To Report or Not: Modeling Individuals' Decision-Making Process when Reporting Hate Crimes

Introduction

The social process that I'm interested in is individuals' decisions to report or not report a hate crime. It is a complex social process, and one that is directly related to both computation and society. The computational aspect is the consideration of the factors that influence individuals' decisions to report or not report a hate crime, which can often be expressed mathematically, such as the probability that a hate crime is reported but nothing is done about it, or the probability that a hate crime is reported and a successful outcome is achieved, such as the suspect being found, arrested, and put behind bars. Other computational portions of this process can include historical data, such as the likelihood of perpetrators of past hate crimes being caught, or the frequency that a hate crime occurs in a given area over a given period of time. Furthermore, as our world becomes increasingly digitized, online forms of reporting have emerged, allowing individuals to report hate crimes through websites or by calling hotlines rather than having to physically enter a police station to file a report. This social process is related to society as a whole because hate crimes impact people from marginalized groups, such as the LGBTQ community, Black and brown individuals, people with disabilities, etc. Thus, we as a society are responsible for uncovering what truly impacts people's decisions to report or not report hate crimes, and what we can do to not only make the process of reporting hate crimes safer, but also how we can create communities that are safer, more diverse, and inclusive for everyone.

Model Explanation

In my simplified model, there are two choices for the survivor of a hate crime: to report (*R*) or to not report (~*R*). The probability of the perpetrator being caught, arrested, and tried is *p*. If the survivor does not report the crime, there is a chance that an observer reports it, which we can assign a value of .1 to avoid excessive complexity in our final answer. In reality, there will not be a clean value that we can assign to the likelihood of this happening, but it does make future calculations much simpler. In the case where an observer reports the hate crime, the probability of the perpetrator being caught, arrested and tried is once again *p*. Naturally, if neither the survivor nor the observer report the crime, the probability of arrest is 0. Thus, the probability that the perpetrator is arrested if the survivor does not report the crime is .1 (the assumed probability of an observer reporting the crime) multiplied by *p* (the probability of the perpetrator being caught, arrested, and tried).

The payoff for the survivor not reporting, and as a result, and an arrest not being made, is 0. The cost of reporting can be assumed to be 1, and one of the possible benefits is the sense of personal safety that the survivor would gain from knowing that the perpetrator of the crime is now securely behind bars (International Association of Chiefs of Police). This can be denoted as *s*, and *s* is assumed to be greater than 1, as it is a benefit and thus must take a positive value. In the case where a survivor reports a hate crime and the perpetrator is caught, arrested and tried, the payoff is (*s*-1) because the benefit is *s*, and the cost of reporting, 1, must be subtracted from it. In the case where the survivor reports but the perpetrator is not put behind bars, the utility is simply -1, because the survivor must pay the cost of reporting with no benefit of personal safety since the suspect is still roaming the streets. The probability of the perpetrator being caught,

arrested, and tried is p, so the probability of that not happening is 1-p. The expected utility of reporting the hate crime would then be $p(s\text{-}1) + \text{-}1(1\text{-}p)$, which simplifies to $\boldsymbol{ps\text{-}1}$. On the other hand, if the survivor chooses not to report but an observer does and the perpetrator is put behind bars, the payoff is simply s because there is no cost to the survivor, only the benefit of personal safety. In the same case, if the perpetrator is not put behind bars, the payoff is 0. Finally, when neither the survivor nor the observer report, the payoff is once again 0.

In the last two cases, the payoff is 0, and since we will be multiplying the payoff of each event by the probability of it occurring in order to find the expected utility, we can disregard those events since multiplying by 0 simply gives us 0. We are left with only the first case, and the expected utility of this is $\boldsymbol{.1(ps)}$. This gives us the expected utility of choosing not to report. According to the rational actor model, the survivor would choose to report when the expected utility of reporting is greater than the expected utility of not reporting. This means that $ps\text{-}1$ must be greater than $.1(ps)$. We can assume that p is 1, which is once again a simplification in order to avoid excessive complexity. The reality is that we can never ensure that a perpetrator will be caught, arrested, and tried in every situation because humans are not perfect and mistakes can be made in one of the many steps of the complex judicial process (Department of Justice). So, if we assume that p is 1, we end up with $1\text{-}1/s > .1$. This means that s must be greater than 10/9 for reporting to be worth the cost.

Computational Approaches

In order to computationally collect and analyze information to determine the usefulness of my model, I would have to consult resources that record incidents of hate crimes, such as the Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, or the Bureau of Justice. However, these

sources only record quantitative information about hate crimes, such as how many occurred, and limited qualitative information such as where they occurred or what they were on the basis of (sexual orientation, gender identity, disability status, etc). It would also be difficult to take into account the benefits and costs that each individual faced when deciding to report because everyone's situation is unique and these factors cannot be generalized. As a result, it would be more accurate to collect and analyze information independently, on a case-by-case basis by directly investigating each instance of a hate crime and the factors that influenced the individual's decision to report it or not. Unfortunately, there is no way to collect information about hate crimes that are not reported because there is no official record of them even happening. The sad reality is that hate crimes happen far too often and have actually been on the rise in the past few years, and according to the National Public Radio, are at an all-time high. It would be difficult to truly determine the usefulness of my model because hate crimes are so underreported and it is so difficult to find out detailed information about them. I believe that my model serves as a way to understand the decision-making process of survivors when they experience a hate crime, and allows us to understand what factors play a role in whether someone reports a hate crime or not. It emphasizes how important it is for us to ensure the safety of survivors who do choose to come forward about their experiences, because even in a perfect judicial system (and ours is nowhere close to perfect, especially when it comes to hate crimes), the safety of individuals is what determines if someone reports or not, not just the probability of the perpetrator being put behind bars.

Current Research and Information

Currently, there are no sources that report on *all* the specifics of hate crime incidents, such as who reported it, what it was on the basis of, where and when it occurred, and other contextual information, and even the information that is available is severely limited because of how underreported hate crimes are (Davis & O'Neill). According to the Bureau of Justice, the National Crime Victimization Survey classifies hate crimes based on the bias motivation, which include "at least one of the following categories of bias against the victim: race, ethnic background or national origin, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, association with people who have certain characteristics or religious beliefs, and perception of victim's characteristics or religious beliefs (Bureau of Justice Statistics). However, this does not take into account who the crime was reported by and the details of when and where it occurred or what the reporting process was like for the individual. The Federal Justice Statistics Program, and the FBI Uniform Crime Reporting and National Incident-Based Reporting System also record this information through the FBI Hate Crime Statistics Program, including "6 categories of bias motivation and 34 specific types of bias" but once again do not provide any further details that could be applied to my model (Federal Justice Statistics Program).

Further Steps

As I mentioned above, my model was simplified in order to avoid further complexity. For instance, when calculating the expected utilities, the only benefit I considered was the safety of the individual. In the real world, there are many other benefits to be considered, such as the benefit of knowing that nobody else will experience violence at the hands of this same individual because they are now securely behind bars. Thus, the improvement for society as a whole could

also be considered. Furthermore, my model simply assumes that the suspect is either caught, arrested, and tried, or they are not. However, the truth is that the judicial process is a complex and lengthy one. It is possible that a suspect is caught and arrested, but that there is not sufficient evidence for them to be found guilty in court and they end up walking free. Because there are so many steps involved in the legal process, it is not realistic to assume that all of these things either happen or do not, but the simplification was made in order to make things less complex.

When it comes to my data collection and analysis methods, I mentioned that it is difficult to explore these cases because there is such limited information on them. In an ideal world, with unlimited time, resources, and energy, I would look into hate crimes on a case-by-case basis and determine who exactly the hate crime was reported by and what made them report it. I would look at the outcomes of these reports to see how likely it is that a suspect is actually put behind bars and what determines if that really does end up happening. This would help us collect and analyze more information that is both accurate and beneficial.

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