," including increased competition for "jobs and scarce resources" from those perceived as "foreigners" or "outsiders" may threaten people's economic security, thereby contributing to hate crimes. Under this view, the increased presence of minority groups within a community may lead to the perception of strain among a majority population, resulting in higher numbers of hate crimes (Hall, 2014).

Another body of research has applied criminological theories on differential association in arguing that hate crimes happen, like most criminal activities, after "a process of social learning" when a person is surrounded by "individuals engaging in similar activities" (Sutherland, Cressey, & Luckenbill, 1995). This is consistent with other subcultural theories of criminology, which emphasize that individual behaviors and values can transmit from one individual to another (Cohen, 1955). By extension, this theory would suggest that group identity and frequent

[3] It is worth noting that this literature review focuses specifically on the general social causes of hate crimes, as opposed to the psychological conditions that cause individuals to commit crimes. For example, individual-level analysis might try to explain hate crimes as the result of individual pathologies. For example, within the psychological literature, there is some evidence that authoritarian personalities may contribute to the commission of hate crimes. *See Green, McFalls, and Smith (2001).*

exposure to inflammatory or prejudicial beliefs might result in a socialization process that could contribute to acts of prejudice.

Outside of criminology, social-psychological explanations suggest that hate crimes may be the result of "particularly sensationalist coverage of spectacular events," which can produce a "hate crime contagion" (Green et al., 2001). According to this line of thought, the media can instigate acts of bias through perpetuating or legitimating stereotypes, and media coverage of "triggering events," like the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, can "combine the ingredients of hate into a combustible brew," thereby contributing to increases in crimes of prejudice (Hall, 2014).

And perhaps most relevant to our study, a number of scholars have observed how political discourse and political events can play an important role in the frequency of bias-based offenses. Some have argued that inflammatory statements by politicians seemingly supporting or condoning racist violence can contribute to hate crimes (Karapin, 1999). For example, in the U.K., researchers linked a rise in hate crimes against individuals with disabilities to "irresponsible rhetoric from the British government in relation to statements concerning the numbers of people claiming incapacity benefit who are 'faking' disabilities." As Donald P. Green, Laurence H. McFalls, and Jennifer K. Smith explain, some hate crime perpetrators "are moved to act on the basis of the 'political opportunity structure'"—that is "the availability of channels to express grievances, the legitimacy of grievance within public and political discourse, and the likelihood of prevention or punishment of hate-motivated crimes" (488).

These theoretical explanations provide some useful baselines for building our empirical model. Empirical studies of this variety are unfortunately rare. While a wide and varied literature exists on hate crime legislation, the enforcement of hate crime laws, and patterns in victimization, there is "little rigorous empirical work on the causes of hate crime in North America and Western Europe" (490). A handful of researchers and media outlets have attempted to test empirically the Trump Effect. ThinkProgress tracked the number of reported hate crimes between November 2016 and February 2017 (Jenkins, 2017). They found substantial evidence that violence against minorities sharply increased after the election of Donald Trump. Research by Professor Brian Levin looked at police data from 40 U.S. cities, counties, and states to conclude that hate crimes likely increased by 20% in 2017 (Levin & Grisham, 2016). In addition, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has tracked the number of hate-related incidents after the election of Donald Trump (SPLC, 2016). They have generally found that bias incidents have increased in the months after Trump's election as President.

Finally, a recent and compelling study by Karsten Muller and Carlo Schwarz found a relationship between social media use and hate

crimes during the Trump Administration. Specifically, they found that President Trump's tweets related to Islam were highly correlated with bias crimes against Muslims. And, similar to our study, they found that counties with particularly high Twitter usage experienced the greatest increase in hate crimes against Muslims (Muller & Schwarz, 2018).[4]

All of the existing literature, along with the recent work by Professor Levin, ThinkProgress, and SPLC, provide valuable insight into the ways that President Trump's rise to power may have contributed to a rise in hate crimes. Nevertheless, there is still a need for an in-depth, quantitative analysis of the Trump Effect. Muller and Schwarz's currently unpublished findings suggest that such a Trump Effect could be plausible, particularly as it relates to bias crimes against Muslims in the United States. But that study leaves considerable room for additional study.

## II. GENERAL TRENDS IN HATE CRIMES

Before delving into our more sophisticated modeling, it is useful to look for general trends in the hate crime data. As we show in Subpart A, the raw and detrended data on hate crimes is consistent with the Trump Effect hypothesis. That is to say, the raw and detrended data suggests that hate crimes have increased during Trump's rise to power though we are cautious in making casual claims. As we explore in Subpart B, scholars in a wide range of fields including criminology, sociology, psychology, and political science have offered a number of different theories about the causes of hate crimes. Thus, even though the preliminary data suggests the plausibility of the Trump Effect, a more sophisticated statistical analysis is necessary to control for these alternative explanations.

The number of hate crimes reported to the FBI in the United States has generally declined over the last ten years roughly mirroring the national decline in crime.[5] But there have been a couple of periods

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[4] While both studies examine, in part, the effect of President Trump's rhetoric on county-level hate occurrences of hate crimes, we were not aware of this study when we initially completed our study. As best we can tell, we released our paper online before Muller and Schwarz. They released their paper online via Social Science Research Network (SSRN) on March 28, 2018. We published our paper on SSRN on January 18, 2018. With that said, we strongly believe that there is ample room for both studies to explore this important topic, particularly given our different approaches. The fact that we arrive at similar conclusions combine to bolster the argument that President Trump's rhetoric may be influencing the number of hate crimes in the United States.

[5] *See Uniform Crime Reporting Resource Guide*, NACJD, http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/content/nacjd/guides/ucr.html. National crime rates are highly predictive of hate crime rates in the United States. That is, as national crime rates increase and decrease, hate crime rates generally follow suit. A simple Pearson product-moment correlation suggests there is a predictive

over the last ten years when hate crimes have spiked despite the continued national decline in crime rates. For example. In 2001 the United States saw hate crime rates increase by over 21%, during the same time when national crime rates increased by only 2%.[6] Past researchers have attributed this spike in national response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (Disha, Cavendish, & King, 2011; Kaplan, 2006). Additionally, in 2015 and 2016, hate crime rates increased by around 13%, as the overall crime rate dipped by 2%.[7] Thus, as a preliminary matter, it appears that the general timing of Donald Trump's rise to power roughly correlated with an anomalous increase in the overall number of hate crimes and hate crime rates.

But teasing out causation from this data is difficult. In the context of causality, we want to be very careful to not overstep the limitations of the data and design. In it's truest sense, statistical causality derived outside of a laboratory setting need come from the isolation and exploitation of an exogenous shock or natural experiment in the data. While we do not proport to totally clear this hurdle for causality, we do feel the time series analysis combined with the relative surprise of Trump's victory makes this a compelling correlative story (Kennedy et al., 2018). So, if Donald Trump's rise to power contributed to a rise in hate crimes, what about Trump's actions actually *drove* this uptick? Was it the divisive rhetoric? Or did his election as President have a signaling effect for would-be hate crime perpetrators? To tackle this problem, it may be useful to look not just at annual hate crime numbers, but instead quarterly statistics. This allows us to isolate when hate crimes began increase most substantially.

By breaking down the FBI hate crime data by quarter, a predictable, cyclical pattern emerges. As shown in Figure 1, in each calendar year hate crimes generally reach their peak during the second and third quarter (roughly April through September), before subsiding during the fourth quarter (October through December). This seasonal variation in hate crimes is consistent with seasonable variations in other crime categories (Jacob, Lefgren, & Moretti, 2007), but in 2016 something unusual happened. For the first time in recent history, hate

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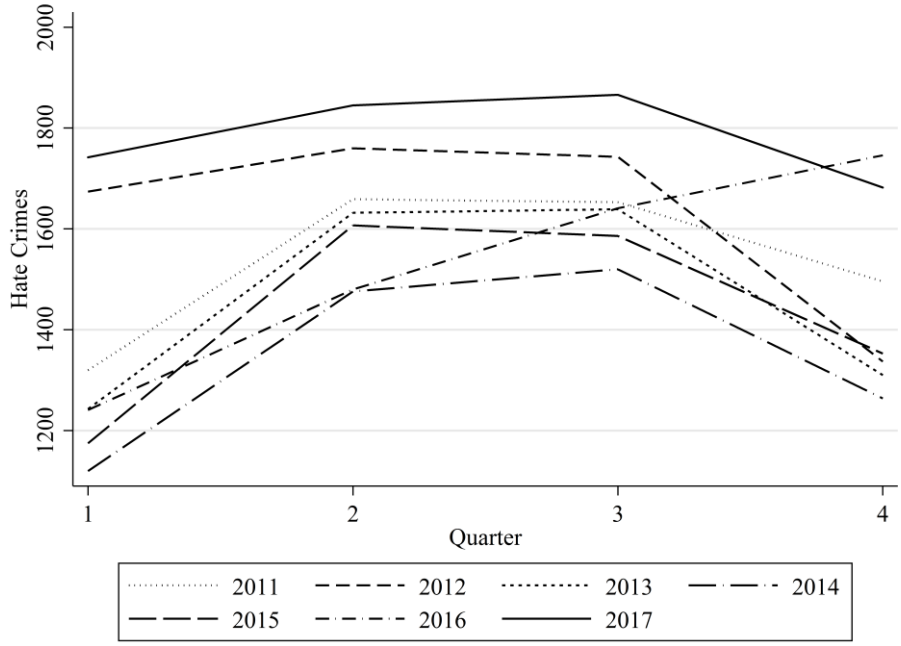
relationship between the two variables (Zimring and Rushin (2013).

[6] In 2000, law enforcement agencies reported 9,430 hate crimes to the FBI. In 2001, this number spiked to 11,451. Controlling for population, this means that the rate of hate crimes went from 3.4 hate crimes per 100,000 residents to 4.0 hate crimes per 100,00 residents. Meanwhile, overall crime rates (grouping together all seven index crime categories) during this time period went from 4,124.8 crimes per 100,000 residents to 4,162.6 crimes per 100,000 residents.

[7] Based on UCR data, in 2014, local law enforcement agencies reported 6,418 hate crimes, or 2.0 hate crimes per 100,000 residents. By 2016, that number had increased to 7,321, or 2.3 hate crimes per 100,000 residents. Meanwhile, overall crime rates (grouping together all seven index crime categories) during this time period went from 2,935.7 crimes per 100,000 residents in 2014 to 2,837 crimes per 100,000 residents in 2016.

crimes trended upwards both between the second and third quarter, and between the third and fourth quarter. Then, in 2017, while season pattern in hate crimes returned, the total number of hate crimes each quarter was substantially elevated relative to prior years.

**Figure 1, Number of Quarterly Hate Crimes, 2010-2016**

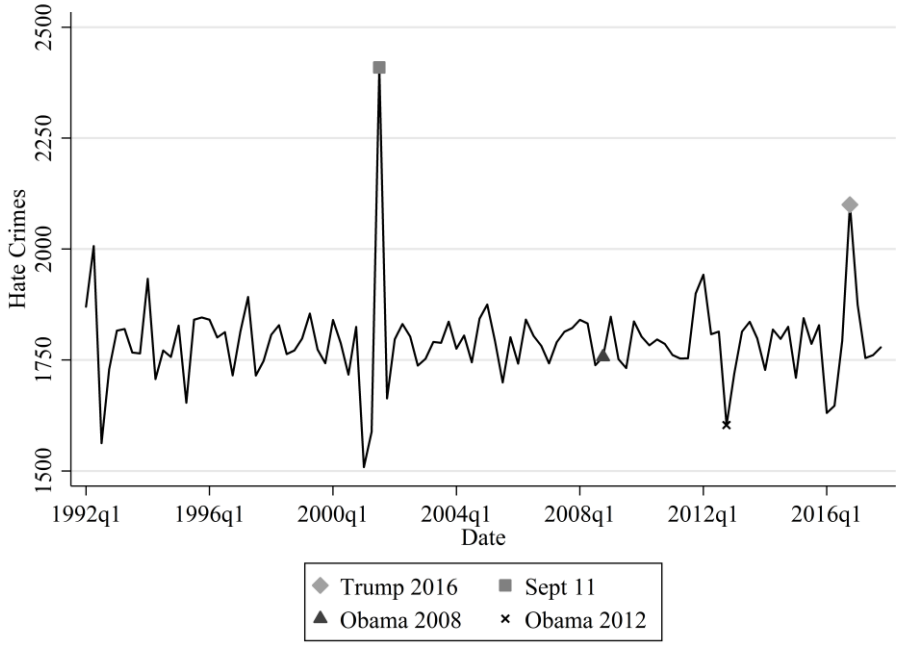



Put simply, the data in Figure 1 is consistent with the hypothesis that something changed around the fourth quarter of 2016. Since then, hate crimes have surged.

Another way to visually illustrate the anomalous nature of the surge in hate crimes in the fourth quarter of 2016 is to view it in relationship to the national trend in hate crimes by quarter since the FBI began collecting data in 1992. Figure 2 presents this long-term trend data. Because hate crime data is highly cyclical and subject to seasonal variation, we present detrended data in Figure 2. This means Figure 2 adjusts the raw data so as to remove the usual seasonal variation in hate crimes each quarter and year.[8] The resulting trend line emphasizes quarters when the number of reported hate crimes deviated from the usual seasonal pattern—that is, when hate crimes failed to follow the usual seasonal pattern seen in most years in Figure 1.

[8] There are a number of ways to detrend macroeconomic data that usually include passing the data through a filter. Hamilton (2018) argues against the use of the most common filter, the Hodrick-Prescott filter, and suggests alternative methods, particularly lag dependent variable models, to seasonally adjusted data. In the presentation of the raw data, we simply seasonally adjust the data by differencing out the quarterly and yearly effects through linear regression.

**Figure 2, Detrended Hate Crimes by Quarter, 1992-2016**




As seen in Figure 2, the number of hate crimes in this detrended analysis is roughly flat over time, with a couple of notable exceptions, namely in 2001 in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11 and in the fourth quarter of 2016 around the same time of Donald Trump's election as President of the United States.[9] During these quarters, hate crimes spiked far above the number we would expect, even after accounting for seasonal variation.[10]

While Trump used divisive and controversial rhetoric throughout 2015 and 2016 during his run for president, there appears to be less of a significant effect visible in the detrended data from Figure 2 until the fourth quarter of 2016. The United States experienced no similar spike in hate crimes in the wake of the elections of Presidents William Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama.

Thus, as an initial matter, the raw data seems at least somewhat more consistent with the theory that Donald Trump's election in

[9] There was also a less significant uptick in hate crimes in 2012. This correlates with the shooting of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida, and the subsequent national debate over Stand Your Ground laws. Nevertheless, we are not aware of any sustained scholarship on the spike in hate crimes in 2012.

[10] Even though hate crimes remained elevated through all quarters of 2017 relative to recent years, the trend line in Figure 2 shows the detrended number of hate crimes decline. This is because Figure 2 is detrended, meaning that it focuses on quarters and years when hate crimes deviate from seasonal patterns, not the total number of hate crimes.

November of 2016 spurred the recent uptick in hate crimes. This is not to say that Trump's rhetoric in 2015 and early 2016 had no effect on the number of reported hate crime. Instead, it appears that the timing of the hate crime surge most strongly correlated with Donald Trump's election.

Nevertheless, correlation is far from causation. There are a number of alternative variables that could explain this unusual spike in hate crimes in the fourth quarter of 2016 through 2017. As described in the next Part, this study uses time series analysis and panel regression techniques to test the relationship between Donald Trump's rise to power and the recent spike in hate crimes in the United States.

## III. METHODOLOGY

Based on an analysis of the raw data, it appears plausible that the election of Donald Trump contributed to a rise in hate crimes in the United States. Thus, our methodology is designed to evaluate this version of the Trump Effect hypothesis. Our outcome of interest is the count of hate crimes as reported by the FBI's UCR database. Hate crimes have been reported since 1992 and are released annually as part of the FBI's larger report on crime statistics. Our data set includes all quarterly reported hate crimes between 1992 and 2017. It is important to note that hate, in it of itself, is not a crime. A hate crime gets classified as any other type of crime with an added flag that suggests that the crime was committed with the motive to target a specific, protected group.[11]

While hate crime data is reported for many years at the incident level, for the purposes of our study we have aggregated hate crime data to the county and quarter level. That is, the unit of observation is county by quarter by year. The average number of hate crimes per county per quarter is 0.57. As mentioned previously, hate crime data is highly cyclical—with peaks in hate crimes coming between April and September each year. The cyclical nature of hate crimes may be due, in part, to weather patterns that have been shown affect crime (Jacob et al., 2007). To adjust for this seasonality in crimes, we include in each regression a set of dummy variables—called fixed effects—for each quarter of the year and another set of fixed effects for each year. As an additional control, we include county fixed effects. Quarter, year, and county fixed effects demean the data from each respective group. That is, our base regressions look at how a county's level of hate crimes differs from a typical amount of hate crime for that county for a specific quarter for a specific year.

[11] The FBI's website explains that, "[a] hate crime is a traditional offense like murder, arson, or vandalism with an added element of bias." In colleting statistics from local law enforcement agencies, the FBI requests counts on the number of "criminal offenses against a person or property motivated in whole or in party by an offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity" (FBI, 2018).

As is evident from Figure 2, it seems to be that hate crimes are fueled, at least in part, by reactions to acts of terrorism. This is evident by the significant spike in hate crimes in the third quarter of 2001. To account for this, we include in each regression a dummy variable that flags the quarter and year of the September 11th attacks. Additionally however, we also include a count variable of the number of terrorist attacks per quarter committed by perpetrators sympathetic to foreign countries or jihadi-extremism such as the terrorist attack in San Bernardino, California (Schmidt & Perez-Pena, 2015). This measure does not include September 11th since it was a clear departure from other terrorist attacks. Additionally, as there may be reason to think that police misconduct may incite hate crimes, we also include a control for the localities under investigation for police misconduct.[12] Lastly, our independent variable of most interest is a dummy variable that takes on the value of one the quarter Trump was elected and remains one through 2017.[13]

We also include controls for the homicide rate, infant mortality rate, prisoner execution rate, proportion of the state that is black, urbanization rate, the unemployment rate, total ethanol consumption, real police expenditures, and the proportion of the state house and senate that are members of the Democratic Party. We also include a control for the level of the population covered by the jurisdictions that report to the UCR in an effort to account for changes in UCR participation. We include these control variables to ensure consistency with the existing literature[14] while also attempting to account for and control for other factors that may influences changes in hate crimes.

To measure the casual impact of Trump's election on hate crimes in the US, we would need to exploit some sort of exogenous shock related to Trump and hate crimes.[15] While this would be the ideal, the

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[12] We derive these from a list of federal investigations and interventions conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice enforcing 42 U.S.C. § 14141, which bars state and local police departments from engaging in a pattern or practice of misconduct. We derived these agencies through open record requests, interviews, and public sources. For more information on how we obtained this information, see Rushin and Edwards (2017).

[13] While the results are insensitive to alternative specifications, including a coding of Trump's influence that only flags the 4th quarter of 2016, we feel the coding presented in the data best reflects the reality of the situation.

[14] More information on each of these controls can be found in Edwards, Nesson, Robinson, and Vars (2017).

[15] For example, imagine a hypothetical US where a meteor shower took out the internet and TV/radio/telephones for the calendar year of 2016 but only sporadically for some very isolated cities with little contact with the outside world. In this scenario the hate crimes reported in those isolated, communication-less cities would act as our baseline, or control group. We would thus compare hate crimes in those cities to hate crimes in the cities that experienced Trump in 2016 and account the difference to the Trump Effect. But, if the Trump Effect is real, it likely affected the entire United States at the same time. This is similar to the

reality is no such exogenous shock likely exists due, at least in part, to the fact that it was seemingly impossible to avoid hearing the daily barrage of news surrounding Trump and his rhetoric. This makes causal inference from secondary analysis a challenge. We are further hampered by the fact that the 2016 election happened in the final quarter of the second-to-last year in our dataset. This prohibits us from doing an event study type analysis that would track the Trump Effect for a considerable length of time in the post-election world (Wolfers, 2006). Despite all this, we can, however, track the changes in hate crimes leading into the 2016 election and in the year that followed, account for all possible factors that might influence hate crimes, and report the associated correlation between Trump's election and hate crimes.

Formally, we do this by estimating the following equation:

$$H_{iqy} = a_0 + a_1 T_{qy} + a_2 Sept11_{qy} + a_3 Terror_{qy} + a_4 DOJ_{iqy} + X_{iy} + C_i + Q_q + Y_y + e_{iqy}$$

Where the outcome, $H_{iqy}$, is the count of hate crimes in county, $i$, during quarter and year, $qy$. The effect that the Trump election had on hate crimes is measured by the coefficient $a_1$, which varies by quarter and year but affects each county uniformly. The coefficients $a_2$ and $a_3$ measure the effect that September 11th and other terrorist activity had on subsequent hate crimes, and $a_4$ measures the effect of police misconduct investigations. $X_{iy}$ is a set of controls that vary by county (when available) and by year. $C_i$, $Q_q$, and $Y_y$ are, respectively, the set of county, quarter and year fixed effects mentioned previously, and $e_{iqy}$ is the idiosyncratic error term that represents all variation left unexplained.

One of the challenges inherent in modeling hate crimes is the frequency by which the outcome is zero. Recall that we measure hate crimes by county by quarter of the year. It's not uncommon for the average county to not have any hate crimes reported over a three-month window. In fact, about 87% of county-quarter-year observations report no hate crimes. This type of "limited dependent variable" presents potential shortfalls (Wooldridge (1999). One strategy to account for this is to model the data as a Poisson distribution with a fixed effects Poisson regression (Edwards, 2014). Another common strategy is to transform the data from a count to a per capita rate, or more specifically, a logged per capita rate (Edwards et al., 2017). Given the frequency of zeros in the outcome variable, transforming the data to a logged rate is infeasible at

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challenge facing researchers who study the impact of criminal procedure cases on police or crime outcomes. As we have previously explained in our prior work, when the U.S. Supreme Court hands down major criminal procedure cases like *Miranda*, "it equally burdened all police departments in the United States. This meant that there was no way to complete cross-jurisdictional analysis. That is, there was no way to compare jurisdictions affected by *Miranda* with jurisdictions not affected by *Miranda* over the same time period." (Rushin & Edwards, 2017, 750).

the county level, and all of our results, including the relative magnitudes, are the same regardless if we run OLS or Poisson regressions. Additionally, if we calculated logged rates after aggregating the data to the state level, where the occurrence of zeros in the outcome variable is much less common, we get very similar results to the county level OLS and Poisson regressions. We do, however, prefer OLS regressions that keep the outcome as a count of hate crimes and the data aggregated to the county level, as it allows for more precise estimates in the supplementary analysis.

Another specific concern is the manner in which we adjust for potential autocorrelation that occur within county, state, or year in the standard errors. There are multiple strategies often employed in the literature, and we report the results from the most common ones though the results are robust to virtually every possible reasonable clustering of the standard errors (Dezhbakhsh, Rubin, & Shepherd, 2003). Given the preliminary nature of the data, we cannot make any formal, statistical claim of causation. Nevertheless, we feel that the reported correlations and supplementary analysis strongly suggest a Trump Effect in inciting hate crimes, as described in the next Part.

## IV. THE TRUMP EFFECT

We find compelling evidence that Donald Trump's election may have contributed to the national increase in hate crimes starting during the fourth quarter of 2016 and continuing through 2017. In Subpart A, we present first the results of our time series analysis, followed by the results of our panel regression analysis in Subpart B.

### A. *Time Series Analysis*

The results of our time series are formally reported in Table 1. Each column represents a unique regression. The only difference between columns (2) through (5) is how the standard errors are treated. Regardless of the treatment of standard errors, the results from Table 1 are clear: the election of President Trump appears to have contributed to a statistically significant uptick in hate crimes.

Specifically, we estimate that Trump's election contributed to approximately 0.13 additional hate crimes per county per quarter. Given that there are 3,151 counties nationwide, this means that Trump's election may have led to around 410 additional hate crimes nationally per quarter, or 2,048 additional hate crimes since his electoral victory.

**Table 1, Effect of Donald Trump's Election on Hate Crimes[16]**

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trump Effect | 0.133‡ | 0.135‡ | 0.135‡ | 0.135‡ | 0.135‡ |
| | (0.044) | (0.026) | (0.044) | (0.005) | (0.036) |
| September 11th | 0.253‡ | 0.257‡ | 0.257‡ | 0.257‡ | 0.257‡ |
| | (0.072) | (0.041) | (0.072) | (0.010) | (0.060) |
| Other Terrorist Attacks | 0.004^ | 0.005‡ | 0.005† | 0.005† | 0.005 |
| | 0.002 | 0.002 | 0.002 | 0.002 | 0.003 |
| DOJ Intervention | 1.389 | 0.924 | 0.924 | 0.924 | 0.924 |
| | (0.855) | (1.099) | (1.194) | (1.229) | (1.165) |
| Controls | | X | X | X | X |
| SE Cluster Level | State | County | State | Year | State & Year |
| Sample Size | 326,793 | 326,786 | 326,786 | 326,786 | 326,784 |
| R Squared | 0.694 | 0.804 | 0.804 | 0.804 | 0.804 |

To put the Trump Effect into perspective, Table 1 also estimates how other major events have similarly affected the number of reported hate crimes in the United States. Remember from Figure 2 that the largest apparent increase in the number of hate crimes happened immediately after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Using the same methodology, we estimate that the September 11th terrorist attacks contributed to approximately 0.25 additional hate crimes per county—roughly two times more than the election of President Trump.

We also include a control that accounts for the number of other terrorist activity that might incite similar feelings. These include terrorist attacks like the Orlando Night Club shooting or the Virginia Tech shooting (Alvarez & Perez-Pena, 2016). As seen in Table 1, these terror attacks were associated an increase in hate crimes, but on a smaller scale. We estimate that these terror attacks contributed to an average of around 0.005 additional hate crimes per county per quarter, or about 19 hate crimes per quarter nationally.

All of this to say the apparent Trump Effect is far from insignificant. If true, the Trump Effect is around 33 times larger than the effect on hate crimes after terror attacks like those in Orlando, Florida or San Bernardino, California. While it does not rival the spike in hate

[16] Notes: Each column represents a unique regression. In each case, the outcome is the count of hate crimes per county per quarter by year. Each regression includes as controls year effects, quarter effects, county effects and reporting population. The other controls included in columns (2) through (5) are the homicide rate, infant mortality rate, prisoner execution rate, proportion black, proportion urban, the unemployment rate, total ethanol consumption, real police expenditures, and the proportion the state house and senate that are democrat. The clustering of the standard errors, in parentheses, vary from column to column. ^ $p<0.10$ † $p<0.05$ ‡ $p<0.01$

crimes after September 11th, there is evidence to suggest the Trump Effect may have contributed to a statistically significant uptick in the number of hate crimes rivaled by few other events in modern American history.

B. *Panel Regression Analysis*

To further investigate this relationship, we estimate the strength of Trump's support on the number of hate crimes reported in all counties in the United States. Formally, we run a regression in the same way as the time series analysis. This analysis is different, however, in that we exploit the county-to-county differences in Trump support as measured by 2016 election results, allowing the Trump effect as measured by $a_1$ in equation (1) to vary by strength of Trump support. We summarize the numerical results of this regression in Figure 3. In the resulting figure, the x-axis groups all American counties by the margin of Trump support.

The y-axis measures the marginal increase in hate crimes in these counties from the fourth quarter of 2016 through the end of 2017. The dashed lines extending upwards and downwards from the trend lines represent a 90% confidence bound. This allows the reader to quickly identify whether a particular data point is statistically significant. If the dotted line includes both positive and negative outcomes, then we cannot say with confidence that the level of Trump support is associated with a change in the number of hate crimes. However, if the dotted line is entirely above zero, then we can say with some confidence that Trump support in those counties was associated with an increase in hate crimes. Prior studies have used this sort of methodology to tease out the associational relationship between two variables under similar circumstances (Rushin & Edwards, 2017).

**Figure 3, Effect of Trump Support on Increase in Hate Crimes by County**

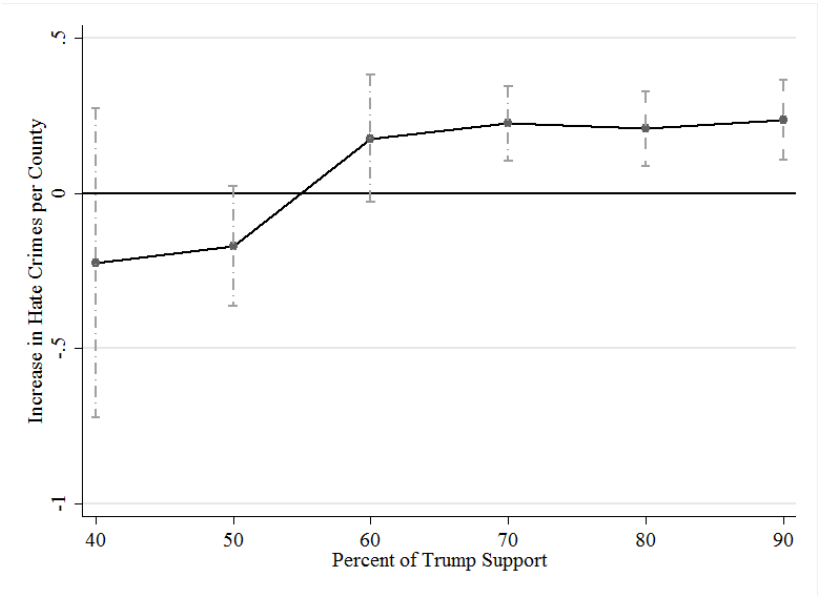


Figure 3 suggests that, at the county level, strong support for Trump during the presidential election was associated with a larger and more statistically significant uptick in the number of reported hate crimes from the end of 2016 through 2017.

C. *Limitations of the Data*

Overall, the available evidence is consistent with a so-called Trump Effect. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the limitations of our data. First, the nascent nature of hate crime research makes it difficult for us to definitively claim that our models control for all alternative explanations for the surge in hate crimes. As discussed in Part I.A, the existing literature on hate crime causation is relatively thin. Thus, we fully recognize that our model may leave out important alternative explanations. For example, both Donald Trump's election and the subsequent rise in hate crimes could both be the result of some variable that we failed to consider. Additionally, in the absence of a formal statistical model of causation, we cannot completely rule out the possibility of reverse causality. That is, instead of Trump driving the increase in hate crimes, it could be that the force behind the rise in hate crimes helped drive Trump into the presidency. Nevertheless, the suddenness and historically anomalous timing of the increase in hate crimes in the fourth quarter of 2016 lead us to believe that Trump's election is the most persuasive theoretical explanation at this time.

Second, this study relies on a relatively small amount of data over a short period of time. An ideal time series analysis would look at trends in hate crime data for many years after Trump's election, including trends in hate crimes when a new president takes office in 2020 or 2024. But unfortunately, no such data is currently available. This means that our findings are not as robust as other time series analyses that rely on more extensive datasets over long periods of time (Cassell & Fowles, 2017). But in our judgment, the importance of this topic necessitates immediate study, even if the data is imperfect.

Additionally, our methodology is inherently limited. Ideally, "[t]he preferred methodology for assessing a social policy" would be an analysis that involves "a true experiment in which on jurisdiction at random is subjected to a new policy, while another 'control jurisdiction is not," (Cassell & Fowles, 1998). There was simply no way to conduct such an analysis in this case. Trump's rise to power affected all jurisdictions in the United States equally. While our panel regression analysis attempted to compare changes in hate crimes in counties with high levels of Trump support to countries with low levels of Trump support, this is still far from the ideal experiment. But even though this is not an ideal experiment that should not foreclose careful research using the best available data. Instead, it simply means that we should be careful in drawing definitive conclusions or generalizing from this data. Instead, we should view these findings for what they are, "one data point in what will hopefully be a growing literature" on the relationship between political rhetoric, electoral success, and hate crimes (Rushin & Edwards, 2017, 772).

Lastly, the release of the 2017 wave and surge in UCR hate crime data sparked a conversation about the reliability of UCR data and the possibility of "false flag" hate crime reporting or falsified hate crime reports. The concern is essentially that what we observe in the data is not actually an increase in hate crimes in response to Trump's divisive rhetoric, but rather a coordinated effort to delegitimize the Trump presidency by reporting fake hate crimes. While there was at least one example that caught national media attention where this occurred (Mele, 2016), we do not believe this to be a systemic problem in our analysis for a number of reasons. First, while it may be costless—that is, not carry associated risk—to falsify a hate crime when surveyed about hate crime victimization akin to the data collected by the SPLC, falsifying any crime, including hate crimes, to law enforcement is, itself, a crime and could carry serious legal consequences. In terms of costs and benefits, it would appear for any individual would-be falsifier, the benefits are fairly low (only increase aggregate hate crime numbers nominally) and the costs might include months or years of jail time. Second, best estimates of the actual incidence of accusation falsification among victims is quite low. This phenomena has been studied at length in the sexual assault literature, and most credible studies suggest very low incidence, less than

10% at worst, of false allegations (Lisak, Gardinier, Nicksa, & Cote, 2010; Spohn, White, & Tellis, 2014). While other studies have found much higher rates, this is usually due to research design or how "falsified report" is defined (Saunders, 2012).[17] Third, even if one were to maintain the false flag stance despite evidence to the contrary, it is widely accepted that the majority of hate crimes go unreported (Masucci & Langton, 2017; Strom, 2001) with a recent estimate suggesting that 54% of hate crimes go unreported (Masucci & Langton, 2017), so unless falsified hate crime reports constitute the vast majority of total reported hate crimes, the best UCR estimates are still likely an underestimate of the true nature of hate crimes in the US.

## V. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF HATE CRIMES

Our findings have important implications for the study of the causes of hate crimes. Using the data from this study, we offer a novel theory that builds on the existing literature on the causes of hate crimes. We hypothesize that it was not just Trump's inflammatory rhetoric throughout the political campaign that caused hate crimes to increase. Rather, we argue that it was Trump's subsequent election as President of the United States that validated this rhetoric in eyes of perpetrators and fueled the hate crime surge.

Supporters of the Trump Effect hypothesis have offered a couple of different explanations for how President Trump may cause such an uptick. These theories have generally fallen into two categories. First, some worried that his extreme rhetoric and flirtation with white supremacists would embolden would-be perpetrators of hate crimes. Under this theory, by merely lending voice to bigoted beliefs, critics worried that Trump's rhetoric would spur more hate-fueled attacks on vulnerable classes of individuals. We describe this as the *Dangerous Rhetoric Theory*. This theory attributes less importance to whether or not Trump succeeded in the presidential election. This theory received significant coverage from the media in the months leading up to the presidential election (Foran, 2016; Litchblau, 2016; Maza, 2017). An article in *The Atlantic*, published a little over a month before the election, is fairly representative of this line of thinking. The byline of that article stated that, "research suggests that extreme political rhetoric can contribute to a spike in hate crimes," (Foran, 2016). The article went on to consider how various Trump statements during his campaign,

[17] For instance, Saunders (2012) shows that much of the friction between academic researchers and practitioners on the topic of false rape allegations can be explained by varying views of what constitutes a false claim. Often, practitioners consider a baseless report, a report that fails to meet the elements of a crime but still could be truthful, the same as a false report, a report made to law enforcement that with investigation was proven to never have occurred, whereas academics would draw a distinction between the two.

including his call for a ban on Muslims entering the United States, affected the number of hate crime.

No doubt, the Dangerous Rhetoric Theory seems consistent with some of the theoretical explanations for hate crime discussed *supra* Part I.B. Specifically, it is consistent with theories by political scientists that link hate crimes to inflammatory statements by politicians (Green et al., 2001). It is also consistent with contagion theories that predict that intense media coverage of stereotypes can legitimate them in the eyes of the public, creating motives for bias offenses. And to the extent that Trump's harsh rhetoric on immigration, race, and economic policy during the campaign created a perception among his supporters that they were suffering from "exploitation and marginalization" because of "increased competition for jobs and other scarce resources caused by 'foreigners,'" it may have contributed to a sense of "strain" among hate crime perpetrators, in line with criminological theory (Hall, 2014).

Second, some critics worried that Trump's election in November of 2016, despite his use of such inflammatory rhetoric, legitimized his views, thereby motivating additional hate crimes. We label this the *Validation Theory*. Under this view, hateful rhetoric alone may not be enough to drive a substantial increase in hate crimes. After all, a large number of Americans may encounter similar language in their day-to-day lives. But in Trump's case, this rhetoric came from a successful presidential candidate. Thus, the Validation Theory predicts that Trump's election validated biased beliefs by a segment of Americans, and likely contributed to more perpetrators acting on these bigoted beliefs in the form of hate crimes. This theory differs from the Dangerous Rhetoric Theory in the causal mechanism allegedly at work. The Dangerous Rhetoric Theory suggests that the vocalization and media coverage of Trump's divisive rhetoric caused an uptick in hate crimes, while the Validation Theory links this rise in hate crimes to the validation provided by Trump's successful election. A number of commentators have explicitly espoused the Validation Theory in explaining the uptick in hate crimes (Okeowo, 2016; Reilly, 2016).

This Validation Theory finds some backing in the theoretical literature, but less so than the Dangerous Rhetoric Theory. Perhaps most notably, the Validation Theory somewhat resembles accounts by political theorists who have hypothesized that political discourse can translate into violence when a "political opportunity structure" exists that lends "legitimacy [to] grievances within public and political discourse," and suggests a low "likelihood of prevention or punishment" (Green et al., 2001).

We ultimately believe that the data we present in this study is most consistent with the Validation Theory. To be clear, both hypotheses could be true. There is no doubt that, if the Trump Effect is real, President Trump's rhetoric during and after the campaign played a critical role in the rise in hate crimes. The viability of one does not

preclude the other. Indeed, the data from Figure 1 suggests that the number of hate crimes in 2016 increased relative to typical seasonal patterns in both quarter 3 and 4. But the timing and magnitude of largest the spike in hate crimes in quarter 4 is most consistent with the Validation Theory.

Under this view, the election of President Trump may have validated his campaign rhetoric. It may have signaled to would-be hate crime perpetrators that the grievances President Trump raised in the campaign, including concerns about economic pressures caused by immigration (Hee Lee, 2015) and the security risks posed by Muslims (Diamond, 2015; Shear & Cooper, 2017), were shared by a significant cross-section of the American population (Johnson & Jordan, 2015; White, 2016). We hypothesize that this, in turn, may have given hate crime perpetrators a sort of permission structure to engage in acts of bias. This finding builds on the existing literature, but also lends itself towards a novel understanding of the causes of hate crimes. At minimum, we believe that this finding ought to spur additional investigation into the Validation Theory of hate crime causation.

## CONCLUSION

This Essay uncovers compelling empirical support for the Trump Effect. Our analysis finds that President Trump's election coincided with a statistically significant surge in hate crimes, even when controlling for alternative explanations. And counties that voted for President Trump by the widest margins experienced the largest increases in reported hate crimes. Nevertheless, this should be just the beginning of an ongoing examination into the relationship between political rhetoric, electoral validation, and hate crimes. If the Validation Theory that we propose in this Essay is correct, then the surge in hate crimes may continue throughout President Trump's time in office. The fact that reported hate crimes have continued to creep upwards during President Trump's time in office seems consistent with this prediction (Mathias, 2017).

As this debate continues, it is important to not to lose sight of the human consequences of acts of hate—even if such acts of hate do not lead to death or serious injury, or even constitute a criminal act. This essay deals with numbers. It focuses specifically on the statistical relationship between political rhetoric, elections, and reported hate crimes across the country. But underlying these hate crime statistics are the lived experiences of marginalized communities. This is something that this study cannot possibly capture. Thus, future researchers may consider the sociological and psychological implications of our findings. After all, it seems plausible that acts of hate, particularly when perpetuated in support of a political leader, can have serious emotional and dignitary harms on their victims. This may be true even if the acts do not technically constitute hate crimes, and thus fall into the category of

hate crimes covered by the FBI database. Take, for instance, the experience of students of color at Salem State University in Massachusetts when they discovered graffiti on campus that read, "Trump #1 Whites Only USA" (Manganis, 2017). Or consider the experience of the predominantly Black and Latino students on a high basketball team in Connecticut that faced chants of "Trump! Trump! Trump!" and "He's our president" from the largely white fans at a game at a nearby suburban high school (Byron & de la Torre, 2017). While these sorts of incidents may be outside of the scope of this study, their causes and effects are worthy of future study by social scientists.

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