



Quantitative Exploration of Themes in the History of American Conservatism: County-Level Antigovernment Group Formation in the United States, 2013-2015

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Introduction

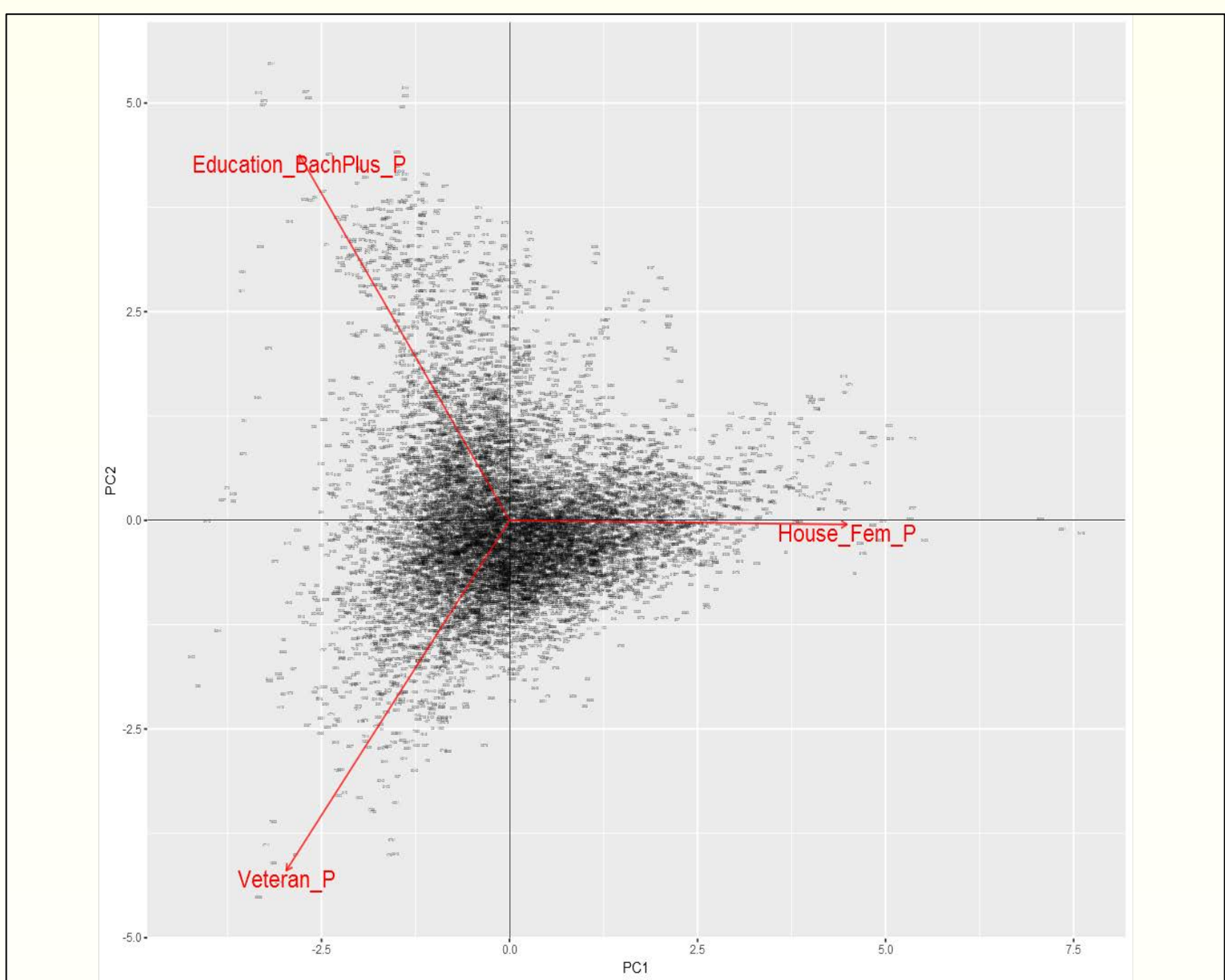
In this study, I examine whether common themes in the history of American conservatism can meaningfully inform an exploration of county-level social, economic and demographic factors that predict antigovernment group formation from 2013-2015. First and foremost, by prioritizing themes in the historical narrative of American conservatism over existing sociological theories, I attempt a different approach to interpretation, assessing the impact of social, economic and demographic factors from a perspective that places less weight on the study of society itself and more emphasis on individual human experience and interaction. Importantly for the historian, this study gives us an opportunity to explore whether the perceived similarity between Cold War conservatives and current antigovernment mobilizers proves quantitatively true.

Data and Methods

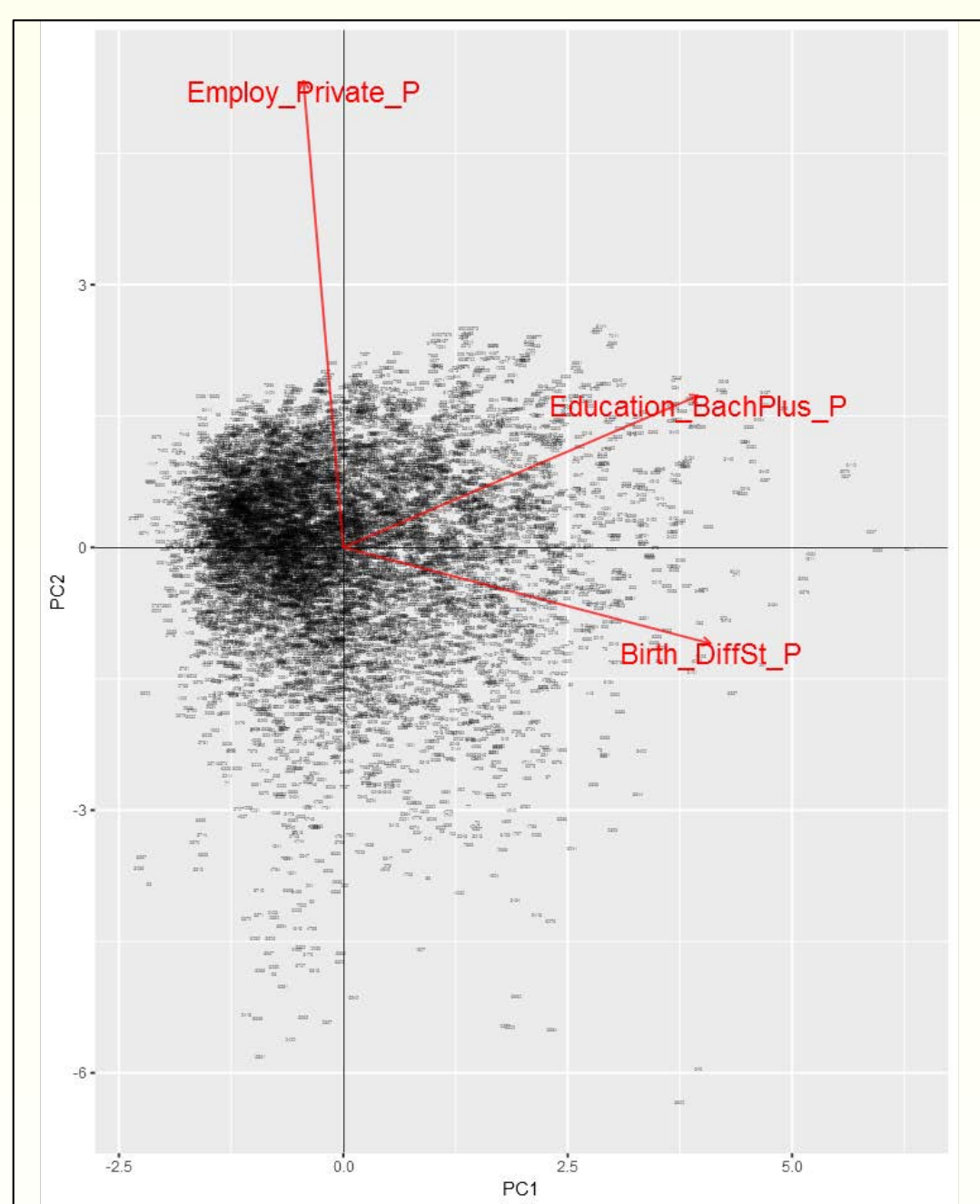
Annual active antigovernment group (a.k.a. “patriot” group) data were obtained from the Southern Poverty Law Center’s (SPLC) quarterly publication, *Intelligence Report* . SPLC data were matched to county-level social, demographic and economic data obtained from the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates.

A mixture of Random Forests, Principle Component Analysis and Decision Trees were used to evaluate variable importance and informed the selection of variables for logistic regression. Two regression models were generated: one to predict the probability of antigovernment group existence by county-unit, the other to predict the probability of militia group existence by county-unit.

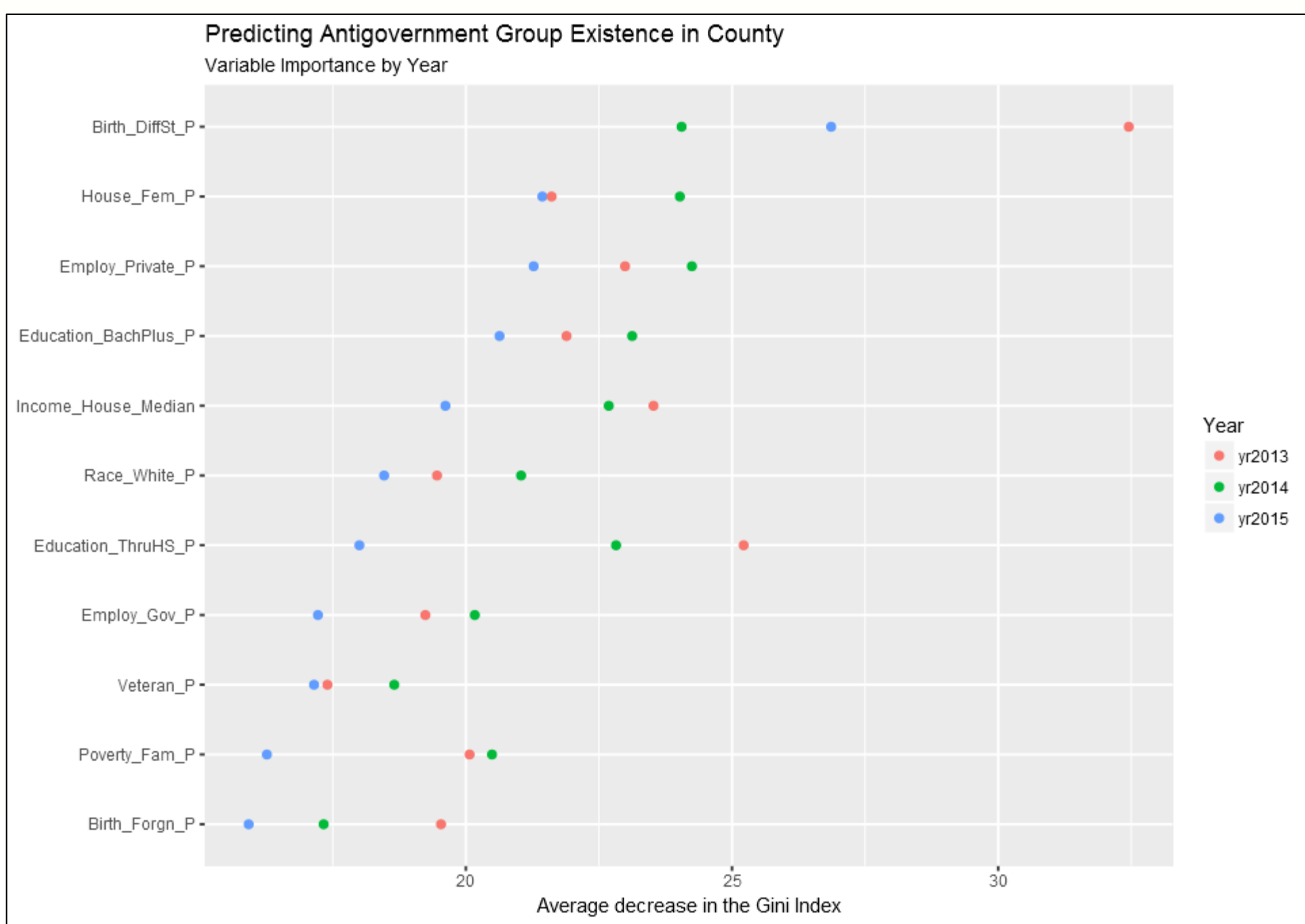
Antigovernment Group Formation:
Principle Component Analysis: % Population with Female-headed households, Veteran status, Bachelor’s Degree or higher



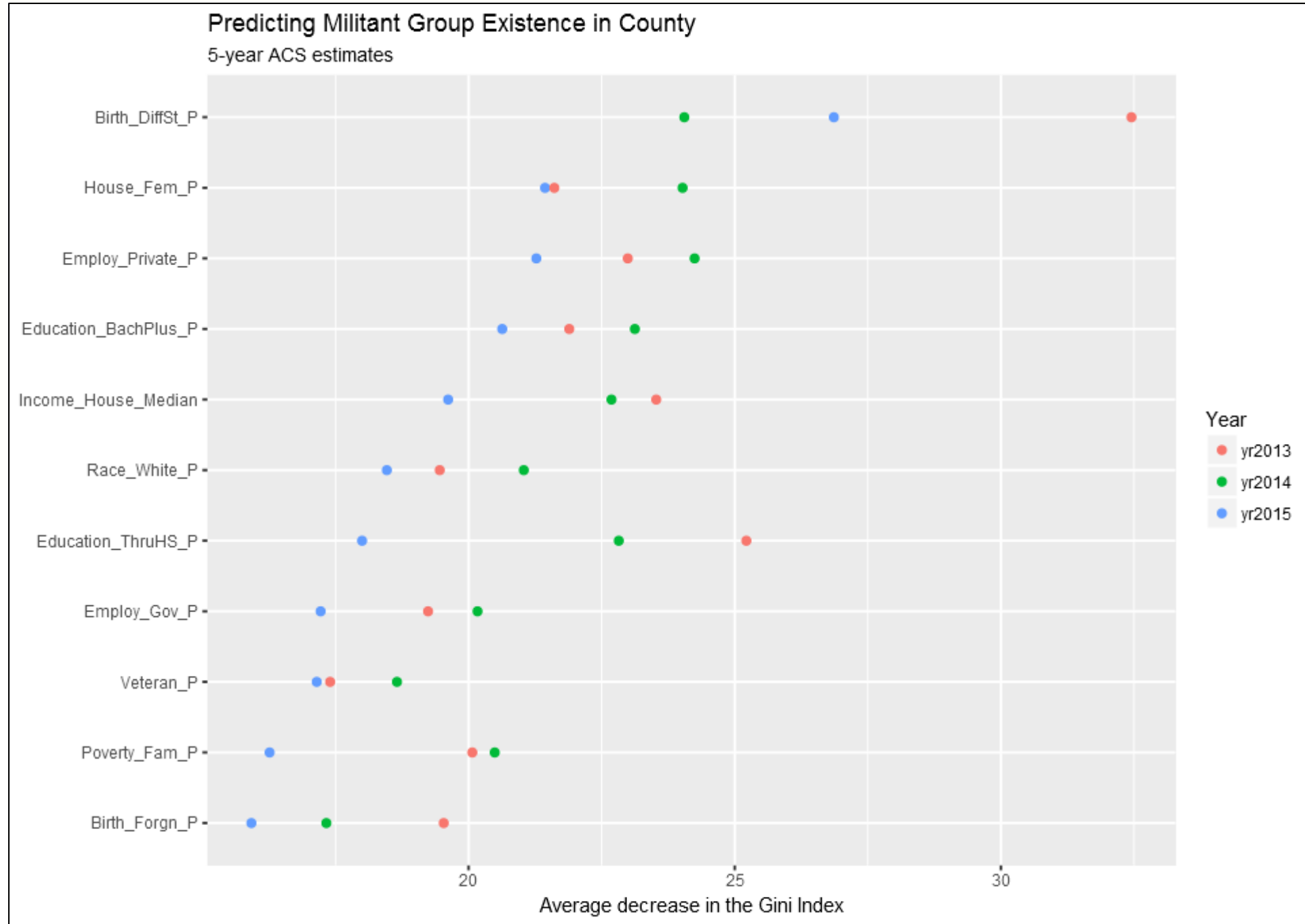
Militia Group Formation:
Principle Component Analysis: % Population Employed in private industry, Born out of state, with Bachelor’s Degree or higher



Antigovernment Group Formation:
Random Forest: Evaluating Variable Importance by Year



Militia Group Formation:
Random Forest: Evaluating Variable Importance by Year



Results

Classification Models for Antigovernment Group and Militia Group Formation Prediction

	Estimate	Standard Error	p-value		Estimate	Standard Error	p-value
ANTIGOVERNMENT MODEL				MILITIA MODEL			
Independent Variables				Independent Variables			
Educational Attainment (Bachelor's Degree or Higher)	0.0899***	0.0038	<2E-16	Educational Attainment (Bachelor's Degree or Higher)	0.0128***	0.0030	2.31E-05
Female-only-headed Household	9.8301***	1.1816	<2E-16	Employment in Private Industry	0.0156***	0.0035	7.75E-06
Civilian Veterans	0.0308***	0.0126	0.0148	Birthplace, Other U.S. State	-0.0014	0.0022	0.5050
Intercept	-4.5857***	0.2294	<2E-16	Intercept	-1.984***	0.2705	2.18E-13
Null Deviance	6148.6 on 6598 degrees of freedom			Null Deviance	8565.1 on 6598 degrees of freedom		
Residual Deviance	5516.1 on 6595 degrees of freedom			Residual Deviance	8520.8 on 6595 degrees of freedom		
AIC	55524.1			AIC	8528.8		
Significance codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05							
NOTE: Independent Variables are provided as percent of the county population							

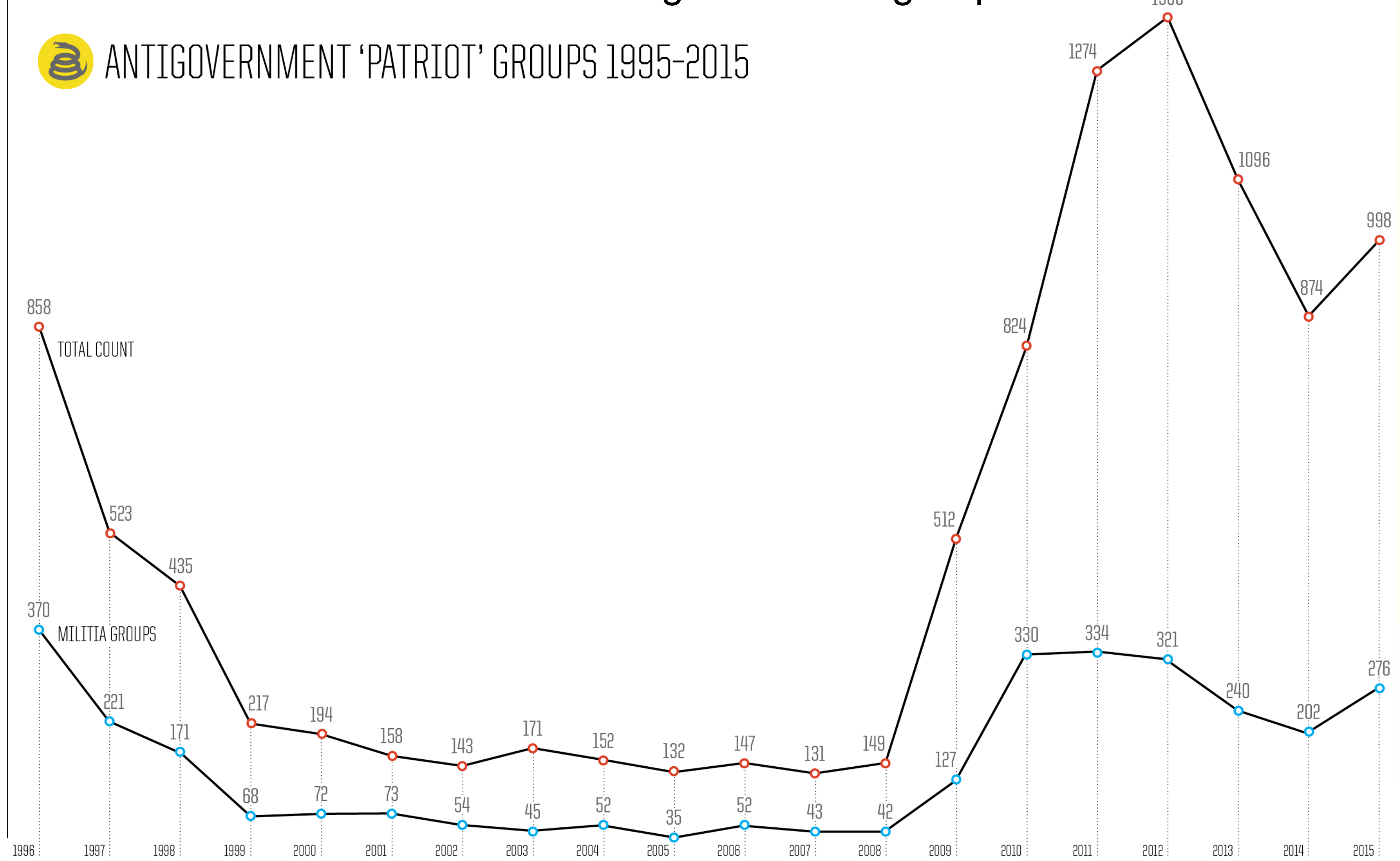
Both the exploratory methods and the logistic regression models indicate that higher levels of educational attainment have a small positive, significant correlation with antigovernment and militia group formation, other independent variables held constant. This agrees with themes observed throughout historical scholarship of Cold War conservative activism. Because of the poor fit of the models and poor quality of antigovernment data, both more research and analysis is required to more meaningfully explore the notion that current day antigovernment and militant group formation has roots in Cold War conservative ideology and/or activism.

Limitations

Tally of antigovernment groups listed in the *Intelligence Report's* annual report

Year	Count of states with "Statewide" location field	Count of records with "Statewide" location field
2016	50	155
2015	48	102
2014	17	21
2013	50	351
2012	50	330
2011	50	349
2010	50	182
2009	49	135
2008	0	0
2007	0	0

Figure provided by the SPLC in the 2015 *Intelligence Report* article on antigovernment groups



The poor quality of SPLC data severely hampers any inference drawn from the analysis. Most troubling, it appears that the designation “Statewide” may have been used inconsistently, and may have exaggerated the spike in antigovernment groups formation from 2009-2015.

Conclusions

Poor data quality will continue to hamper this area of research. No meaningful results can be inferred from data whose validity is so suspect. Until and unless data collection and maintenance are significantly improved, traditional methods of historical research and analysis will serve more fruitful in the near future for assessing the formation of antigovernment and militia groups.